STATS MATTERS & EVENTS

30 March 2023

Dear Contact,

I recently had a conversation with a friend who started to lament the perils of Artificially Intelligence (AI), and more specifically, ChatGPT. I interrupted him quickly to say: "Hold on a moment. . I love ChatGPT! It makes a real difference to my work." I went on to explain in what ways I find it useful: "I receive articles for our newsletters from members, and quite often they don't have a headline. Depending on my mood, I would write back, asking for a headline, or I'd try to come up with something myself. These days I just enter the text into ChatGPT, ask for a 'catchy headline', and ChatGPT usually obliges."

This is just one example of how ChatGPT has made my work not only more efficient, but also much more fun. ChatGPT helps in countless other ways: It finds the right words to use on our social media channels, it summarises third-party articles that may be of interest to our members and it can even give me "hot topics for statisticians" when I'm facing writer's block.

While I appreciate ChatGPT and its benefits, I'm not blind to its drawbacks or even dangers. I understand that, for example, using ChatGPT in a school or university environment will create issues. Rather than ban ChatGPT it was suggested that the curriculum needs to be looked at. Do we still need to learn how to write, for example, book reports, or essays, if AI can do this for us?

(This is a rhetorical question – please don't send me angry feedback). It turns out that my "worries" over the misuse of AI are nothing compared to what the experts think.

Recently "The Future of Life Institute" issued an open letter urging a pause on AI research. The mission of the Future of Life Institute is "Steering transformative technology towards benefiting life and away from extreme large-scale risks." In line with its mission, the Institute calls for a six-month pause on some forms of AI research, citing "profound risks to society and humanity". Thanks to ChatGPT I can provide you here with a summary of the open letter, which took me literally less than thirty seconds to produce:

> "The increasing capability of artificial intelligence (AI) systems poses significant risks to society and humanity, as acknowledged by top AI labs and extensive research. There is a concern that AI systems could flood information channels with propaganda and untruths, automate away all jobs, develop non-human minds that replace humans, and cause a loss of control of our civilisation. To address these risks, all AI labs are called upon to immediately pause for at least six months the training of AI systems more powerful than GPT-4. During this pause, AI developers should work with policymakers to accelerate the development of robust AI governance systems. Additionally, AI research and development should be refocused on making today's powerful, state-of-the-art systems more accurate, safe, interpretable, transparent, robust, aligned, trustworthy, and loyal. By doing so, humanity can enjoy a flourishing future with AI, which has the potential to benefit society significantly."

The open letter was signed by 1200 expert AI researchers. However, according to an article published in "Datanami" by Alex Woodie on 29 March 2023, not everyone agrees. The author quotes Bindu Reddy, the CEO and founder of Abacus.AI, who commented: "The letter to pause AI training is ludicrous. How would you pause China from doing something like this? The US has a lead with LLM technology, and it's time to double-down."

I doubt that this open letter can stop, or rather pause, the momentum that is driving AI forward. As Woodie writes in his article: "(…) the genie would appear to be out of the bottle, and there's no telling where it will go next. "

I will continue to be a big fan of ChatGPT. However, that open letter certainly provides food for thought.

Marie-Louise Rankin
SSA Executive Officer

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A new name for our former Vic Branch

Did you know that Tasmanian members are technically part of the Victorian branch? Well if you didn't, it should be clear now after the Vic branch updated its name at their Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 28 March. The branch is now called the Victorian and Tasmanian branch (or SSA Vic & Tas for short) to recognise the fact that the branch serves members across both states! This change in the name of the branch reflects the ongoing work of the branch council to have better representation of statisticians living in Tasmania in their activities throughout the year. Given this update, if you're a statistician living in Tasmania and would like to be on the SSA Vic & Tas branch council, are interested in organising an event or talk, or are looking for support to organise a local meetup of Tasmanian statisticians, get in touch with the branch on vic.branch@statsoc.org.au.

Ben Harrap
Secretary, SSA Vic & Tas

***Philosophical Transactions A:* Bayesian inference: challenges, perspectives, and prospects**

Royal Society Publishing has recently published special issue of *Philosophical*

Transactions A entitled "Bayesian inference: challenges, perspectives, and prospects", compiled and edited by Christian P Robert, Judith Rousseau and Michael I Jordan. The articles can be accessed directly here.

You can purchase the print issue at the reduced price of £40 per issue by contacting sales@royalsociety.org.

Royal Society Publishing is also looking for new theme issues. If you are interested in submitting, please visit their website or contact the Editorial Office.

Research grant for for AI safety research

Conjointly, an Australian-headquartered provider of quantitative research services, are pleased to announce an AUD20,000 grant for AI safety research, which they believe will help to play a role in AI alignment using market research techniques.

As AI have led to a rapid increase in the number of AI systems that are used in our daily lives, Conjointly is offering this research grant to researchers from any field who are interested in applying market research techniques to the problem of AI alignment. Conjointly believe that this grant will contribute to the growing body of knowledge in this field and help ensure that the development of AI is conducted in a responsible and ethical manner.

