LETTER FROM THE DEPARTMENT HEAD

Tharuvai Sriram / Interim Department Head

Dear alumni and friends:

In the 2009 Newsletter, our former head wrote: "*One day Statistics will be housed in a building that we can all be proud of, and that befits the exceptional dedication of our faculty, staff and students*." The day is coming near—many thanks to the *UGA Genie* (Upper Administration) for granting our first and foremost wish! In late Fall 2017, we will be relocating to Brooks Hall, situated on North campus and within walking distance to downtown Athens. An added bonus is that, from the Spring of 2018, the majority of our classes will be held right next door in Caldwell Hall. While the actual move is scheduled to happen between November and December 2017, there is much to do in preparation for our move, such as renovations to create a new Cohen Room, the Bargmann Lab, three new computer labs for STAT 2000, one large computer lab for all upper division and graduate classes, and so on. The move, itself, is actually the easy part as we'll spend most of our time packing and unpacking, but the extensive renovations will take careful planning, time, effort, and—not to mention—the funds from the University and our generous donors.

UGA Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost Pamela Whitten visited the department for the first time in October of 2016. The day of her visit coincided with our October 2016 faculty meeting, and this provided an excellent forum for faculty to discuss a variety of issues openly with Provost Whitten. She thanked faculty and staff for all our accomplishments.

We have welcomed four new faculty members during the 2016-

17 academic year—Assistant Professor, Shuyang Bai, brings his expertise in stochastic processes from Boston University; Lecturers Catherine Case from University of Florida and Mickey Dunlap from University of Tennessee at Martin add to our strength in Statistics Education; and Academic Professional, Xianyan Chen—one of our recent PhDs—joins as Associate Director of our Statistical Consulting Center. In addition, we have successfully recruited a new Assistant Professor, who will join us in Fall 2017.

Our data-driven world needs ever more statistics and statisticians, and the UGA Department of Statistics is leading the charge. While our total

"Fall 2017, we will be relocating to Brooks Hall, situated on North campus and within walking distance to downtown Athens."

faculty size will increase to 24 next year, new faculty are much needed. Statistics is becoming one of the "in demand" about 180 undergraduate majors in Spring 2017 compared to 139 in Spring 2015—a 27% increase. Additionally, our credit hour production in undergraduate courses is the third highest within the mathematical and physical sciences division. This growth is a reflection of the importance that employers are placing on statistical skills.
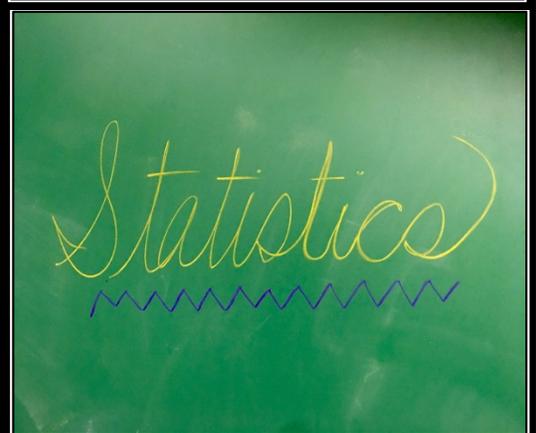
As for increasing the size and quality of our programs, we are directing special efforts to enhance diversity in our graduate program by increasing the number of domestic applicants to the program. We are also introducing a variety of innovative curricular offerings. During Summer 2017, Mark Werner will teach our first-ever Student-Centered Active Learning

Environment-Upside-down Pedagogies (SCALE-UP) MSIT 3000 class; Shuyang Bai and Abhyuday Mandal will teach the first-ever *Statistics Bootcamp*, which will provide a rigorous overview of important topics in Mathematical Analysis and Linear Algebra for our new MS and PhD students joining in Fall 2017. In addition, we are partnering with the Department of Educational Psychology in the College of Education to introduce a new *Double Dawgs* BS/MS degree in Statistics and Quantitative Methodology, working with Department of Genetics to introduce a *Certificate in Statistical Genetics*, and collaborating with Department of Computer Science to start a new undergraduate degree in *Data Science*.

Special recognitions of our faculty and students are hard to hide, as Mark Werner received the prestigious 2017 Sandy Beaver Excellence in Teaching award from the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences; Ping Ma was named a 2017 Fellow of the *American Statistical Association* for outstanding contributions to statistical methodology, especially in nonparametric modeling, statistical analysis of massive data sets, bioinformatics, and geophysics; Abhyuday Mandal received a UGA Certificate for greatly contributing to the career development of undergraduate students; Lynne Billard was selected by the University of New South Wales Australia as its first Mathematics Ambassador of the Year 2016; and a "*Conversation with Lynne Billard*" appeared in a 2017 issue of Statistical Science. Three years in a row our student groups have earned high recognition at the SAS Analytics Shootout Competition. Graduate student Rich Ross captained a team with Dan Hall as faculty

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LETTER FROM THE DEPARTMENT HEAD *(continued)*
TN Sriram | Interim Department Head

advisor and placed third in the 2016 SAS Shootout Competition, and another team—led by Xianyan Chen with Jaxk Reeves as advisor—received honorable mention in the same competition.

For about a decade, we have been providing undergraduate research experience for statistics majors through year-long capstone courses. Our undergraduate coordinator, Abhyuday Mandal, is now broadening the landscape of undergraduate research by encouraging students to get more involved in research. We are beginning to see our undergraduate majors receive recognitions for their research. Sarah Robinson won the Outstanding Undergraduate Student Presentation Award at the International Conference on Advances in Interdisciplinary Statistics and Combinatorics; Rachel Zilinskas received the 2017 CURO Summer Fellowship; former UGA undergrad, Zachary Stokes received an honorable mention from the National Science Foundation Graduate Fellowship Program for a proposal extending his research performed at UGA; and Jordan Eckert received CURO assistantship.

Our weekly seminar series continues to expand its scope by not only inviting distinguished speakers throughout the year, but also actively participating and organizing special events, such as, Georgia Statistics Day, Industry Days, UGA-Clemson Joint Colloquium, and Bradley Lecture. These are aimed at promoting collaborative research Iain Johnstone from Stanford University delivered the keynote lecture at the 2016 Georgia Statistics Day; Vijay Nair (Wells Fargo & University of Michigan), Christopher Breen (Eli Lilly), and Julian Parris (JMP) presented talks on statistical applications in industries; Brian Williams (Los Alamos National Lab) gave the UGA-Clemson Colloquium talk; and this year's Bradley speaker was David Dunson —winner of the prestigious 2010 Committee of Presidents for Statistical Societies (COPSS) Presidents' Award—from Duke University.

