

Some Non-statistical Reminiscences of My 45 Years of Chairing the Deming Conference

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In 1964, I was Group Leader, Process Analysis at Lederle Laboratories, American Cyanamid in Pearl River, NY. I worked closely with Charlie Dunnett whose department owned the computer and mechanical calculators my group had to use. In December, he was speaking at the Princeton Conference and he invited me to go along. The conference started at 2 PM Friday and ran through lunch on Saturday. It included a beer and cider party on Friday evening and a Saturday lunch for a total registration fee of \$6. The topics ran the gamut of highly theoretical from the Princeton Statistics Department to extremely simple QC talks. I enjoyed the atmosphere and camaraderie so I went every year for the next six years. I usually stayed in a cheap motel on Route 1 but occasionally splurged for the Nassau Inn.

I had joined the ASQC in 1962 and by 1969 was quite active in the Metropolitan Section's executive committee and thus was acquainted with the members of the conference's organizing committee. Harry Howard was the official conference chair but the de facto chair was Art Bobis who headed the statistics group in Cyanamid's Bound Brook, NJ facility. The week after the conference, I had to go to Bound Brook to use their analog computer to model drug stability reactions. I ranted with Art on such points that most attendees were grandfathered out of paying the \$10.50 registration, the Friday afternoon to Saturday schedule was odd, and there was no unified theme to the talks. After listening to me grumble for about 5 minutes, he told me that he was leaving Cyanamid to become Vice President of his family's folding chair business and how would I like to be chair. It sounded like fun so I accepted.

I enlisted Khushroobanu Shaikh, Charlie Dunnett, and Don Behnken from Cyanamid and my old NYU Professor, John Kao, for the committee and retained Art Bloomberg (Figure 8) who did a tremendous job on arrangements and registration until his death 25 years later. John stayed on the committee for the next 25 years and in 2012 at the age of 96, we gave him a distinguished service award (Figure 1). (He died on June 8, 2014 at the age of 97.) Stu Hunter was also extremely helpful with arrangements for the next 9 years until the conference left Princeton. He then stayed on the program committee until 2004 and in December 2014 attended the conference at age 91½ I got together with him once or twice a year for a luncheon at the faculty club where I gained a reputation for only eating the desserts. In 2013 we gave Stu the distinguished service award despite the fact that he was only a youngster of 90 (Figure 2).

I changed the venue to all day Friday with four 3-hour sessions of 3 one-hour related talks, while retaining a luncheon and the beer and cider party. (I claim credit for enforcing the term *related* as prior to this anyone who wanted to talk could. In a similar vein, I added the word *Applied* to the title of the conference in 1972.) We had to raise the registration fee to \$15 but we also raised attendance to about 100 and tried to let no one in for free. The Metropolitan Section was pleasantly surprised that the conference actually made money and with the exception of an experimental outlier year of 2001 where statistics was radically deemphasized, the conference never lost money again.

In 1971, the ASA's Biopharmaceutical Subsection assumed co-sponsorship. In 1973 Bill Wooding became their first official representative and the Section has been continually active in the conference. Ivan Chan (Figure 5), who joined the committee in 1997, has been their longest serving agent. In 1979 the Statistics Division of the ASQC assumed co-sponsorship. Bill Strawderman joined the committee in 1980 for 14 years and Frank Alt (Figure 8) in 1983 for 11 years as their official reps. They did an excellent job in evenly balancing biopharmaceutical topics with QC and applied topics in other industries. Once they left the committee, the conference gradually shifted to being completely biopharmaceutical and the Statistics Division became a sponsor in name only. Biopharmaceutical made sense due to the heavy preponderance of pharmaceutical firms in New Jersey although in recent years about 10% of our participants have been international. The conference steadily grew in attendance and length. Book sales and tutorials based on recently published texts started in 1976.

The conference had a peak attendance of 476 in 1977 when it overflowed the Woodrow Wilson School. We felt that the crowd posed a security problem so for the first time we decided to check badges. The registration fee had at this point been raised to \$40 but this included meals. Literally dozens of people hadn't paid. One individual threatened to sue as he said he'd been coming for 5 years without paying and it was illegal for us to check badges without advance notice. An author of a highly acclaimed text who flew in from California also said that she had never paid in the past. (1975 was the *UN Year of the Woman* and she was one of our speakers in our mainly distaff program.) Two individuals from a major drug company in NYC were stopped at the door of the meeting room. When they were next caught trying to slip in a back door, they paid but came back 15 minutes later to ask for a refund. Their boss told them

that if they couldn't sneak in, they couldn't attend. As a registrant left our book exhibit, a book fell out of his pants leg but he kept on walking. A member of the program committee, Kris Arora, owned an excellent local Indian restaurant (Sitar) and he catered a very successful Indian buffet in the basement of the Statistics Building. During the meal, 4 students were caught exiting from a closet where they had earlier secreted themselves.

