



UI College of Public Health

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

Department of Biostatistics Newsletter

Letter from the Head

The Department of Preventive Medicine and Environmental Health has drastically changed; in fact, it no longer exists. In its place is the University of Iowa's College of Public Health, which was officially formed on July 1, 1999.

One of the many consequences of the establishment of the University's first new College in fifty years is the founding of the Department of Biostatistics. The former divisions of Epidemiology and Occupational & Environmental Health have also become departments. The former Graduate Program in Health and Hospital Administration has become the Department of Health Management and Policy. The newest department in the College is Community and Behavioral Health, which is being built entirely by recruitment of new faculty members.

Although Biostatistics as a unit is not new, we are undergoing considerable personnel changes. The long-time Division (Department) Head, Dr. Robert (Skip) Woolson, will officially retire from the Department in May 2002; however, he has agreed to continue to serve the College of Public Health on a three-quarters time basis as Associate Dean for Research. Since the College continues to expand its re-

search activities and funding, Skip will remain very busy in directing our research efforts.

There have also been important changes within the Department. Most Department faculty members have been relocated from the Steindler Building to C22 in the General Hospital. Due to space limitations, our newly created Division of Statistical Genetics, under the leadership of Dr. Veronica Vieland, is now officed in remodeled facilities in Westlawn. The Steindler Building is currently two-thirds demolished to provide space for the new seven-story Medical Education and Biomedical Research Facility. The remaining part of the Steindler Building will disappear in 2002, according to plans.

We also have had important changes in the faculty of Biostatistics. Dr. Charles Davis has accepted a position at Elan Pharmaceuticals in San Diego. Those of you who know Chuck will recognize immediately the tremendous void his career move has caused. We are very fortunate, however, that Dr. Brian Smith has agreed to serve for at least one year as a (continued on page 3)

visiting assistant professor. Brian is

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New Department Address:

College of Public Health
Department of Biostatistics C22-GH
200 Hawkins Drive
Iowa City IA 52242-1009
Phone: (319) 384-5016
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Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Division (Department) of Biostatistics to be Celebrated

Plans are being developed to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Departments of Biostatistics, Epidemiology, and Occupational and Environmental Health. The occasion will be marked in on-campus festivities on June 8, 2002. Included will be a dinner on June 7^h to bring together all graduates of programs in the three departments. This event will be held in conjunction with The University of Iowa Alumni Association's annual Alumni Weekend, June 6-9, 2002.

Leslie Ann McClure, M.S., '97, is serving as the Biostatistics alumni representative on

the Planning Committee for the Joint Twenty-fifth Anniversary Celebration; Dr. William Clarke is the faculty representative on this committee.

A special thanks is in order to each of you who participated in the recent alumni survey. We would also appreciate any pictures, stories, or other recollections of our twenty-five year history that might be included in the celebration. The success of the event depends, of course, on the attendance of our graduates. Please mark June 7-8, 2002 on your calendars; we look forward to seeing you at that event.

Location of Department of Biostatistics

The Department of Biostatistics has recently moved – in several directions. Most faculty members are enjoying newly remodeled offices in C22 of the General Hospital. This is the area of the Hospital on the second floor formerly occupied by Otolaryngology. It is anticipated that we will be in this area for approximately five years. If things go as planned, a portion of the new Medical Education and Biomedical Research Facility, to be constructed on the Steindler Building footprint, will house the College of Public Health.

The newly formed Division of Statistical Genetics, headed by Dr. Veronica Vieland, has moved to a remodeled area of Westlawn. Drs.

Trudy Burns, Kai Wang, and Jian Huang (joint with Statistics) and their research staff are enjoying a large and refurbished area that will prove conducive to advancements in their area of biostatistics specialty.

The administration of the College of Public Health, including Associate Deans Burmeister and Woolson, will remain in the Steindler Building until late 2002. Then they also will be relocated in the approximate area of the General Hospital formerly occupied by Otolaryngology.

Recent Graduates

Jian Jia, M.S.

Jacqueline A. Neuhaus, M.S.

Sara Nichols, Ph.D.

Brian J. Smith, Ph.D.

Deli Wang, M.S.

Qi Wang, M.S.

Weibing Zhou, M.S.

teaching the introductory course and serving in several research collaborations, including the Holden Comprehensive Cancer Center.

Several important recruitment efforts are currently underway, including a search for our new department head. The Department is also recruiting new faculty to replace Dr. Davis and Dr. Woolson, as well as a new faculty member in the Division of Statistical Genetics. Once a new department head is chosen, two additional faculty positions are anticipated. The areas of specialty of these two faculty members will depend on the recommendations of the new head.

