

Information for Prospective MS Students in Biostatistics

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CONTENTS

Frequently Asked Questions	page 2
1. How long does it take to finish the MS degree?	
2. Do I have to start in Fall quarter?	
3. How are job prospects for graduates?	
4. What are my chances for admission?	
5. Do I have to take the GRE?	
6. When and where are classes offered?	
7. What if I am working?	
8. What if I have been out of school for years?	
9. What if I am a student from outside the U.S.?	
10. What data science and computational skills are taught?	
I. Introduction	page 3
A. Multi-Purpose Program	
B. Flexible Schedules	
C. Ideal Environment	
II. Admission to Program	page 4
A. Verify Course and Degree Requirements for Admission	
B. Application for Graduate Admission to the University	
C. Department Application	
III. Degree Requirements	page 8
IV. Financial Aid	page 10
V. Graduate Faculty and Staff	page 11

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

In many cases more detailed answers can be found elsewhere in this brochure. (See section references.)

1. **How long does it take to finish the MS degree?** Most students take two courses a quarter and finish in about two academic years (one year and nine months). Courses are sequenced with this schedule in mind. Students with heavy family or job responsibilities sometimes take longer. Scheduling courses in the right sequence to finish in less than five quarters is very difficult. (refer to sections I-B, III-C.)
2. **Do I have to start in Fall quarter?** For most students, Fall is the best time to start because the required 3-quarter sequences of courses begin in Fall. If you need to make up background courses, you may want to start in Spring or Summer. (refer to sections II-A & B.)
3. **How are job prospects for graduates?** Excellent. Our program is targeted towards the job market for MS-level biostatisticians in the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond. Historically, most graduates seeking jobs have found them near their graduation date. But there are no guarantees. Your motivation, communication skills, flexibility as to location, selection of courses, and quality of work in the program may all have a bearing on employability. We distribute job postings provided by graduates, friends and corporate contacts. A University office helps students develop resumes and interview skills. (refer to sections II-A, III-C4.)
4. **What are my chances for admission?** If you have taken a full sequence of lower-division calculus (through multiple integration) in a college, have a GPA above 3.0 in quantitative courses, and can provide favorable, informative letters of recommendation, your chances are excellent. The only way to know for sure is to let us evaluate your application. The program is growing, adding several excellent new faculty members over the last few years. There may be a limit to how fast we can grow, but we have not yet had to turn away qualified students for lack of space. (refer to sections II-A, VI.)
5. **Do I have to take the GRE?** Generally, no. We may ask you to take the general GRE if you can't provide suitable letters of recommendation or you have a GPA below 3.0. Also, we will ask you to do so at some point if you plan to go on to do doctoral work. (refer to sections II-C5 & 6.)
6. **Where and when are classes offered?** All classes for our MS program are offered at the Hayward campus. All classes needed for the MS degree are offered after 4pm, and there are occasional earlier classes. Classes start at 4pm, 6pm, and 8pm and last about two hours, two days a week. Usually, first-year classes are on Tuesday and Thursday, second-year classes on Monday and Wednesday. There is a reduced schedule of classes in Summer quarter. (refer to sections I-B & C.)
7. **What if I'm working?** A large number of our students are working, some at jobs that involve statistics. That's the reason for the night schedule of classes. (refer to section I-B.)
8. **What if I have been out of school for years?** There are various ways to document that you can succeed in our program. Many of our students have relevant work experience. Some have MS or PhD degrees in fields other than Biostatistics. Some take the GRE in lieu of letters of recommendation. Some need to begin by reviewing crucial background courses. (refer to section II-A.)
9. **What if I am a student from outside the US?** Almost half of our students are international students. The University Center for International Education (<http://www20.csueastbay.edu/cie/>) helps coordinate visas with applications. Students whose previous study has not been in English must take the TOEFL. Financial aid and work opportunities are very limited; international students must provide evidence that they have financial resources to carry them through two years of study. (refer to sections II-B3 & 4, IV.)
10. **What data science and computational skills are taught?** Our program has long taught SAS® and R-Programming. We have expanded our program to include courses in Data Visualization and Statistical Learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Department of Statistics and Biostatistics at Cal State East Bay offers graduate study leading to the Master of Science in Biostatistics. This brochure should answer most of your questions about the program. It describes the University and our Biostatistics MS Program, and it summarizes application procedures and degree requirements from the Cal State East Bay *Catalog*. The *Catalog* in effect at the time you enter the program provides the official statement of your graduation requirements. It is available online:

www.csueastbay.edu/ecat/current (entry point for entire Catalog)

www.csueastbay.edu/ecat/current/g-bsta.html (MS Program in Biostatistics)

In particular, this brochure describes some required procedures for applying to MS programs of the Department of Statistics and Biostatistics that are not included in the *Catalog*. (Refer to section II-C.)

