



Department of Statistics

Newsletter

March 2021

Greetings from the Department Head



Much has happened since our last newsletter went out! My sincere apologies for the lack in communication from us for longer than usual, and my thanks and appreciation to all of our alums and friends who have been so helpful to us during these times!

Dr. Payton retired from the Department in August of 2019, and he and his wife have relocated to the Denver, Colorado area where Dr. Payton has taken a position as chair of Biomedical Sciences at Rocky Vista University. We wish him and his wife Amy the very best and greatly appreciate his many years of service to the department.

When Dr. Payton retired, I was appointed as interim department head for a 1-year term, and then agreed to serve a 5-year term as permanent department head. I'm enjoying the challenge and the opportunity to lead the department through challenging times. My new role has led to an increased appreciation of our supportive departmental atmosphere. I couldn't be happier to have the opportunity to lead such a fabulous group of faculty, staff, students, and alumni! It's been rewarding and enjoyable, and the family atmosphere makes even those more difficult tasks less onerous. I'm looking forward to continuing to work with everyone and hope to initiate more opportunities for all of us to interact in the future.

As most of you know, the University moved to all virtual classes in the spring of 2020 after spring break. This was a difficult transition as you can imagine, but the faculty and students in the Department handled this extremely well! It was definitely a blessing that we had introduced our applied statistics M.S. degree which is all online, as this meant that all of faculty had already taught at least one online course, and were at least somewhat familiar with the logistical challenges involved. It certainly helped us as we transitioned to all online last spring.

Our next challenge was the opening of face-to-face classes with appropriate social distancing and masks. This required quite a bit of thought and preparation with appropriate equipment. Again, the faculty did an excellent job! They were essential in assisting the staff and myself with determining what equipment was needed, where to obtain it, and how to utilize it. The faculty, staff, and students deserve a huge thank you for their continued positive attitude during these difficult transitions. I am extremely thankful for our team and family atmosphere! It made it much easier to navigate the new challenges we were dealing with.

As we look forward to next year, I am greatly encouraged by the strength of our department! We have a great group of faculty, staff and students who all work well together and are always willing to help each other out. I love being part of our team and look forward to our future accomplishments!

Dr. Mindy McCann

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Faculty & Staff Notes

Lan Zhu was promoted to the rank of Professor of Statistics effective July 1, 2020.

It's been a challenging year balancing work and homeschooling Emily when the schools have been closed for classes due to COVID-19.



Josh Habiger and his wife Kate went to Mexico for Christmas break 2019 while his son Max helped his grandpa in Kansas drive the tractor on the farm. In summer 2020 they enjoyed their new above ground

pool and inflatable playground equipment during summer quarantine. Max is 5 years old and attends kindergarten at Perry Elementary, a short bus ride after school to Perry High School where Kate teaches Art.

Staff Spotlight: Meet Jana Alford!



Jana Alford graduated with her MS in Statistics in 2018. After graduation she was hired by the department as a lecturer. In addition to her teaching duties, she coordinates the student employees who work in SLIC.

Jana and her husband, Fred, have two daughters. Ann is almost 2 years old, and Claire was born in Spring 2020.



Adam Molnar continued as course coordinator for STAT 2013. He learned a great deal about online quizzes, in-home studio lighting, and Zoom during March and April. Most summer events were cancelled,

although he did serve as discussion leader for Topic 3 at the IASE Roundtable conference, held through Zoom. He and his wife moved into a new house in September, constructed (slowly) through the pandemic, and are now almost finished with decorations.

Ye Liang has received OCAST support for developing statistical methods and algorithms for big electronic health records. He has been collaborating with data scientists, engineers and medical physicians to implement, improve and commercialize big-data based clinical solutions. He has delivered an invited talk for a topic-contributed session at the virtual JSM this year. He is looking forward to a much better year in 2021!



Mindy McCann welcomed daughter Megan to the world of professional statisticians, as she began an actuarial job with Mutual of Omaha in Omaha, Nebraska, after graduating from the University of Nebraska with an actuarial science degree in May of 2020. (See an article about Megan at https://business.unl.edu/nebraskabusiness/2019/article/mccann-boosts-collegiate-and-professional-career-through-tutoring/?content=Group=nebraska_business_magazine_2019®ionName=article.) Megan and her mother have a difference of opinion on whether an actuary is a statistician, but obviously Mom, who says OF COURSE an actuary is a statistician, is right! Mindy's younger daughter, Cassidy, is currently a sophomore at Missouri State University in Springfield working on a psychology degree. She loves college and is doing great! Mindy and her husband have also recently bought a Class A motorhome, so they are planning to travel more in the future.

Mindy has also been active at the state level as a member of the Oklahoma governor's COVID-19 modeling team at OSU, pictured here.



The full article about this OSU research team can be found online [here](#).



