



The Bulletin
msgsQ&A

***Mathematics and Statistics
Graduate Students Association***

Dear Staff, Colleagues and Professors,

I think it is appropriate to begin the editorial of the first issue of the Bulletin by answering: Why are we doing this? The seed (and frankly the entire tree) of this venture germinated in the brain of Ms Maria Deliyianni when she was struck by the abysmal turnout at last year's picnic party, an act that I am guilty of too. She also observed that even though we practically spend more time around each other in the department than anyone else out in the real world (if you are still aware of its existence!), we know very little about each other personally. You might grudgingly ask why would it matter? Well, I think even though abstraction is our mainstay, the human touch is what makes mathematics fascinating to me. It amazes me that Gauss was the same guy who was uptight about releasing proofs to his results in order to secure further developments in the area to himself and he mentored Sophie Germain in an era when it was unthinkable to do so. I believe it would impart a bit of kinship amongst us if we could know a bit more about the personalities of the members in our department.

For this first issue we thought it would be a good idea if we get to know our new students, what is their background like and how were they inspired to choose their paths. Apart from that, we are asking the question, "What are you most afraid of now that you are starting graduate school?" As far as it involves the professors, we go a step further and ask what were their major concerns when they embarked on their PhD journey that ended up being trivial. There is a broad spectrum of thoughts and ideas that, I feel, are reflected in the interviews which kind of also espouses the ethos of UMBC.

This effort would not have been possible without the multiple responsibilities shouldered by Eswar, Abhishek B. and Maria. Finally, a big thank you to all the interviewees who were kind enough to part with their time, and to those who could not.

Hope you like it!

***Abhishek Guin
Editor***

“Excellent professors made the process a lot easier”

I did my BS in Statistics in 1965 under Calcutta University, followed by MS in Statistics in 1967, and subsequently submitted my PhD thesis in 1971 at the same university. Back in the 60s, getting a PhD was not that common. We had the idea that one had to be super bright to get in. There were no scary premises for me while being a PhD student. We had excellent professors who were extremely knowledgeable and skilled which made the process a lot easier. Having an identical twin brother - Dr. Bikas Sinha (faculty at Indian Statistical Institute Kolkata), was also a good rewarding experience for me in my academic career.



*Prof. Bimal Sinha
Professor, Statistics*

We had the good fortune of studying and discussing together, which continues even to this day. While in graduate school my brother and I did pretty good in terms of academics. Out of a class of 25, only three of us got a PhD. In fact, later in life my brother taught many of our current professors at UMBC like Dr Roy, Dr Neerchal and Dr Mathew.



“Not living up to expectations”



*Ellie Gurvich
PhD 1st Yr, Applied Math*

-Can you introduce yourself and share with us some things about your background?

Hi, I am Ellie Gurvich, first year Applied Mathematics PhD student. I was born in Minsk, Belarus; my dad is from Ukraine and my Mom is from Belarus. We moved to the US when I was 3.

-Why did you choose Math?

My interest in mathematics was piqued in school because it was the only subject that I could thoroughly grasp, since I did not speak English very well at that point. I got my Undergraduate degree in Mathematics and Physics from UMBC. The mathematical formulations I studied in physics are really what gave me a passion for mathematics.

Moreover, having been here for 5 years already, I know that the professors do interesting research, which is why I took the leap of deciding to pursue a PhD at UMBC. I am a fan of Dr Hoffman’s teaching, she inspires me to hone my craft.

-What is your biggest concern about grad school?

I guess not living up to expectations in terms of classes and grades.

“If my alumni can succeed, so can I”

When I first started learning Statistics, I was pretty sure that this was something that I would continue to do. However I wasn't sure where I would go with it. My interest began when I took a couple of courses in my Bachelors program. I did want to get a job after my Masters degree, but I got so engrossed in the subject that I decided to get a PhD. I recall being fascinated by the concept of "standard error" (I am still fascinated by it). I received my PhD in 1983 from the Indian Statistical Institute. In those days it was neither very common to get a PhD in Statistics nor were there plenty of PhD programs being offered at universities in India. You could even teach at a college or university without having a PhD!



