An open letter

My dear Australian colleagues,

On my recent trip to your country as the first recipient of the AusCan Scholarship, I visited 7 cities, 11 universities, 7 CSIRO offices, and 5 non-academic institutions. I attended 5 SSAI branch meetings and 1 informal meeting with a group of young statisticians in Melbourne. I gave 2 one-day workshops and 18 lectures. It was an intense — but amazing and rewarding — experience.

Organizing and coordinating a trip of such scale was in itself a formidable logistic challenge. The planning took months. I have many, many people to thank. My trip could not possibly have been so enjoyable and memorable without the generous help of these wonderful people: Melissa Dobbie (CSIRO); Doug Shaw (CSIRO); Boris Choy (University of Technology Sydney); Richard Jarrett (CSIRO); Kerrie Mengersen (Queensland University of Technology); Brent Henderson (CSIRO); Steven Roberts (Australian National University); Mark Griffin (Queensland University of Technology); David Allingham (University of Newcastle); Margaret Swincer (WorkCover); Alok Phatak (CSIRO); Brenton Clarke (Murdoch University); Caro Badcock (Covance); Paula O’Reilly (University of Melbourne); Terry O’Neill (Australian National University); Michael Martin (Australian National University); Alan Welsh (Australian National University); Ross Sparks (CSIRO); Sally Galbraith (University of New South Wales); Graham Wood (Macquarie University); Tony Wohlers (The National Australia Bank); Tony Swain (Queensland Department of Primary Industries); Geoff McLachlan (University of Queensland); Matthew Wand (University of New South Wales); Billy Duckworth (Australian National University); Petra Kuhnert (CSIRO); Richard Huggins (University of Melbourne); Debra Partington (Victoria Department of Primary Industries); and a few others who must, most regrettably, remain anonymous because I, for one reason or another, did not remember their names.

Your many talents and the interesting, innovative, and diverse work you are doing impressed me deeply. You have invented fast and effective algorithms for extracting information from microarray data, elucidated the connection between penalized splines and support vector machines, and made new advances in the analysis of zero-inflated count data. You are fitting sophisticated Bayesian mixture models to analyze air pollution data and looking for better ways to construct informed priors from expert opinions. You are building smart-sensor networks to monitor your limited water supply and designing efficient strategies to surveil your extended coastlines. You have even taught robots to play soccer and won the world championship title in RoboCup 2006!

Fortunately, despite my busy itinerary, I did manage to find some time to feed a kangaroo and see such Australian landmarks as the famous Sydney Opera House. As to various side effects of my trip, I now find coffee from Tim Hortons quite unacceptable and can boast of having given more than one lecture while holding a glass of shiraz!

I surely hope that you have enjoyed my visit as much as I have enjoyed visiting you, and that you have enjoyed and perhaps even learned a few things from my lectures and workshops. Thank you for your hospitality and for allowing me to have such a great time!

Mu Zhu
University of Waterloo
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada
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2007 AusCan Scholar
Applications for the AusCan Scholar 2007 were reviewed and Melissa Dobbie from Queensland has been selected as the first Australian AusCan Scholar. Melissa will visit Canada later in the year. More information about Melissa’s visit will be published later.