

University of Pittsburgh Statistics Department Seminar

Investigating Psychic Phenomena with Statistics Professor Jessica Utts, Department of Statistics University of California, Davis

Thursday, March 25 from 12:00 to 12:50
University of Pittsburgh WWPB 1P56



Anecdotal stories about phenomena such as telepathy (mind to mind communication) and precognition (knowledge of the future) are intriguing and compelling. But they do not constitute solid evidence for these phenomena because in any given case, random events or normal methods of communication can provide alternative explanations. For several decades, scientists have been studying these abilities using well-designed experiments and simple statistical methods. The speaker has been analyzing the results of these experiments for over 15 years, and has found strong statistical evidence for some of these abilities. This talk will cover the kinds of experiments that have been done and give a summary of their results. For the statisticians in the audience, there will be a brief description of a hierarchical Bayes analysis of the data. Otherwise, no prior knowledge of statistical methods will be assumed.

About the speaker: Jessica M. Utts is interested in applying statistics to issues of public interest and in educating students and others to be critical consumers of statistical information. She is an expert on statistical issues related to parapsychology, the scientific study of purported abilities such as telepathy and precognition. In the mid-1990s, Utts took part in an American Institutes of Research evaluation of the Central Intelligence Agency's "Star Gate" program, which investigated possible intelligence uses for extrasensory perception. She has appeared on numerous television programs, including ABC's *20/20* and *Nightline*, *Larry King Live* and *CNN Morning News*, discussing topics ranging from parapsychology to luck and lotteries. She is the author of *Seeing Through Statistics* (Duxbury Press, 1999), and co-author of *Mind on Statistics 2nd ed.* (Duxbury Press, 2004).

Duxbury Press has generously offered to provide lunch for interested students and Statistics faculty/grad students in the Galleria (hallway outside WWPB 1P56) before Prof. Utts' talk, from 11:00 to 11:50. The first 20 students in each of the classes using Prof. Utts' textbook who send their instructor an email to reserve a place will be accepted for this unique opportunity. Please email Dr. Pfenning at nancyp@pitt.edu or Dr. Gordon at jhgordon@pitt.edu and specify if you would like to plan to attend both luncheon and talk or just the talk.