



WSS NEWS

WASHINGTON STATISTICAL SOCIETY

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CONGRATULATIONS AWARD WINNERS!

From the JSM Student Travel Awardee



My first Joint Statistical Meetings was unlike any other JSM because of the Covid-19 pandemic; however, I had an excellent and educational time despite the circumstances. I gained many new ideas and much enthusiasm that will fuel my final year as a graduate student in mathematics and statistics at Georgetown University and help me pursue my professional interests in machine learning for data imputation and data privacy. This would not have been possible without the generous support of the 2020 Washington Statistical Society Joint Statistical Meetings Student Travel Award. Thank you!

Several sessions stood out as interesting and particularly relevant to statisticians in the area. Dr. Frauke Kreuter gave a clear and timely presentation about how differential privacy will affect the social science workflow, and Dr. Aleksandra Slavković gave a related presentation about how to achieve optimal statistical inference under formal privacy. Both presentations outlined a rich set of unanswered research questions and broached many topics that will have far-reaching consequences for statisticians in the Washington DC-area who work with official statistics and federal government survey data. I also enjoyed the session “Modern Techniques in Handling Missing Data with Challenging Data Structures Including Big and Small Data Files”, which formalized many ideas I’ve been pursuing for missing data imputation and synthetic data generation.

On day three of the conference I presented, “A Synthetic Supplemental Public Use File of Low-Income Information Return Data: Methodology, Utility, and Privacy Implications”. I would not have submitted the paper without the opportunity to seek funding from WSS. I was stunned to receive the support and the opportunity to present.

While I was disappointed to not visit Philadelphia and to miss out on the opportunity to meet statisticians from across the country in person, the virtual event had several silver linings. First, I did not have to pick between concurrent sessions, which too frequently occur because of the rich conference programming, because every session was recorded. Second, the recordings were posted through all of August so I was able to attend more of the conference online than I would have ever been able to attend in person. Third, the video player offered the ability to pause after dense concepts and to watch content at different speeds. This made it possible to stop and explore unfamiliar concepts mid-presentation—a welcomed feature for a student! Fourth, and finally, the trip across my apartment was shorter than the trip from DC to Philadelphia.

My first JSM was a positive experience but I hope it is safe and possible for everyone to attend JSM 2021 in Seattle, Washington. I look forward to the opportunity to meet more WSS members and to engage with the broader statistical community.

Thank you to the American Statistical Association and all who worked to put JSM 2020 together under challenging circumstances. Thank you to my professors at Georgetown who made it possible for me to understand the topics shared at JSM 2020. Thank you to my mentor Claire McKay Bowen for encouraging me to apply for the Washington Statistical Society Joint Statistical Meetings Student Travel Award and thank you to the Washington Statistical Society for providing the generous opportunity.

~ Aaron R. Williams

Jeanne E. Griffith Mentoring Award

The Jeanne E. Griffith Mentoring Award Selection Committee is pleased to announce that this year's recipient is Rajeshwari Sundaram, a Senior Investigator at the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, National Institutes of Health.

This recognition is awarded annually to a supervisor, technical director, team coordinator, or other member of Federal, State, or Local government statistical staff for his or her efforts in supporting the work and developing the careers of junior statisticians.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, plans for an award ceremony to celebrate the award and Rajeshwari's accomplishments have not been finalized.

To learn more about the Jeanne E. Griffith Mentoring Award, please see:

<http://community.amstat.org/governmentstatisticssection/home>

If you have questions about the award, please contact **Rick Peterson** at rick@amstat.org, (703) 684-1221, or the chair of the Award Committee: **Bill Mockovak** at Mockovak.William@bls.gov.

WELCOME NEW ASA MEMBERS

Scott Alan Bruce
Nicole Czaplicki
Morgan Hrab
Jingxian Huang
William A. Huber
Gizem Korkmaz
Luona Lin
Veronica Isabel Salinas
John Francis Schilp
Taehoon Song
Elizabeth Teeple
Kelly Toppin
Garth Wales
Xiaoke Xiong
Xin (Rosalynn) Yang

- ~ Welcome to WSS!
- ~ Eileen O'Brien, WSS President
- ~ Tom Krenzke, WSS Past President
- ~ Jill Dever, WSS President Elect

WSS MEMBERS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Washington Statistical Society

Member Spotlight

Introducing your fellow members and showcasing the diversity of the WSS membership

Meet WSS Member Carolina Franco...

Where do you work and what do you do?

I work at the Census Bureau's Center for Statistical Research and Methodology (CSRM). There, I'm a Mathematical Statistician and Principal Researcher.

I conduct statistics research with a focus on questions relevant to the Census Bureau, often collaborating with others both within the organization and in academia. Most of my research is in small area estimation.

What attracted you to your current position?

Near the end of my PhD, I did an internship at another department at the Census Bureau, and during my internship I had the chance to meet some of the researchers at CSRM and learn a little bit about the center's work and culture. I liked CSRM's working environment and research focus, so when I was nearing graduation I inquired about job opportunities there.

