

PROFILE

Jeffrey Joseph Hunter



Born in Otahuhu in 1941, Jeffrey Hunter was educated at King's College, Auckland (1954-1958). Following his result from the university scholarship examinations, he was awarded a Scholar's Tie by King's College. In 1959, he entered to the University of Auckland and graduated with a BSc degree and was awarded Senior Scholar in Mathematics in 1962. In 1963 he obtained an MSc degree, with First Class Honours in Mathematics from the University of Auckland. In 1964, Jeffrey was offered a Commonwealth Scholarship to Queen's University, Canada and a Fulbright travel grant. He decided to decline the offer to Queen's University and accept the Fulbright grant to attend the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, U.S.A., where he completed a PhD degree in Statistics in 1968. During his doctoral studies, Jeffrey worked as a research assistant (1964-1966) and a teaching assistant (1967-1968). He held the position of research associate (equivalent to a post-doctoral fellowship position) in 1968. Between 1965 and 1968, he also held various positions (analyst or statistician) at Research Triangle Institute, Research Triangle Park, NC, USA, in different short periods.

In 1969 Jeffrey returned to New Zealand and took a Lectureship in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics at the University of Auckland, where he was promoted to a Senior Lecturer in 1971 and then to Associate Professor in Statistics in 1986. Between 1969 and 1990, Jeffrey served various roles at the University of Auckland, including Acting Head of the Statistics Unit (1978-1979) and Chairman of the University Committee on Operations Research (1985-1990). In 1990 he accepted the Chair in Statistics at Massey University, Palmerston North Campus within the Department of Mathematics and Statistics. In 1991 he became the Foundation Head of the Department of Statistics and in 1995 became the first permanent Dean of the newly established Faculty of Information and Mathematical Sciences. Following the formation of College of Sciences at Massey University in 1998, he moved back to Auckland to become the Foundation Head of the Institute of Information and Mathematical Sciences on Massey University's newly established Albany Campus. He stepped aside from this role in 2001 to return to the position of Professor of Statistics. He was granted Professor Emeritus status on his retirement from Massey University in November 2007. He then joined AUT within the School of Computer and Mathematical Sciences and finally retired from AUT in December 2018 when he was granted the title of Professor Emeritus of Mathematical Sciences in recognition to his contribution to the university through shaping the Mathematical Sciences programme and his research contributions.

Jeffrey has published widely and is internationally recognized in the field of applied probability including Markov chains, semi-Markov processes, generalised matrix inverses, two-dimensional renewal theory – in the latter area his research has had wide applicability to warranty analysis. More recently, his research in Markov chains has seen him explore the properties and interpretation of Kemeny’s constant and develop some pioneering innovative computational procedures. He has produced over 80 publications in these areas, including 46 journal articles and 8 books or book chapters. In 1983 Academic Press published his two-volume work on “Mathematical Techniques in Applied Probability”. In 2005, he gained a Doctorate in Science from Massey University for his research in Applied Probability – the first of its kind in his field of research at the time in New Zealand. He has delivered over 50 plenary/keynote/invited talks at various conferences, and been the chair, an organizer or a committee member for over 30 conferences. In addition, he has also been invited to be an editor, a guest editor and a reviewer or referee for many journals and conference proceedings.

During his career he has held visiting positions at the Department of Statistics, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, (1973, 1988, 2001), Department of Industrial Engineering and Operations Research, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, (College of Engineering Visiting Professor 1980, 1987) and has been an academic visitor at the Department of Mathematics and Statistics, McGill University, Montreal, (1988), Mathematical Sciences Institute, Cornell University (1988), Statistical Laboratory, University of Cambridge, U.K (1992), Department of Industrial Engineering, Texas A & M University (1992) and Department of Statistics, University of Oxford, U.K., (2002).

In 1992 he was awarded a Claude McCarthy Fellowship to visit universities in the U.S., Canada, United Kingdom and South Africa. In 1992 he was the Distinguished Lecturer in Applied Probability, Department of Industrial Engineering, Texas A & M University. In 1993 he was elected as a Member of the International Statistical Institute.

Jeffrey has been the member of the NZ Mathematical Society, the NZ Statistical Association and the Operational Research Society of NZ for the duration of his career. He was President of the NZ Statistical Association (1995-97), elected a Fellow of the NZ Mathematical Society (2002), and served as Chair of the Royal Society of New Zealand Committee on Mathematical and Information Sciences (1997–2002). In 2003 he was awarded a Bronze New Zealand Science & Technology Medal, “for his significant contribution over an extended period to the public understanding of the role and importance that the mathematical and information sciences play in all spheres of the community including business and industry”. In 2006 he was the recipient of the Campbell Award, the highest award given by the NZ Statistical Association “to recognize his contributions to statistical research and education, and his services to the profession of statistics“. He was also given Honorary Life Membership of the NZSA. In 2015 he was appointed to the Advisory Board of Christ’s University in Pacific, Tonga.

Jeffrey has been a member of the International Organizing Committee (IOC) of the International Workshops in Matrices and Statistics following his chairing of the Local Organising Committee for the Auckland Workshop held in 2005. He has chaired the IOC for three meetings in China – Shanghai in 2010, Haikou in 2015 and Shanghai in 2019. His 75th Birthday was recognised with a special session at the Madeira Workshop in 2016.

Over the 10 year period from 2008 to 2018, Jeffrey made significant contribution to the discipline and staff development in Mathematical Sciences at AUT. Through him, the Applied Statistics major was changed to Analytics in 2009. In 2014, Jeffrey worked together with Jiling Cao and Ajit Narayanan to set up the Master of Analytics at AUT, which was the first of its kind in the Departments of Mathematics and/or Statistics within New Zealand. After his retirement at AUT, Jeffrey still visits the Department of Mathematical Sciences from time to time, shares his vision and advises his colleagues. In April 2021, a group of his friends which included some colleagues from the University Auckland, Massey University and AUT met together at a gathering celebrating his 80th birthday.

Jeffrey enjoys travelling and is a great traveller and has been to many places in the world having visited over 85 countries. It has been a tradition for many years that he and his wife Hazel choose a new place to visit that year. I am sure that the couple will be on another cruise to a new destination once the international travel ban due to COVID-19 is lifted. Many of their colleagues and friends will extend best wishes to the couple. Also, I am sure that many of us look forward to Jeffrey’s continued services and contribution to the mathematical sciences community within New Zealand and beyond.

Jiling Cao
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