Biostatistics Fall 2023 Newsletter

Leading data-driven science in Public Health

A Letter from the Chair

Dear Friends,

I hope this message finds you all in good health and high spirits. As we look back on the past academic year, we are delighted to share the remarkable achievements and significant milestones that our department has accomplished. Last year, in particular, holds special significance for me as it marked my first year as the department chair. I have had the privilege of delving into the extraordinary history of our department, getting to know the talented individuals who make up the Pitt Biostat family and collaborating with our award-winning faculty to further the department's mission. As I reflect on these experiences, I am filled with optimism for the department's bright future.

Through this newsletter, we hope to strengthen and fortify the connections we have with each of you. Your ongoing support and engagement are invaluable components of our department's success. We cordially invite you to join us in celebrating the 75th anniversary of our School of Public Health and to follow and engage with us on the department's social media channels.

Hail to Pitt!

Yan Ma

New Faculty Introduction

Rebecca Deek is a recent graduate from the University of Pennsylvania biostatistics program. She obtained her MS in biostatistics from Columbia University and her BS in biology/biological Sciences from New Jersey Institute of Technology. Her research focus is in statistical methods for modeling dependency structures and inflated data. She began her assistant professorship in August 2023.

Haley Grant is a recent graduate from the Johns Hopkins University biostatistics program. She obtained her undergraduate degree in mathematics from Cornell University with a minor in English. Her research focus is in early cancer research detection and meta-analysis. She began her assistant professorship in early August 2023.

Yan Ma assumed the role of chair in our department in September 2022. Prior to joining us, he held the roles of professor and vice chair in the Department of Biostatistics and Bioinformatics at the Milken Institute School of Public Health, George Washington University.

Guan Yu assumed the roles of associate professor in our department and statistician at the NRG Oncology Statistical and Data Management Center Pittsburgh office in August 2022. Prior to joining us, he held a tenure-track assistant professor position in the Department of Biostatistics at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

Rebecca Deek   Haley Grant   Yan Ma   Guan Yu

University of Pittsburgh
Biostatistics
School of Public Health

Harvey Co Chien Endowed Scholarship for Biostatistics

Upon graduating from the School of Public Health in 1987 with his degree in biostatistics, **Harvey Co Chien** started his career with Westat, where he stayed for nearly a decade, working on biostatistics and epidemiology projects and studying cancer risk factors. He collaborated with ALZA Corporation (a Johnson and Johnson Company) on drug delivery technology for children with ADHD, after which he became an associate director at InterMune. In 2007, he founded his own biostatistics consulting company, Synerstat. Harvey's past research interests have included CNS, inflammation/pain/abuse liability, cancer risk factors, urology, hepatology and pulmonology trials and the development of computer software.

Faculty and students at the 2023 Graduation Ceremony

Now retired and living in San Francisco, Harvey wished to give back to the school and leave his legacy. In 2021, Harvey fully endowed the Harvey Co Chien Endowed Scholarship for Biostatistics to support students pursuing master's degrees in the Department of Biostatistics. Paige Walbert, a 2025 biostatistics student and last year's recipient of the Harvey Co Chien Endowed Scholarship for Biostatistics, shared that she is "very grateful that the scholarship really helped alleviate financial strain on my family."

To make a gift to the Harvey Co Chien Endowed Scholarship or to learn more about endowed scholarships visit https://www.sph.pitt.edu/biostatistics/about/harvey-co-chien-endowed-scholarship-biostatistics. Remember to enter "**Harvey Co Chien Scholarship**" in the "other" box when prompted on page 2.

Faculty Awards

Ying Ding, associate professor, is the recipient of the **2022 inaugural health science Ascending Star Award.** Internationally recognized for her contributions in biostatistics and data science, she has a primary research interest in statistical theory and methodology for time-to-event data that arise in clinical trials, epidemiology, engineering and medicine.

