

Letter From the Editor

Dear reader,

Whenever people ask me what my major is, I reply that it's operations research and almost invariably get a puzzled look followed by the obvious question, "what is operations research?" (or the one we've all gotten, "can you make much money doing operations research?"). To the first question, I usually go on to explain that OR also called industrial mathematics and then give them one of the countless examples that I've studied in one of my courses and the best part is, they actually understand.

This is one of the great things about OR for me; I get to work on problems that I and many people around me have faced before, sometimes on a regular basis. Things like how many cashiers should be on duty at the grocery store at any given time (queueing theory). While OR does allow us to solve these everyday problems, it also allows large companies to save lots of money. For example, Continental Airlines implemented a program designed by operations research specialists in 2001 to re-assign passengers when things like snowstorms disrupt their flights. This program was used 4 times that year and saved the company an estimated \$40 million (Yu et al, 2003)

As for the second question that I sometimes get asked, "can you make money doing operations research," I think that the previous paragraph answers this quite nicely. While I don't know exactly how much Continental Airlines's OR team was paid, I think it's a safe assumption that if you're saving a company \$40 million, you can expect a pretty big Christmas bonus.

Finally, I would like to thank you for showing interest in the field of OR. By reading this publication you are taking a step toward an exciting and rewarding area of mathematics. I hope you have as much fun reading this as I had assembling it.

This is the part where I thank all the members of the SFU operations research student union for all their hard work; in particular Michelle and Sam for orchestrating the creation of the union and coming up with the idea to make this publication. I look forward to many more excellent issues of Analytics Now.

Optimally yours (given some regularity conditions),



William Ruth
Vice-President and Secretary of the
Operations Research Student Union

Reference

G. Yu, M. Argüello, C. Song, S. M. McGowan, and A. White, "A New Era for Crew Recovery at Continental Airlines," *Interfaces*, **33**(1): 5-22, Jan.-Feb. 2003.