*Prof. Thomas Mathew
Professor, Statistics*

I was not exactly scared of anything in graduate school but I do remember that staying away from home, and the food that I was eating on campus were things that I did not particularly enjoy. When I joined the program I was not sure about the topic and the advisor, these things evolved with time. I was not worried about these things as I saw people in the program were succeeding so I figured if I put in my effort and persist, I would too.



“My ability to manage even more responsibilities than before”

-Can you introduce yourself and share with us some things about your background?

I am Gaurab Hore from India. I have completed my BSc Statistics, from Ramakrishna Mission Narendrapur and then MSc Statistics from Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur.

-Why did you choose statistics?

My interest in Statistics goes back to my childhood days when I remember enjoying playing with numbers. I dreamed of getting an Honors degree in Mathematics. It was during my 10th grade that I first became aware of Statistics and took my first course when I was in 11th grade. It was fascinating to see the scope of applicability of statistics in various fields. Inspired by PC Mahalanobis and his tremendous work in Statistics, I want to pursue a career in this field.



*Gaurab Hore
PhD 1st Yr, Statistics*

-Can you tell us your biggest concern about grad school?

The biggest concern that I have now entering into grad school, is about time management and about my ability to manage even more responsibilities than before. Especially in my TA class I don't know how I will handle the students. I think I'll need a bit of time to get attuned to their sensibilities. I hope the cultural gap would not be hard to bridge.

“Finding a compatible advisor!”

-Can you introduce yourself and share with us some things about your background?

-Hello, my name is Neha Agarwala and I am a PhD student in the Statistics department. I am a transfer student from the University of Illinois and this is my first year at UMBC. My academic background is St Xavier’s College, Kolkata for BSc and Indian Statistical Institute Kolkata for MSc.



*Neha Agarwala
PhD 1st Year, Statistics*

-Why did you choose statistics?

-My love for mathematics segued into love for stat. I think that stat background provides with a bright job prospect. I love statistics, I literally love it!

-Can you tell us what scares you the most about grad school?

- I broadly like Bayesian and biostatistics. Finding an advisor who is compatible with me is my primary concern.



“Juggling a lot of things at once”



*Katelynn Huneycutt
PhD 1st Yr, Applied Math*

-Can you introduce yourself and say some things about your background?

My name is Katelynn Huneycutt and I am from Wilmington, North Carolina. I am a first year PhD student in Applied Mathematics at UMBC. I did my undergrad in College of Charleston, South Carolina. I started my undergraduate as a Physics major but I ended up getting a Math major too. I realized that I wasn’t enjoying as much being in a lab and performing experiments. When I talked to physics professors that weren’t working in labs, it seemed to me that their work was interesting and something that I could do through the lens of mathematics. My decision was pretty easy to make as anything I wanted to do was falling under the umbrella of mathematics.

-What is your biggest concern for your new beginning in grad school?

I guess juggling a lot of things at once. When you are an undergrad, you do your coursework and anything else is supplemental. But now that we are getting to the path of becoming mathematicians, it is crucial that we become good at teaching and in a variety of peripheral stuff as well.



“No need to be scared before it happens!”

-Can you introduce yourself and say some things about your background?

My name is Lillian Chow and I am from Northern California. I am a PhD student in the Statistics department at UMBC. I did my undergrad in Statistics in San Francisco. I chose Statistics at the very beginning of my undergraduate program and I ended up loving it and wanting to do more.



