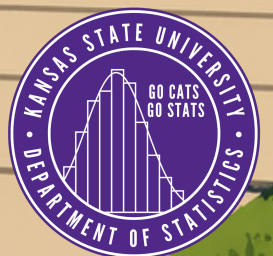


Department of Statistics Newsletter

Kansas State University

Volume 28 Issue 1 | 2026



Announcements

K-STATE Alumni & Friends
dinner @JSM!

Boston on
Monday,
August 3,
at 6:30pm

[RSVP here](#)



JSM 2025 in Nashville



From the Desk of Perla Reyes

I'm proud to share with you another year full of achievements by the members of the K-State Statistics family, our community of faculty, students, and alumni. In an ever-changing landscape of higher education, success is only possible through collaboration and determination.

I'll highlight some of this year's news and events, including guest speakers, so you can stay connected with our department's activities.

In the Fall 2025 commencement ceremony, the College of Arts & Sciences' first-ever student speaker was Tinashe Sekabanja, one of our graduating students. She made us proud by delivering a message of perseverance and human connection.

The department co-sponsored the second K-State ASA DataFest competition this Spring. The K-State organizing team led by Dr. Trevor Hefley not only hosted a successful event and extended participation to teams from the University of Nebraska and Colorado State University, but also, through K-State's research collaboration with Stormont Vail Health, the Topeka-based regional health system was selected as the event's official data donor, supplying the dataset and challenge used at DataFest events worldwide.

In April, we welcomed Dr. Ron Wasserstein's visit to celebrate his appointment as a 2026 Alumni Fellow for the College of Arts & Sciences. It was a meaningful occasion for our students and faculty to connect with him and feel part of our vibrant community.

Thanks to the generosity of our donors, we were able to award over \$70,000 in departmental scholarships to help students stay in the program. In addition, after many years of chasing a dream, we succeeded; it took multiple philanthropic donations (small and large), two funded faculty awards-one for research, one for teaching- and the efforts of several faculty and staff to finally acquire two Beocat supercomputing nodes for the

department. In 2026-2027, students and faculty will be able to run priority jobs for learning and research activities.

In Fall 2026, we'll welcome back Dr. Chris Bilder to K-State as a member of the department's faculty. This is a bit bittersweet news, as the unfortunate decision by administrators to eliminate Statistics at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln was a contributing factor. Chris will be giving a talk on the topic at the 2026 JSM in Boston. If you are attending, I hope to see many of you at the K-State friends dinner on Monday, August 3, at 6:30 PM (RSVP).

Consider visiting Manhattan soon and sharing your news with us at statdept@ksu.edu.

Thank you for your trust, your partnership, and your commitment to Statistics at K-State. I can't wait to see what we will achieve together next.

Greetings from Manhattan
Perla Reyes
Associate Professor and Head



Faculty Additions

Chris Bilder



We welcome back Chris Bilder (PhD grad in 2000) as a full professor in our department! Chris continues to perform research on categorical data analysis problems. In particular, his main focus area is group testing that is used widely to make infectious disease testing more efficient. Its application was especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic, where Chris provided help to individuals around the world. Chris also recently had the second edition of his “Analysis of Categorical Data with R” book published, which is co-authored with former faculty member Tom Loughin.

Chris and wife Kimberly have two sons, Callum (17) and Keegan (14). The family has traded in their red for purple and look forward to attending Wildcat football games in the fall.

You can check out Chris’s teaching and research website at ChrisBilder.com. Chris is active with social media on BlueSky [@chrisbilder.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/chrisbilder.bsky.social) and YouTube [@ChrisBilder](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCChrisBilder). He will be giving a [late-breaking session](#) presentation at JSM regarding the elimination of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s Department of Statistics on Tuesday, August 4 at 10:30AM.

Welcome Home Ron!





The Department of Statistics was pleased to welcome back alumnus Ron Wasserstein, Ph.D. '87, and his wife, Sherry, to Kansas State University. Ron was recently named a 2026 Alumni Fellow, representing the College of Arts and Sciences.