In his third year as assistant professor at OSU **Pratyay Rudra** is enjoying teaching and his newly developed research collaborations at OSU with faculties from Department of Integrative Biology

and College of Veterinary Medicine. The pandemic restricted tennis and travel, but he and his wife, Sreemala, are enjoying backyard birding at their new home.

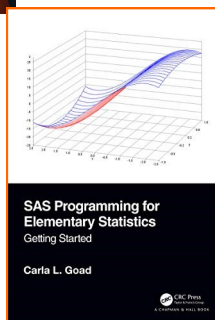
Nishshantha Samarakoon has been named as Teaching Assistant professor.

Advisor **Cara Brun** has been blessed with grandchild #4, Sadie Katherine.



Carla Goad is not the only OSU Cowboy in her household. This year her daughter Elizabeth is a freshman at OSU. (No, she's not a statistics major.)

After many years of teaching the SAS Programming class for the Department, she has published a textbook with CRC Press. *SAS Programming for Elementary Statistics: Getting Started* was released in December 2020.



COVID-19 Precautions in the Classroom and in the Office

It is our sincere hope that all of our friends and alumni are safe and well during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the activities we have taken for granted have been impacted.

In the classroom a few changes have been made. All students are wearing masks, instructors are wearing a mask or face shield, and classroom seating limits are greatly reduced. This has meant that some classes have moved to larger classrooms (or a basketball court in the Colvin Center!), or that classes are now a hybrid format. That is, students get some of the class material in person and other material online. For example, in a Tuesday/Thursday class half of the students may attend on Tuesday and half on Thursday. Software such as Microsoft Teams is being used to live stream class lectures to students on the days they are not in the classroom. Additionally, almost all of the lectures are being recorded and made available to students as soon as possible. This has required that all of the faculty, lecturers, and TA's learn new software. All of the faculty in the Department already have some experience teaching online. This is an advantage the Statistics Department had over many other departments which did not have faculty with online teaching experience. Our faculty did have to learn some other new tools to make online teaching work better. Some of the University's classes have switched to an entirely online format.

SLIC, the Department's help session for undergraduate statistics courses where students get one-on-one help from TA's, has made the switch to an all online system. Special groups for the applicable courses are set up in Canvas, the University's course management system. Students meet with a member of the SLIC staff in a video conference. With this online structure, the Department has been able to increase the number and variety of hours that SLIC is "open".

In the Department offices, the University has discouraged in-person meetings. There are some instances, however, in which we do have to meet in person. The staff in the front office utilize an intercom system to minimize the traffic in the main office. The main office and several faculty offices also have Plexiglas barriers in use.

We are telecommuting and video conferencing whenever possible. Office hours have moved online. Faculty meetings have a new look also. (See the photo below.)



Student News

Due to the high research interest in the current coronavirus disease, Meghan Sealey, a statistics Ph.D. candidate, has partnered with the Center of Health Systems Innovation (CHSI) to study the impact of the virus' fatal consequences to those that contract it. Their research focuses on identifying which patients diagnosed with the coronavirus are at the highest risk for fatal outcomes. Specifically, the researchers are modeling the conditions, medications, and procedures that patients undergo on their first day of hospitalization, as well as their historical conditions, in order to predict patient mortality. They hope that their results will help health care organizations identify patients at severe risk quickly in order to focus their resources appropriately.



CHSI's research was featured on Tulsa's television Channel 6 and OKC television Channel 9 in August 2020. Here is the link to the story:

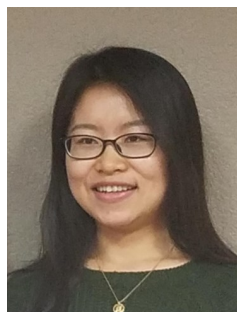
<https://www.newson6.com/story/5f56fdfa1de7740b92c7f4ec/osu-researchers-develop-tool-to-predict-covid19-risk>

Student Awards

In this newsletter we have two years' worth of awards to announce.

Dr. Gaute Vik and his family sponsor annual awards for graduate students in the Department.

In December 2019 **Fisher Ankney** was awarded a \$1000 scholarship as the recipient of the Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistantship, Fisher graduated in 2020 and was named the Robert D. Morrison Outstanding Masters Graduate for 2020.



Also in 2019 **Qingqing Dai** was awarded a \$1000 scholarship as the recipient of the Outstanding Graduate Student Award. Qingqing graduated and was named the Carl Marshall Outstanding PhD Graduate for 2020.

Xiaowei Hu (not pictured) was named the Carl Marshall Outstanding PhD Graduate for 2019.



PhD student **Damilola Adeyemi** is the 2020 recipient of the Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistantship Award and \$1000 scholarship.

Ru Wang is the 2020 recipient of the 2020 Outstanding Graduate Student Award and \$1000 scholarship.



The Department wishes to thank the Vik family for their generous and continued support .



