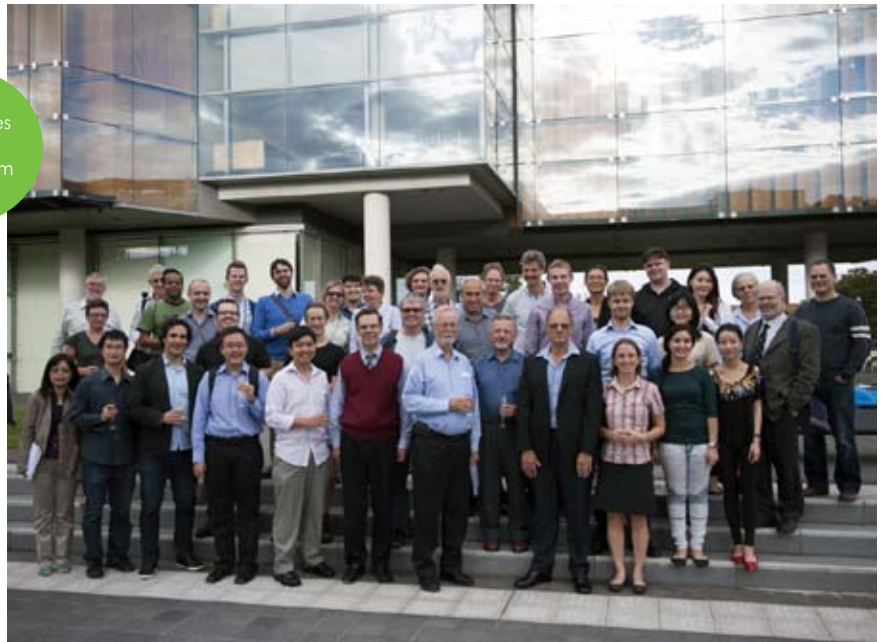


## MUCH MORE THAN U-STATISTICS: A SYMPOSIUM TO CELEBRATE NEVILLE C. WEBER


Neville stands out as one of the best that academia can produce. His mentorship helped fast-track many a career. His generous help was experienced by all who had the pleasure to interact with him. His career spans more than three decades - the majority of which was spent at the University of Sydney. In recognition of his distinguished service, in January 2014 Neville was awarded the title of Emeritus Professor. While Neville planned to retire quietly, after talking to some of his current and previous colleagues, it was more than clear that Neville deserved better. Hence, we organised a symposium to celebrate his career which was held on the 30th January 2015 at the University of Sydney.

Attendees  
at the  
symposium



The event was a huge success with 60 people attending the symposium and afterwards 50 people attended the dinner. Many people contributed towards a retirement gift for Neville, which was spent on a travel voucher for \$1320 along with a plaque that read:

*On the transition of  
Professor Neville Weber  
to senior statistician.  
Researcher, teacher, mentor, friend:  
a leader in the field;  
a generous servant to the discipline;  
an invaluable colleague;  
a complete academic;  
and the finest possible role model.  
Presented by colleagues, students and friends.  
30 January 2015*



We heard opening remarks from Professor Trevor Hambley, Dean of the Faculty of Science at the University of Sydney, who praised Neville's administrative work during his five years as Head of the School of Mathematics and Statistics. Professor Eugene Seneta, chair of the first session, took us on a trip down memory lane, with a choice selection of photographs and anecdotes from the history of the School of Mathematics and Statistics.

Neville's first PhD student, Philip Kokic (CSIRO) gave an enlightening presentation on their early research together and shared with us some revealing photos of their extra-curricular hiking trips. It's fair to say that Neville looked quite fetching in shorts as a younger man. Next off the ranks was Neville's most recent (we're hesitant to say last) PhD student, Garth Tarr (ANU). He bemoaned the pain and suffering Neville put him through during his PhD, by suggesting he look at the properties of an estimator under long range dependence.

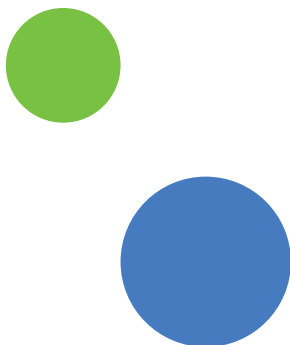
The first session was rounded out by David Warton (UNSW) who outlined the PIT-trap: a general bootstrap procedure for inference about regression models with non-normal response. He also reminisced about how little had changed in the Carlaw lecture theatres in the 20 years since he was an undergraduate student at the University of Sydney. We were then treated to a delicious afternoon tea, kindly sponsored by the Faculty of Science and the School of Mathematics and Statistics, before Professor John Robinson welcomed us back as the chair of the second session.

The next session began with Vasilis Sarafidis (Monash), a relatively recent collaborator of Neville's, who highlighted the depth and diversity of Neville's statistical ability. As an example he spoke about a joint paper they had recently published entitled: "A partially heterogeneous framework for analysing panel data". Justin Wishart (UNSW), another of Neville's recent PhD students, then took the floor and described aspects of his PhD research on nonparametric change point problems with long range dependence. Justin also outlined how Neville was there to provide unfaltering guidance and support through tragic circumstances related to his PhD studies. Finally, Alan Welsh (ANU), Neville's first honours student, regaled the audience with a discussion on recent work he's been doing with a masters student on jackknife estimation of prediction mean squared error in linear mixed models, and drew parallels with his own honours research with Neville. Alan also made the point that while all the speakers had been thanking Neville for the impact he has had on their lives and careers, there should be recognition of the positive impact that Neville's students have had on him.

With that, it was time for Neville's right of reply. He gave an entertaining overview of his career progression, singling out a number of people who made an impact on him including Harry Mulhall, George Cooney and Malcolm Quine as lecturers, Peter Hall as his lab tutor, Geoff Eagleson who was visiting from Cambridge, as well as John Robinson, Eugene Seneta and Howard D'Abrera who were outstanding role models and mentors. Agreeing with the sentiment on which Alan ended his presentation, Neville made the comment that: "It is the students that make a University career so rewarding." Neville finished with a quote from Mario Cuomo:

"You find your own good in the good of the whole. You find your own individual fulfilment in the success of the community."  
(Mario Cuomo, New York Governor, 1983-94)

Oliver Lancaster told Neville when he was first appointed as an academic that service is important and Neville clearly took this to heart. Neville didn't list any of the committees he's served on or professional service activities he's generously



given his time to over many years (which is good, because we would have been there for a long time if he had). However, special mention should be made of his longstanding role as the chair of the Technical Committee on Scaling for university admissions, his contributions to the NSW branch of SSAI and to the University of Sydney Graduate Studies Committee, particularly the Postgraduate Awards Sub-Committee. We eagerly anticipate the future contributions Neville is yet to make to the discipline of statistics, the practice and administration of education, and the lives of those around him.

After the symposium, champagne was served and frivolity followed as colleagues, young and old, mingled and exchanged thoughts and memories. This was continued at a dinner held at Chedi Thai in Newtown, where the festivities kicked on until we were kicked out well past their usual closing time. It was a memorable afternoon and enjoyable evening spent celebrating an unforgettable pillar of the statistical community.

Many people need to be thanked for their help organising this event: Alan Welsh for crafting the text on the plaque; Sonia Morr and Susan Liddell for helping with administration and catering; and Yinan Zhang for taking photos throughout the afternoon.

**Garth Tarr and Samuel Müller**

