

13/24/51

Memorial Resolution - George W. Snedecor

An international authority who was a pioneer in his field, George W. Snedecor, passed away February 15 in Amherst, Massachusetts.

Dr. Snedecor was born October 2, 1881, in Memphis, Tennessee, and received his education at the Alabama Polytechnic Institute, the University of Alabama and the University of Michigan. He joined the Iowa State faculty as an assistant professor of mathematics in 1913, and remained for 45 years.

Shortly after his arrival at Iowa State, Dr. Snedecor took the lead in helping people with problems in statistical applications. In 1924 he participated in weekly sessions conducted by Henry A. Wallace, then editor of Wallace's Farmer, demonstrating rapid machine calculation to solve basic statistical needs, especially relating to agricultural research. Because of his interest and enthusiasm, Dr. Snedecor continued statistical experimentation, and in 1927 he and Dr. A. E. Brandt were put in charge of a Mathematics Statistical Service, established to supply the demand for professional help in statistics.

Six years later the Statistical Laboratory was established as a research institute under the president, with Dr. Snedecor as its first director. He remained in the post until college regulations forced him to relinquish administrative responsibilities in 1947 at the age of 65, continuing as a professor of statistics on a part time basis until his retirement in 1958.

Dr. Snedecor is recognized throughout the world for his pioneer work in the development and use of statistical methods, particularly in the field of biological and agricultural experimentation. His book, Statistical Methods, first published in 1937, is now in its sixth edition and has been translated into Spanish, Hindi, and Japanese. Dr. Snedecor authored three other books and some 50 papers on statistics. He served as editor of the Queries section of Biometrics from its inception in 1945 until 1958.

In 1948 Dr. Snedecor was named president of the American Statistical Association, the first person in the field of agricultural research ever to head the association. His national and international reputation is indicated by his election as an Honorary Fellow of the British Royal Statistical Society and an Honorary Life Member of the International Biometric Society. He was also elected to membership of the International Statistical Institute and was a Fellow of the American Statistical Association, the Institute of Mathematical Statistics and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He held memberships in the Iowa Academy of Science, Phi Beta Kappa, Sigma Xi, Gamma Alpha, Pi Mu Epsilon and Kappa Sigma.

In 1954 the George W. Snedecor Award, administered through the ISU Alumni Achievement Fund, was set up in his honor by his colleagues, former students, and friends. Later he himself contributed generously to the Award which has enabled the Department of Statistics to accord appropriate recognition each year to its top Ph.D. student.

Dr. Snedecor received the Iowa State Faculty Citation in 1955, an honorary Doctorate of Science from North Carolina State in 1956, and an honorary Doctorate of Science from Iowa State in 1958. In 1969 the Service Building housing the Department of Statistics was renamed Snedecor Hall. The Samuel S. Wilks memorial medal was awarded to him in 1970 and a book Statistical Papers in Honor of George W. Snedecor was published by Iowa State Press in 1972.

George Snedecor's personal qualities were the foundation for the development of the Statistical Laboratory and the Department of Statistics which were the first institutions of their types to be formed at an American university. He was always ready to discuss the problems of data collection and interpretation of any worker and would then interact deeply to the conclusion of the study. He appreciated the roles of the scientist, the mathematician, and the statistician, and even before the formation of a full department he brought together a wide range of essential complementary talents. It was critical in this respect that he was so successful in forging diverse talents into a single working group.

As a teacher, though somewhat unorthodox, Snedecor left a huge imprint on students, particularly those with creative talent. Almost all the more advanced students of his teaching career went on to high positions in professional statistics.

In all his professional life, he was aided strongly by his wife, Gertrude, who will be recalled with deep affection by all who knew her.

Throughout, his life was characterized by high integrity and deep personal and professional commitment. The spirit of Snedecor will live long in the Statistical Laboratory which has assimilated his basic philosophy, values, and aims, and continues to develop the use of statistical ideas in a continually widening span of research endeavors.

The Faculty of Iowa State extends its deepest sympathy to his son, James. His wife and another son preceded him in death.

Be it resolved that this memorial statement be made a part of the records of the Iowa State University general faculty minutes, and that a copy be sent to his son.