

IBS statement on R.A. Fisher

The International Biometric Society (IBS) was founded in 1947 as a result of the growing awareness of the importance of statistics in the biological sciences. Sir R.A. Fisher was instrumental in the establishment of the new Society and served as its first President.

Fisher was a major scientist in the first half of the 20th century and developed many techniques for the statistical design and analysis of experiments. His contributions to the statistical profession can hardly be overstated. Fisher was also a dominant figure in the development of statistical genetics following the important foundational breakthroughs by Darwin and Mendel in the 19th Century.

Fisher also became fascinated by the movement of eugenics, the application of genetic insights to 'improve human populations'. He participated in The Cambridge University Eugenics Society, published views supportive of eugenics, espoused racial inequality, and encouraged political lobbying for the implementation of those views. In light of this, Fisher's reputation has recently been heavily scrutinized and several organizations decided to no longer honor his legacy. For example, the North American Committee of Presidents of Statistical Societies (COPSS) have renamed their Fisher lecture (https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/COPSS_Distinguished_Achievement_Award_and_Lectureship); the Rothamsted Lawes Agricultural Trust has changed the name of the Fisher Court accommodation block (<https://www.rothamsted.ac.uk/news/statement-r-fisher>); Gonville and Caius College Cambridge have removed the stained glass window commemorating Fisher (<https://www.cai.cam.ac.uk/news/college-council-decides-remove-ra-fisher-window-hall>). In a recent statement (<http://www.senns.uk/FisherEugenics.pdf>), the Fisher Memorial Trust has presented a detailed account of Fisher's work, views, and activities, and argues that Fisher's views evolved over time as empirical evidence against eugenics became available.

While the IBS continues to value Fisher's contributions to the field of biometry, it rejects Fisher's support of eugenics and race distinctions. We strongly and unequivocally condemn all racist or discriminatory views or actions. The IBS promotes equality, diversity, and inclusion and rejects all forms of exclusion. The Society aims at uniting practitioners and researchers devoted to advancing the collection, the analysis, and the interpretation of data related to the biosciences, regardless of race, age, gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearances, or religion. IBS continuously strives to reflect this position through its governance, committees, policies, initiatives, and activities.