

2015 Herbert Howe Lecture in Mathematics



David Aldous
Probability, outside the classroom
May 28, 4-5pm, Olin Hall 105

Abstract: Aside from games of chance and a handful of textbook topics (e.g. opinion polls) there is little overlap between the content of an introductory course in mathematical probability and our everyday perception of chance. In this mostly non-mathematical talk I will give some illustrations of the broader scope of probability.

Why do your friends have more friends than you do, on average? Were there unusually many candidates for the 2012 Republican Presidential Nomination whose fortunes rose and fell, and what should we predict for 2016? Why, in a long line at airport security, do you move forward a few paces and then wait half a minute before moving forward again? In what everyday contexts do ordinary people perceive uncertainty/unpredictability in terms of chance? How can we judge someones ability to assess probabilities of future geopolitical events, where the true probabilities are unknown?

About the speaker: David Aldous received his Ph.D. from Cambridge University in 1977. He is a Professor in the Statistics Department at UC Berkeley, Fellow of the Royal Society, and a member of the National Academy of Sciences.

His research in mathematical probability has covered weak convergence, exchangeability, Markov chain mixing times, continuum random trees, stochastic coalescence and spatial random networks. A central theme in the works of Dr. Aldous is the study of large finite random structures, obtaining asymptotic behavior as the size tends to infinity via consideration of some suitable infinite random structure.



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