It is clear that the department is in a period of

transition, with exciting opportunities as we expand. If you have comments, advice relative to potential new faculty members, etc., please contact Ms. Terry Kirk at (319) 384-5016. We would be very happy to hear from you.

Leon F. Burmeister, Ph.D.
Professor and Interim Head

Recent Faculty and Student Awards

Robert F. Woolson, Ph.D., Faculty Appreciation Award, College of Public Health 2001

Jane F. Pendergast, Ph.D., College of Public Health Faculty Teaching Award

William R. Clarke, Ph.D., College of Public Health Faculty Research Award

Brian J. Smith, Ph.D., Milford E. Barnes Award for Biostatistics

Exceptional Leader Remembered



Dr. Peter Isacson, former Principal Investigator of the Iowa SEER Program, died on June 16, 2000 in Silver City, New Mexico. Peter was born on January 31, 1927 in Omaha, Nebraska. He received an M.D. degree from the University of Nebraska in 1955. From 1954 to 1956, he was an epidemic intelligence service officer for the Centers for Disease Control. A three-year stint of residency and fellowship training in medicine followed.

From 1959 to 1966, he was a junior faculty member at Yale University. From 1966 to 1972, he was a faculty member at the State University of New

York at Buffalo where he was quite successful with the Vaccine Evaluation Unit, a mixture of applied public health and applied laboratory studies of both the wild viruses to be conquered and the modified viruses used in vaccines.

In 1972 Peter moved his family to Iowa City, Iowa, where he became Professor and Head of the Department of Preventive Medicine. His skills and vision led to great progress in the Department as the size of the faculty grew and the scope of their research, service, and teaching increased. **(continued on page 4)**

Peter remained as Department Head until 1984 and thereafter served as Head of the Division of Epidemiology until his retirement.

Dr. Leeper is a native of Waterloo, Iowa, and attended the University of Iowa, where he obtained his B.A. in 1967 (physics/astronomy), his M.S. in 1974 (biostatistics), and his Ph.D. in 1977 (biostatistics). He was the first Ph.D. graduate of the Department of Preventive Medicine and Environmental Health in biostatistics. Upon graduation in 1977, he joined The University of Alabama School of Medicine – Tuscaloosa Program, where he still works. Since 1987, he has been Professor and Chairman of Behavioral and Community Medicine (now Community and Rural Medicine) at Alabama. He is also a faculty member of the Applied Statistics Program at Alabama and an adjunct faculty member in the Department of Health Behavior, University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Public Health. He received the National Alumni Association of The University of Alabama Outstanding Commitment to Teaching Award in 1995. Dr. Leeper has been very active in the American Public Health Association. In the Statistics Section, he was program chair for two years, newsletter editor for one year, and section representative to the Governing Council for two years. He received the Statistics Section Award in 1994. In APHA, he has also chaired the Program Development Board (now Science Board) and co-chaired the Joint Policy Committee and currently serves on the Education Board. Dr. Leeper is a member of the University of Iowa College of Public Health's External Advisory Board.

Alumni Spotlight

James D. Leeper, Ph.D.

Professor and Chairman
Department of Community and Rural Medicine
University of Alabama



Exceptional Leader Remembered—continued from page 3

Peter's own interests changed from infectious disease to chronic disease, especially the study of causes of cancer. He was particularly interested in drinking water supplies and cancer risk, and wrote several papers related to the contents of municipal water supplies in Iowa and the cancer rates in those municipalities. Peter's interest in cancer led him in 1977 to become Principal Investigator of the Iowa SEER Program, a position he held until planning his retirement in 1990. Peter was deeply appreciative of the SEER Program and what it meant to him, his Department, the University and the state of Iowa.

It was always a pleasure to work with Peter as he had a combination of interesting characteristics that were quite attractive to others. Peter read a lot, and had the amazing ability to recall the clever jokes and quips he read, so he was always most entertaining in general conversation, in part because he was able to

remember the jokes the rest of us always forgot. Faculty appreciated the warmth and advice received from Peter, as well as his support. Peter also had a strong sense of public responsibility and dedication to family.

In the early 1990s Peter retired from the University of Iowa and moved to Silver City, New Mexico to be closer to his grandchildren. Ruth, Peter's wife for over 50 years, died in 1996. Peter is survived by three children, several grandchildren, and a host of others who grew to adore his colorful personality.

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