

### Econometric Actuaries

The enjoyable article “First Date with Math” in the July/August 2006 issue of your magazine shows the lovely ties between mathematics and actuarial science. As a professor of probability and optimization, I see that many of my students in econometrics choose a career in actuarial science because of their love for mathematics and economics. The above-mentioned article also shows how important it is that young people get enthusiastic about mathematics and its applications.

The readers of your magazine (and their children) might be interested to learn that for a few months the educational mathematics software ORSTAT2000 can be downloaded free of charge from my homepage <http://staff.feweb.vu.nl/tijms>. This package is a polished English version of educational software that was original-



ly developed to promote probability and optimization in the senior forms of Dutch high schools. I thought your readers might want to learn about the existence of this public-domain software that was well re-

ceived by mathematics teachers and their pupils in Holland.

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### Down, Pluto

Regarding Richard Zatorski's Endpaper in the January/February 2007 issue: 1) Imagine the trauma delisting Pluto had on Clyde Tombaugh, who “discovered” Pluto. I had the pleasure of briefly meeting him in White Sands Proving Grounds in 1955. 2) I occasionally teach an introductory course on how to use Microsoft Excel. Except for those students with accounting backgrounds, just mentioning “percents” results in a definite green pallor. The math dumbing down in the United States has been in progress for at least 50 years, as I can recall the “new math” being taught back then.

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### Unintended Consequences

I enjoyed Rhonda Lessard's review of Ian Stewart's *Letters to a Young Mathematician* in the January/February issue of *Contingencies*. I was also struck by an error in the Table of Contents for that issue, which listed the title of the book as “Letters to a Young Musician.” In fact, the error was unintentionally insightful, since there is a long-recognized connection between mathematics and music.

Consider the harmonic series that defines each tone in an octave, or the complex rhythmic structures in jazz compositions. The many books addressing music and mathematics include Douglas Hofstadter's classic *Gödel, Escher, Bach* and the more recent *Music and Mathematics: From Pythagoras to Fractals*, edited by John Fauvel, Raymond Flood, and Robin Wilson.

And then, of course, we have Albert Einstein and his violin. Anyone who, like Ian Stewart, wishes to inspire young students with the beauty of mathematics would do well to use music as an example.

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