In 1979, the conference established the W. Edwards Deming Medal in Statistical Excellence. I was undeservedly awarded the first silver medal and for the next 16 years the medal was presented at the conference to distinguished statisticians. It is now awarded by the national ASQ to QC practitioners. In 1981, John Mandel (Figure 10) of the National Bureau of Standards received the first medal after Ed. Ed (in Figure 3) was the keynote speaker every year and presented the medal until his death in 1993 shortly after the conference. The following year, with his daughter's permission, we renamed the conference in his honor. I was privileged to get to know Ed during this period and was a guest in both his Washington home and Manhattan apartment on several occasions. Ed was one of the participants in the first conference held under the auspices of the Planning and Statistics Division of the War Production Board at Princeton University in December 1945 and always had a soft spot in his heart for it. He spoke at the conference several times prior to the medal's establishment. One amusing incident occurred in 1974. Ed was scheduled to speak for two hours followed by a famous pollster headquartered in Princeton. The pollster still had not shown up 30 minutes prior to his talk. I called his office, and heard in the background, "Tell them I'm not here!" Ed graciously agreed to continue to talk and did not stop until well after 3 hours.

By 1979, the conference had become too big for the University to handle. Also, Princeton decided that we could no longer cater our meals and we had to use their food services at a cost that was triple what we had paid before. Reluctantly, we moved to Villanova. It was a successful conference but we only stayed for a year mainly due to extreme complaints of the quality of the catered food that caused the majority of the participants to boycott all meals after the first. In the 70's and 80's, I was extremely active in ASTM's E11 statistics committee and chaired their nonparametric subcommittee as well as a group revising their E178 outlier standard. Vic Barnett and Toby Lewis had just authored a widely acclaimed outlier text so in 1979 I invited them from England to give a 3-day course. Within the course, I gave a session on E178 and its associated software that was well received. Intriguingly, the course was held in a hotel across the street from Wyeth-Ayerst where I would be transferred 16 years later when American Home Products bought Cyanamid. While the format varied somewhat over the next two years, the full week, conference was here to stay. In 1982 we started our current structure of a 3-day conference followed by two 2-day short courses. One course was made the responsibility of the ASA's Biopharmaceutical Section and their agents have done an excellent job of organizing this for the last 33 years. The other one was given to the ASQC's Statistics Division but after they terminated their active sponsorship in 2000, I organized it for two years after which Fred Balch (Figure 5) assumed control and has done a fine job for the last 14 years.

I believe that one of my claims to fame was coming up with the idea of the 3-hour tutorial (preferably based on recently published texts) as opposed to 3 one-hour talks on related subjects hosted by a moderator. Tutorials made their appearance in 1975 and the last one-hour talk was essentially given in 1982. Coincident with the adoption of its current format, the conference moved to the Holiday Inn at Newark Airport in 1980 where it remained for the next 5 years. Until, my wife compelled me to move in 1990, I was a lifelong Manhattan resident who twice failed the driving test. This obscure point is relevant, because I insisted on including information on how to get to the Holiday Inn by public transportation. My instructions in the program were to take a nonstop bus to Newark Airport, walk about a quarter of a mile along a busy exit ramp, try to safely cross it, and then go through a hole in a chain link fence. When I got there the day before the conference, I found that the hole had been repaired. I had to take a bus to a Newark hardware store, buy a pair of wire cutters, and regenerate the hole.

After the Holiday Inn, we moved to Atlantic City in 1985 where with two not too successful exceptions and one disaster, we have remained ever since. I got married in 1984 and my 3 kids virtually grew up in Atlantic City. My 2-month-old son got thrown out of the Osmond Family production of Fiddler on the Roof at the Claridge for crying. I've never been paid for my tenure at the conference but in 1986 I won a drawing (attended by Mickey Mantle no less) at the Claridge for meeting planners where the grand prize was a trip on the QE2 to England and back on the Concord 11 days later. We had a great time but my wife suffered some odd complications such as physically losing her green card, being allowed on the ship without a British visa and thus having a rather difficult time getting off, and losing her brown Philippine passport two hours prior to our scheduled return, which caused her to somewhat believe in being

cursed. The passport was the same color as our hotel room carpet and our son had apparently grabbed it from his crib and dumped it. These incidents somewhat assuaged my guilt for not rebooking the Claridge for 1986.