Each year, our faculty research productivity continues to increase. Our external research funding soars to a new level—thanks to Jennifer Kaplan, Ping Ma, Wenxuan Zhong, and Cheolwoo Park for attracting large grants. We are attracting strong graduate students to our program, and our faculty members continue to serve the profession by taking on a variety of roles in professional organizations.

The growth of our program is a return on the investment made by the generous donations of alumni and corporations—donations that fund travel of graduate and undergraduate students, the Best Capstone Project Award, and the Best Consulting Assistant Award, among others. I also want to take this opportunity to wholeheartedly thank all of you who made donations to the department during the past years. You are recognized by name in this Newsletter. The creation of an endowed professorship for statistics is one of the major goals of our department and you can help make it happen!

I hope you enjoy reading this Newsletter. We are looking forward to another exciting year ahead. Given that there are more ways than ever to stay connected, we will be back in touch. In the meanwhile, do let us know if you are planning to be in the area.

T.N. Sriram

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM UPDATE
Anne Vencill | Undergraduate Advisor

With the retirement of Chris Franklin, Abhyuday Mandal became the undergraduate coordinator for the 2016-2017 Academic Year. The Office of Academic Advising in Franklin College appointed Anne Marie Vencill as the undergraduate advisor for the department.

The BS-Statistics undergraduate program continues to grow! There are approximately 180 active undergraduate majors and nearly 200 undergraduate students who have declared statistics as a minor. 32 students were awarded degrees in May 2017, and an additional 7 students earned their degree in Summer or Fall 2016.

Throughout the academic year, a number of proposed curriculum changes, including moving linear algebra from Area VI into the major, increasing the number of major electives, and course pre-requisite changes were discussed and approved by the faculty. The number of statistics elective hours will increase from three to nine and the number of required hours for the major will increase from 22 to 31 with the above changes. There were also number of changes made to pre-requisites for statistics courses. Since STAT 4210 is a gateway course, in order to enroll in a course that requires STAT 4210 as a pre-requisite, a student must earn a grade of C or higher in that course.

Our year-long Capstone course continues to provide undergraduatesthe opportunity to apply the knowledge they've gained in coursework to solving real-life problems! As for new initiatives, the Statistics Department will participate in the new UGA Double Dawgs program, partnering with Educational Psychology in the College of Education to offer undergraduate students the opportunity to complete a BS in Statistics and an MA-Educational Psychology with Area of Emphasis in Quantitative Method. Students will begin Master's level courses their fourth year and complete them in their fifth year.

If you haven't already, please check out our undergraduate website at: http://www.stat.uga.edu/undergraduate-students

GRADUATE PROGRAM UPDATE
Cheolwoo Park |Graduate Coordinator

Hello, everyone. I am the new Graduate Coordinator of the Department of Statistics at UGA. It is my great pleasure and honor to do this important service for the department after 11 years of residence. My job includes recruitment and admission of new MS and PhD students, advising current graduate students, award nominations, learning outcome assessments, graduate program reviews, and teaching assistant assignments. They are not easy tasks (Kudos to Lynne Seymour who had been Graduate Coordinator for more than 13 years!), but I have been enjoying interacting with our faculty members and graduate students, and working together to build a better program since I started this position in July 2016.

Our MAGNet program sponsored by State Farm is running smoothly as it is wrapping up its third year. Four MAGNet students have graduated with degrees so far (3 MS and 1 PhD), and five students are currently working in the program while they are pursuing their MS in Statistics. We are also trying to build a relation-ship with other companies to provide our graduate students with internship experience.

Our graduate students have been consistently successful in finding jobs in various places including Apple, Bank of America, State Farm, Workday, U Vermont, Duke University, Liberty Mutual, CitiBank, Sanford Health, Cathay Home Inc, and Cascade Data Labs. It is certainly a great time to be a statistician!

The Graduate Program Review Committee is currently revising both our MS and PhD programs. We are identifying weaknesses in our curriculum, reorganizing it and proposing new courses to keep up pace with rapid changes and new challenges happening in the real world. We are also restructuring our Qualifying Exams. Stav tuned!
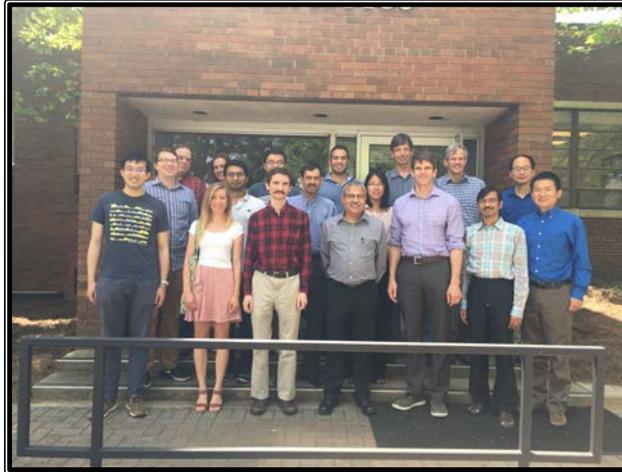
UPDATE: *Colloquium Series*

Abhyuday Mandal, Associate Professor | Pengsheng Ji, Assistant Professor
Ray Bai, Assistant Professor

The Fall 2016 Colloquium series featured an array of inspiring and distinguished speakers from academia and industry. A total of 14 speakers presented talks on both theoretical and applied topics ranging from dimension reduction, quantile regression, multiple testing, missing values, risk analysis in banking, challenges in biomedical studies. Five of the talks were jointly held with the UGA Biostatistics department. The faculty and students interacted with the speakers in various ways.

The regular colloquium series in the Spring 2017 semester was shortened due to an interview period, but we were compensated with five interesting talks from the assistant professor candidates, as well as a promising young statistician to join the department in the Fall of 2017. In addition, two regular colloquium talks were given by the colleagues from other departments in UGA for applying for the adjunct faculty status. This reflected the fast growth of the university-wide statistics community. These talks covered a variety of topics including covariance models, fog computing, statistical software, resampling, computerized testing, Bayesian models and compressed sensing.

Bradley Speaker, Dr. David Dunson, with Statistics faculty and students

On April 21, 2017, the department hosted the annual Bradley Lecture. The speaker this year was David Dunson from Duke University. Professor Dunson gave an enlightening speech on "Probabilistic Factorizations of Big Tables and Networks", which addressed an Bayesian approach to modeling high-dimensional data that are structured as a multiway array or tensor. He also shared his personal view of "Artificial Intelligence, Data Science, and Brain Connections" in an after dinner talk.

We encourage you to visit the colloquium website for the most up-to-date information on the upcoming speakers, presentation abstracts and links to guest speakers' websites. Our colloquium series enhances the educational experience of our students, provides research opportunities for our faculty, and enriches the academic environment of the department. If you would like to support this endeavor, please click on the link below.

