Happy Holidays to everyone and I wish you all a Happy New Year. The department got together last month for our annual Thanksgiving luncheon. It is always fabulous to get together with colleagues, co-workers and students to talk about personal interests rather than work related talk. We had a diverse spread of food representing the cultures of individuals in our Biostatistics department. (Indian, Chinese, American, etc…).

In addition to our annual Thanksgiving luncheon, Dr. Shumei Sun graciously welcomed us into her house to host a Welcome to the Department for our incoming students! We had a wonderful time getting to know each other and our families. Not to mention there was food and anyone who has been in our department knows how much we all love food!

During our get togethers I was pleased to learn that some of our graduate students have been busy traveling internationally these last 6 months. There travels were for both personal and business reasons. Two of the adventures are showcased in this newsletter and one is showcased in the 12th and Marshall (see link below). I am excited that they shared their travels with me.

**Department Fun**

We held our 24th annual New Student Introduction and Reception in August 2016. Faculty, staff and returning students welcomed the following new students:

- Narad Mishra
- Christine Orndahl
- Spiro Stilianoudakis, MA
- Jonathan Yu, MA
- Sonja Volker, PhD

**12th and Marshall**

Be sure to check out the Fall edition of 12th and Marshall.

Amanda Gentry, graduate student, is featured on page 5 regarding her trip to Australia to study data from the Brisbane Longitudinal Twins Study.

Ed Glass, PhD, recent alumni, is featured on page 15. This is a very nice article of how Ed came to be a PhD candidate in the Biostatistics department.

Maureen McBride, alumni, is featured on page 50. She discusses her high powered career at UNOS.

Click on link above to read more about each story.
Last October, fourth year PhD student, Keith Zirkle, had the opportunity to travel to Qatar with the VCU Qatar Leadership Exchange Program. This was the third year of the program, but the first year that MCV Campus students were invited to apply.

Qatar, a peninsula nation off of Saudi Arabia, is considered the richest country in the world, largely due to its exportation of oil. In 1998, Qatar invited six American universities to open schools in Education City, a city within a city in Doha. VCU was the first school to arrive, offering a comprehensive arts program, alongside Weill Cornell Medical College, Texas A&M (engineering), Carnegie Mellon (business and computer science), Georgetown (foreign service), and Northwestern Universities (journalism and communications).

The week-long program focuses on connecting students at VCU’s Richmond campuses with students on its Qatari campus. Throughout the week, the students and trip advisers visited museums, different schools at Education City, Qatar Science and Technology Park, and even ventured into the desert.

Keith found the trip eye-opening all-around. In an increasingly globalized world, there’s not many places that are more different from America than Qatar (or the Middle East in general) that are still “first world.” It was fascinating to see the intersection of culture, religion, and government. Qatar is a constitutional monarchy whose state religion is Islam, though other faiths are accepted. Simultaneously, Qataris are actually outnumbered by expats, and Doha is an international hub. Qatar openly discusses its 2030 vision to be the leader in everything from healthcare, technology, and the arts to the world economy and education.

Of academic interest, Keith enjoyed seeing the science jobs that are available internationally. The Qatar Science and Technology Park aspires to be the next Silicon Valley (It’s probably hot enough, Keith thinks). He also appreciated touring Weill Cornell Medical College’s Qatar campus and comparing their programs to VCU’s. The group also received a seminar on global and public health in Qatar and intercultural competence in medicine.

The highlight of the trip, though, had to be desert duning and riding a camel. More information on the trip can be found at http://www.vcusga.org/qatarleadershipexchange/ or email Keith at zirklekw@vcu.edu.
Sonja Volker, Graduate Student

Dr. Volker traveled to Switzerland to meet up with her family and celebrate her parents' birthdays and their upcoming 45th wedding anniversary. Her brother lives in Switzerland, and although she has visited him on several occasions, she is still awestruck by the country’s natural beauty every time she visits.

During her last visit, she explored the old city centers of Zurich and Bern, hiked through the rugged canton of Graubünden, saw the Matterhorn and the Aletsch glacier (largest in Europe), visited medieval castles, stayed in alpine mountain towns, rode the glacier express, sampled the local beers, and consumed an unholy amount of chocolate and cheese. She also experienced the alpine tradition of the “alpabzug”, where the cows are brought down from the higher mountain pastures to their stables in the valleys for winter. Each town celebrates the arrival of the decorated cows with music and local food/drink/produce/crafts. It was a lot of fun to experience this Swiss tradition.

She had a wonderful trip and great time seeing her family; she is already looking forward to her next visit!
Graduate Students Present

Anny-Claude Joseph
Presented her research “Shared Risk Modeling on Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma Subtypes and Ultraviolet Exposure” at National Cancer Institute Geospatial Conference, Bethesda, MD, (September 2016). Co-authored with Dr. Elizabeth Cahoon and Dr. David Wheeler.

Rebecca Lehman

Keith Zirkle
Presented his research “Spatial Analysis of Community-Based Intervention on Youth Violence in Richmond, VA. VCU Clark-Hill Institute for Positive Youth Development, Department of Psychology, Virginia Commonwealth University, (November 2016).


Addressing Spatial Interference in Causal Analysis. Joint Statistical Meeting (JSM), Chicago, IL (invited talk), (July 2016).