He is one of 11 distinguished individuals selected for the 2026 class. Alumni Fellows are recognized for their outstanding professional accomplishments and distinguished service within their careers and communities.

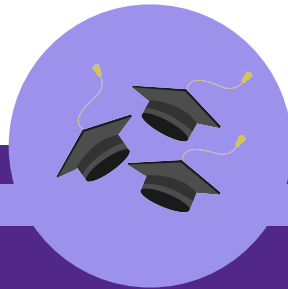
Ron has served as executive director of the American Statistical Association since 2007. In this role, he works to advance the organization's mission of promoting the practice and profession of statistics. He oversees a staff of 31 employees who serve more than 14,000 members from the ASA's headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia.

To commemorate Ron's visit, Dr. Perla Reyes presented him with an original work of art created by Dr. Shreepad Joglekar, Lindy E. Bell Head of the Department of Art and associate professor. Dr. Joglekar generously donated the piece after Dr. Reyes requested an example of K-State-created artwork that would serve as a meaningful keepsake of Ron's return to campus.



Alumni News

We would love to have you here! We want to know where our alumni are and how they are doing! Don't hesitate to reach out at statdept@k-state.edu



Support the Future of Statistics at K-State!

Help us continue to empower the next generation of data scientists, researchers, and educators. Your donation supports student scholarships, cutting-edge research.



SCAN ME

Social Events

Kicking Off the 2025-2026 Academic Year



The Department of Statistics kicked off the 2025–2026 academic year by welcoming new and returning students at its annual Kickoff event. The gathering provided an opportunity for students to connect with faculty, staff, and peers while learning about the department's resources, student organizations, and upcoming activities. The event fostered a welcoming atmosphere, encouraged new connections, and set the stage for another year of academic success, collaboration, and community within the department.



Fall Picnic



Fall Picnic



Halloween



Graduate students gathered for the department's annual pumpkin carving social to celebrate the Halloween season and spend time together outside the classroom. Armed with carving tools and plenty of creativity, students transformed ordinary pumpkins into a wide variety of unique jack-o'-lanterns—from spooky faces to playful and imaginative designs. The event provided a relaxed setting for students to connect, unwind, and enjoy one another's company while showing off their artistic side. While no formal statistical analysis was conducted, the results suggested a strong positive effect on department morale.



Halloween



Spring Picnic



Spring Picnic



Academic Events

2026 Conference for Applied Statistics in Agriculture and Natural Resources @ Nebraska



Agstat 2026

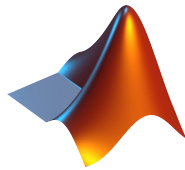
This year's conference, hosted by the University of Nebraska–Lincoln from May 11–14 in Lincoln, Nebraska, brought together scholars from across the region.

K-State was strongly represented by an impressive delegation of students and faculty. Our students presented their research in both oral and poster sessions, earning notable recognition for their work. K-State students swept the poster competition, with **Claudio Dias** earning 1st place, **Maliha Wassim** taking 2nd, and **Gustavo Roa** securing 3rd. In addition, **Abraham Arbelaez** received 3rd place in the oral presentation competition. These achievements highlight the exceptional quality of research being conducted within the Department of Statistics and the dedication of our students.