Colloquium Series Website
www.stat.uga.edu/events/colloquia/upcoming

Support the Department
www.stat.uga.edu/giving

Students and faculty enjoying the Bradley picnic

COLLOQUIUM SPEAKERS
2016-2017

FALL 2016

Snehanshu Saha
PES Institute of Technology, India

John Stufken
Arizona State University

James Monogan
University of Georgia

Xiaoyu Li
Auburn University

Fei Zou
The University of Florida

Maxine Pfannkuch
The University of Auckland, New Zealand

Gauri Datta
University of Georgia

Peter Song
UM School of Public Health

Bin Nan
University of Michigan

Ery Arias-Castro
University of California, San Diego

Vijay Nair
Wells Fargo/ University of Michigan

Gang Li
University of California, Los Angeles

Zhezhen Jin
Columbia University

Christopher Breen
Eli Lilly and Company

Haonan Wang
Colorado State University

Yanyuan Ma
Pennsylvania State University

SPRING 2017

Donald Richards
Pennsylvania State University

WenZhan Song
University of Georgia

Julian Parris
JMP

Haiying Wang
University of New Hampshire

Shiyu Wang
University of Georgia

Jerry Reiter
Duke University

Miles Lopes
University of California, Davis

Brian Williams
Los Alamos National Lab

David Dunson
University of California, Davis

STAT CLUB UPDATE
Kristen Roland | STAT Club President

Stat Club Superbowl Party 2017

It has been another great year for Stat Club! With many social and academic events scheduled over fall and spring semesters, graduate and undergraduate students within the department kept busy. The fall semester started by bringing incoming and current graduate students together with a Welcome Picnic, a pot luck event with lots of yummy dishes. The next event was Georgia Statistics Day which was hosted by Georgia Tech. Many graduate students carpooled into Atlanta to attend. We were also able to help sponsor two Industry Days. The department invited Dr. Vijay Nair from Wells Fargo & University of Michigan and Christopher Breen from Eli Lilly and Company. Students were able to attend lunchtime talks and colloquium talks given by both speakers. A few social events downtown were held during the course of the semester which allowed students to mingle and discuss classes and research. The fall semester was brought to a close with our annual International Pot Luck, a great social event representing the diverse nature of our department.

The semester started with the Atlanta Falcons making the Super Bowl! To celebrate this state achievement (and with several New England faculty and students who were excited about the New England Patriots making it, as well), Stat Club held a Super Bowl party. Spring semester brought back our second annual Junior Colloquium. We held a talk about Internships during which State Farm and NASA DEVELOP Program representatives discussed internship opportunities.

Those in attendance learned about the MAGNet and NASA DEVELOP National Program, the process to apply, and the opportunities for advancement within both companies. Several departmental co-sponsored events also added to the Spring agenda. This year, the UGA-Clemson Joint Seminar was held at Clemson with Dr. Brian Williams as our guest. The semester's final event was the Bradley Lecture. This year's speaker, Dr. David Dunson, was welcomed at the State Botanical Gardens in Athens for a lecture, dinner, and after-dinner talk. The Bradley Lecture Picnic was a success with many students attending, despite it being G-Day! As the semester draws to a close, Stat Club would like to thank its retiring officers: Vineet Vora, Richard Ross, Thad Sulek, and Kristen Roland for their commitment and wishes them luck on their future endeavors. We welcome our new officers:

President- Krissy Knight
Vice President- Arunava Samaddar
Treasurer- Soyeon Youk
Secretary- Rachel Zilinskas
Coordinating Team Members- Elliot Terris and Shuchi Goyal

International Potluck

CONSULTING CENTER UPDATE
XianYan Chen | Associate Director

In August 2016, the SCC hired a new Associate Director Dr. XianYan Chen. Under the leadership of Director Dr. Jaxk Reeves and the new Associate Director, the SCC has gotten off to a good start and everything is back to normal after 7 months with no Associate Director. The SCC has continued its tradition of training graduate students to be effective consultants, while adapting operational procedures to better manage consultants and projects, yet simultaneously providing excellent services to our clients on and off campus. After we move to our new location in Brooks Hall later this year, the SCC hopes to begin offering some drop-in consulting hours in addition to the more formally scheduled consultation sessions that we now provide.

During the 2016-2017 Academic Year, the SCC has provided consulting assistantships for eight graduate students from the Department of Statistics: Hao Tong, Yaotong Cai, Wenhao Pan, Xiaodong Jiang, Yan Du, Tawanda Benesi, and Cun Wang. These paid consultants, along with about 20 volunteer consultants, have made strong contributions to research efforts at UGA and beyond. Support for the SCC continues to be provided by the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences, the Office of the Vice President for Research, and the UGA Graduate School, in addition to the income earned through SCC projects.

The SCC's collaborative relationships across the University remain strong. The SCC has continued to maintain a strong client base from the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Agriculture and Environmental Science, with the College of Family and Consumer Sciences, the College of Veterinary Medicine, the College of Pharmacy, the College of Education, and the Law School all providing several interesting projects during the current year.

The UGA Football team has become one of our largest internal clients, with two major active projects. Our two most prominent corporate clients are Merial and Unclaimed Property Consulting and Reporting, but we hope to develop several more strong corporate relationships so as to be better equipped to handle the financial fluctuations which seem to occur fairly regularly with academic budgets.

The Director has been an active participant in bi-weekly conference calls with similar staff at eleven other land-grant institutions (Penn State, Texas A&M, Purdue, Minnesota, Nebraska, UCLA, Colorado, Colorado State, Montana State, Kansas State, and Washington State) which have statistical consulting/collaboration centers. These conversations have proven quite useful in allowing UGA's SCC to learn what others are doing and to help us be at the forefront of academic statistical consulting centers.

The SCC hopes to continue to develop ways to meet the three areas of its mission: including making statistical support available to UGA researchers, increasing the quality of quantitative research at the University, and providing valuable educational experience and training to graduate students in the Department of Statistics.

