How a Statistical Idea Saved Darwin's Theory and Much More

Monday, April 9, 2012 | 6:00 pm
Duncan Hall, McMurtry Auditorium

Following a salute to the anniversary of Statistics at Rice, a story will be told about what may be the most influential idea in the history of statistics, and its consequences for Darwinian evolution, Bayesian inference, and much more. One consequence was the correction of a two-thousand year-old error involving the application of simple Euclidean thinking in science. At the end both themes will be tied together in discussing a deep and important development of that idea that took place at Rice.

About the Speaker

Stephen M. Stigler is the Ernest DeWitt Burton Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of Statistics of the University of Chicago. He also holds an appointment in the Committee on Conceptual and Historical Studies of Science, and in the Social Science Collegiate Division. Dr. Stigler has worked on a variety of topics in mathematical statistics, ranging from asymptotic theory to the theory of experimental design, and on applications of statistics including in anthropology, forensic science, paleontology, psychology, information transfer, and sports. In recent years he has concentrated on the history of statistics, with inquiries ranging from the development of statistical methods in astronomy and geodesy and their spread to biological and social sciences, to lotteries, to the modern development of statistical theory. He has published two books, The History of Statistics (1986), and Statistics on the Table (1999). Honors received include election to the American Philosophical Society and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a Humboldt Foundation Research Award, and election as a Membre Associé of the Académie Royale de Belgique, Classe des Sciences. Stigler received his BA and D.Sc. (hon) from Carleton College, and his PhD from the University of California, Berkeley. He has served as president of the Institute of Mathematical Statistics and of the International Statistical Institute, and as editor of the Journal of the American Statistical Association: Theory and Methods.

There will be a social time from 5:30 to 6:00 in Martel Hall before the talk. Parking is available in the Visitor Parking lot located next to Duncan Hall.