The Chair’s Corner: Thoughts on Graduation Day

Tony is one of our distinguished graduates with a string of successes to his name. He is our most recent benefactor, with a planned gift of $90,000 and a pledge of $20,000 to our Biostatistics Endowed Scholarship Fund. These gifts and the students who will be able to complete their graduate studies will redound credit upon Tony and his family far into the future.

I, too, was fortunate to have been included in the roster of speakers on Graduation Day. After having chaired the Department for nearly a decade, I felt comfortable in dispensing advice to our new graduates.

First and foremost I urged our graduates to involve themselves in collaborative research with scientists in other professions. This, I believe, is the genesis of truly collaborative research. Some of my most interesting and impactful research has been done with collaborators in fields of inquiry as diverse as childhood epilepsy, alternative tobacco products, retarding the aging process, and controlling the onset of puberty. No matter what line of collaborative research you choose, be sure to be part of a team and try to surround yourself with colleagues who are smarter than you are. And be nice.

People will notice and remember small courtesies, and they will reward you for them.

I was very pleased to be part of this impressive Graduation Day ceremony, and would like to acknowledge the unstinting efforts of the Graduation Committee in producing such an impressive show. Russ Boyle, Shanshan Chen, Donna McClish, Adam Sima, Keighly Bradbook, Erin Donahue, Viviana Rodriguez, Kate Stromberg, Brian Bush and Allison Loudermilk, Gayle Spivey, and Yvonne Hargrove all contributed to making Graduation Day a grand success.

In this issue

- Featured People of Interest
- Graduate Program Spotlight
- Alumni Corner
- Department Laurels
- Department News
Featured faculty
Le Kang, Assistant Professor

Dr. Le Kang joined the VCU Biostatistics December 2013. He came here after finishing a postdoc research fellow position in the Center for Devices and Radiological Health at the US Food and Drug Administration. Le Kang’s statistical method research mainly focuses on the development of diagnostic/prognostic accuracy measures and comparisons between different candidate biomarkers in terms of proposed summary accuracy measures. His paper “comparing two correlated C indices with right-censored survival outcome: a one-shot nonparametric approach” is one of the most cited articles in Statistics in Medicine between 2015 and 2016. One paper dealing with comparison under finite sample between correlated biomarkers is under review currently. Under his direction, one student (Anna L Bosse) is working towards a U-statistics based variance estimator for assessing the difference between correlated AUCs and looking to compare that with the highly-cited structural components based variance estimator used by DeLong et al. Le Kang is also heavily involved with a wide variety of Internal Medicine collaborative projects. Specifically, he is very interested in helping the derivation and validation of the risk prediction models. The most recent publication in this area, “risk model for predicting complications in patients undergoing atrial fibrillation ablation” is to appear in Heart Rhythm Journal. Over the years, Le Kang has developed a broad interest in survival analyses and randomized clinical trials. Future direction for research includes assessment methodology with complex data (e.g., imaging/sequencing data), and cost-effective adaptive clinical trials.

Featured student
Keith Zirkle, Ph.D. Candidate

Keith is originally from Virginia Beach, VA. He received his BS in Statistics from James Madison University. He is currently working on his dissertation “Estimating Causal Effects in the Presence of Spatial Interference” under Dr. David Wheeler where he is interested in the various causal estimands that arise when a subject’s treatment may affect neighboring subjects’ outcome, specifically in settings with air pollution. He hopes to graduate in summer 2018.

For the past two years, he has been a trainee on the NIEHS T32 training grant where he has worked on his dissertation and worked with Dr. Saba Masho to assess community interventions effects on youth violence in Richmond, VA. He previously interned for PharPoint, Inc. and was a TA his first year at VCU.

Besides his coursework and dissertation, Keith is involved with the VCU Student Government Association where he has served as Treasurer and President for the MCV Campus and will be the Vice President of Graduate and Professional Students this upcoming year. He also volunteers with VCU Massey Cancer Center’s young professionals board, the Massey Alliance.