Students enjoy Joint UGA/Clemson Colloquium

Ping Ma, Professor, Pl

NIH "Deciphering The Regulatory Role of Small RNAS on Alternative Splicing"

In higher eukaryotes such as humans, genes are transcribed to pre-mRNAs, in which exons (RNA segments that code for proteins) are separated from each other by intervening introns (RNA segments that do not code for proteins). A gene may generate different mature mRNA transcripts by selectively including different combinations of exons. This biological process is referred to as alternative splicing and is the main strategy for genes to generate proteomic diversity. Extensive evidences indicate that over 95% of human genes undergo alternative splicing. Aberrant splicing of pre-mRNAs can cause various human diseases, such as cancers, aging related diseases, heart diseases and neuro-development diseases. Recent studies have shown that small non-coding RNAs play an essential regulatory role in alternative splicing. For example, small interfering RNAs (siRNAs) can regulate alternative splicing by modulating chromatin structure. The overarching goal of this project is to develop a set of novel statistical tools to advance our knowledge of the regulatory role of small RNAs on alternative splicing. More specifically, the investigators of this project will (1) develop effective significance testing theory and methods via generalized smoothing spline ANOVA models to identify genome-wide small RNA targets; (2) develop a new statistical framework for isoform assembly and quantification via joint modeling multisample RNA-seq data; (3) bridge the research gap in the study of small RNAs by elucidating the regulatory role of small RNAs on isoform expression. Although the proposed methods are developed to address the current analytical challenges in isoform and small RNA analysis, a burgeoning area in biology studies, the statistical theory and methods can be broadly applied to many research fields.
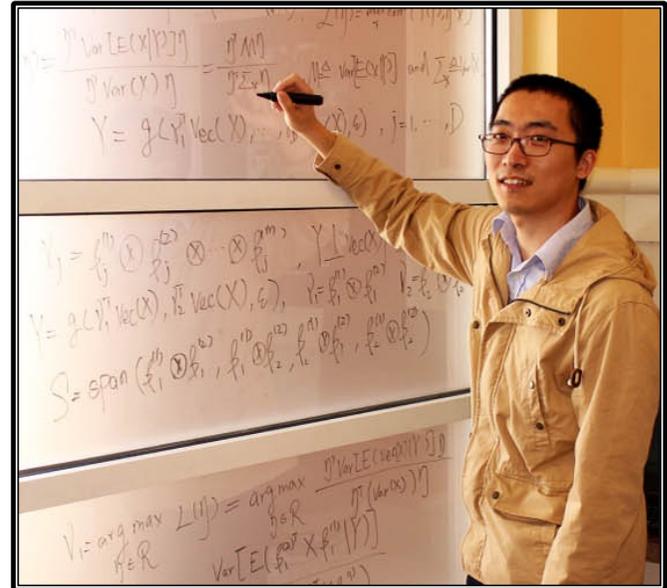

Dr. Ma and some of his research team

Xin Xing, Student working in Dr. Ma's Lab

Cheolwoo Park, Associate Professor, Pl & Nicole Lazar, Professor, Co-Pl

NSF-CRCNS " BrainPack: A suite of advanced statistical techniques for multi-subject, multi-group neuroimaging data analysis "

Understanding the neural bases of psychiatric disorders is a critical component in the development of targeted behavioral or drug therapies. Given the rapid advancements in availability of, and access to brain imaging equipment, there now exists a large literature reporting on functional neuroimaging results differentiating people with psychotic disorders (such as schizophrenia) from healthy people. The literature is littered, however, with failures to replicate. The popularity of imaging as a research tool in psychiatric disorders, and the lack of consistency in results, provide a compelling demonstration of why resources would be well invested on the development of more reliable, accurate and sensitive tools for analyzing data. These tools must be based on sound statistical theory, yet accommodate the actual, practical challenges caused by the realities of the data. The project develops a suite of robust, sensitive and effective statistical methods which will help neuroscientists better understand the etiology of psychiatric disorders.

The enhanced sensitivity of these tools also creates a better means for evaluating new treatments, as it provides improved assessment of changes across time that are currently difficult to capture due to their subtle nature.

The suite of methods developed in the project ("BrainPack") is a comprehensive system for the analysis of group-level imaging data that makes minimal assumptions on the distributional behavior of the measured signal. It does not require an *a priori* model of the expected activation across sessions, can effectively reduce the size of large data sets containing mostly irrelevant information, account for spatial and temporal correlations, and quantify the discrepancy between groups and assess the statistical significance of these discrepancies. As such BrainPack will provide robust identification of subtle group differences that are common across many types of neuroimaging studies. These advancements are generalizable and readily adapted across a wide range of neuroimaging studies and beyond.

Dr. Ping Ma at Georgia STAT Day

Framework for my Future: First African American PhD Graduate
Stacy Cobb

In one way or another, every day someone makes history as a barrier is broken and a new level of success is achieved. As the first African-American to receive a Ph.D in Statistics from the University of Georgia, I am honored to be able to add to a little piece of history. I began my journey to UGA in 2011, and along the way I have overcome many life changing obstacles including the birth of my son during the 4th year of my program. Before journeying to UGA, I convinced myself that I was going to succeed and that I would not allow anything to deter or stop me from accomplishing the goals I set for myself. Although I was rarely at the top of my class, I always worked hard and persevered to make it to the next level. Whenever I was presented with another challenge, I would feel the urge to quit as if this wasn't meant for me. However, I was always able to regroup and regain my strength. I was determined to make it. This accomplishment means something to my family as a whole. I do not come

from a background composed of scholars, but my parents understand the value of a quality education. My mother and father were proud to see me obtain my Bachelor's degree, but I knew that there was something burning inside of me to push even further beyond that point. My passion and love for statistics in addition to my love for education led me to pursue both a Master's and Doctoral degree.

My experience at UGA has been very different than my experience at my previous graduate institution. Here at UGA, the environment has been more welcoming and the various teaching styles match the needs of all students. Most importantly the support of the faculty members in my department is ever present, and I can wholeheartedly say that their support made a difference in my graduate experience and contributed to my success. With their help, I was able to make a dream come true for myself and my family.

In closing, I consider myself a rare occurrence in the field of statistics. As I look toward my future, I hope that I am

able to inspire other young women, particularly African-American women, to pursue their dreams especially if they are in a field where they feel they may not necessarily belong. Although the road may look daunting, I believe there is nothing that separates you from anyone else except hard work and perseverance. As a transition into my career, my goal is to continue the integration of statistics

into public health research to understand the association between certain diseases and contributing factors. As a statistician; that puts me in a place to work in an area that I am passionate about while using my statistical skill set. It is my hope to one day be a leading statistician, conducting my own research, while making a difference in communities across the world.

