

DECISION LINE

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

A Focus on Education in the Decision Sciences

Lee J. Krajewski,
University of Notre Dame

Having never visited Greece before, I did not know what to expect when I got off the plane in Athens, the site of the Decision Sciences Institute's 5th International Meeting. Would I understand the signs for the restrooms? Would I only have salads to eat? What is eggplant, anyway? The answers to these and many more questions did not matter—the experience

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far exceeded my expectations. Conference Co-Chairs Steve Zanakis, Florida International University, and Georgios Doukidis, Athens University of Economics and Business, with the help of many others, did an outstanding job. With 1,000 attendees, the DSI Athens Conference was the largest international conference the Institute has ever had. Fifty-six countries were represented, and over half the attendees were from countries other than the U.S.A. In all regards, each session was well worth the trip for any attendee, especially the panel on the ancient Greeks' contribution to decision making. I did not see a session on the ancient Poles, though. Nonetheless, a remarkable statistic for that conference is that 62 percent of the attendees were not DSI members. We need to encourage those attendees to join our ranks and help us develop a truly international presence for the Institute. The DSI Athens Conference has set the stage and now we must act.

Lessons in Greece

Of course, one can be educated in more ways than attending social gatherings and formal sessions at a conference. I would be remiss if I did not relay what I learned *after* the conference. First, take a cliff-climbing course before you attempt to see the beautiful monasteries in Meteora. The monasteries are built in the mountains, with sheer cliffs on all sides. The only way to see them is to climb stairs from the foot of the mountains. To be respectably dressed, men must have slacks and women must have skirts — no sleeveless shirts or blouses. In 100-degree temperatures! The monastery I liked best was the Monastery of Agia Trias (or the Monastery of the Holy Trinity), where the James Bond movie "For Your Eyes Only" was filmed. After we climbed 145 steps, Father Ioannes Serafim Palatzas (Father John to you and me) met us with cold water and candy treats. When he found out that I teach at Notre Dame and I am the father of four boys, he took us on the "grand" tour. He gave me a (heavy) box of candy treats to lug home and share with my family.

Second, always look before you sit. I can still see Larry Ritzman sitting on a blob of bubble gum that was parked on a bench near the Oracles of Delphi. Larry concluded that Greek gum has about the same consistency as American gum in 100-degree temperatures.

Finally, never attempt to drive in Athens unless you are absolutely clear as to where you are going. Our directions from Delphi to the airport in Athens were a little "fuzzy." After making a few wrong turns, we found ourselves in the heart of Athens looking for the airport. You haven't lived until you have tried to drive a van along the narrow streets of the inner city of Athens. Thank goodness for Larry Ritzman's patience. After asking for directions from attendants at three different BP service stations, we started to believe that you could not get to the airport from there. The attendant at the fourth BP station finally got us on the correct path. A post analysis of this decision-making exercise indicated that a major problem was our map: It was in English, and the street signs were in—you guessed it—Greek.

Education in Decision Sciences

In my last President's Letter (*Decision Line*, Vol. 30, No. 4) I focused on the research thrusts that I think the Institute can foster. Theorists, Methodologists, Problemists, and Empiricists all have different points of view; however, the strength of their collective research into issues of decision making comes from a synergy of efforts. Theories must be developed that explain decision-making behavior in an age where technology is changing rapidly. Methodologies must be developed to help decision makers face short lead times and enormous information loads, and to help researchers analyze and evaluate new approaches. Problemists must address realistic decision problems, and Empiricists must provide the data, information, and models of current practice.

Since its inception 30 years ago, the Decision Sciences Institute has provided a forum for the Theorists, Methodologists, Problemists, and Empiricists. I think that is appropriate because research is a foundation of academics. But, so is education. After all, we learn from our research and our students learn from us. Thirty years ago there was not as much concern over how we would bring new and exciting ideas (or even, old, boring, but important ideas) to our students. We used the time-honored lecture format and the students sat in their chairs, took notes, and learned the subject because the instructor said it was important and they would be tested on it. The early annual meetings of the Institute devoted only a handful of sessions to educational issues, focusing mainly on the

communication of research findings and developments. Little did we know then that times would change—in a big way.

We can debate over the factors that caused a change in the focus of academia regarding teaching. However, the student activism of the '70s brought students into the inner sanctums of academic decision-making bodies. The budget constraints of the '70s and '80s, because of reduced state subsidies, caused universities to justify their programs to lawmakers by emphasizing the importance and quality of the teaching missions of their respective units. The importance of the teaching mission is especially acute in the business and engineering colleges whose donors, alumni, and recruiters are practicing professionals. In addition, the Total Quality Management movement in the business world in the '80s and '90s spilled over into academia and focused attention on the "customers" that universities are attempting to serve. Academia has come a long way in 30 years. It is no longer uncommon to hear that teaching and research have parity in the academic missions of universities.

I am proud to say that the Decision Sciences Institute has also made progress in addressing educational issues in the decision sciences. The DSI Athens international meeting this summer devoted 28 sessions to educational issues. If you missed that conference, do not despair. Program Chair of the 1999 Annual DSI Meeting, Tom Jones, University of Arkansas, has organized nearly 60 sessions addressing teaching, curriculum, and other educational issues. This is welcome news for those of us who literally have to hang on to our garters lest our socks get blown off in class. There is literally something for everyone, regardless of your functional preference. Here are some of the many questions that can be answered at the 1999 Annual Meeting:

- What technologies are there for supporting teaching outside the classroom?
- How can I make my course in statistics more effective?
- What are the considerations I should make in designing an interdisciplinary course?
- What are the latest directions in curricula at the undergraduate, MBA, and Ph.D levels?
- How can I write effective cases?
- How can spreadsheets be used to foster creative thinking in my classes?

- What is ERP and how can it be integrated into an existing curriculum?
- What progress has been made in applying the Baldrige Award criteria in academic institutions?
- How can I use the Web to improve my course?
- Can I get away with using a presentation that is 30 years old?

The 1999 Annual Meeting can even answer the last question: Attend the Special Fellows Session co-chaired by Jim Evans and Linda Sprague. In addition, you can rub elbows with top case writers at the finalist presentations for the Case Studies Award Competition, see firsthand the finalist presentations for the Instructional Innovation Award, and attend a new mini-conference on Teaching with Spreadsheets.

I focused on education in this letter, but the 1999 Annual Meeting has much more to offer. See the web site at the Institute's web page <http://dsi.gsu.edu/>, or the program chair's web page at <http://comp.uark.edu/~finnell/dsi99/>, for a complete display of all the activities and events to take place at the 30th anniversary meeting of the Decision Sciences Institute. Join us in New Orleans, where we will learn a lot and have fun doing it. See you there! ■

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