

UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

SCHOOL OF MATHEMATICS AND STATISTICS

Statistics Seminar Series - 2002

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**Statistical Illiteracy - A Persistent Challenge To
Statistics Education**

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Abstract

Our society is regrettably innumerate and nothing much is being done about it.

Inappropriately collected statistics, incorrectly interpreted statistics, and just plain bad statistics are the common stuff of print reportage, the background to much public discussion, and, most disappointingly, sometimes the evidence guiding social and economic policy making. That this state of affairs persists (and with so little protest) shows how intractable is the social problem of statistical illiteracy.

The need for enhancing statistical literacy in the broad Australian community is pressing, yet achievements from educational efforts in the schools and in the workplace have been sparse.

Our universities, on the other hand, are producing graduates well versed in the appropriate use of high-level statistical techniques. Perhaps we should look to people such as these to play a part in rolling back statistical illiteracy in our society?

To do that effectively, we may need to make some modifications to the way we educate statistics professionals today. But the rewards promise to be great.

In this seminar I shall take a closer look at these issues, and propose a new way forward towards a statistically literate society.

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