Ying Ding

Gong Tang, professor, is the recipient of this year's ASA Pittsburgh Chapter Statistician of the Year award. The award is a recognition of his contributions towards the field of statistics and its applications in clinical trials and his service to the community. His primary contribution in statistics is to robust methods for analysis of data with missing values and his primary works in application are cancer clinical trials and biomarker development.

Gong Tang

Lu Tang, assistant professor, has received an R21 award titled "Federated learning methods for heterogeneous and distributed Medicaid data" from the National Institute on Drug Abuse at the National Institute of Health (NIH). This award has a duration of two years and the goal is to apply the newly developed methods to improve our understanding of the use of medication for opioid use disorder. He has received another award titled "Fusion Pursuit for Pattern-Mixture Models with Applications to Longitudinal Studies with Nonignorable Missing Data" from the Division of Mathematical Sciences of the National Science Foundation. This award has a duration of three years. We expect this new development will greatly broaden the applicable scenarios of pattern-mixture models to modern large-scale longitudinal datasets

Lu Tang

George Tseng, professor, has received 1.2 million R01 funding from the National Library of Medicine at the NIH beginning February 2023. The project will develop an outcome-guided disease subtyping statistical framework to identify novel disease subtypes with guidance from critical clinical outcomes so that the identified disease subtypes are clinically relevant and actionable. The methods will be tailored to research in invasive lobular carcinoma breast cancer and asthma to ultimately translate into bedside practice and benefit patients.

George Tseng

Jiebiao Wang, assistant professor, has received an R01 award titled "Statistical methods for population-level cell-type-specific analyses of tissue omics data for Alzheimer's disease" from the National Institute on Aging of NIH. The goal is to increase our understanding of cellular mechanisms underlying Alzheimer's disease and inform future prevention and treatment strategies. The total funding is $1.9 million for five years starting February 2023. Dr. Wang was awarded an R03 in September 2022 for a total funding of $315k. The funding is from the NIH Office of the Director to integrate large-scale Common Fund datasets to gain cell type-specific insights and deal with selection bias.

Jiebiao Wang

Ada Youk, associate dean for academic affairs and director of the Bachelor of Science in Public Health (BSPH) program, is the 2023 Bernard D. Goldstein Undergraduate Public Health Teaching Award recipient. Established by University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health Dean Emeritus Bernard D. Goldstein, MD, this award recognizes classroom teaching excellence in the BSPH program. The 2022-23 academic year marks the first time this award has been bestowed.

Ada Youk (Second from left)

Congratulations to **Jeanine Buchanich,** associate professor, **Ada Youk,** associate professor, on achieving tenure! Dr. Youk is presently serving as associate dean of academic affairs, director of the BSPH program, and associate professor in biostatistics. Dr. Buchanich is currently holding the roles of associate professor and vice chair for practice in biostatistics and associate dean for research.

National Student Awards

Manqi Cai - Best Research Presentation Award, Graduate Student Research Conference, National Institute of Statistical Sciences - Advisor Jeibiao Wang/ Wei Chen

Yusi Fang - Student of the Year - ASA Pittsburgh Chapter - Advisor George Tseng

Haoyi Fu - Distinguished Student Paper Award, Honorable Mention (ASA) - Advisor Robert Krafty / Lu Tang

Penghui Huang - Student Research Award, New England Statistical Society
- Research Poster Award, ICSA Applied Statistics Symposium - Advisor Jiebiao Wang

Xiaoqing Tan - Student Research Award at the 35th New England Symposium
-Distinguished Student Paper Award (ENAR) - Advisor Lu Tang / Gong Tang

Wenjia Wang - Student Paper Award - ASA Section on Statistical Computing and Graphics - Advisor George Tseng

Molin Yue - Abstract Scholarship American Thoracic Society (ATS) Conference - Advisor Wei Chen

Lang Zeng - Student Paper Award - ASA Section on Risk Analysis - Advisor Ying Ding

Jian Zou - Mihaela Serban Memorial Award - **2022** - ASA Pittsburgh Chapter - Advisor George Tseng

Alumni Story - Kelley Kidwell

Kelley Kidwell is a 2012 graduate of the PhD program and is currently an associate professor at the **University of Michigan**. Kelley came to Pitt in 2007 after achieving her BS in mathematics from Bucknell. In an interview with Dr. Kidwell this year she said, "I've now been at Michigan for over ten years, almost eleven years in the fall. I switched tracks from a research position to a tenure-track position in 2018. I have actually continued my dissertation work area."