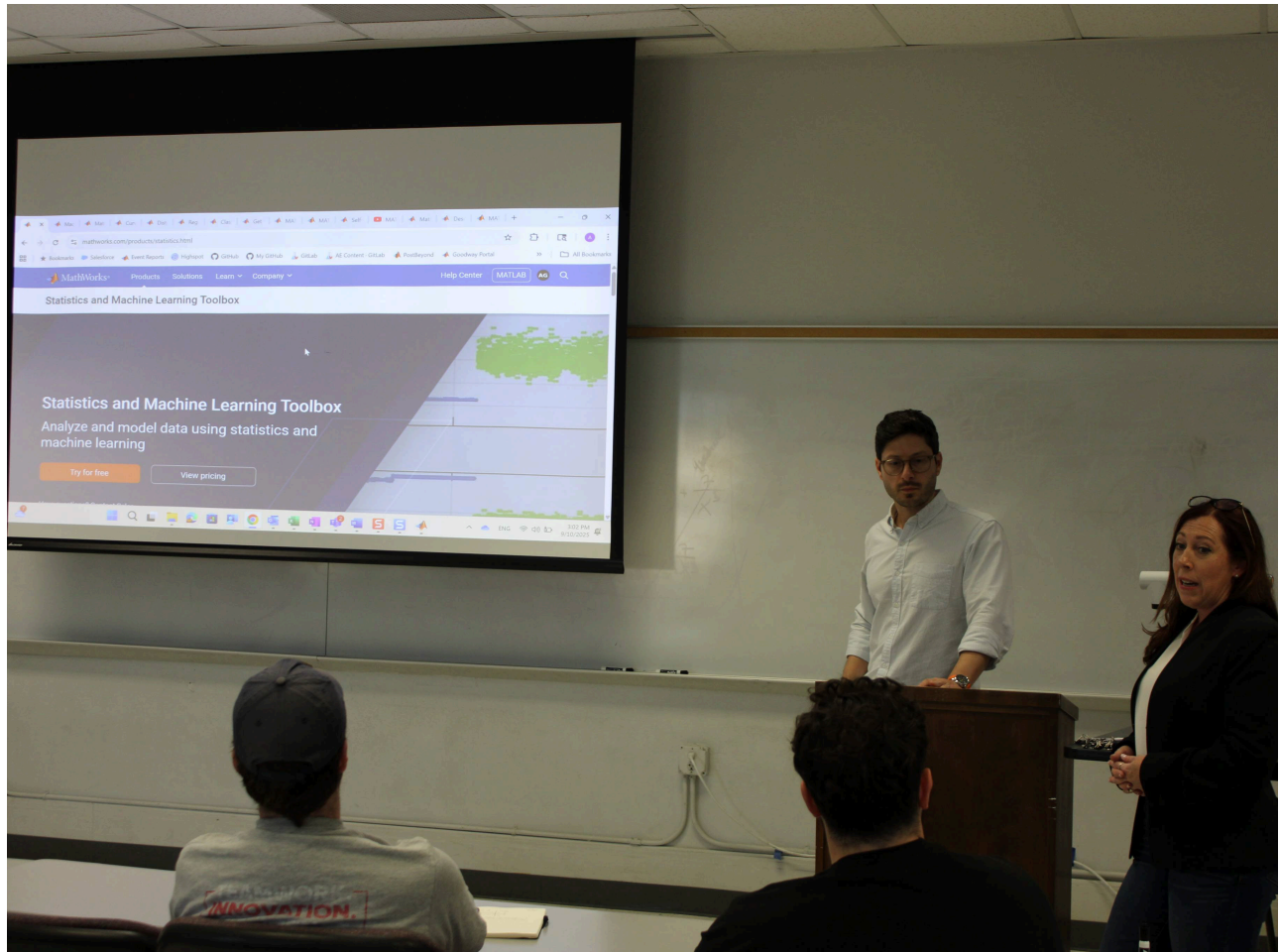


Recent Events

Exploring MATLAB with MathWorks



The Department of Statistics welcomed representatives from MathWorks for an engaging presentation on MATLAB and its applications in data analysis, scientific computing, and industry. Students had the opportunity to learn about MATLAB's capabilities, explore real-world applications, and gain insight into how the software is used across a variety of careers. The visit also provided an opportunity for students to connect with industry professionals and learn about resources available through MathWorks.



Recent Events

ASA Kansas-Western Missouri Chapter Fall Meeting

The ASA Kansas-Western Missouri Chapter hosted its Traveling Short Course and Fall Meeting on September 19, 2025, at the University of Kansas Medical Center in Kansas City, Kansas. The event featured Dr. Joyce Robbins of Columbia University, who presented the traveling short course, Effective Graphs with ggplot, followed by the keynote address, Making Models Make Sense: The Role of the Statistician in Interpretable Machine Learning. The meeting also included a poster session, chapter business meeting, and networking opportunities, bringing together students, faculty, and professionals from across the region to learn, collaborate, and share their research.



