

Fall 2005 StatFest

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StatFest is a one-day conference aimed at encouraging undergraduate minority students to pursue careers and graduate studies in the statistical sciences. The conference is an ongoing initiative of ASA's Committee on Minorities in Statistics and has been held at several colleges and universities. These include Spelman College (2001), Hampton University (2002), Meharry Medical College (2002), North Carolina State University (2003), the University of Hawaii West O`ahu (2005), and, most recently, Florida A&M University (2005).

The Fall 2005 StatFest was held on November 12 at Florida A&M University (FAMU) in Tallahassee, Florida. The conference was coordinated by Dr. Nagambal Shah, Professor of Mathematics at Spelman College and Chair of the ASA's Committee on Minorities in Statistics (ASA CMS), and Dr. Sonya Stephens, Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Mathematics at FAMU. The conference was sponsored by ASA CMS and received generous funding support from Eli Lilly and Company. Undergraduate students, predominantly from FAMU, were in attendance to hear about the role of statistics in academia, industry, and government; graduate studies in the statistical sciences; summer internships; and undergraduate research opportunities.

The keynote address was given by Dr. Lloyd Edwards, Associate Professor of Biostatistics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In his talk, "Addressing the Need for Trained Statisticians in Biomedical Research," Edwards said, "At the current time, there is a worrisome shortage of well-trained statisticians in the United States, and the shortage may only worsen in the years to come." Speaking of the dire need for qualified minority statisticians, Dr. Edwards pointed out that minority statisticians are important to ensure that "statistics related to their communities are not used improperly to cause them harm and/or misrepresent the truth." For instance, he cited issues related to racial and ethnic health disparities. He urged the students to stay focused, seize the moment during their formative years, and pursue excellence.

Immediately following the keynote address, students heard from a panel of speakers in the **Statistics in Academia** session. This session was moderated by Dr. Monica Stephens of Spelman College and included presenters from a broad array of U.S. institutions: Dr. Ben Hansen of the University of Michigan, Dr. Kimberly Weems of North Carolina State University, Dr. Jackie Miller of The Ohio State University, Dr. Derrick Rollins of Iowa State University, and Dr. Dan McGee of Florida State University. Panel discussants provided information about active research areas in statistics and opportunities available for advanced degrees in statistics education.

A panel session on **Statistics in Industry** followed the panel on Statistics in Academia. The first speaker in this session was Dr. Randy Davis, Director of Statistics and Programming, Antivirals and Hepatitis at GlaxoSmithKline. Dr. Davis, a supporter of StatFest since 2001, presented "The Role of a Statistician in the Pharmaceutical Industry: Drug Discovery to Marketing," in which he introduced general statistical issues in the

drug development process, along with a real-life example based on the development of EPIVIR HBV for the treatment of chronic Hepatitis B. While sharing information about the employment outlook in the pharmaceutical industry, Dr. Davis emphasized that “it is a good time to be a statistician” where the work is exciting, compensation is great, and there is a great satisfaction in knowing that you are helping mankind. Following, Dr. Davis, were Ms. Viki Roy, Manager of Biostatistics at Lineberry Research Associates in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, and Ms. Denai Milton, Assistant Senior Statistician at Eli Lilly and Company. Both Ms. Roy and Ms. Milton shared the history of their careers in biostatistics, discussing the valuable lessons and experiences that prepared them for their current positions. This session was moderated by Ms. Katrina Hardin-Williams of Spelman College.

The session on **Statistics in Government** was moderated by DeAnne Young, a senior mathematics major at FAMU. Speakers in this session included Ms. Sybil Brown, statistics consultant to the Office of the State Courts Administrator in Tallahassee; Ms. Cynthia Davis of the U.S. Census Bureau in Washington, D.C.; and Dr. Elizabeth Hughes of the Centers for Disease Control. Ms. Brown gave examples of several projects she worked on which have resulted in public policy changes. Ms. Davis spoke on opportunities for students with a degree in statistics at the Census Bureau. Dr. Hughes spoke about the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System.

The **Graduate Studies** session consisted of two components: a panel of graduate faculty and a panel of graduate students. The session presented by graduate faculty was chaired by Dr. Kimberly Weems and included Dr. Pam Arroway of North Carolina State University (NCSSU) and Dr. Leslie McClure of the University of Alabama, Birmingham (UAB). This session covered expectations for graduate programs (with specific attention to the programs at NCSSU and UAB), information about application processes, and advice to students on how to prepare for the programs. Dr. Timothy Thornton, the first African-American to receive a Ph.D. in Statistics from the University of Chicago, chaired the session presented by graduate students. From a graduate student perspective, the discussion focused on choosing a graduate program, funding graduate studies, and the graduate school experience.

The final session of the conference was on **Undergraduate Research Opportunities**. In this session, Dr. Vasant Waikar of Miami University of Ohio shared information about his program, SUMSRI, a successful summer research program that targets minority students. Following Dr. Waikar’s talk, Janell Jones (senior mathematics major at Spelman College) and Monique Owens (senior mathematics major at Central State University), both of whom participated in the 2005 SUMSRI program, presented their research. The final presentation in the session was given by Luvenia Hellams (sophomore mathematics major at Spelman College) who presented her research from the Spelman Environmental Statistics Summer Institute.

Overall, the Fall 2005 StatFest presented a wealth of information and exposed students to many dynamic role models in statistics while challenging them to consider opportunities the field. Commenting on Eli Lilly and Company’s support of StatFest, Dr. W. Scott Clark (Director, Non/Pre-clinical & Program Phase Statistics) and Mark Short (Diversity

Associate) noted, "Diversity is a priority for Lilly because it translates into real results. We appreciate the contributions StatFest makes towards encouraging diversity within the field, and we are proud to be able to contribute."

The coordinators extend their sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to making the event successful: the presenters and moderators who selflessly gave of their time to share information with the students and FAMU and the local organizers who hosted and prepared for the event.