A. Multi-Purpose Program

Our admission requirements are flexible enough to accommodate a wide range of backgrounds and interests. Successful graduates have come to the program with undergraduate majors in such fields as statistics, health science, public health, mathematics, computer science, biology and other sciences. Also, it is not unusual for students with MS and doctoral degrees in fields other than Biostatistics to enter the program.

Most of our graduates work as biostatisticians or SAS programmers in pharmaceutical and biotech industries. Many have moved into managerial roles as their careers have matured. Department contacts with alumni and Bay Area employers enable new graduates to seek opportunities with organizations familiar with the quality of our program.

Our programs are highly respected by employers in the Bay Area and beyond because they provide students with a mixture of practical applied and computational methods, and they also provide enough theoretical background so students can continue to learn new methods after leaving the University. The same contacts with alumni and local businesses that provide our students with employment opportunities also provide our faculty with an opportunity to cooperate with employers in keeping our programs up to date.

Faculty make every effort to help students devise programs that meet their individual needs. For example, individually designed programs of study have prepared about 10% to 15% of our MS graduates for PhD work in biostatistics at universities with international reputations.

B. Flexible Schedules — For Working or Full-Time Students

Because many of our graduate students are also employed off campus, bio/statistics courses are scheduled so that the Biostatistics MS Degree can be completed by taking courses between 4:00 and 10:00 p.m. Most classes related to the program are scheduled for two evenings a week. (Some full-time employers allow flexible work schedules, for example, to permit attending classes starting at 4:00 p.m. on two days a week.) As the program continues to grow, we will offer more afternoon courses and sections, providing greater scheduling flexibility for students.

Most students complete the program within two years. Recently, about 15 students have graduated from our MS programs each year, and the programs are growing steadily. This makes our Department one of the largest producers of MS-level professional biostatisticians in the US.

C. Ideal Environment

The Hayward campus of Cal State East Bay is located in the rolling foothills on the eastern shore of San Francisco Bay with magnificent views of the Bay Area. The climate is mainly dry from May through October, with rainy periods November through April. Temperatures are mild: freezing weather is rare, and usually only a few summer days exceed 90°F (32° C).

The Bay Area is a center of much cultural and statistical activity. Stanford University and the University of California, Berkeley and UC San Francisco are all within 35 miles of campus. The San Francisco Chapter of the American Statistical Association has a regular calendar of events. Also, companies in the biotechnology, pharmaceutical, computer/high-tech, defense, and financial sectors participate in the statistical life of the Bay Area.

A modern computer laboratory, equipped with a wide range of statistical software, is available for Biostatistics classes. Important statistical software is licensed for student use off campus. Class sizes are relatively small, usually averaging 30-40 for the beginning courses in the program and often smaller for advanced graduate-level courses.

II. ADMISSION TO THE PROGRAM

Here is a step-by-step explanation of the admission process. This section explains some procedures required by the Department of Statistics and Biostatistics, but not included in the *Catalog*. They are intended to ensure that your application for admission receives the most prompt and favorable consideration possible.

Step A: Verify Course and Degree Requirements for Admission

The following information is provided so that you can assess whether you are eligible for admission to the Biostatistics MS Program. Admission is a two-stage process: (1) Admission to the University as a graduate student, and (2) Acceptance into the Biostatistics MS Program. The only way to know for sure whether you are qualified for admission is for the University and the Department to evaluate your transcripts, letters of recommendation, and other evidence listed below in Steps B and C. However, for applicants who meet the criteria below, the acceptance rate has been very high. Currently, there is no set maximum number of students admitted each year.