Dr. Kidwell was very proud of her time in Pittsburgh, sharing, "I was very proud of the amount of research that I was able to do at NRG Oncology. I was proud of the papers that I had already submitted and of the number of interviews and opportunities that I had coming out to get a job and I just really loved the city."
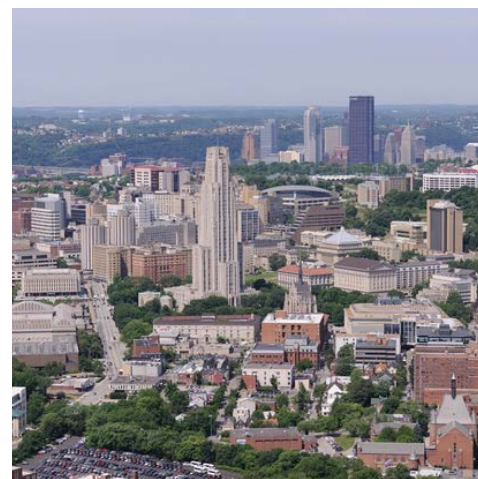

Kelley Kidwell

Jeanine Buchanich with a student

BIOSTATISTICS
Department | 2023

Education
44 Courses taught
132 Total credit hours

Education Programs
MS in biostatistics
MS-HDS — Health Data Science
MS-SCG — Statistical and Computational Genomics
PhD in biostatistics

Grant Funding
121 Total grant submissions
$20.1m — 2023 grant funding
47 grants awarded

Celebrating 75 Years!
University of Pittsburgh, School of Public Health

Department Publications
2023   149

Find us on social media
@PittBiostatistics

Student Enrollment in 2023
75 Total students
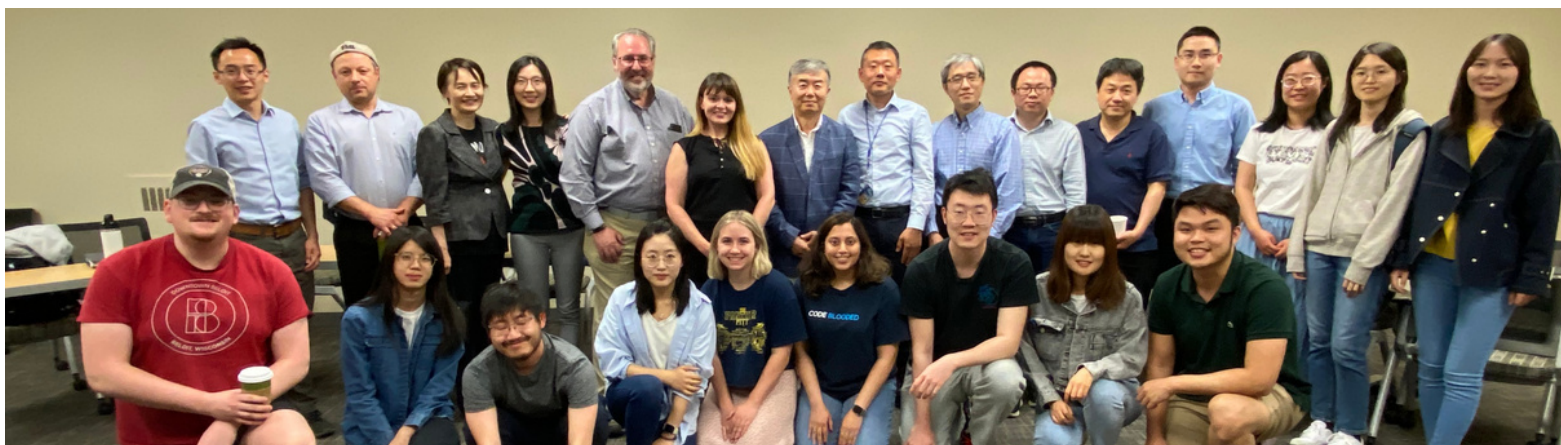53 Average Enrollment
39 PhD students
36 MS students