Besides attending the conference in their formative years, my oldest son (Walbert) redesigned our program into its current form; my youngest son (Peter in Figure 9 who is currently stationed at Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska) served as registrar in 2009; and my daughter (Katharine) was awarded the conference's first Walter Young scholarship in 2008

In 1983 Karl Peace (Figure 8) replaced Jim Arsevan as the Biopharmaceutical Section rep and for 11 years did a superlative job in getting speakers and successful short courses. Then after a dispute that is remembered differently by the parties concerned, Karl resigned and founded BASS whose format was initially very similar to our conference. Mimicry is one of the greatest compliments and I felt vindicated in our choice of the conference's format. BASS evolved into a somewhat different structure while ours remains unchanged. In 2010 Karl graciously accepted our invitation to present a tutorial on his latest text and we recognized him for his contributions to our conference. His coauthor, and my coeditor Din Chen, has done an equally outstanding job in replacing him for the past 4 years (Figure 4).

After 5 quite successful and enjoyable years at the Sands, we were banished as the Sands replaced their meeting rooms with a gambling floor. We had a multiple year contract and the Sands negotiated a very favorable contract at Resorts as part of their settlement. Resorts has a very strange meeting facility on the 13th floor consisting of a large auditorium and two very long narrow meeting rooms. There is a parapet surrounding these rooms and one can walk along the outside of the building with a rather spectacular view of Atlantic City. However considering the December weather, not many registrants elected to exercise this option. We remained there successfully for 7 years, mainly because the contract included a cocktail hour with excellent food and an unlimited open bar. This proved to be a mixed blessing as one of our moderators had to stay in the local hospital with an inebriated registrant for a number of hours until a family member came and picked him up. I paid two hospital visits to registrants that were mugged outside Resorts. One moderately distinguished statistician was ejected from the hotel for urinating in the cocktail line and the police ejected another for doing something worse. I took a tour of Resorts three years ago when they offered us a good contract unsolicited, but without free cocktails, their weird meeting setup proved to be a hard sell.

At the end of the nineties, the Metropolitan Section experimented with QC short courses and tutorials with less than stellar results. In 2000 they fired me as chairman as they felt the conference should be devoted to Deming's QC principles despite the fact that he was a statistician for the greater part of his career. I did not contest this as I felt a 31-year tenure was adequate. A few weeks later they reinstated me as co-chair as they couldn't find anyone else to handle the statistics portion of their revamped program. All programs for the past 16 years can be found at www.demingconference.com and the Spring 2001 program was fundamentally different from anything seen before or since. It was held in the spring at the Newark Airport Holiday Inn because it could not attract sufficient registrants to be held in December. It still lost quite a bit of money in the spring but as so much money had been invested in the conference (e.g., paying a professional design firm to compose the program), it was decided not to cancel. The statistics tracks did marginally better than the QC tracks but both did poorly. The meeting included meals but there were more speakers and committee members at the meals than participants. The statistics course, that I moderated, came close to making money but the QC course was held with a single registrant and the instructor was paid appreciably more than the registration fee. The one positive change we made that year was that Ed Warner joined the committee as transactions chair and all registrants have been given a bound copy and a CD of all of the speaker's slides ever since. I regained my sole hold on the chair and Satish Laroia (Figure 2) was ensconced as arrangements chair and has done an outstanding job in improving and strengthening the conference's amenities.

Registration has always been a problem. In our record year at the Woodrow Wilson Center, I personally typed the 476 punched cards and wrote the listing program in Fortran. We had a number of registrars but they did not stay that long due to the hassle of opening the mail and interpreting the poor handwriting on the registration forms. Fred Balch (Figure 5), our currently longest serving committee member joined in 1993 as registrar and served for 7 years before transferring to the program committee. His successor served for 6 years but was a challenged speller and complained that his hotel suite did not have enough space to adequately layout and arrange the forms on the floor. Our biggest technical innovation came when Wenjin Wang (Figure 5) joined the committee in 2005 as Bibliolater. In 2006 he replaced Kalyan Ghosh (Figure 5) as Webmaster and designed a website that allowed for online registration,

removing the need for the registrar to type all of the demographic information. We still allow for mail registration but have not received a form for several years.