Industry Day Fall 2016 – Christopher Breen
Gabriel Hinton

On November 10, Christopher Breen, a Senior Research Scientist at Eli Lilly and Company came to give two lectures about statistics in industry as part of the SPES Marquardt Memorial Industrial Speakers Program with the American Statistical Association. At the lunch talk, Mr. Breen spoke about the history of statistics in industry. He compared statistics about job growth in our field decades ago to those of recent years, showing that the field is rapidly growing. Additionally, he cautioned about the nature of working in a field that many feel they can perform as an "amateur" after brief training boot camps or certifications. Based on this he discussed the challenges of working in proximity with people who may be inclined to improperly use techniques and methods. Students were highly engaged by his talk and afterwards had many questions including seeking advice for how to best prepare themselves to be attractive candidates for industry jobs.
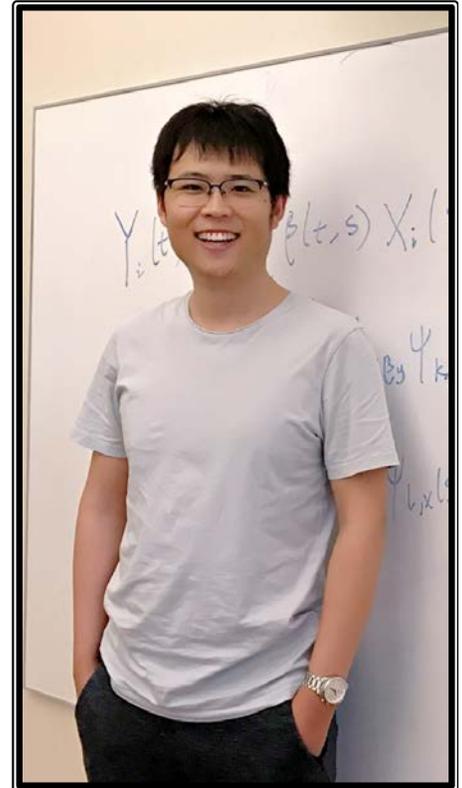
Later that afternoon Mr. Breen gave a technical talk titled "Extreme Quantile Determination for Manufacturing Process Parameters." The company needs to estimate the distribution of outcomes of certain manufacturing processes for the sake of quality control – specifically measurements

for control chart limits and process capability, which are related to maintaining pharmaceuticals within acceptable ranges. After a vendor returned some analysis of these variables using a different method than Eli Lilly had been using, Mr. Breen's team sought to investigate in more detail whether the current or new method is better for the company's needs, as well as whether other methods found in literature could perform even better. They evaluated the methods with simulations, and found that certain methods more accurately estimated distributions under certain circumstances, so they had to prioritize which circumstances (sample size, type of distribution, etc.) were most common for their purposes. Mr. Breen also described

directions of possible further study, such as using MISE as a criterion but only integrating across the outer ranges of the domain (more than two standard deviations from the mean) to prioritize the region of greatest importance for their purposes. Students enjoyed seeing a technical talk from industry to see the ways in which a specific industry research project was both very similar and different from the academia projects of which we see presentations more frequently.

Mr. Breen brought unique insight into statistics careers to the students in our department and we are grateful to have had the opportunity to enjoy his presentations.

Xiaoxiao Sun was one of the six finalists in the American Statistics Association Nonparametric Statistics Section Student Paper Competition.

Industry Day Fall 2016 – Vijay Nair
Richard Ross

This year, the department had the really wonderful opportunity to learn from Dr. Vijay Nair, a statistical researcher with previous experience both in the private sector as well as experience in academia. His experiences from working in both a private research lab as well as at the University of Michigan provided for useful insights for students looking forward to careers in either sector. The research talk Dr. Nair gave focused on his new job at Wells Fargo. His official job title is Statistical Consultant in the Corporate Model Risk Group of Wells Fargo. Dr. Nair discussed the interesting and unique challenges that the banking industry has faced in recent years. Unsurprisingly, the Dodd-Frank Act has imposed new requirements on banks and the allowable ratio of "risky" investments in relation to liquid assets. Wells Fargo, like many other financial institutions, has two different teams working on models which help to guide the company's investments and aid the bank in evaluating the risk associated both with their customers and their investments:

The first team is called the "model development" team, while the second team (which Dr. Nair works on) is called the "model validation" team. Although both teams work to optimize many business decisions, the second team is primarily focused at rigorously examining the work of the first team, making sure there are no problems or potential for such in newly developed models. Overall, the research talk was engaging, educational, and gave a glimpse into the world of working for a financial institution. One theme which was present throughout Dr. Nair's talk and lunch meeting with the Department was the importance of communicating clearly. Dr. Nair mentioned that during his 15 years at Bell Labs, he often needed to learn about various applications of statistics which his theoretical coursework at UC-Berkley hadn't discussed in depth, and being able to communicate with his co-workers was critical to this self-education. Dr. Nair warned students to avoid focusing too heavily on

applications without first obtaining a strong background in theory. He told students "it's much easier to learn a new application than to rebuild your foundation". This message provided extra motivation for students to really shore up their knowledge of the principles of statistics, even if they are looking forward to industry careers

which seem more applied! He also emphasized knowledge of not only statistical software, but really learning some database management skills.

The Department really enjoyed Dr. Nair's visit as well as hearing the experiences he shared!

Faculty and students enjoying lunch with Dr. Vijay Nair

Graduate and Undergraduate Teachers of the Year 2016: Abhyuday Mandal & Dan Hall
Kirsten Jackson

This year, for the first time, the Department of Statistics at the University of Georgia reached out to our students for nominations for 2016 Statistics Teacher of the Year. We wanted a way for students to show how much our amazing educators influenced their lives and helped them reach their goals. As with any new pursuit, we had a few snafus along the way; be it nomination deadlines or emails with several questions, it was definitely a new experience for all of us.
Graduate students and undergraduate students alike were emailed and asked to send in nomination letters for teachers or researchers who they felt expressed an overwhelming passion for their field and helping others. This generated a pool of candidates, and students were asked to vote.
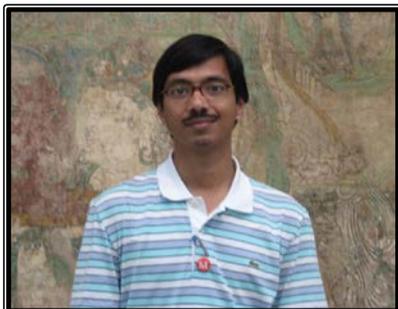
The nominees were: Drs. Jennifer Kaplan, Jaxk Reeves, Abhyuday Mandal, Kim Gilbert, Dan Hall, and Nicole Lazar. Every single letter written for these amazing faculty members was truly an honor to read. Once everything was in, the department, along with Interim Department Head, Dr. T.N. Sriram, decided to divide the nominations and award a Graduate Teacher of the Year and an Undergraduate Teacher of the Year.
The 2016 Undergraduate Teacher of the Year for Statistics is Dr. Abhyuday Mandal. In his nomination letter the student writes: "Simply put, I think Dr. Mandal is the best teacher in the department" and "I've found that Dr. Mandal is always very willing to work with students; I get the impression that student learning is more important to

him that any preconceived academic schedule or deadlines". Interim Department Head, T.N Sriram, states that "Dr. Mandal is a dedicated, conscientious teacher and mentor who goes the extra mile to provide high quality education experiences for his students."
Congratulations Dr. Mandal!