When not working on his dissertation or volunteering at VCU, Keith can be found photographing Richmond architecture, searching cheap flights, and seeking out the city’s best iced coffee.

Click a link below to visit that section of the Biostatistics Department website:
Graduate Program
Consulting a Biostatistician
Biostatistician Research Interests
Biostatistics Research Seminar Series

WWW.BIOSTATISTICS.VCU.EDU
Featured Presentations from our Graduate Students

Victoria Garcia

Kate Stromberg
Presented her research entitled “Racial Disparities in Patients with Traumatic Brain Injuries” at the TBI Conference in Williamsburg, VA, May 2017.

John Stansfield

Rebecca Lehman

Kickball
The Department of Biostatistics continued their extramural kickball team this year. Team None of the Above, came, played, kicked some balls, and occasionally caught a ball in its inaugural season in the River City Sports and Social Club Spring Kickball league. The team finished with a regular season record of 8-2, losing in the semifinals during extra innings. Some highlights from the season were Kellen’s homerun, great pitches by Kate, Anna, Jake and Corey, and lastly watching Kellen attempt to crawl 8ft to third base after he slipped! Lot of laughter was had by all!!! A big shout out to Jason, Camille, and Dr. Cameron as this will be their last season playing kickball with us!!

Tea Time
Students and faculty had another great semester of Tea Time, enjoying various team activities, making valentines, and celebrating the end of the semester with ice cream sundaes! Invited guests this semester included administrative staff, current faculty members, and even a visit from some affiliate faculty. Dr. R.K. Elswick, Dr. Al Best, and Mr. Luke Wolfe spent the afternoon sharing stories of their time here at VCU and reminding us all why we chose to pursue biostatistics. We would like to thank Camille Hochheimer for organizing this event over the past two years and look forward to the team of rising second year students who will lead the effort next school year. Thanks also to everyone who participated and to the department for their support!
**ALUMNI CORNER**

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**Enar Reunion**

As we seem to do every couple of years, we organized another departmental reunion of sorts at **ENAR in Washington DC.** Several of our current graduate students coordinated the dinner, which included **Biostatistics faculty and students as well as a few alumni and former faculty members.** ‘Always nice to see different generations of our Biostatistics family share their perspectives…

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**Facebook**

Interested in keeping up with all the news from the Department of Biostatistics on a regular basis? Some of our social media conscious first-year students have reformatted our Facebook page and are updating with “all the news that's fit to print”. Search for “VCU Biostatistics Department” on Facebook…

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**Featured Alumni, Tony Segreti, PhD**

We recently had the pleasure to reconnect with **Tony Segreti** and his wife Wendy, as Tony was our **Keynote Speaker** at our annual Graduation Ceremony on May 12. Because of this, we would like to feature Tony in our Alumni Spotlight for this edition of the newsletter.

Tony arrived at the (then) Medical College of Virginia in the summer of 1975 after earning his B.S. and M.S. degrees at the **University of Pittsburgh.** He completed his Ph.D. in 1977 and then stayed in the graduate program as an Instructor from 1977 to 1979. In addition to his academic accomplishments, Tony was a member of the **B League Champion Intramural basketball team** along with several well-known ballers - Karl Peace (Ph.D., 1975), Frank Rockhold (Ph.D., 1978) and Don Stablein (Ph.D., 1979). ‘A formidable team…

Tony started his professional career at **Burroughs Wellcome, Research Triangle Park in North Carolina,** in 1979 and stayed through all the name changes until 2006. He served as a senior level Director and had extensive experience with Phase I - IV clinical trials. He then applied his considerable industry expertise at Research Triangle Institute, moved to a clinical outsourcing firm and finally a small biopharmaceutical company before “officially” retiring in 2015. He has held academic positions as an Adjunct Professor at the **Jiann-Ping Hsu College** of Public Health, **Georgia Southern University** and the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences at Campbell University. Not surprisingly, Tony is also an Affiliate Professor in our graduate program.

