

Date:21/10/2010 URL:

<http://www.thehindu.com/2010/10/21/stories/2010102159622200.htm>

Indian Statistical Institute celebrates first World Statistical Day

Ananya Dutta

Professor Stigler lists most influential and consequential ideas

Regression can be applied to events such as the global economic slowdown

KOLKATA: Number crunchers at the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) here joined the world in celebrating the first World Statistics Day on Wednesday, a day that noted an interesting play of numbers on the calendar, with the date registered as 20.10.2010.

As part of the celebrations, a lecture entitled “Five ideas that changed Statistics and continue to change the way we think about the world” was delivered by Professor Stephen Mark Stigler, Ernest DeWitt Burton Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago.

The decision to declare October 20 as World Statistics Day was taken by the United Nations General Assembly earlier this year. The ISI has been observing the birth anniversary of its founder, P. C. Mahalanobis, which was declared as the National Statistics Day by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2006.

First event

Beginning with the concept of the Mean, Professor Stigler detailed five ideas that he felt had been “most influential and consequential” in the field of Statistics. Tracing its historical origins, he said that although the concept of the Mean had been around since the Greek civilisation, the first event that had come to his notice where the concept was applied was in the 17th century by an English mathematician, Henry Gellibrand.

He mentioned the “square root ‘N’ rule” as the second most influential idea, because it speaks of the rate at which information accumulates, and had led to C. S. Peirce's 1879 work on “Economy of Research.”

The concept of tests and likelihood or “weighing possibilities” was the third suggestion made by Professor Stigler, as it marks the point of Statistics “entering mathematical territory.”

The final two ideas emphasised in his lecture were based on the work of British scientist Sir Francis Galton — Statistics by inter-comparison and the theory of regression.

Explaining the relevance of these concepts in contemporary situations, Professor Stigler told journalists that the phenomenon of regression could also be applied to events such as the global economic slowdown.

An economic depression can be viewed as an extreme event from a statistical point of view and since there was an overall “tendency towards mediocrity,” the economy would return to a moderate position, he said.

“This does not mean that it will happen on its own,” Professor Stigler cautioned.

© Copyright 2000 - 2009 The Hindu