Department Seminars

Dr. Anindya Bhadra



The Department of Statistics was pleased to welcome Dr. Anindya Bhadra for a seminar on recent developments in Bayesian methodology for Gaussian graphical models. His presentation explored new approaches for evidence estimation and efficient posterior computation using telescoping and reverse telescoping block decompositions of the precision matrix. The seminar highlighted the challenges of maintaining positive definiteness in high-dimensional graphical models while developing computationally efficient Bayesian methods.

Department Seminars

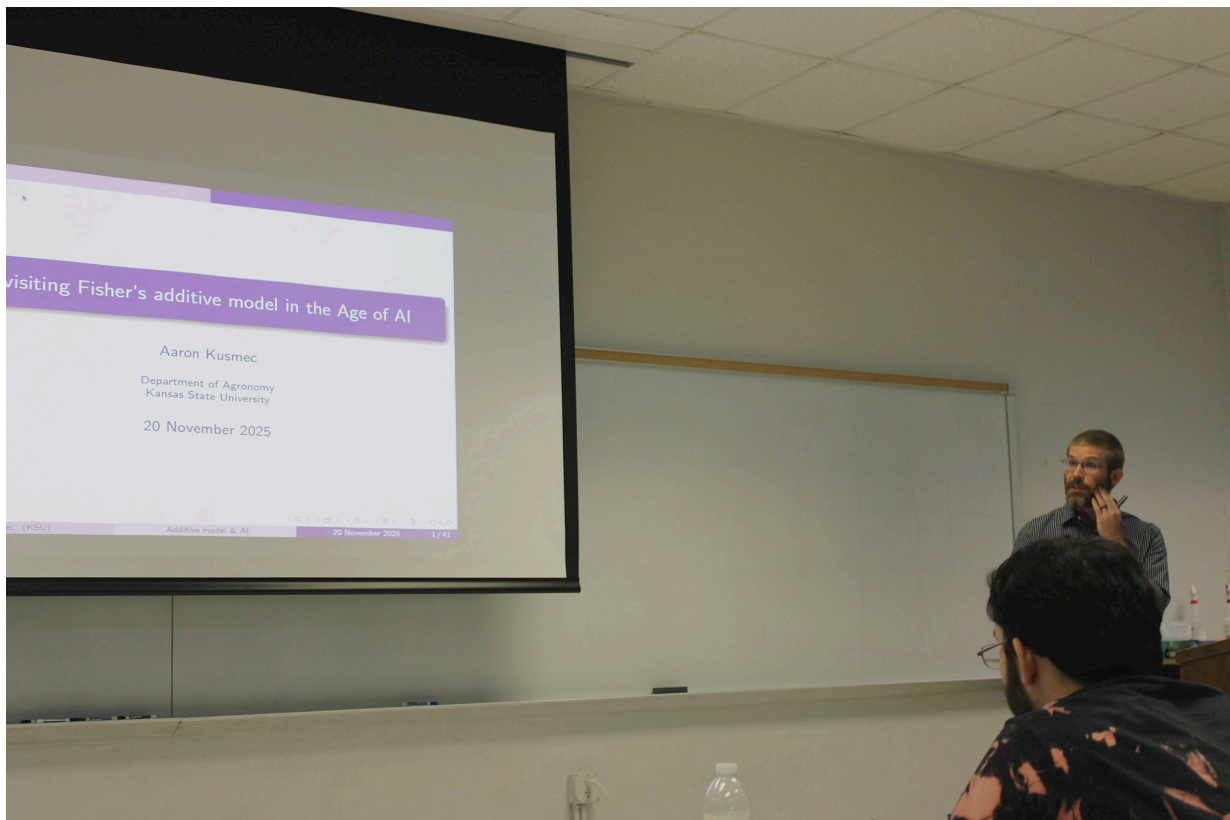
Dr. Dale Zimmerman



The Department of Statistics welcomed Dr. Dale L. Zimmerman of the University of Iowa for a seminar examining the role of spatial confounding in spatial regression models. Dr. Zimmerman discussed the ongoing debate surrounding restricted spatial regression, a class of methods developed to address collinearity between fixed and random effects in spatial linear mixed models. His presentation provided both theoretical and practical perspectives on the implications of these modeling choices for statistical inference.