We are excited to announce that Tony and Wendy recently committed a very generous planned gift to help start a new **Biostatistics Endowed Student Scholarship Fund.** This fund will address one of the primary challenges of our graduate program and help support outstanding graduate students as they pursue their Ph.D. degrees. Students and faculty are very appreciative!

We wish Tony and Wendy all the best in their retirement years and hope that their travels will include trips to Richmond to visit us…

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Please contact **Russell Boyle** or **Dipankar Bandyopadhyay** if you are interested in presenting at one of our **Research Seminars** in the 2017-2018 academic year or if you would like to be featured in our newsletter.
Honors

- **Kingston Kang**, Graduate Student, was awarded **First Place** at Biostatistics Student Research Symposium (BSRS).
- **Camille Hochheimer**, Graduate Student, was awarded **Second Place** at BSRS.
- **Brian DiPace**, Graduate Student, was awarded **Third Place** at BSRS.
- **Brian DiPace**, Graduate Student, received the Biopharmaceutical Applied Statistics Scholar.
- **Victoria Garcia**, Graduate Student, was awarded the Karl E. Peace Biostatistics Award for Excellence and Scholarship.
- **Victoria Garcia**, Graduate Student, won “Poster of Distinction” for a poster she was co-author on at the American Transplant Congress Conference.
- **Viviana Rodriguez**, Graduate Student, received the C.C. Clayton Award.
- **Ethan Lotz**, Graduate Student, received the C.C. Clayton Award.
- **Keith Zirkle**, Graduate Student, was inducted into the Graduate Student Honor Society, Alpha Epsilon Lambda.
- **Keith Zirkle**, Graduate Student, received the University Leadership Award.
- **Keith Zirkle**, Graduate Student, was awarded $1,000 scholarship from VCU Massey Cancer Center’s Cancer Prevention and Control Research Program.
- **Brian Di Pace, Anny-Claude Joseph, & Viviana Rodriguez**, Graduate Students, were inducted into the honor society Phi Kappa Phi.
- **Camille Hochheimer**, Graduate Student, received the Phi Kappa Phi Scholarship.
- **Rebecca Lehman and Keith Zirkle**, Graduate Students, received the Phi Kappa Phi
- **Nitai Mukhopadhyay**, Associate Professor, was awarded Teacher of the Year, in the Department of Biostatistics.
- **Roy Sabo**, Associate Professor, was awarded Best Teacher for the MPH Program in the Department of Family Medicine and Population Health.

Recent Graduates

**M.S. in Biostatistics**
- Anna Bosse
- Jason DiNardo
- Ziyu Zheng

**M.S. Concentration in Clinical Research & Biostatistics**
- Xiaolei Pan

**Ph.D. in Biostatistics**
- Dr. Zirui Gu

**Ph.D. with Concentration in Genomic Biostatistics**
- Dr.Kyle Ferber
- Dr. Amanda Gentry
- Dr. Rebecca Lehman
Congratulations!!!

- Dipankar Bandyopadhyay, was promoted to full professor with tenure.
- Dipankar Bandyopadhyay, was elected as the Council of Sections Representative for the Biometrics Section of the ASA (American Statistical Association).
- Kelly Sullivan, Fiscal & Grants Accountant, welcomed her son Layne Paige Sullivan, April 3, 2017. He weighed 8lbs, 6oz and both mom and baby are doing great and everyone is adjusting at home!
- David Wheeler, was promoted to Associate Professor with tenure!!

We are excited to report that we will welcome 8 new students for Fall 2017:
- 5 Ph.D. in Biostatistics
- 2 M.S. in Clinical Research & Biostatistics concentration
- 1 M.S. in Biostatistics

These most recent additions to our graduate program will have nearly a full week of orientation activities, culminating in our 25th Annual New Student Introduction and Reception on August 22.