Departmental Calculus Requirement: The Department absolutely requires a background in mathematics through lower-division calculus. At CSU East Bay, the equivalent courses are MATH 1304, 1305, and 2304. See the latest online *Catalog* under [Undergraduate Programs > Mathematics > Courses](#) for course descriptions. The Department requires “math major” calculus, including infinite series and multiple integrals. *Simplified courses, such as those intended for majors in biology and business, are not adequate.*

About calculus: A solid background in calculus is essential to success in the program. First-year statistics and probability courses in the program regularly use ideas of calculus. Also recommended (either previously or within the program) is at least one upper-division course with a calculus prerequisite: linear algebra (equivalent to our MATH 3100) or analysis (equivalent to our MATH 3300).

If your calculus background is weak (grades below B or taken long ago): (1) review on your own topics you once understood well, but now remember only fuzzily, (2) re-take a course equivalent to our MATH 2304: Calculus III, or (3) re-take the entire lower-division sequence of “math major” calculus. Depending on the degree of your deficiency and your personal schedule, you may be able to handle some of this review during your first year of the program. However, taking the required calculus courses for the first time after admission to the program is not a possibility.

CSU East Bay Information for Prospective MS in Biostatistics Students

University Degree and GPA Requirements: University requirements for admission to graduate programs include the following:

- The University ordinarily requires a 4-year baccalaureate degree from an accredited institution.
- The University target specifies that work taken during your junior and senior years must average B (GPA 3.0) or better. In borderline cases, the Admissions Office sometimes requests an opinion from the Department of Statistics and Biostatistics based on grades in courses in mathematics, statistics, and other sciences, on performance in other graduate programs, or on other factors.

Additional Helpful Background: Students who have some of the following additional background may be at an advantage for admission to the program and for progress towards the degree after acceptance.

- Basic statistics and probability courses, especially those requiring calculus as a prerequisite. (Examples: Courses equivalent to STAT 3401, 3502, or beyond. See the *Catalog* under [Undergraduate Programs > Statistics > Courses](#).) Some students prefer to start the program in Spring or Summer in order to take these courses before beginning their graduate-level courses the following Fall.

About previous background in statistics and probability: During the first quarter in the program almost all students take beginning statistics and probability courses taught at the graduate level. In addition to theory, these courses contain applied and computational concepts not often found in undergraduate courses.

A solid background in calculus is required. But we do not formally require a background in statistics and probability. Of course, students with some previous knowledge of statistics or probability generally have an easier time in these courses and gain a better initial understanding of the deeper concepts. The combination of weak calculus and no previous statistics or probability can cause difficulties.

- Mathematics courses beyond calculus, especially linear algebra and analysis. (See the *Catalog* under [Undergraduate Programs > Mathematics > Courses](#)—particularly MATH 3100, MATH 3300, and so on.)
- Knowledge of a computer programming language (for example, C++ or Java) or experience using statistical software (especially SAS or R) to analyze data.
- Experience in a setting where studies or experiments result in the collection of data, especially if this has involved writing statistically-oriented reports.

Flexibility: Exceptions require clear evidence of your ability and motivation to succeed in our program—where almost all grades must be A's or B's. For example, such evidence may be found in Graduate Record Exam scores, recent coursework, relevant work experience, and informative letters of recommendation. (However, there is no exception to the departmental calculus requirement mentioned above.)

Step B: Application for Graduate Admission to the University ([Online Information](#):

from CSUEB website: [Prospective Students > How to Apply > Graduate Student Admission](#))

Deadlines: Students are usually admitted to the Biostatistics MS Program starting in Fall quarter (beginning late September). Also, as mentioned above, if you want or need additional background courses before starting your graduate study, you might start in Winter or Spring. However, no guarantee for admission to the following Fall.

Your application and transcripts should be submitted online before the application deadline date for the quarter in which you intend to enter the program. For some programs, including the Biostatistics MS Program, deadlines for application have sometimes been extended beyond the published dates. If you miss a deadline, do not assume that applications are closed without asking.

1. APPLICATION FORM.

Apply for graduate admission to the University by completing the appropriate online form. Follow the instructions at www.csumentor.edu/AdmissionApp. Be sure to: (1) indicate *East Bay* as your choice of campus and *Biostatistics* as your proposed MS major, (2) complete all parts of the application (including the questions used to determine residency status for tuition purposes), and (3) pay the required processing fee.

Keep a copy: You should keep a copy of the contact information, academic history, and list of references you give on your application because you will also need these items for the information packet required by the Department of Statistics and Biostatistics (see Step C). Please let us know if there are any changes. (One way to capture this information is to make a printout of your online application.)