Department at a Glance
Admin staff 9.5%
Primary faculty 30.2%
GSRs 60.3%
6
38
19

University of Pittsburgh
Biostatistics
School of Public Health
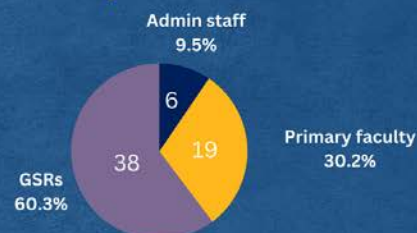
Biostatistics Student Award Ceremony

Past Department Events

Biostatistics Research Day was held on Thursday, March 2, this year. The event was extended from previous years and three guest speakers made appearances in the morning. The dean of the school of public health, **Maureen Lichtveld**, gave a speech along with **Jiebiao Wang** from the biostatistics department. Also in attendance was world-renowned biostatistician, **Bhramar Mukherjee** from the University of Michigan. Dr. Mukherjee's presentation was titled "Using Electronic Health Records for Scientific Research: Promises and Perils".

The morning guest speaker presentations were followed by the students' poster and oral presentations.

Best Oral Presentation Award: Na Bo | Best PhD Poster Award: **Manqi Cai**, **Penghui Huang** | Best Master's Poster Award: **Jiaqian Liu** | Honorable Mentions: **Molin Yue** and **Michelle Sun**

The department kicked the year off with their annual **strategic planning meeting** in early January. Here, the department funding, research, activities and new hires were discussed, including the newly appointed executive assistant to the chair, **Calvin Dziewulski**.

Dean's Day is our annual showcase of student research featuring poster sessions during which students present their work to the multidisciplinary Pitt Public Health community. Coming in first place from Biostatistics was **Runjia Li** and second place was **Lang Zeng**. Congratulations to these students for their tremendous effort and accomplishments.
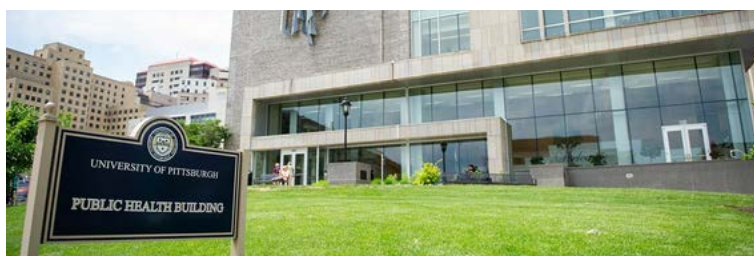
The biostatistics department would like to thank assistant professor **Jenna Carlson,** professor **Abdus Wahed** and professor **Jong Jeong** for their dedication and support over the years. The department acknowledged their valuable contributions to our department and extended our best wishes to them for their future endeavors. Jong Jeong has contributed over twenty years of his career to the department and will be heading to the National Cancer Institute NIH. Dr. Carlson will remain at the University and move to the human genetics department in the School of Public Health. Dr. Wahed now is at the University of Rochester. Thank you all, and good luck!

Biostatistics Research Day 2023

New Social Media channels

The department has created **three social media channels** to update the department's current news, publications and research from students and faculty and to promote upcoming internal events. The channels have been created to increase the department's visibility. The username for the channels is the same, **@PittBiostatistics (LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram).**

Interested in providing content for the Biostatistics Department?

If you would like to provide the School of Public Health biostatistics department with your **updated contact information**, please scan the **QR code** provided or click on the **link** below. You can also update us on your accomplishments by emailing the School of Public Health communications team at phcomm@pitt.edu or Calvin Dziewulski, executive assistant to the chair, at cdd42@pitt.edu.

Link: https://shorturl.at/syGRW