We went back to Resorts in 2001. We did okay with registration but got considerable complaints on the missing free cocktail party. We then went to the Taj for a year but weren't too happy with their facilities. For the past 13 years we've been at the Tropicana with a very high rate of recidivism as our attendees like the Havana Tower. From past experience, we're reluctant to change what has proved to be a relatively successful format. However, the conference is still evolving. Since 2008, we've awarded a \$4,000 college scholarship to the offspring of a participant. For the past 7 years, Nandita Biswas (Figure 7) has run a student scholar program where we support the attendance of 2 to 4 local biostatistics PhD students who present their work in a poster. In 2012 Manoj Patel, our current registrar (Figure 6), initiated a program where we encourage our attendees to also present posters. BASS can keep their southern contingent in Orlando or DC in November while we'll stick to Atlantic City in December despite its avalanche of 4 casino closings in 2014. We've been fortunate in that we've never lost a speaker due to weather in Atlantic City.

In December 2014, Din was awarded a plaque as a tutorial was presented on 5 different books that he coedited in 5 consecutive years and he will again present a tutorial in 2015. I was awarded an engraved iPad (which my wife immediately commandeered) as a longevity award for chairing the conference for 45 years. I emphasize longevity as the ASA rejected my nomination for Fellow stating that they do not entrench Fellows simply for longevity. Still I am quite proud of my achievements in creating the conference in its current format. Obviously, I can't go on forever but I'll remain as long as I believe I can continue to contribute positively to the conference's continual success.



Figure 1: Kao and Young 2012



Figure 2: Hunter, Laroia, and Young 2013



Figure 3: Deming and Young 1974

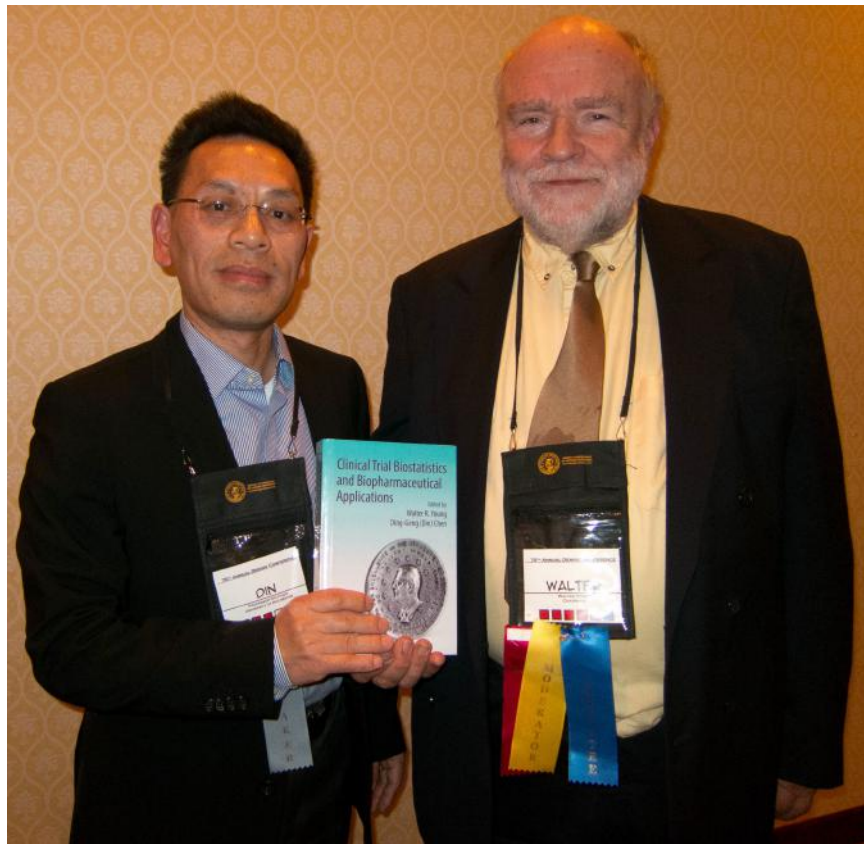


Figure 4: Chen and Young with Book 2014



Figure 5: 2014 Committee Members Left to Right
Standing: Ivan Chen, Kalyan Ghosh, Naitee Ting, Xiaoming Li and Wenjin Wang
Seated: Satish Laroia, Walter Young, Alfred Balch and Joseph Borden