Kyle Alvarez was named the 2020 Outstanding Senior among our undergraduates. Jiawei Yu (not pictured) is the Outstanding Senior for 2021. Unfortunately, the annual College of Arts and Sciences awards banquets where Kyle, Jiawei, and all CAS outstanding seniors were to be recognized have been cancelled due to COVID-19 concerns.

Alumni Update



Desiree' Butler McCullough (PhD 2001) died August 5, 2020.

After her graduation in 2001, she accepted a position on the faculty of

the Mathematics and Statistics Department of the University of Tennessee at Martin. Since 2016 she served as the Director of Institutional Research at UT Martin. Faculty remember her for her thoughtfulness, creativity, and her kindness to their children.

Our sincere condolences to her husband, Jeff.

Tamanna Hossein-Kay (MS 2015) is presently a graduate student in computer science at University of California—Irvine. She and her co-authors recently won the Best Paper Award at the EMNLP 2020 COVID-19 Workshop for their paper [COVIDLies : Detecting COVID-19 Misinformation on Social Media](#)

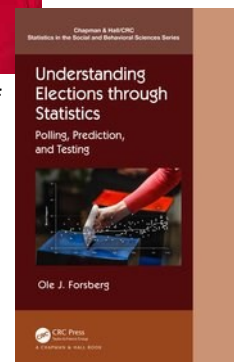
Yimin Zhang (PhD 2014) has been promoted to Associate Professor with tenure by the Department of Mathematics and Statistics at Villanova University. She and her husband, Rohit Singh, recently welcomed their daughter, Joy, to the family. Congratulations!

Scott Richter (PhD 1997) and Carri (Duvall) Richter (MS 1996) are both employed at University of North Carolina—Greensboro. Since 2001 Scott has been a statistics faculty member, and Carri is also employed by the department as a Program Associate. They have three sons.



Ole Forsberg (PhD 2014) is an assistant professor of mathematics and chair of statistics at Knox College in Illinois.

In September of 2020 his book *Understanding Elections through Statistics* was released by CRC Press.

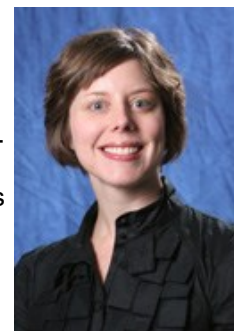


Josie Akosa (Ph.D. 2018) is currently employed as a Visiting Assistant Professor of IT, Analytics, and Operations in the Mendoza College of Business at the University of Notre

Dame. She is enjoying this position which provides her with research support and the opportunity to teach.

Amy Wagler (2007 PhD)

lives in El Paso, Texas with her husband Ron Wagler and children Olive (9th grade) and Elias (5th grade). Both Amy and Ron work at the University of Texas at El Paso. Amy is currently Associate Chair of the Department of Mathematical Sciences and directs the Data Analytics Lab and Data Science doctoral program. In their free time, Amy and family like to hike in mountains around El Paso and have always successfully avoided both cacti and rattlesnakes during these outdoor explorations.



College of Arts and Sciences Distinguished Alumni Award



Pictured above, Alex Bagby (left) and CAS Dean Glen Krutz

Alex Bagby (BS 1983) was named the 2019 Distinguished Alumnus for the Department of Statistics. Since the completion of his statistical mathematics degree in 1983, Alex has been employed by the American Fidelity Assurance Company in Oklahoma City. Working as an actuarial analyst for many years, he advanced within the company and is now the senior vice president and chief product officer. Alex and his family are long-time OSU sports fans and have held season football tickets for many years.

The Department would like to thank Alex and Kelly Bagby for their continued support and the establishment of an undergraduate scholarship. The

scholarship will be provided to an outstanding undergraduate student in statistics. The department has experienced an increase in the number of undergraduate majors in recent years, and we are excited about the opportunities this scholarship will provide for students in the future.

The 2020 ceremony for CAS Distinguished Alumni was cancelled due to COVID-19 concerns. This has been rescheduled for September 24, 2021.

Donate to the Department

The Department is able to make student awards annually based on the generosity of our alumni and other donors. We appreciate your support. When OSU Foundation calls, you can specify where your donation dollars go. Friends and Alumni who wish to make a financial gift to the Department of Statistics at OSU should go online to <http://statistics.okstate.edu/donate>. Donors can choose from several funds. Among them are the following fund accounts:

[Statistics Department Fund # 22-43500](#) The Statistics Department Fund supports guest speaker activities.

[P. Larry Claypool Undergraduate Statistics Scholarship # 22-52900](#)
The P. Larry Claypool Undergraduate Statistics Scholarship is awarded to an outstanding undergraduate student.

[Carl Marshall Award #22-41100](#) The Carl Marshall Award is presented to the outstanding Ph.D. graduate.

[Robert D. Morrison Award #22-80500](#) The Robert D. Morrison Award is presented to the outstanding M.S. graduate.

[David L. Weeks Award # 22-32100](#) The David L. Weeks Award supports an outstanding statistics graduate student in Experimental Design.

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