

Learning Statistics in an Australian Mega-class: The view from students, lecturers and researchers

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At Macquarie University in Sydney, the Department of Statistics runs one of the largest Introductory Statistics courses in Australia. Over 3000 students per year from all around the campus take Stat170 Introductory Statistics. The initial conception of Macquarie University, over 40 years ago, was that students were free to compose their degree from whatever courses they wished to take from any area of studies. This idea has been diluted with the creation of many specific degree courses following a set pattern of study, and more recently by the withdrawal of participation by some discipline groups (such as psychology), motivated sometimes by academic concerns but more often by financial ones. However, the vision of an introductory course in statistics, accessible and useful to students from across the academic spectrum, is still current. Nevertheless, the unique features of a mega-class in Introductory Statistics remain: a large and diverse enrolment, multiple lecture streams and tutorial/laboratory classes, large numbers of teaching staff working together to present a consistent offering, and a comprehensive assessment schedule that is always constrained by resources. In this talk, I will present some ideas about the Introductory Statistics class from the viewpoint of key participants in the enterprise: the students who are taking the course, the lecturing staff involved in its teaching, and the academics in the department who are involved in researching aspects of statistics pedagogy. I will highlight some successful features of the course and also mention some of the tensions and challenges that we will have to face to keep this mega-class vibrant and relevant for contemporary students.

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