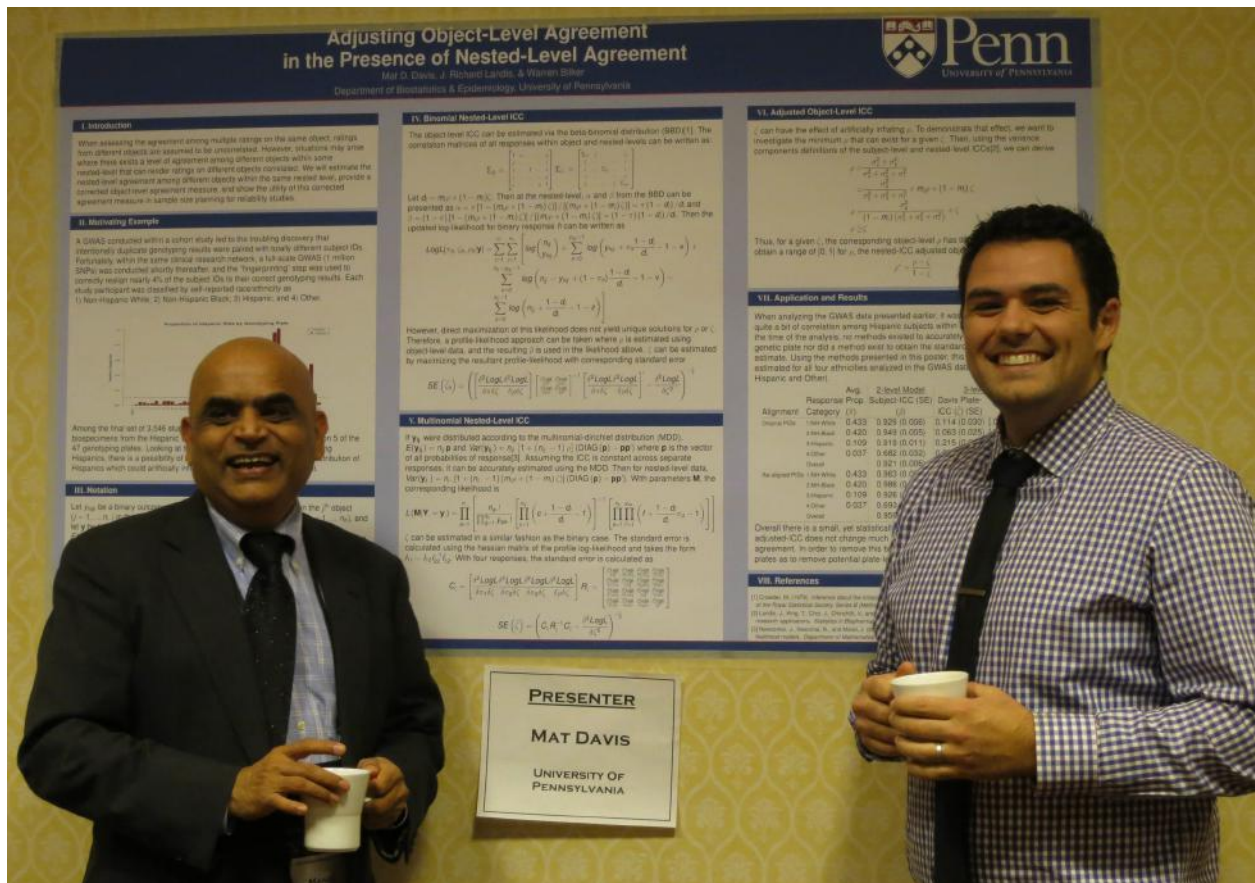


Figure 6: Manoj Patel with Student Scholar Poster Presenter 2013



Figure 7: Nandita Biswas with Student Scholars 2011



Figure 8: 1989 Committee Members Left to Right
Standing: Karl Peace, Walter Young and Frank Alt
Seated: Art Bloomberg, Jenny Wong and Mary Grimstead



Figure 9: 2009 Committee Members Left to Right
Xiaoming Li, Ivan Chan, Joe Borden, Satish Laroia, Fred Balch, Walter and Peter Young

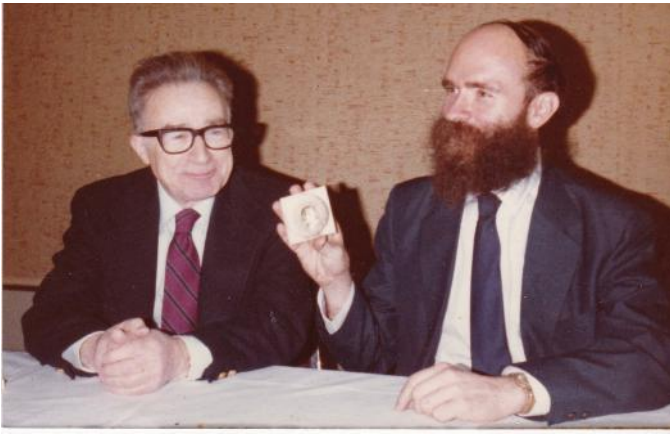


Figure 10: John Mandel 1981 Deming Medalist



Figure 11: Marjori Keshmiri Publicity Chair 1984 – 1991



Figure 12: 2015 Committee Members