The 2016 Graduate Teacher of the Year for Statistics is Dr. Dan Hall. In his nomination letter the student writes: "I don't believe I've ever been in any other Graduate course which has stretched me to become better and more proficient in the discipline that I have in his courses." It is also greatly notes that Dr. Hall shows further commitment outside of the classroom by training young statisticians and

serving as a team advisor for the demanding SAS Shootout Teams. Interim Department Head, T.N. Sriram, states that "Dr. Hall is a highly meticulous, teacher who invests considerable time and effort to provide what is best for his students." Congratulations Dr. Hall!

Awards will be presented to Dr. Hall and Dr. Mandal on August 24, 2017 during our first Colloquium of the 2017-2018 Academic Year.
The Department of Statistics at the University of Georgia is filled with amazing teachers and researchers that put their students first every single day. Please join me in congratulating these astounding professionals that are being recognized this year!

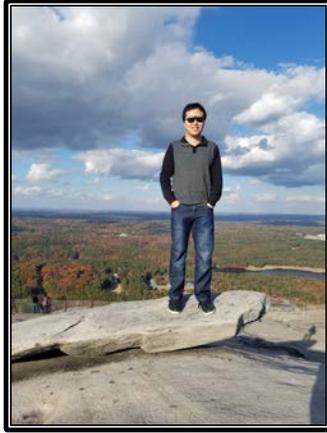*"It feels great to be recognized for one's work- thanks all!"*
-Dr. Mandal

"It is a great surprise and honor to win this award. Working with students is definitely the most gratifying part of my job!"
-Dr. Hall

NEW FACES!

Shuyang (Ray) Bai, Assistant Professor

Ray (Shuyang) Bai joined the department as an Assistant Professor in the fall of 2016. He obtained his PhD in mathematics from Boston University. His research interests lies across the boundary between probability and statistics, with a focus on the statistical notion called long-range dependence, a phenomenon frequently found in biology, communication, economics, geoscience, physics, etc. Many standard inference techniques need substantial modifications for data with long-range dependence. Ray's current research focuses on developing valid resampling methods in such a context.

Ray grew up in Sichuan, a place well-known for the spicy cuisines and the adorable pandas. After finishing his high school, he left his hometown and attended

Beijing Normal University. He then spent 5 years in Boston for his PhD. In his spare time, Ray enjoys playing and watching tennis. Ray is also a food lover as inherited from his hometown culture. For those who feel little passion for food, watch the The Food Ranger videos in YouTube!
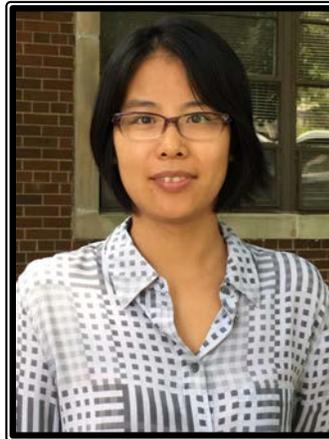
Mickey Dunlap, Lecturer

Lecturer. Mickey received his Ph.D. from Texas A&M University in 2004. He has over 10 years of experience with teaching Statistics. Mickey and his wife, Sharyn, moved to Athens from Northwest Tennessee over the summer.

In January of 2017, Mickey Dunlap joined the Department of Statistics at the University of Georgia as a new

At home, Mickey enjoys watching NASCAR on the weekends and taking his dog, Henry, to the dog park.

Josh Green, IT Professional Assistant

Folk guitarist and video game enthusiast Joshua Green found his way into IT from a young age. Hailing from a friendly little swamp-town in South Georgia where winters are warm and the summers boil, Josh learned to escape the heat in the comfort of his family's cozy computer room. Here he cultivated a love for technology from the moment he set up the family's first computer. Since then, Josh's adventures have brought him to Athens, where he has nearly completed a degree in Computer Support at Athens Tech. Before working for UGA, Josh was a Consultation and Repair Agent at Geek Squad. Josh now provides IT support for Statistics, Biochemistry, Artificial Intelligence, Bioexpression & Fermentation, and

the Institute of Bioinformatics. When he isn't working or saving his friends and relatives from their computer catastrophes, Josh enjoys traveling, hiking, cooking, and refining his abilities as a musician. Josh is also a J.R.R. Tolkien fanatic, and can do pretty good impressions on command.

Catherine Case, Lecturer

Catherine Case joined the University of Georgia, Department of Statistics in Fall 2016. She has a Ph.D. in Statistics Education and an M.S. in Statistics, both from the University of Florida. Professionally, she maintains an interest in statistics education, particularly in simulation-based inference, active learning, and assessment. Outside the office, she enjoys going to concerts and playing music with her husband, cooking (and

taking too many pictures of what she makes), and spending time on the water.

Xianyan Chen, Academic Professional

Consulting Center (SCC) in the Department of Statistics at UGA. She received her Ph.D. in Statistics from the University of Georgia in 2016, and M.S. in Statistics from the George Washington University in 2012. Dr. Chen's primary research interests include dimension reduction, data visualization, feature selection, and optimization.

Dr. Chen has strong interests in analytics. She was the captain of the first-place winning team of the 2016 Capital One modeling competition, and captain of honorable mention team in the 2016 SAS Data Mining Shootout. She has extensive consulting experience through her previous work

In 2016, Dr. XianYan Chen became the Associate Director of the Statistical

WELCOME uga FACULTY & STAFF

Undergraduate Seek to Pursue Higher Studies in Statistics

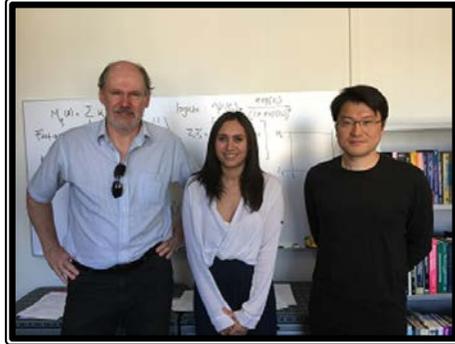*Megan Elcheikhali / Statistics Undergraduate Students*

After having decided to apply to graduate school programs in statistics, the schools that admitted me were kind enough to allow me to visit and learn more about their programs. One of these schools was Arizona State University (ASU), where Dr. John Stufken is currently a faculty member. Dr. Stufken, who was previously in the Statistics department at UGA, organized an itinerary involving meeting faculty, having Q&A sessions with current graduate students, and attending a faculty-led seminar about new and innovative ideas pertaining to research.

During this visit, I was able to paint a clearer picture of how my life would look for five years at Arizona State.