Department Seminars

Dr. Aaron Kusmec



The Department of Statistics welcomed Dr. Aaron Kusmec of the Kansas State University Department of Agronomy for a seminar exploring the intersection of quantitative genetics and artificial intelligence. In his presentation, Revisiting Fisher's Additive Model in the Age of AI, Dr. Kusmec reflected on the lasting influence of R.A. Fisher's additive model while examining why advances in deep learning have yet to transform genomic prediction in the same way they have revolutionized other fields.

Recent Events

Graduates from this year



Fall 25

Yuan Gao (BS)
Aiden Werner (BS)
Tinashe Sekabanja (BS)

Spring 26

Brock Olson (BS)
Bryce Myers (BS)
Shuangshuang Liang (PhD)
Ebene Mboumi (PhD)
Gustavo Roa (MS)
Tinashe Sekabanja (MS)
Grace Vanderwyst (MS)

Summer 26

Zhanxian Zhu (MS)
Robert Sholl (MS)
Isaac Smith (MS)

The Department of Statistics proudly celebrates student **Tinashe Sekabanja**, who made history as the **first student speaker** at a College of Arts and Sciences commencement ceremony at Kansas State University. Selected for this distinguished honor, Tinashe addressed fellow graduates, faculty, family, and friends, reflecting on the shared experiences, challenges, and achievements that defined her academic journey. We congratulate Tinashe on this remarkable achievement and look forward to her continued success.

GOOD LUCK TO OUR GRADUATES!!!



Recent Events

**Graduates from
this year**



Scholarship Winners

Summer Lolafaye Coyne Statistics Graduate Scholarship



Abraham Arbelaes



My name is Abraham Arbelaes and I am a third-year PhD student in the department. I finished my BS in Statistics at Penn State and came all the way to the Little Apple to specialize and learn more about spatio-temporal statistics and its applications with ecology and environmental science. I grew up in Colombia playing the piano, playing a lot of soccer and falling in love with numbers and data. This past summer I went to a couple of World Cup games to support Colombia! Vamos seleccion!



Madhav Dhital



I'm Madhav Dhital, a statistician and, out of a genuine love for the subject, a physicist too, having completed my Master's in Physics. I'm passionate about developing innovative solutions using data structures, and I'm currently focused on optimal statistical blocking using Zero-Suppressed Binary Decision Diagram. Beyond my professional life, I love discovering new technologies and exploring different corners of the world. I'm proud to be from Nepal, a country renowned for its breathtaking landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and historical significance as the birthplace of Lord Buddha. Nepal is also home to Mount Everest, the highest peak on Earth. With its diverse traditions, vibrant festivals, and warm hospitality, Nepal offers a remarkable blend of nature and culture, and popular trekking routes like the Annapurna Circuit only add to the adventure it has to offer.



Vishmi Ridmika Dissanayake Pathiranage



I joined the Ph.D. program in Statistics at KSU in 2022 after completing my B.Sc. in Statistics in Sri Lanka in 2020. Before beginning my doctoral studies, I worked for about a year as a Demonstrator and another year as a Statistician. Alongside my Ph.D., I work as a Graduate Teaching Assistant in the Department of Statistics. My research focuses on developing Bayesian methods for high-dimensional genomics and longitudinal data analysis. Outside of academics, I enjoy spending quality time with family and friends, getting lost in a good book, and watching detective and mystery films and series.

Scholarship Winners

Summer Lolafaye Coyne Statistics Graduate Scholarship



Kingsley Darko



I am currently in my final year of my PhD program in Statistics at Kansas State University, where my research focuses on causal inference. Originally from Ghana, I have always been passionate about mathematics and its applications. In my free time, I enjoy engaging in various activities, such as playing soccer, ping pong, volleyball and participating in community events. I also love spending time with friends and family, sharing experiences that enrich my life and foster connections.