Kickball

As you may remember from previous newsletters. Our graduate students have been participating in an extramural kickball team through River City Sports. They finished the regular season 5-2 and had a full day of games for the playoffs 3-1. They had a fun run in the kickball playoffs, eventually losing 4-2 in the final! Everyone played their hearts out, so the game ball went to all. Kellen Cresswell made some amazing plays, Jason DiNardo kicked a grand slam, Kate Stromberg and Anna Bosse were great pitching.

Until next season....
Honors

Brian DiPace, PhD student, was awarded 3rd place for his presentation at the Biostatistics Student Research Symposium.

Camille Hochheimer, PhD student, was awarded 2nd place for her presentation at the Biostatistics Student Research Symposium.

Kingston Kang, PhD student, was awarded 1st place for his presentation at the Biostatistics Student Research Symposium.

Rebecca Lehman, PhD student, received the Phi Kappa Phi Love of Learning Award.

Nitai Mukhopadhyay, PhD, was awarded a Teaching Excellence Award at VCU’s School of Medicine’s 18th Annual Faculty Excellence Award Program.

Grants Awarded (July 2016–December 2016)

Dipankar Bandyopadhyay, PhD
Co-Investigator on Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson’s Research award entitled “Deep Brain Stimulation of the Nucleus Basalis of Meynert to Improve Cognitive Functioning in Parkinson’s disease dementia” with Dr. Holloway of Neurosurgery as PI.

Le Kang, PhD
Co-Investigator on Cystic Fibrosis Foundation Therapeutics award entitled “Project UPLIFT to Reduce Anxiety and Depression in CF Patients” with Dr. Schechter in Pediatrics as PI.

Nitai Mukhopadhyay, PhD
Co-Investigator on NIH’s grant entitled “The role of AEG in NASH and NASH-HCC” with Dr. Sarkar in Genetics as PI.

Roy Sabo, PhD
Co-Investigator on AHRQ grant entitled “Understanding Health System, Practice, Clinician, and Patient Factors Associated with the Implementation of New Clinical Practice Guidelines” with Dr. Tong in the Department of Family Medicine as PI.

Adam Sima, PhD
- A Co-Investigator on an NIH grant entitled “Practical Prognostics: Building Clinically Useful Predictive Models for Long-term Functional Outcome after TBI,” with Dr. Walker as PI.
- A Co-Investigator on a Department of Health and Human Services grant entitled “RRTC on Employer Practices,” with Dr. Wehman as PI.

Shumei Sun, PhD
PI on an NIH grant entitled “Juvenile Protective Factors and Their Effects on Aging”. Drs. Roy Sabo and Yongyun Shin are co-investigators on this grant.

David Wheeler, PhD
- PI on NCI’s award entitled “Statistical Modeling of Environmental Exposures using Spatial Models and Data Mining Methods.”
- Co-Investigator on a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention award entitled “Evaluation of a Comprehensive Community Level Approach to Youth Violence Prevention” with Dr. Masho in the Department of Family Medicine as PI.
Alumni Spotlight

Tina Cunningham, PhD Alumni

For this issue of Statistically Significant News, our Alumni Spotlight falls on Tina Cunningham. Tina graduated from the College of William and Mary then started her PhD studies in 2006. During her time at VCU, Tina worked under Dr. Bob Johnson as a research assistant for the Virginia Ambulatory Care Outcome Research Network and under Dr. Al Best as an instructor for the BIOS 554 course.

Upon graduation, Tina took a short-lived position at University of California Los Angeles, however she missed the east coast too much and relocated to Norfolk, VA. Here she took an Assistant Professor position at Eastern Virginia Medical School in 2011. She recently was promoted to Associate Professor at Eastern Virginia Medical School. Tina is a valuable member at EVMS in that she is the Director of the Center for Health Analytics and Discovery and the Director of the Master in Healthcare Delivery Science Program.

All of her hard work did not go un-noticed as she was the recipient for the Rising Star award this academic year. This award is given to two faculty members on the entire campus who:

- Demonstrate commitment to the school’s mission, vision and values.
- Receive outstanding evaluations for teaching performance and/or clinical supervision of medical/graduate students or residents/fellows.
- Establish a recognized research program evidenced by extramural funding, invited presentations, abstracts and publications.
- Seek opportunity to improve or gain new skills.
- Make significant improvements to clinical care or to a clinical program.
- Contribute in a major way to committees and/or administrative functions affecting the mission, goals and welfare of EVMS.

School of Medicine Alumni and Development Office

The Department of Biostatistics is partnering with the VCU School of Medicine Alumni and Development Office to enhance our ability to offer support to our promising graduate students and to increase opportunities for our students to attend professional conferences. We are excited about this expanded relationship. This office has three staff members, Nathan Bick, Kenny Melvin and Priscilla Wiggin, who are visiting alumni around the country. When they come to your area, they may contact you on behalf of the Department of Biostatistics to bring you news from Richmond and to hear about your experiences. I hope you will make time to visit with them. If you have more questions about these efforts, please contact Russ Boyle at boyle@vcu.edu.

ENAR 2017

Our last VCU Biostatistics get-together - at the 2016 ENAR Spring Meeting in Austin, Texas - was very successful, with almost 20 current students and faculty as well as alumni and former faculty members attending. As a result, we are planning another get-together at the 2017 ENAR Spring Meeting, to be held at the Washington Hilton in Washington, DC, March 12-15, 2017. Once again, several current Biostatistics students and Biostatistics faculty members will be attending and would be happy to meet any of our alumni or friends for dinner on Monday, March 13. If you are attending ENAR 2017 and are interested in getting together, please email Russ Boyle at boyle@vcu.edu, and he will coordinate.