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Special Issue on the First Stu Hunter Research Conference

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Special Issue on the First Stu Hunter Research Conference

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This special issue of *Quality Engineering* features invited papers with discussions presented at the First Stu Hunter Research Conference. The model for the Stu Hunter Research Conference was the Gordon Research Conference on Statistics in Chemistry and Chemical Engineering. For many years, this conference was one of the preeminent conferences in industrial statistics, primarily due to its unique format. It took place annually from 1951 to 1999 and then biannually until 2005. For 44 years, the conference was at the New Hampton School in New Hampshire, a very rustic location. Many veteran participants called this conference “summer camp for statisticians.” However, it was very well known for its high quality of scholarly debate and inquiry. Unfortunately, the board that oversees all of the Gordon Research Conferences decided after the 2005 conference that newer areas deserved the slot reserved for the one on statistics.

Many of us who were regular participants have longed to see this conference resurrected. Stu Hunter, in particular, has been quite vocal. It was only appropriate that we create a conference modeled on the old Gordon Conference to honor Stu’s 90th birthday.

The Gordon Research Conferences (see also <http://www.grc.org>) were initiated by Dr. Neil E. Gordon, of the Johns Hopkins University, who recognized in the late 1920s the difficulty in establishing good, direct communication between scientists, whether working in the same subject area or in interdisciplinary research. The Gordon Research Conferences promoted discussions and the free exchange of ideas at the research frontiers of the biological, chemical, and physical sciences. Scientists with common professional interests came together for a full week of intense discussion and examination of the most advanced aspects of their field. These conferences provided a valuable means of disseminating information and ideas in a way that cannot be achieved through the usual channels of communication—publications and presentations at large scientific meetings. The mission statement was: *The Gordon Research Conferences provide an international forum for the presentation and discussion of frontier research in the biological, chemical, and physical sciences, and their related technologies.*

Each Gordon Research Conference operated relatively autonomously, with each conference chair being fully responsible for the content and conduct of the meeting as well as the selection of discussion leaders and attendees. The primary criteria for attendance at a conference were

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scientific accomplishment and, implicitly, the commitment to participate actively and meaningfully in the discussions.

To encourage open communication, each participant of a Gordon Research Conference agreed that any information, whether in a formal talk, poster session, or discussion, was a private communication from the individual making the contribution and was presented with the restriction that such information was not for public use. Guests were not permitted to attend the conference lectures and discussion sessions. Each participant of a conference acknowledged and agreed to these restrictions when registration was accepted and as a condition for being permitted to attend a conference.

Each year, the Gordon Research Conference on Statistics in Chemistry and Chemical Engineering formally began early Monday morning. There were two sessions each day: one in the morning and one in the evening after supper. Each session featured only one speaker, who was given approximately one hour to make his or her presentation. A 30-minute break followed. Next was a 90-minute conversation, often initiated by a discussant. The basic idea was to provide a frank, often brutally honest evaluation, of the ideas underlying the speaker's topic. The lovely exchange of ideas certainly advanced the field of industrial statistics. After lunch each day, people enjoyed the New Hampshire weather and outdoor activities. After the evening session, people enjoyed each other's company while enjoying a few beers or glasses of wine.

The combination of outstanding scholarship with strong social bonding created a unique atmosphere. Sessions often were very intense. Ideas were on trial, questioned, and thoroughly cross-examined; yet, all of the exchanges were purely scholarly in nature and rarely personal. In fact, personal animosity was never tolerated. People often had very heated intellectual exchanges in a session and then would drink beer happily with each other afterwards. Many very long-lasting friendships were born by this conference.

On several occasions such as Fall Technical Conferences and the American Statistical Association's Quality and Productivity Conference, Stu Hunter suggested that the profession should take the initiative to start a new Research Conference that was based on the same philosophy as the Gordon Research Conferences. Many industrial statisticians had heard of these conferences but were not able

to attend any of them. In the autumn of 2011, Geoff Vining and Ronald Does took the initial steps to organize the first Stu Hunter Research Conference in The Netherlands. It took 2 years for the real start. The first Stu Hunter Research Conference was held in Heemskerk, The Netherlands, during March 13–15, 2013, at the Château Marquette, a historical castle that stems from the 13th century, surrounded by protected natural landscape.

The Stu Hunter Research Conference provides a platform for discussion and the free exchange of ideas at the frontiers of statistics and quality research. Statisticians and quality researchers come together for 3 days of intense examination of the latest research in their field. Like the old Gordon conference, each day consists of two sessions. Each session has a single invited speaker, who has 90 minutes to present his or her ideas. After the break is a 90-minute conversation started by two invited panelists, who briefly share their thoughts. All conference participants then join the conversation led by a number of invited discussants. The honoree guest of the conference was the famous statistician J. Stuart Hunter, who celebrated his 90th birthday in 2013.

The keynote addresses were as follows:

- The Statistical Evaluation of Categorical measurements (Jeroen de Mast, The Netherlands)
- Statistical Engineering in Variation Reduction (Stefan Steiner, Canada)
- Reliability Meets Big Data: Opportunities and Challenges (William Meeker, United States)
- (Latent Structures–Based Multivariate) Statistical Process Control: A Paradigm Shift (Alberto Ferrer, Spain)
- Running Designed Experiments in Blocks: A Journey from the 1950s to the 21st Century (Peter Goos, Belgium)
- Stu Hunter's Contributions to Experimental Design and Quality Engineering (Douglas Montgomery, United States)

Each keynote address was commented on by two panelists and about five invited discussants.

Each of the six sessions followed the same structure: one featured speaker (three speakers from Europe and three speakers from North America) and two panelists (one panelist from Europe and one from North America), who acted as reviewers of

the presentation and provide transition to the floor discussion by invited discussants. In all the conference had about 60 participants. The veterans from the former Gordon Conference all commented that the first Stu Hunter Research Conference re-created the atmosphere and exchanges of the old.

The special issue follows more or less the same format as the conference (one main contribution followed by contributions from discussants). We hope that you will enjoy the papers and become motivated to participate in future Stu Hunter Research Conferences.

The next conference will be held in Tempe, Arizona. We expect the conference to continue annually. Initially, the conference plans to alternate between Europe and North America. In the near future, we hope to extend the conference rotation to Asia.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ronald J. M. M. Does is professor of industrial statistics at the University of Amsterdam. He is also managing director of the Institute for Business and Industrial Statistics, which operates as an independent consultancy firm within the University of Amsterdam. Furthermore, he is director of the Graduate School of Executive Programmes at the Amsterdam Business School. His current research activities include the design of control charts for nonstandard situations, health care engineering, and Lean Six Sigma methods.

G. Geoff Vining is a professor in the Department of Statistics at Virginia Tech. He is a Fellow of the American Statistical Association and the American Society for Quality. He is the 2011 recipient of the ASQ Statistics Division Hunter Award and the ASQ Shewhart Medal.