Find out more.

The Random Sample Podcast

The Future is Now: Building Better Climate Models

It's one of the most pressing, if not the most pressing, question facing scientists: what impact is climate change having on our planet's future?

In this episode, we chat with world-renowned climate researcher Professor Lisa Alexander from UNSW. Her research concentrates on understanding the variability and driving mechanisms of climate extremes. That work includes understanding and building better climate models.

We explore the challenges she and other researchers face in trying to model the climate and what they're dong to address those challenges. Professor Alexander also talks about her work with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Our host is Rose Crocker, an applied mathematician with the Australian Institute of Marine Science.

Subscribe and listen to the podcast for free on iTunes, in Spotify, or on your Android device.

Find out more [here](#).

National Science and Research Priorities Refresh - submissions close Friday 6 April 2023.

Australia's Chief Scientist, Dr Cathy Foley, has spent the past month holding roundtables around the country, asking people what they think are Australia's big challenges and opportunities that science can address.

To make sure all voices are heard and all ideas captured to inform the development of a new set of Science and Research Priorities, Dr Foley is reminding everyone of their opportunity to have their say. Written, voice or video submissions can be made via the [Department of Industry, Science and Resources online consultation portal.](#)

Mentioned in previous newsletters (click on the relevant heading to find out details)

[**SSA PhD Top-Up Scholarships: the SSA wants to support you**](#) **(**deadline 26 April 2023)

[**Society Awards**](#) **-** Do you know anyone deserving of one of SSA's Society Awards?

[**ASC 2023: Call for Abstract Reviewers**](#) (deadline 31 March 2023)

[**Expression of Interest in Survey and Data Science Courses in 2023–24**](#)

[**2023 Venables Award for Developers of Open Source Software for Data Analytics**](#) **-** Call for submissions

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SSA Events

Statistical Consulting Network March Meet-Up

31 Mar 2023, 12:30 PM – 1:30 PM AEDT, held online

Come along with your thinking cap, maybe a problem, and some lunch!

The Statistical Consulting Network invites you to their monthly meet-up, a virtual lunchtime meeting where statisticians help each other out with problems that they aren't sure how to deal with. This virtual meeting is held on Zoom at lunchtime on the last Friday of each month, 12:30-1:30 PM (AEDT). We start each meet-up with announcements, or occasionally a special topic discussion, then discuss problems that attendees have brought along with them.

We also have a Slack workspace where members of the consulting network

can communicate between meetings, or post problems or relevant materials they would like to discuss during a meeting.

Zoom link

Slack Workspace link

Mathematical Engineering of Deep Learning - Part One Foundations

20 Apr 2023, 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM (AEST) held at Room 163, 14 Sir Christopher Ondaatje Ave Macquarie University, NSW 2109, Australia

This workshop is presented by the NSW Branch and School of Mathematical and Physical Sciences, Macquarie University. It is targeted at people interested in engineering, signal processing, statistics, physics, econometrics, operations research, quantitative management, pure mathematics, bioinformatics, applied machine learning, or even applied deep learning.

For more details and to register click here.

Item Nonresponse And Imputation Course

20 Jun 2023, 5:00 PM (AEST) – 11 Jul 2023, 6:00 PM (AEST), held online - weekly 1 hour live discussions with Professor Dr Jörg Drechsler

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The ASC2023 workshops are now open for registration:

10 December 2023

ASC 2023 Workshops- Essential Skills for Statistical Communication

ASC 2023 Workshops-Statistical Consultancy – The Essentials for Getting Started and Ongoing Success

ASC 2023 Workshops-Deep Statistics for More Rigorous and Efficient Data Science

ASC and OZCOTS 2023

10-15 December 2023, University of Wollongong, NSW

Abstract submissions now open!

The Scientific Program Committee is pleased to invite authors to submit abstracts for oral and poster presentations, to be delivered at ASC and OZCOTS 2023.

Please click here to submit your abstract. You will be asked to create an account with Oxford Abstract. Just follow the prompts.

Presenters should aim for 10-15 minute presentations. Depending on the number of submissions a final decision on the length of presentations will be made closer to the event.

The abstract submission deadline is 24 April 2023.

Find out more

Current Vacancies in SSA's Career Centre

Revenue Officer- DIRECT HIRE (12 Month Register)

Multiple Locations (see description)

Internal Revenue Service

Duties WHAT IS THE DIVISION? SMALL BUSINESS ...

Internal Revenue Agent (Examiner) - Direct Hire (12 Month Register)

Multiple Locations (see description)

Internal Revenue Service

Duties WHAT ARE THE APPEALS (AP), LARGE BUSINESS ...

Lecturer in Applied Statistics

Western Australia

Curtin University

A new role for a statistician to teach data science ...

View All Jobs

If you have news from the Australian statistical community to share in Stats Matters and Events, please get in touch with us! We love getting feedback too.

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