

Impressions of ICOTS5

◆ INTRODUCTION ◆

The Fifth International Conference on Teaching Statistics was held at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, in June 1998. Delegates attended from all over the world; the photograph shows some of the British contingent. Many papers covering all aspects of statistical education were presented in a large number of parallel sessions. A published version of the Proceedings is available: *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Teaching Statistics* edited by Lionel Pereira-Mendoza *et al.* (3 volumes), which can be ordered from:

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Two of the British delegates have provided short notes of their impressions of ICOTS. One of these is Flavia Jolliffe who has attended many of the previous ICOTS and presented papers at some of them. By way of contrast, the other is Dave Pratt who was attending an ICOTS for the first time. You will also find a short report of the conference in the IASE supplement at the centre of this issue.

◆ SUMMER HOLIDAY? ◆

When I told people that I was going to spend a week in Singapore in June I suspect they had an imaginary picture of an exotic holiday in the Far East. Delegates at ICOTS5 were not there for a holiday of course, although it is very pleasurable to be in the company of like-minded people with interests in the teaching of statistics and to find that we have similar ideas and similar experiences. Singapore itself is a very crowded small island and one is hardly out of sight of tall buildings. The people are well-regulated (for example

heavy fines for crossing the road in the wrong place or eating on public transport, and importing toy money is prohibited). Certainly Singapore has a warm climate but it is humid and it rains heavily at times.

There was a very full programme of talks at ICOTS. Selection of what to attend was made easier by glancing at the printed versions of the talks which were published in three large volumes of Proceedings running to 1479 pages, but, if you preferred, choosing what to attend on the spur of the moment could be very rewarding. Some delegates steadfastly attended sessions in their areas of interest whereas others made a point of attending sessions in what were for them new areas. Several speakers spoke about statistical thinking or statistical literacy or statistical reasoning or statistical understanding and this questioning of what we mean by these, and how to teach them and assess them is encouraging. Other speakers were concerned with research into various aspects of statistical education, in getting it recognised as a research activity and in using the results to inform good practice. There were also talks on how to teach particular topics or groups of students and, of course, an update on the latest developments in technology for teaching, learning and doing statistics.

There were also plenty of opportunities for formal and informal networking, for meeting old friends and making new ones. If you missed ICOTS5, make sure you plan ahead to attend ICOTS6 in 2002.

Flavia Jolliffe
University of Greenwich

◆ HOW WAS IT FOR ME? ◆

This was my first visit to ICOTS and I have to say it struck me as a *very peculiar practice*.

I had not appreciated what a wide range of people it would attract. In hindsight, it is not so surprising since statistics is a topic of interest and application to people in many different contexts. Hence, many of the delegates were present because of their concern with the teaching of a statistics course or courses in higher education. These delegates might focus on the mathematical aspects of statistics or the application of statistics within a diverse set of fields. Another group of delegates was more concerned with statistics as taught at secondary or primary age levels. A third group was interested more

specifically in chance and probability (my focus). The delegates also varied greatly as to the extent that they considered learning as well as teaching.

The conference was extremely well organised and tried its best to handle this enormous variety by setting up strands. Nevertheless, there were huge sectors of the conference with whom I felt I had little in common, and a small subset with whom I had some very exciting conversations.

I was surprised at the low level of analysis in many of the sessions. Perhaps reflecting the backgrounds of many of the delegates, it seemed that it was acceptable to present a description of an approach to teaching statistics. On the other hand, there were a small number of excellent sessions, and once I had identified my common interest group, I was able to discuss ideas with people from that group - at this point, the nature and quality of the

sessions became less important to me.

I enjoyed my stay in Singapore. The arrangements for getting from our hotels to the conference site meant that I perhaps saw less of the island than I would have liked but, nevertheless, it was an interesting experience. My lasting impressions will be the quality of the food - wonderful - and the very humid weather conditions - the practice was to get warm by stepping outside from the air-conditioned rooms into the natural sauna. The intellectual pay-off from the conference for me will, I hope, manifest itself through the many e-mail conversations organised to take place over the next few months. Then it should be possible to evaluate properly how successful the conference has been for me.

Dave Pratt
Warwick University



From left to right:

Margaret Rangelcroft (Sheffield), David Green (Loughborough), Susan Starkings (South Bank, London), Dave Pratt (Warwick), Helen Wright (Manchester), Flavia Jolliffe (Greenwich, London), Robert Russell (Paisley, Scotland), Erica Morris (Open University, Milton Keynes), Neville Davies (Nottingham), Fred Smith (Southampton), Neville Hunt (Coventry)