Separate Statement of Purpose: There is not enough room on the online application form for a statement of purpose of the kind required by the Biostatistics MS Program. On the application form indicate that your statement of purpose has been “Sent to the Department of Statistics and Biostatistics.”

2. TRANSCRIPTS.

As soon as you submit your application, arrange to have official transcripts sent to the Admissions Office by **all** colleges and universities you have attended (whether or not a degree was earned). Your application to the University will not be processed until all your transcripts have been received. **Late-arriving transcripts are a major cause of delayed admissions.**

3. Required of all foreign-language applicants: TOEFL SCORES.

If your undergraduate degree is from a place where English is not the principal language of instruction, you must complete the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). The lowest acceptable score is 550 (or 213 for computer-based or 79 for internet-based tests), but higher scores are preferable. Have scores sent to the Admissions Office.

4. Required of all non-US applicants:

AFFIDAVIT OF SPONSORSHIP OR EVIDENCE OF FUNDS.

The Department of Statistics and Biostatistics welcomes students from outside the US, and many international students have done excellent work in our program. However, neither the University nor the Department has funds to offer international students for financial aid or scholarships towards tuition, academic expenses, or living expenses. Permission to work in the US is difficult to obtain because of immigration restrictions.

Students who are not citizens or permanent residents of the US can be accepted at Cal State East Bay only with evidence that they have funds available to cover all educational and living expenses for the length of time necessary to complete the degree. International students must also be covered by a health insurance policy during their time at the University. For more specific information and the required forms, see <http://www20.csueastbay.edu/cie/>. Depending on educational background, it has been our experience that most international students take about two years to complete the Biostatistics MS Program.

Step C: Department Application Information on Qualifications for MS in Biostatistics (Email Application to the Department)

Please submit all of the following information and documentation via email to the Department of Statistics and Biostatistics, statistics@csueastbay.edu. Submit each document in a separate .pdf file (but not necessarily in a separate email).

1. INFORMATION FROM YOUR APPLICATION. In your email, please include the following information: (1) your desired starting quarter, (2) your contact information (full name, postal address, telephone, email address), (3) your academic history (institutions attended, dates, degrees), and (4) a list of your references.

2. COURSE LISTS. Please make an organized chronological list of your previous work in mathematics, statistics, and related quantitative courses and submit it in .pdf format. Attach this list to the email for the Department Office.

- **Required Calculus courses (no exceptions).** Provide a clear statement of how and where your basic calculus requirement was met. Give course names, dates, grades (converted to the US grade system, if necessary), institutions, and brief course descriptions. This information must be precise so that we can verify on your transcript(s) that our calculus requirement has been met.
- List of other relevant courses. If you have taken any post-calculus courses in statistics, mathematics, or related fields, please give us a list with dates, grades (in the US system: A, B, C, etc.), and, if known, instructors and textbook authors. In particular, if you believe you have already taken the equivalent of either Math 3100: Linear Algebra or Math 3300: Analysis I, please tell us which courses may be equivalent and why. (For course descriptions see the *Catalog* under Undergraduate Programs > Mathematics > Courses.)

3. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE. Write a straightforward statement of about 1.5 pages in length discussing your background (especially academic), career objectives (to the extent known), and reasons for seeking an MS Degree in Biostatistics. Attach this as a separate .pdf document.

If you believe that your transcripts or past grades do not accurately represent your current ability to perform to a high standard in the Biostatistics MS Program, please provide an explanation. Especially if your GPA is below 3.0, you need to convince us that you can succeed in a program in which you will be expected to get no grades lower than B. This Statement of Purpose must be provided directly to the Department of Statistics and Biostatistics—not included in your online application.

4. LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION. Normally, we require at least two, preferably three, letters of recommendation from people who are familiar with your academic background in mathematics, statistics, or other quantitative courses, and who can provide informative assessments of your aptitude for graduate work. These should correspond to the references named on your application form. Please have your recommenders email their letters of recommendation directly from their professional/academic email to statistics@csueastbay.edu.

There is no special form for submitting letters of recommendation.

A gap in your studies? We realize that some applicants will seek to enter the program some years after their previous degree work was completed, and so academic references may be difficult to obtain. If you cannot provide at least two recent, informative, and relevant academic letters of recommendation, then please take the general GRE and have the scores sent to the Department (see below). Usually, recent means within five years, informative means providing assessments beyond what is obvious from a transcript, relevant means based on performance related to statistics or mathematics, and academic means based on coursework at a university.