I've been working in CSRM ever since.

Finish the sentence: "I joined WSS to..."

...stay informed of interesting seminars and events in the DC area and to stay connected with the local statistical community. In general, I think professional associations such as the ASA are a great way to get more involved in the profession. I have recently become more active by participating in two different ASA committees as chair and vice-chair, and it's been a very good experience so far.

What profession other than your own would you like to attempt?

It took me some time to find a profession that I am passionate about, and I would not trade it. However, if I retire one day, I would like to spend more time painting, which I also love. It can be hard to find time for it.

"...what makes a great mentor is a strong desire to help more junior colleagues succeed, extensive knowledge about the field of interest, and patience"



Why did you join the statistics profession?

Long story short, I discovered I had a passion for mathematics after college, and took additional coursework to prepare to enter into an interdisciplinary PhD program in applied mathematics at the University of Maryland in College Park (UMCP), with the help of some mentors. It was during my graduate studies at UMCP that I discovered statistics is a great way to use mathematics to better understand the world.

What was your first job?

My first job was in early high school, when I worked at a kiosk at one of the local malls, selling hair accessories. Though I enjoyed the human interaction that the job entailed, the experience was also a good way to learn that sales was not my real interest.

Have you had any great mentors? If so, what made them great?

I've been very fortunate to have had great mentors throughout my statistics career, and I am grateful to them.

Before entering graduate school, one of my undergraduate professors, Peter Wolfe, really encouraged me to pursue my interest in mathematics by applying to graduate programs, and guided me through the process. I had other great professors in graduate school who also provided guidance and information about professional growth

opportunities before, during, and after my doctoral program (Abram Kagan, Partha Lahiri, Eric Slud, Benjamin Kedem, Paul Smith). And when I started my job at CSRM, I was paired with a more experienced researcher, William Bell, who is very knowledgeable about my areas of research, and he taught me a lot. I think what makes a great mentor is a strong desire to help more junior colleagues succeed, extensive knowledge about the field of interest, and patience.

What is your favorite meal or favorite restaurant?

I like all kinds of restaurants, but wherever I go, I almost always order seafood. Healthy and delicious! I especially enjoy sushi, because you get to enjoy so many different flavors in one meal. My favorite is Uni (sea urchin).

If you could have one superpower, what would it be?

The first thing that comes to mind is teleporting! I am thinking of never again having to sit in a tiny airplane seat for hours, and never having to get stuck in a traffic jam on my way to work! I could visit a new place every weekend or even during my lunch break.

How do you like to spend your free time away from work?

I like outdoor activities when the weather is nice. For instance, a nice bike ride in a trail at the Rock Creek Park, some laps at the pool, or the occasional tennis game. I also love painting, going to art museums, travel, and spending time with family and friends.

Washington Statistical Society

Member Spotlight

Introducing your fellow members and showcasing the diversity of the WSS membership

Meet WSS Member Sylvia Dohrmann...

Where do you work and what do you do?

I have worked at Westat for over 20 years, and was recently promoted to the position of *Associate Director in Statistics and Evaluation Sciences*. I am currently the lead statistician on the Population Assessment of Tobacco and Health (PATH) Study, which is longitudinal cohort study of tobacco use and how it affects the health of people in the United States. I manage a team of other statisticians in the work of sampling, weighting, nonresponse bias analyses, and disclosure control prior to the release of restricted- and public-use data files.

What attracted you to your current position?

My first job out of graduate school at Florida State University was with the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Mine was a good position that introduced me to the field of survey statistics, and I met people I still consider friends today. Following the rigor of graduate school, I missed more challenging and diverse work. After a couple of years at BLS, I was attracted to a position at Price Waterhouse (now PricewaterhouseCoopers) as a litigation consultant, supporting those providing expert testimony in the field of statistics. This certainly proved to be a challenging position, but a stressful one. Westat provided a balance between my two previous positions: the opportunity to contribute to the production of official statistics, while at the same time providing challenging work in a number of subject matter areas without the stress of the litigation field.

“Westat provided ... the opportunity to contribute to the production of official statistics... [and] ... challenging work in a number of subject matter areas”



Sylvia (right) with daughter, Zoë (left)

Finish the sentence: “I joined WSS to...”

... learn more about the courses being offered in the region and to learn of other positions available in the area. I did not realize at the time that it would also open the door to more opportunities to contribute to the profession (or that I even wanted to make such contributions). After a few years, I was asked to assist with the organization of short courses for WSS, and that led to my becoming a founding member of the ASA Conference on Statistical Practice Steering Committee.

What was your first job?

I worked at a Ben and Jerry’s Ice Cream store. This was quite a controversial choice because my older sister worked at Häagen-Dazs®. My mother proved her allegiance early on; you will, in fact, find a pint of Häagen-Dazs® ice cream in her freezer today.

Why did you join the statistics profession?