Fortunately, the current graduate students seemed to be incredibly happy with their decisions to attend ASU, and the department in general seemed enthusiastic about helping their students succeed. I was also given time to explore the ASU area, Tempe, with some of the graduate students. This also added perspective, as I learned about other students' hobbies and resources. Dr. Stufken made sure to help me learn as much about this program as possible, allowing me to examine Arizona State University in a way that was more in-depth than what I had researched before applying. Knowing that he also spent time at UGA also reassured me that I have additional resources and a strong support system if I ultimately attend.

2017 Best Capstone Student Award Winners: Sara Robinson, Farris Hammami, and Coleman Greene

Paul Schliekelman / Director

The Statistical Capstone course is taken by graduating seniors and focuses on practical data analysis skills as well as written and oral communication. Student teams work on data analysis projects with clients from UGA and beyond. There were eight projects this year, varying from a study of brain imaging to a study of tourism trends in Oconee County. There were 35 students (tied with last year for the largest Capstone class ever) divided into project teams of 4-5 students.

The teams received their data in November and worked on the projects over the remainder of the academic year. They started with exploratory analysis in the fall and then developed a full analysis in the spring working with the client, professors, and TAs. The spring semester culminated with a poster session, group oral presentations, and a written report from each group.

Each year, a student from the course is selected for the Kermit Hutcheson Best Capstone Student Award.

This award, which includes a $500 prize, comes from a non-endowed account funded by Professor Emeritus Kermit Hutcheson. The award is given to the student who best exemplifies the Capstone guiding principles of rigorous analysis that focuses on the big picture, clear written and oral communication, and professionalism.

This year's winner was Sarah Robinson. Sarah graduated this spring and will be starting in the Statistics Ph.D. program at Rice University in the fall after spending the summer working at Oakridge National Laboratory. Farris Hammami and Coleman Greene received honorable mention for the Capstone Award. All three students did a fantastic job and we wish them well in their careers after UGA.

SAS Shootout 2016

In 2016, for the third consecutive year, the department had teams that participated in the annual SAS Data Analytics Competition. The problem for the 2016 competition concerned effects of the aging US population on life in the US from 2020-2040. A 5 person team consisting of Statistics graduate students Richard Ross, Wenhao Pan, Yaotong Cai, Shiyu Ye, and Chunla He made it to the finals of the competition. They and their advisor, Dr. Dan Hall, were invited to the SAS Analytics conference in Las Vegas in September 2016, where it was announced that they had finished Third among the 70+ teams who had competed. A second UGA team consisting of Xianyan Chen, Yan Wang, Xiaodong Jiang, Yan Du, Huizhe Jin, Wei Zhang, Yang Song, and Weifeng Wang, and advised by Dr. Jaxk Reeves received an honorable mention award in the contest. The team which won first place in the competition, from the University of Oregon, was advised by our former PhD student, Dr. Wenbo Wu, who had been a member of two first-place teams while he was a student here. Congratulations to all the UGA students and former students for such good performances!

Lewis Jones: University of Georgia's Department of Statistics First MAGNet Alumni

When I was in high school I read my dad's copy of Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game. It met all of my needs in a book: baseball, numbers and less than 300 pages. Up until that point I had no concept of modeling data or building predictive models. I thought statistics just meant numbers on the back of baseball cards or figures the U.S. Census Bureau reports every ten years. This book sparked an interest that led me to the University of Georgia to study Statistics and after graduating last year, I am now a statistician at State Farm. My boss once told me that when his kids ask him what he does at work he tells them he predicts the future using math. I think books like Moneyball capture the science and discipline behind statistics, but are also able to make our field of study fun and even feel a bit magical. I grew up in the Cobbham District in Athens, and decided to stay in town and attend UGA after graduating from Clarke Central High School in 2010. I entered my freshman year at Georgia as a Math Education major, but after taking a STAT 2000 course with Jack Morse I decided to change my field of study to statistics. Mathematics is a huge foundation of statistics, but at a point somewhere between calculus and linear algebra I found mathematics to be too black-and-white for me. I enjoyed the gray area and creativity of statistics. I liked getting a data set and being able to decide which variables to keep in a model, which variables to transform, what my alpha should be set at, etc. I graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Statistics in May of 2014 and decided to continue my education in statistics at UGA to pursue a Master's degree. State Farm's MAGNet program opened the fall semester of 2014 and I was lucky enough to be one of the members of the inaugural class. My first semester in the program I got to validate a SAS macro that is used to build decision trees. I also spent a semester testing out statistical methods like decision trees, neural networks and two-stage modeling, attempting to see which method best fit a data set. However, arguably the most valuable thing I learned was how to understand and solve a business problem.

In May of 2016 I earned my Master of Science in Statistics and moved to Atlanta to work full time for State Farm. I am currently working primarily on Experimental Design projects, so learning how to communicate with a business partner was a huge benefit. My experiences in the MAGNet program taught me that while understanding the assumptions and principles of statistics are paramount in being able to produce legitimate results, understanding when it's appropriate to bend the rules of statistical assumptions can be just as important in solving business partners' needs.

If anyone has any questions about the State Farm MAGNet program or about being a student in the UGA Statistics department, please feel free to get in touch with me at lkjones03@gmail.com or the MAGNet lead, Jonathan Sauls at jonathan.sauls.dpzc@statefarm.com. I strongly encourage any statistics student to consider applying to the State Farm MAGNet program. The experiences I took away from the internship made everything I learned in the classroom more meaningful because I saw how the theory and application work together. I am forever grateful for everything the UGA Statistics department and everything the MAGNet program taught me.

ALUMNI UPDATES

Mayukh Dass
M.S. | 2007

Mayukh Dass has recently been promoted to Full Professor in Marketing at the Rawls College of Business, Texas Tech University.

David Benkeser
B.S. | 2010

David has spent the last year as a postdoctoral researcher in the Division of Biostatistics at the University of California, Berkeley. In July, he will start a position as a tenure-track assistant professor in the Department of Biostatistics at Emory University. David and his wife, Katherine, are expecting their first child this Fall.

Joseph Hosmer
B.S. | 1976

Joseph Hosmer is currently with Business Software, Inc. He has been with them for 26 years. His current job title is Sr. Quality Assurance Analyst where he works with the Payroll Tax Withholding Software. His company is now working on implementing automated I/O testing across 7 different databases for their payroll tax product, using the SELENIUM testing tool that comes with FireFox Web Browser.

Jack Schuenemeyer
J.D. | 1976

Jack Schuenemeyer is engaged as a consulting statistician in energy, environmental and earth science related modeling. His new venture is working with a middle school teacher to develop the use of R in middle and high school. He is an elected board president of the Cortez-Montezuma school district in southwest Colorado and dealing will all the problems of lack of funding for public education. Jack is professor emeritus, University of Delaware and is president of Southwest Statistical Consulting, LLC. He resides in Cortez, CO with his wife Judy (UGA, J.D., 1976).

