



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

Article from:

The Actuary

May 1982 – Volume 16, No. 5

Letters

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We Should Examine On Computers

Sir:

In the March "E. & E. Corner" five "philosophical and practical" objections, none of them valid, to putting computers into the exam syllabus were offered. Considering each in turn:

(1) "The computer . . . is . . . not an element of actuarial theory." That could be said of social insurance, taxation, law and accounting, which are on the syllabus purely because a practicing actuary must (generally) know about them. This is equally true of computers.

(2) "Rapidity of EDP development would make syllabus items obsolete." Many other syllabus topics, e.g. the four mentioned above, tend to change.

(3) "There is no consensus on a universal computer language for actuaries." I doubt that the questioner was asking that a specific computer language be in the syllabus. But it does seem desirable to examine on a comparison among the main language types; some of James Martin's books might be useful here.

(4) "Exam questions . . . would . . . give some students an unfair advantage." There is hardly a syllabus item about which this can't be said.

(5) "There is enough exam material already." This was true when I was writing the exams, and still may be, but does the E. & E. Committee believe that every present syllabus item outranks the computer topic in usefulness to the student? Isn't there some deadwood cullable to make room for computers?

If there are sound reasons for not bringing computers into the syllabus, they weren't presented in the March issue.

Kenneth T. Pawulski

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Hurrying Actuaries

Sir:

Michael J. Cowell's observation (March issue) of the abnormally high proportion of actuarial marathoners should come as no surprise. Surely it's just an extension of the masochistic . . . oops . . . zealous tendencies displayed in our tenacity to continue through the examinations.

ACTUARIAL LEFTIES

FIASCO has reported from London that the Institute President and at least three other members of its 35-member governing body are left-handed, a proportion said to be above their national average, though not necessarily significantly so.

A poll of our 29 Board of Governors members under President Robert H. Hoskins' supervision reveals that we veer even farther to the left. Among them we find six lefties.

Our refined study differentiated between Class "L" (4 Board members) who write with their left hands, and Class "R" (2 members) who have taken the risks popularly associated with acquiring the ability to scribble right-handedly.

We'd welcome information from readers on how these figures compare with the Canadian and U.S.A. averages, and what difficulties lefthanded actuaries encounter in performing their professional duties.

E.J.M.

Some of us, though, have recognized the value of bicycling instead of running long distances. You can coast downhill. You can carry your refreshments, change of clothing and, on some machines, your accompanying person. And the pleasures of Falstaffian eating don't have to be renounced.

Lawrence Mitchell

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Self Slaughter

Sir:

Helga Kronheim's report from COINTRA (March issue) that lessened availability of lethal ovens in the U.K. may account for fewer suicides is surprising; one would think that where there's a will, there's a way. This may tell us how many suicides reflect the mood of the moment.

The gas in question is of course not carbon dioxide but carbon monoxide which, together with hydrogen and a sprinkling of hydrogen sulphide, formed a delightful mixture called coal gas, now widely replaced by North Sea natural gas.

Michael Cohen

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Crabbed Age and Youth

Sir:

The distribution of Fellows by year of Fellowship (April issue) bears on the question whether our Board of Governors has the same perspectives about the Society's direction as the Fellows do. Here is the same distribution for the current Board:

<u>Year of Fellowship</u>	<u>Number of Board Members</u>
1940(1), 1949(1)	2
1950(1), 1952(4), 1954(2)	7
1956(1), 1957(2), 1958(1), 1959(5)	9
1960(3), 1962(1), 1963(1)	5
1965(2), 1967(2), 1969(2)	6
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For Board Members the median year of qualification is 1959, contrasting with 1974 for the Fellows as a whole. All the Board Members have been Fellows for longer than the average for Fellows as a whole, and most fall into the first quartile.

Even though the Board is bound to have a higher proportion of older, more experienced, Fellows than the membership at large, there may be practical and useful ways for the Committee on Elections to achieve greater young-member representation. One might be to include some younger people as candidates, as was done some years ago. Another would be to publish a distribution by year of Fellowship corresponding to what's now done for geographical region and type of employment.

Peter W. Plumley

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Tastes Vary

Sir:

Actucrostics and Actucrosswords are all very well for lovers of those art forms, but would it be too unreasonable to suggest that perhaps once or twice a year *The Actuary* publish a Literary Supplement for those of us who prefer fiction or poetry? Among those whose classic writings might appear are Henry H. Jackson, William M. Anderson, Benjamin T. Holmes and, going back to the 19th century, Augustus de Morgan. Do other readers support this idea?

Frank P. Di Paolo