Aidan Kerns



I started at KSU in 2018, completing a BS in Statistics and Data Science in 2021 before joining the PhD program. After a year working as a contract statistician for Corteva Agriscience, I returned as a full-time student where I hold a position as a GRA in the Statistical Consulting Lab and expect to graduate in 2026. When I am not in my office I spend time with my wife and infant daughter, as well as our dog and two cats, and enjoy renovating our circa 1900s home.



Jacob Spooner



My name is Jacob Spooner and I am a master's student here in the department. I was born and raised in Quincy, Illinois and completed my undergraduate studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln before pursuing a graduate degree here at Kansas State. During my time here, I have gained experience applying statistics to various real-world scenarios and currently focus on predictive climate modeling. Outside of statistics, I enjoy playing soccer and exploring nature.

Scholarship Winners

Summer Lolafaye Coyne Statistics Graduate Scholarship



Srijana Subedi



I am Srijana Subedi from Nepal and currently in my fourth year of pursuing a PhD in Statistics at Kansas State University. Alongside my studies, I work as a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) in the Department of Statistics. I am passionate about teaching Statistics and enjoy working with numbers. My primary research interest lies in Biostatistics, particularly in the analysis of high-dimensional data, with a focus on cancer genomics. In my free time, I enjoy cooking, watching movies, and prose writing, especially poetry. I also love traveling to new places and capturing memories through photography.



Yuzhou Xu



I am currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Statistics at Kansas State University. Previously, I earned a degree in the Interdepartmental Genetics Program in the Department of Agronomy at Kansas State University, where my research focused on wheat genetics and plant breeding. My research lies at the intersection of statistics, artificial intelligence, genomics, and plant breeding. I am interested in developing AI-assisted statistical inference methods and machine learning approaches for statistical genetics, quantitative genetics, genomic prediction, and high-dimensional biological data analysis. My long-term goal is to integrate modern statistical methodology, artificial intelligence, and genomics to accelerate crop improvement and enhance our understanding of complex traits in plants. Outside of research, I enjoy playing basketball, fishing, and hiking, which help me stay active and maintain a healthy work-life balance.



Zhu Zhanxian



My name is Zhanxian, and I'm aspiring statistics student. During free hours, I devote myself to solving various mathematical questions, which strengthens my foundation in logic, numbers and statistical thinking, and fuels my interest in data research. To balance my study life, I also love playing table tennis. It helps me relieve academic pressure, trains my concentration and sharpens my ability to make quick, rational judgments. These two hobbies complement each other: mathematics build my analytical expertise, while playing table tennis keeps me energetic and focused for long-term statistical learning.

Scholarship Winners

Holly C. And E. Beth Fryer Statistics Scholarship



Gayantha Jayakody

I am a PhD student in the Department. I am from Sri Lanka, and I completed my bachelor's degree in Statistics and my master's degree in Financial Mathematics. I worked in the clinical research industry for nearly four years before joining the Department. My primary research focus is on Bayesian modeling, Spatio-temporal statistics, and Biostatistics. In my free time, I like to watch movies and play cricket or soccer. I also like traveling to different places, hiking, and enjoying different cultures. Singing is another source of relaxation for me.



Erik Huter

Hello, my name is Erik and I am a senior studying statistics and mathematics. I am from Derby, KS and aspire to pursue a PhD after my undergraduate studies. My biggest passion is learning, I love diving deeply into topics that capture my interest. Outside of class, my hobbies and interests include K-State sports, video games, and my two cats Snowflake and Fubini.

Ray and Carolyn Waller Statistics Scholarship



Delainey Isaacson

Hello! My name is Delainey, and I'm about to start my senior year at Kansas State University! After graduation, I plan on attending graduate school for an MBA and an MS in Business Analytics. In my free time, I love to go bowling, spend time with my friends, and play board games! I also love spending time with the women in my sorority Alpha Omega Epsilon, where I serve as our chapter president.