Steve VanWieren
M.S. | 1995

Steve VanWieren is now the Head of Data Science at Lifeworks. He also published his first book in 2017 – "Quantifiably Better: Delivering HR Analytics from Start to Finish".

Will Keyes
B.S. | 2010

Will Keyes is currently serving as a Judge Advocate General with the United States Army. He is currently forward deployed to Camp Arifjan, Kuwait for a 12 month assignment in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. His responsibilities include military justice, administrative law, fiscal law, international law. After graduating from the University of Georgia with a BBA in Economics and a BS in Statistics, he earned a MA in Economics, then graduated from the University of Georgia School of Law in 2013. He is engaged to marry Margaret Sullivan, also a Georgia graduate, in the Spring of 2018.

Gary Gensler
M.S. | 1992

Gary Gensler is completing his 25th year as a biostatistician at the Emmes Corporation. His clients, past and present, include the FDA, the CDC, the National Eye Institute, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the National Institute of Mental Health and the Communication Sciences and Disorders Research Group, for which he was a board member. Gary rekindled his love for teaching statistics in the role of adjunct professor at Montgomery Community College, which he has been doing for 3 years now. Gary lives in Germantown, MD with his wife and 2 daughters, age 14 and 7.

Michelle Greene
B.S. | 1996

After graduating from UGA in the spring of 1996, Michelle got a job as a math teacher at Lamar High School, Lamar, SC. LHS did not have Statistics before she started, and she was the first teacher of statistics in 1997. Michelle was awarded Teacher of the Year for LHS in 1997-1998, 2004-2005, and 2016-2017. She was the Darlington County District Teacher of the Year in 2004-2005. She also started teaching math at Francis Marion University in 2005. Michelle was a LearnZillion National Dream Teacher from 2013-2015. She is also a member of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Teacher Advisory Council from 2016-2018. Michelle have also been the statistician for the varsity football and baseball teams at LHS since 1996.

Amanda Hand
M.S. | 2008

Amanda Hand is currently a Senior Manager in the Data Science & Advanced Analytics Practice at Aspirent Consulting in Atlanta. She has over 8 years of analytics consulting experience serving as a trusted advisor to clients, and solving complex business challenges by turning data into information. She leads solutions from project definition to execution and delivery, providing thought leadership and data-driven recommendations to senior management and executives in marketing and business operation. Her expertise is in leveraging data mining, predictive modeling, segmentation, and other statistical methods to drive efficiencies in: explaining and reducing customer churn, customer acquisition, identifying valuable business segments, influencing social brand conversation, guided analytics and reporting, root-cause analysis, and more.

She resides in Newnan, GA with her husband, Philip, her son Wade (almost 2), and newborn son, Matthew (born in March 2017). She is actively involved in her community through the Newnan Junior Service League.

Donor Spotlight: Our Man in Oman
Suzi Wong

For Mohammed Redha Qassim Jawad Al Lawati (MS 1990 Statistics) every day brings a new opportunity to be charitable, do good, and make a gift. Out of immense gratitude for his studies at the University of Georgia, Mr. Al Lawati reconnected with his *alma mater* and says, "I wake up thinking about how to support my university." With that in mind, he has made numerous gifts to many aspects of UGA, including the Graduate School Fund, the Georgia Fund (University-wide and Alumni Support), The University Libraries Excellence Fund, and the Complex Carbohydrate Center Fund.

A closer look at Al Lawati's record of giving reveals that in his donations to UGA, he gives frequently and most generously to his home department in the form of gifts to the Statistics Fund. Last year, in a conversation with Franklin College development officer Suzi Wong, Al Lawati learned that it was possible to endow a Fund, creating a source of permanent funding to benefit the Statistics department. He is delighted that the University will honor his generosity by naming this fund, The Mohammed Al Lawati Academic Enhancement Fund in Statistics. The Fund provides general support in Statistics, including awards, faculty and student research, travel to attend professional conferences, and purchases of educational materials and equipment.

The Al Lawati Endowment will not only generate funds in perpetuity to benefit the Statistics department, but will also serve as a reminder of how alumni loyalty can make a lasting difference and create a legacy. But, hold on! Our generous donor, is not done! He will be returning to UGA later this year to visit the campus and the soon-to-be-new home of Statistics—Brooks Hall. He is eager to revisit favorite places and say hello to former professors. He is already sure that he will be inspired by the excellence of Statistics to make a few more gifts that will develop and enhance learning in the Statistics department's new facilities.

We look forward to meeting our benefactor, friend, and alumnus and by way of introduction; here are a few points of biography from our man in Oman. Al Lawati was born in Kuwait in 1959. He was given a scholarship from his home country, Oman, to study at Ain Shams University in Egypt. Here he earned a BS in Accounting. After this, Al Lawati worked in the Ministry of Finance and Economy in Oman from 1981-1996. During this time he served as Director of General Budget, Director of Planning and Studies, and Director of Financial Affairs. In 1986 he traveled to Athens, GA on scholarship and earned his MS in Statistics at UGA. In 1996 Al Lawati took early retirement to work full time in his private business ventures. He established the Abu Kumail National Enterprise which develops residential and commercial units throughout Oman. In 2010 Al Lawati launches a private business in professional auditing. By 2015, mostly retired, he embarked on charity work following the guidance of Islam and the example of American billionaire, Warren Buffet. He has made several donations around the world that have improved public health, created scholarships, helped orphans, and established Islamic centers as well as served on numerous charity associations in Oman. In 2016 Al Lawati was nominated by the Ministry of Social Affairs to head the finance and investment committee of the Omani Chartered Accountants Association. In 2017, he is approaching the "realization of his dream"--- after his retirement he started studies for his PhD in business and will soon finish. Mohammed Al Lawati's story is inspiring and instructive. Like any business person, he faced severe financial loss during economic downturns but quickly bounced back bigger and better than ever. Rather than focus on accumulating more wealth, he embarked on charity work and continuing his education.

We hope that his travel plans will come to fruition, and that in 2017 Mr. Al Lawati will achieve another dream: to return to his alma mater to practice his charity, do good, and make gifts. Thank you, and safe travels back to Athens, GA!

We invite all of our alumni to keep in touch! Let us know how you are doing by submitting an alumni update form on our website at:

http://www.stat.uga.edu/alumni-update-form

MARK YOUR CALENDARS:

We would love to see you soon! Stay tuned for future event information by visiting our website:

www.stat.uga.edu

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Begins Thursday, August 24, 2017
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THANK YOU!

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