All through junior high and high school it was clear that math was my best subject. When considering a major in college, I knew I did not want to major in math or to become a math teacher, so accounting seemed to be a good fit. In college I took my first economics course and the required business statistics course. Both were taught in the same large lecture hall. In the economics course, I found myself finding seats closer

“...the statistics lecturer made complete sense, even from the balcony”

and closer to the lecturer in the hopes that I would understand the subject matter better; but the statistics lecturer made complete sense, even from the balcony. I changed my major that semester and never looked back.

Have you had any great career mentors? If so, what made them great?

Yes, David Morganstein. He is the person who hired me at Westat, and led our unit until only recently. He was the first supervisor I ever had that said “Thank you” for my participation on a project – which almost brought me to tears. Watching him in a professional capacity showed me the importance of communicating statistical issues to our clients in a clear and resonant manner. His concern for the personal lives of the people he supervised is at the heart of how I strive to supervise my staff.

“Watching [David Morganstein] in a professional capacity showed me the importance of communicating statistical issues to our clients in a clear and resonant manner”

What is your greatest accomplishment?

Raising my daughter, Zoë, as a single parent. My late husband died when Zoë was 9 months old. Since my career was in the DC area, I decided to remain here even though my family was not available to help on a day-to-day basis. That is not to say that my family (and here, I include Zoë’s paternal grandparents, aunts and uncles in addition to my parents and sister) didn’t help – they did; I received tremendous emotional support from them, and made sure we had frequent trips to visit them all. Now that she is an adult, I can see that I have raised an independent woman who can take care of herself, but who also knows and supports both sides of her family.

What is your favorite daily ritual?

I have an older neighbor who was also a single mother. The first stop on my evening walk with my dog, Maisie, is my neighbor’s house. Maisie gets a treat (secretly supplied by me), and my neighbor and I can check in with each other. She and I have completely different religious and political

affiliations but come together on the important things such as parenting, kindness, and simply getting through this life with some sense of sanity.

What is your favorite vacation spot?

Anywhere on or near the ocean. From a very young age my father was a ship and cruise enthusiast, and introduced me early on to cruise vacations - when the ships still looked like ships and not floating amusement parks. Cruising is still my family’s favorite vacation, but I’ll take a beach somewhere warm in a pinch.

If you could give your 18-year-old self one piece of advice, what would it be?

Don’t take yourself so seriously!

SPOTLIGHT A WSS MEMBER

Washington Statistical Society's Spotlight on Members Program

The WSS Board of Directors has established a program to highlight members who have made or are making notable contributions to the work of their organization or their professional field of expertise. We know that WSS members are doing interesting work in the fields of statistics, survey methodology, and the social sciences. Through this program, we hope to spotlight the accomplishments of our fellow WSS members.

This is our first request for nominations, to be featured in an upcoming issue of WSS News. We are interested in featuring members at all levels of the employment spectrum including recent graduates, mid-career employees, and those seasoned veterans.

Please feel free to nominate more than one person or a team working together. You may also nominate yourself as well. The nominees must be members of the WSS and not currently affiliated with the Board.

Please provide us with the following information about your nominee or nominees.

1. Your name, email address, and telephone number
2. Name or names of nominee(s)
3. Organizational affiliation
4. Job title
5. Their contact information including email address and telephone number
6. A brief narrative describing the reasons for your nomination
7. A photo of the nominee, although not required, would be greatly appreciated

Please submit your nominations or direct any questions to Nick Hart (nhart@bipartisanpolicy.org) or Natalia Weil (NataliaWeil@westat.org).

We look forward to hearing from you.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Calling Data Scientists, Developers, Designers and Storytellers for a Month-Long Virtual Hackathon Supporting Chesapeake Bay Conservation

Booz Allen Hamilton has partnered with a local nonprofit, the Chesapeake Monitoring Cooperative, to host **Hack the Bay**, a month-long virtual hackathon dedicated to exploring, analyzing, and enriching data on water quality throughout the Chesapeake Bay. The competition will be open beginning Aug. 3 and participants (18+) of all geographies and skill levels are eligible to engage individually or as part of a team. Entrants will have the option to address one of four hackathon challenges, outlined [here](#). Teams with the most compelling entries will be invited to present their solutions and findings to a distinguished group of scientists and experts from Booz Allen Hamilton and leading organizations in the environmental sector, and will be recognized in press and publications after the event. Sign up at <https://hack-the-bay.devpost.com/>

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FROM THE WSS NEWS EDITOR

Items for publication in the next issue of WSS NEWS will be accepted thru the **20th of the preceding month.**

Email items to wss.editor@gmail.com.

The authors are responsible for verifying the contents of their submissions. Submissions requiring extensive revisions on length and/or contents will be returned. Announcements with track changes will not be accepted.

Please submit all materials as an attachment in **MS WORD** or **plain text**. Submissions in any other format will be returned.

PLEASE DO NOT SUBMIT YOUR ITEMS IN PDF OR IN THE BODY OF AN EMAIL.