Scholarship Winners

Ronald and Rae Iman Scholarship in Statistics



Kallie Keiter



Hello! My name is Kallie Keiter, and I am going into my Sophomore year here at K-State. In my free time, I like to stay active, such as going to the gym or throwing a football around outside. I also enjoy volunteering and serving at my church! There, I help with the tech ministry and ensure everything runs smoothly for the service. Another thing I like to do in my free time is watch true crime documentaries. I know some people might think I am weird for this, but I think it's a great way to practice my analytical skills and put problem-solving into practice! While I am watching the documentary, I try to figure out what happened before it is revealed. I hope this helped you learn a little bit more about me! Have a great day!



Abie Mihulka



My name is Abie Mihulka and I'm currently a senior studying statistics and actuarial mathematics. This past summer I got the opportunity to work for Markel Insurance as an actuary intern. I also got back in June from studying abroad in Liverpool for the semester! In my free time I like to read and I love traveling to new countries and immersing myself into different cultures!



Reagan Stephenson

I am a military brat who lived all over the world (Hawaii and Sri Lanka, to name two!) before my family settled in Kansas. I'm majoring in Data Science and Statistics as well as Spanish. I love Taylor Swift and cars. My dream job is to work for Formula One.

Scholarship Winners

Ronald and Rae Iman Scholarship in Statistics



Avery Hafliger



I am a data science/statistics and actuarial math double major who loves staying active and engaged. During the school year, I work at the K-State Rec, and I am currently finishing up my summer internship at Farm Bureau right here in Manhattan. In my free time, I enjoy going on long walks, working out at the Rec, and curling up with a good book.

Dr. Lynn Ying-Shiang Lin Statistics Graduate Scholarship



Taehun Um



My name is Taehun Um, and I am a Ph.D. student in Statistics at Kansas State University. I'm interested in environmental statistics, agricultural statistics, and optimization. I'm working hard to build a strong foundation for future research in these areas. In my free time, I enjoy working out at the Recreation Center, spending time with friends, and exploring new places.



Robert Sholl



I've been a life-long K-State fan, growing up wearing Darren Sproles jerseys and doing push ups with Willie from the other side of a TV screen. I got my Bachelor of Science in Microbiology here at K-State but after a decent exposure to industry lab-work and data science, I've come back to get a Ph.D. in Statistics. My scientific interest lies in infectious disease, and there's no better group of scientists to work on forecasting models than Statisticians. Almost all my free-time involves computers, whether it's fixing and restoring old systems, programming personal projects, volunteering with technology infrastructure groups, or playing video games. I've been doing two of those four since the days of floppy disks, and I don't plan to stop anytime soon!

Faculty News

We congratulate Dr. Jingru Mu and Dr. Juan Du on their promotions



Faculty News



Dr. Juan Du has been promoted to Full Professor in the Department of Statistics at Kansas State University. Her research focuses on spatial statistics, stochastic processes, multivariate random fields, and interdisciplinary statistical applications. She is dedicated to excellence in teaching, mentoring, graduate education, and professional service, and is grateful for the support of her colleagues, students, and collaborators throughout her career.

Faculty News



Dr. Jingru Mu has been promoted to Associate Professor with tenure in the Department of Statistics at Kansas State University. Her research focuses on nonparametric and semiparametric methods for complex, large-scale, and spatio-temporal data, with applications in variable selection and image analysis. She is also dedicated to teaching mathematical statistics, statistical inference, and time series analysis. We are delighted to celebrate this well-deserved milestone.

Word Search

S	Y	A	S	Y	M	P	T	O	T	I	C	S	W	H	I	O	U	Y	R
S	Q	E	X	B	C	O	N	J	U	G	A	C	Y	R	G	Z	V	R	G
E	B	A	A	Z	L	L	I	K	E	L	I	H	O	O	D	K	L	O	F
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Find these words:

- Asymptotics
- Identifiability
- Consistency
- Efficiency
- Sufficiency
- Ancillarity
- Completeness
- Estimability
- Ergodicity
- Exchangeability
- Martingale
- Filtration
- Measurability
- Convergence
- Likelihood
- Posterior
- Prior
- Hyperparameter
- Hierarchical
- Conjugacy