CSU East Bay Information for Prospective MS in Biostatistics Students

5. GRADUATE RECORD EXAM (GRE) SCORES. We do not require GRE scores of all applicants. However, in any of the following circumstances, we ordinarily require scores for the General GRE (Verbal, Quantitative, Writing):

- If you cannot supply at least two academic letters of recommendation as explained in Section 4 above.
- If your average GPA in any of the following categories is below B (3.0):
 - (a) All of your undergraduate work,
 - (b) All of your courses in the mathematical sciences (including statistics and computer science) at the undergraduate level,
 - (c) All of your post-baccalaureate work at any one institution.
- If you intend to pursue PhD work after earning your MS degree.

In evaluating you for admission to the Biostatistics MS Program, the Department will consider GRE scores along with your previous grades, letters of recommendation, and statement of purpose. In addition to providing important information for admission, GRE scores can be useful for advising students once they are admitted to the program. Also, a score of 4.5 or better on the writing part of the General GRE satisfies the University Writing Skills Requirement (see part III-A below).

Last-minute GRE? If GRE scores are available at the time you email your information to the Department, include a scan of the GRE report as a separate .pdf document, and have your official scores sent to the University separately (Institution Code 4011). But do not delay your application waiting for GRE scores. If scores are not available when you send your packet, please have official scores sent to the University as soon as they are available. (Usually, upon finishing the GRE, you are given estimated scores. Please report these unofficial estimated scores to the Department Office, in terms of both points and “percent below,” and let us know approximately when to expect official scores.)

III. DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

Here we give brief, informal summaries of the degree requirements. For official information on specific requirements, consult the University *Catalog*. (In the online *Catalog* for the academic year of your admission, or most recent re-admission, to the program, select Graduate > Biostatistics.)

Requirement A: University Writing Skills Requirement (UWSR)

The Writing Skills Requirement is intended to make sure students can express themselves effectively in written English both during their degree work and after graduation. It is satisfied by taking the Writing Skills Test (WST) administered by the University during the first quarter of residence in the program and, if necessary, by taking one or two designated English composition courses. In order to continue in the program, you must complete this requirement, and your status in the program will be “unclassified” until you do so. (See the *Catalog* for more information on the UWSR as it applies to graduate students.)

Sufficiently high scores on certain standardized tests may be used in place of the WST. See www.testing.csueastbay.edu/uwsr/uwsrexempt.php for information.

If you have already satisfied the Writing Skills Requirement as a graduate or undergraduate student at any California State University, you need not do so again.

Requirement B: Unit and Grade Requirements

The minimal unit and grade requirements are as follows:

- The MS program consists of at least 48 quarter units of graduate (6000 level) coursework.
- All work applied toward the 48 units must be at an average grade of B (3.0) or higher, and no required graduate-level course may be at a grade below B– (2.7).

However, depending on mathematics and statistics background before entry into the

CSU East Bay Information for Prospective MS in Biostatistics Students

program and career objectives upon graduation from the program, many students will need or want to take more than 48 units to finish the program. (Taking approximately 12 additional units is not uncommon.)

Requirement C: Course Requirements

This is a general and abbreviated statement of course requirements. All courses, other than the required courses, to be submitted towards the Biostatistics MS must be approved by a graduate advisor in advance of registration.

1. FOUNDATION COURSES. All entering students will have taken a full sequence of lower-division calculus courses before entry into the program. However, especially if you took calculus several years ago, you may need to re-take one or more calculus courses early in the program.

Many entering students will have taken previous courses in statistics or probability. Strictly speaking, the beginning graduate courses in probability (STAT 6204) and statistics (STAT 6304) do not require any probability and statistics as prerequisites. However, if you have little or no previous background in these subjects, you may feel more comfortable taking an upper-division course in probability (STAT 3401) or statistics (STAT 3502) before you begin taking the corresponding graduate courses (for descriptions see the latest online *Catalog* under Undergraduate Programs > Biostatistics > Courses).

Neither calculus review courses nor upper-division probability or statistics courses count towards the 48-unit requirement for the Biostatistics MS Degree.

2. UPPER-DIVISION UNDERGRADUATE COURSES. Many entering students will have taken an upper-division mathematics course beyond calculus in analysis or linear algebra. Mathematics at this level is required for the degree and as a prerequisite to certain graduate-level statistics courses. (Examples are MATH 3100 and MATH 3300. See the current online *Catalog* under Undergraduate Programs > Mathematics > Courses.)

