

**Biostatistics Faculty Meeting**  
**June 3, 2014**  
**12:15-1:15 PM**

**MINUTES**

**Present: Faculty:** Karen Bandeen-Roche; Brian Caffo; Elizabeth Colantuoni; Marie Diener-West; Constantine Frangakis; Chiung-Yu Huang; Leah Jager; Hongkai Ji; Martin Lindquist; John McGready; Betsy Ogburn; Roger Peng; Chuck Rohde; Dan Scharfstein; Elizabeth Sugar; Margaret Taub; Carol Thompson; Cristian Tomasetti; Jim Tonascia; Mei-Cheng Wang; Gayane Yenokyan; Scott Zeger; Vadim Zipunnikov; **Staff:** Mary Joy Argo.

**1) Announcements**

Karen passed along Brian's thanks to everyone involved in this year's comprehensive exam process, with particular thanks to Mary Joy and the exam writers (Constantine, Jim Fill, Jeff, Ciprian, Michael, Chuck, and Hongkai).

Our Twitter feed now has over 800 followers (more than any other department of biostatistics). Please continue to send your news items (140 characters or less) to Brian or Betsy.

We as a department are taking up a collection for a fund that has been established in memory of Cindy Hockett's son. Debbie Cooper has kindly agreed to collect contributions. Anyone wishing to donate should do so by Monday, June 9. Debbie is planning on attending an upcoming memorial service and will pass along a departmental sympathy card and contribution notice.

Karen reported on the recent Dean's retreat, where there was a discussion of how our school can remain first in the *US News & World Report* rankings of schools of public health. This in turn has prompted Karen to think about the ways in which our department is excellent. Karen will be following up in an email with more details; in advance of discussion of this at a future faculty meeting, please give some thought to what our "top stories" are as a department.

Another retreat item was the launching of the School's new "10x10" fundraising outreach, whereby funding of up to \$10 million is sought for 10 new initiatives. There would seem to be a niche for us here with data science as related to public health. There may also be a tie-in to Ciprian's recent grant proposal. Stay tuned for further discussion via email.

**2) Student Focus Groups on Biostatistics Programs**

Karen gave an [update](#) on the four focus group meetings she and Brian have held over the past few months (as part of the self-study process). The groups were: 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>-year PhD students; senior PhD students (3<sup>rd</sup> year and higher); ScM students (all years); and concurrent MHS students. Among the main items that emerged:

- There was strong enthusiasm across all four focus groups for our working group model (which emerged as one of our biggest strengths as a department).

- The number of quantitatively-oriented doctoral students from other departments who are participating in the concurrent MHS has declined slightly in recent years. This may be due to a perceived “tightening” of our admission requirements. Another reason may be that other departments may not be referring their top quantitative students to us (they may not see the value of the program?) The decline in SPH enrollment may be mitigated somewhat by an accompanying rise in participants from doctoral students in the Schools of Medicine, Engineering, and Arts and Sciences. In a related matter, it was noted that Scott, Marie, and others have begun thinking about how we might introduce a BA/MHS program; this is scheduled for discussion at an upcoming faculty meeting.
- Karen noted that the department’s general funds revenues are heavily weighted toward tuition funds. She requested that our Public Health Education Group continue to think about teaching strategies that would distinguish the department and help attract students to the School’s degree programs.
- PhD students are looking for a more meaningful TA experience (ie, one that allows for them to do some actual teaching, as opposed to “merely” grading papers, conducting help sessions, etc). The Homewood undergraduate course taught by Margaret and Leah might help to fill this need, as there are built-in opportunities for graduate students to teach. There was also enthusiasm for “spreading the word” about the Hopkins “Future Faculty Teaching Academy” and the Leon Gordis Teaching Fellowships, and for looking into whether any of us know of any international teaching opportunities similar to the Armenia program. It would be helpful to list all of these and more in a document that we could post/distribute to the students. It was noted that for next year’s student admissions cycle, we might target recruitment of native English speakers by emphasizing these and other teaching opportunities (ie, MOOCs). It was also suggested that we re-visit the idea of giving academic credit/providing some kind of evaluation for TA service.
- Concurrent MHS students feel isolated, both from the department and from each other, while the first and second year ScMs reported feeling somewhat isolated from each other. PhD students did not report any sense of isolation, but we will have to wait and see whether that changes once the new PhD curriculum is introduced. (PhD students will no longer take Introduction to Epidemiology during their first year, and many of them will take Introduction to Biomedical Sciences online, rather than onsite.)
- The ScM students feel strongly about the need for more hands-on training, particularly for data analytics/consulting, and towards that end, Carol and Elizabeth are designing new coursework on “consulting” and data analysis.
- Across the four groups, there was enthusiasm for the department offering some kind of “bootcamp” or preparatory training in advance of the first year of study. One way to address this might be to partner with the Economics Department, which offers a bootcamp-type math refresher each summer. Other, related suggestions included offering our own summer bootcamp that could be run by or co-taught by our senior students (in either an online or onsite format), and looking into putting together a SIBS proposal (perhaps in partnership with the School’s summer diversity program?). NSF and BD2K may also offer funding for SIBS-type programs. It was noted that introducing a bootcamp might alleviate some of the isolation felt by the concurrent MHS students, and would also provide an additional “higher-level”

teaching experience to the senior PhD students.

- PhD students would like clarification early in the program as to the RA requirement (ie, that there is a need to line up an RA after the first year, how to go about lining up an RA, what to do if you can't find something, etc). In a related discussion, it was noted that we have a real need for more assistantship opportunities; perhaps our once-a-term email to faculty soliciting opportunities needs to be reworded to better convey the urgency. It was suggested that we partner with joint faculty to open up more RAs to our students (ie, we provide some funding support to joint faculty in exchange for their mentoring of a Biostat PhD student in a research assistantship). We will also look into ways in which our working groups might facilitate RA opportunities.
- PhD and ScM students would like to see a strengthening of departmental support for career development. We will schedule a more in-depth discussion of this issue at an upcoming meeting. There was enthusiasm for having those students giving presentations at ENAR or JSM participate in a day of "practice presentations" in the department 1-2 weeks prior to the conference.

[Return to Faculty Meetings List](#) | [Return to Home Page](#)