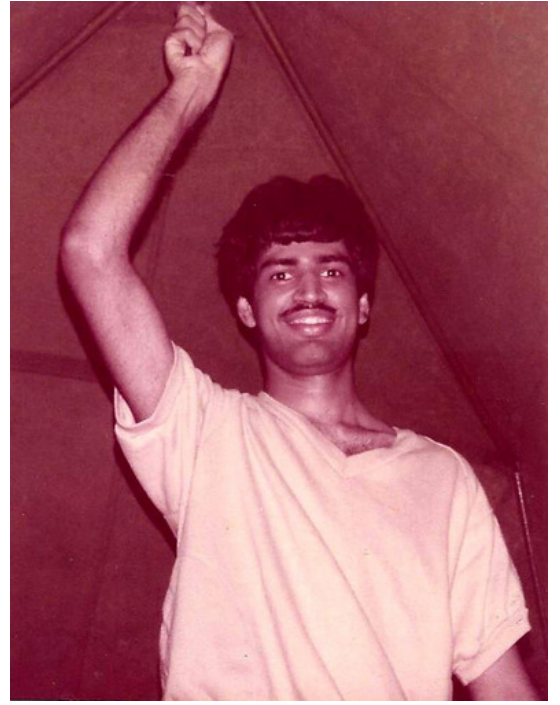
*Lillian Chow
PhD 1st Yr, Statistics*

-And what would you say is your biggest concern about the new life in grad school?

The most scary thing for me is being in a really new city. I went from growing up a few miles from San Francisco to all the way across the country. It is very different here from the West Coast. I am more nervous about snow since I have never seen snow in my life. Academically, I don’t have any worries for now, I will wait for a month before I get really scared! No need to be scared before it happens.

“Things that bother you now will matter less once you’ve been through”

It is hard to give general advice on how to overcome your fears in graduate school. All I can do is take you through some of my experiences. For me the big question was my visa situation. I had a single entry visa for a couple of years, which I had exhausted on earning my master’s degree. So when I went back to India in summer after that, I was not sure if I would be able to come back to pursue my fledgling ambitions of a PhD. I was still holding down my apartment in Pittsburgh though! In the end it turned out to be very easy as it was just a stamping process. They did not even interview me. (Dr. Suri received his MSc in 1980 and PhD in 1983 in Mathematics from the Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh).



Prof. Manil Suri during a trip to Niagara Falls in 1982

Another one was the drawn out process of realizing myself and acquainting friends with the fact that I am gay. This was back in '79 and things were quite closeted. I think my roommate in college had come to know about it, but I did not tell anyone else. At that time, the US kind of interpreted being gay as a reason to not admit you to the country. So as you can imagine this particular personal issue was a source of tension. But as it turned out, when I started coming out (which was much later), it was not that big of a problem. When I was applying for my green card, before my interview, my lawyer asked me if there was anything he should know and I was hemming and hawing. He suspected that I had been arrested in the past! When I finally told him, he said that it was not a problem unless you decide to make it a problem. So I suspect that there are similar situations that students might be going through. A lot of these things will matter less once you have been through them, hopefully.



“Maybe I’ll be okay?!”



*Neil Kpmagen
PhD 1st Yr, Statistics*

-Can you introduce yourself and tell us some things about your background?

My Name is Neil Kpmagen and I am a PhD student in the Stat department at UMBC. I had my BSc in Statistics at Rutgers University and MSc in Stat at American University.

-Why statistics?

It is like a family tradition. My dad has a PhD in Stat as well as my uncle. I’ve always been kind of good at math but the first time I encountered Statistics was at a seniors level in High School. My time as an undergrad in Statistics was tough but in my last year of my masters I definitely enjoyed it and I could see where it was going. Once I started doing programming and analysis it clicked for me and I just felt: Wow this is really cool!

-What scares you the most about grad school?

Am I going to be good enough? I feel that when I talk with other people and I get a glimpse of their background and the things that they have already done, it sometimes overwhelms me. But then I say to myself : Maybe I’ll be okay?! But since I’ve gone through grad school already, I’ve a better feeling about what to expect.