3. REQUIRED GRADUATE-LEVEL COURSES. Ordinarily, students must take the following courses as part of their program here. Several prerequisites must be completed before taking the sequence STAT 6501-6502, which is ordinarily taken in Fall and Winter of a student's second year.

STAT 6204: Probability Theory

STAT 6205: Statistical Theory

STAT 6250: SAS Programming

STAT 6304: Advanced Statistical Inference

STAT 6305: Analysis of Variance Models

STAT 6501, 6502: Mathematical Statistics I and II

STAT 6509: Theory and Application of Regression

BSTA 6651: Analysis of Categorical Data in Biostatistics

BSTA 6652: Survival Analysis in Biostatistics

BSTA 6653: Clinical Trials in Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Industries

4. ELECTIVE COURSES. Additional graduate-level courses, if needed to meet the minimum requirement of 48 units overall.

Requirement D: Comprehensive Examination

The MS Comprehensive Exam tests for general knowledge of the fields of Biostatistics and probability and an understanding of methods of application to “real world” situations—including the use of statistical software such as Minitab, SAS and R. General information about the courses and material covered is provided in advance of each offering of the MS Comprehensive Exam. In order to take this exam, students must be in good academic standing and no more than 12 units short of finishing their degree requirements.

IV. FINANCIAL AID

The *Catalog* describes various loans and scholarships that are administered by the University. You can obtain additional information from the Financial Aid Office. Within the Department, a few possibilities for limited financial support may be available for students who have proved their ability to do good work in the program.

Department Graduate Assistantships. The Department has a limited number of graduate assistantships (approximately \$500 per quarter), grading for professors, etc. Selected students who have already been in the program for at least one quarter are hired for these positions. The main selection criteria are quality of work in the program, suitability for the tasks required, and financial need. No teaching assistantships nor research assistantships are available.

Internships. In recent years, a few paid internships (course credit for on-the-job experience) have been available for advanced students. Usually, students make their own arrangements for internships in an area of personal interest, often with present or possible future employers.

Department Scholarships. Several scholarships (usually \$500 or more) have been established through the generosity of alumni, faculty, staff, and friends of the Department. See for details:

<http://www20.csueastbay.edu/csci/departments/statistics/scholarships.html>

International Students. For many years, the Department has welcomed students from countries around the world. But students who are neither citizens nor permanent residents of the US must provide evidence of financial sponsorship or of their ability to meet all tuition and living expenses from their own resources. (See II-B-4 above.)

V. FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have questions not answered here or in the *Catalog*, please contact the Department. See the contact information at the beginning of this brochure. The Graduate Coordinator for Biostatistics can be reached by email at kelly.fan@csueastbay.edu. (For the quickest, most relevant response, please begin the subject line of your email with BIOSTAT-MS=Inquiry and provide brief information about citizenship / residency / visa status and prior degrees / dates / GPA in the body of your email along with your questions. Please DO NOT send attachments, unless requested.)

Tuition and fee information can be found at:

<http://www20.csueastbay.edu/prospective/cost-and-financial-aid/index.html>

VI. GRADUATE FACULTY and STAFF

DEPARTMENT FACULTY

Ayona Chatterjee (PhD 2006, University of Edinburgh, Scotland) Bayesian statistics, big data, dietary risk assessment.

Lynn Eudey (PhD 1988, University of California, Berkeley). Experimental design, survey sampling, biostatistics, clinical trials. Graduate Advisor in Statistics

Shenghua (Kelly) Fan (PhD 1999, University of Minnesota). Clinical trial design, Bayesian statistics, biostatistics. Graduate Advisor in Biostatistics

Joshua Kerr (PhD 2006, University of California, Davis). Time series, computational statistics, Bayesian statistics.

Eric Suess (PhD 1998, University of California, Davis). Time series, Bayesian statistics, statistical computing, statistical consulting. Department Chair

Mitchell Watnik (PhD 1996, University of California, Davis). Econometrics, statistical consulting, statistics education. Graduate Coordinator

YanYan Zhou (PhD 1996, University of Maryland, Baltimore). Categorical data analysis, time series, biostatistics.

DEPARTMENT STAFF

Raquel Arcia

Administrative Support Coordinator

Eric Suess

Department Chair