

THE CREATION AND EARLY HISTORY OF THE BERKELEY STATISTICS DEPARTMENT

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Abstract

This paper sketches the development of the Berkeley statistics group from Neyman's appointment as Professor of Mathematics in 1938 to its status as an independent Department of Statistics in 1955. It ends with a brief description of Neyman's resignation as chair of the Department in 1956 and its transition to a new era under the chairmanship of David Blackwell.

1. The Beginning. In her Neyman biography,¹ Constance Reid describes how in 1934 the University of California brought Griffith Evans² to Berkeley to revitalize its Mathematics Department. She mentions Evans' early interest in statistics, and tells of his search for a suitable statistician, which ended with his offering a position to Jerzy Neyman.³ Evans took some risk with this offer since he had never met Neyman. But I believe Neyman fulfilled his expectations as a serious and original scientist, interested in both the mathematical theory of statistics, and the broad spectrum of its applications. He also turned out to be an ambitious and dynamic administrator, sometimes perhaps more so than Evans had bargained for.

On Neyman's part, the risk was of course also very great. He had never been to California and knew little about its University except the—to him very attractive—fact that it had as yet no statistics program. However, he quickly came to like both Berkeley and the University, and he does not seem to have had any later regrets.

Neyman arrived in the summer of 1938 to take up a position as Professor of Mathematics, with the specific responsibility of developing a statistics program and of assisting Berkeley faculty members with the statistical problems they might encounter in their work.

Over the next three years, he set up a skeleton teaching program and acquired a few graduate students who, as Teaching Assistants, helped with the laboratories attached to the courses. He also engaged in a steadily increasing amount of consulting work with various faculty colleagues, which he enjoyed and which was much appreciated. For the Assistants, his secretary,