

June 2021

Dear all,

As you know, I retired at the end of August 2020. Before my retirement I planned to publish the newsletter with my last “Letter from the Chair” in it, but it was an unusual year, many things went not-quite-as-planned, and the newsletter did not get finalized at the time.

After a note about my retirement was published on the departmental Facebook page, I received many very kind cards, notes and emails. It is hard to express how much I appreciated every single one of them. Since I was still teaching two courses in the Spring of 2021, now is a good moment for me to reflect on my time at WMU and to say goodbye.

I joined the department of Statistics in 2001, the year it separated from the former Department of Mathematics and Statistics. Dan Mihalko, the first chair of the new department, and all my colleagues were very excited about having the separate Statistics Department. There was a lot of good energy, a very collegial atmosphere; I felt at home, and it was truly a great place to work. All of this had a very positive effect on our programs: the number of graduate students increased, as did the number of PhD dissertations. Then our first chair retired in 2007, and I was offered his job in 2008 after Jay Wood—Professor of Mathematics—served as our interim chair for a year.

At first the job seemed overwhelming, and the learning curve was steep. Fortunately, I was able to join the American Statistical Association Caucus of Academic Representatives – a community of chairs and directors from Statistics, Biostatistics and now also Data Science departments that provided excellent networking, mentoring, and organized very interesting workshops, invited speakers etc. It gave me a lot of insight about how other departments function, what were the current trends, and what could be applied to our department.

During the 12 years I served as chair, we developed several programs that enhanced credentials of both Statistics undergraduates and graduates as well as students from other departments. The Statistics Department developed three different minors, two graduate certificates: in Biostatistics and in Applied Statistics, and two programs in Data Science that were offered jointly with the Computer Science department. Several departments and programs on campus asked us to offer specific courses in statistics that would satisfy their accreditation requirements and we developed those as well. This is how the Data Analysis for Biosciences was created (STAT 3660) to

serve the nursing and then dietetics program, Data Analysis Using R (STAT 2600) was created to serve primarily Computer Science and Engineering students, etc. All these new programs and courses (Survival Data Analysis, Categorical Data Analysis, Statistics for Epidemiology, Fundamentals of Clinical Trials, Bayesian Statistics, Data Analysis with Python, Data Mining, etc.) were developed as a result of the hard work of all the faculty who wanted the department to grow and serve students well.

Even though all this work was a joint effort, I have to say that it would not have been possible without Joe McKean. And I would like to stress this especially since Joe is retiring this year after 43 years at WMU. For Joe his job was his passion, his students were his younger colleagues, and his PhD advisees were his research collaborators, or they as felt such. Joe graduated about 30 PhD students who are now working all over the world. When we celebrated Joe's 70th birthday a few years ago, the Department held a conference in his honor and participants came from all over the country, but also from Europe and Australia. It happened to me several times at various statistical conferences abroad that people, seeing WMU on my name tag, asked if Joe McKean still worked there. Thank you, Joe, for all your hard work and for your passion for academia. I feel honored to have been able to work with you, to be able to discuss new ideas with you and to get your help whenever it was needed, regardless of how many other commitments you always had. You were and still are a true inspiration for many faculty and students.

While I would like to thank every student, colleague, and staff member with whom my path crossed during my 20 years at WMU, there are some people for whom I have a warm spot in my heart. Sue Stapleton was the first person that I met during my job interview, representing the Women's Caucus at that time. Little did I know that Sue would be the person having enough confidence in me to suggest seven years later that I become department chair. Sue helped me and the department many times as an Associate Dean, Graduate College Dean and as an Interim Provost. No amount of thanks would be enough for all the support that we received from her.

I am also indebted to the fourth dean that I worked with, Carla Koretsky. Thank you, Carla, for your great, transparent and fair leadership, and the collegial environment you continue to help support.

Thank you to all my colleagues—those who hired me and those whom I was happy to hand off a job offer to. We lost two very good faculty members because of the lack of job opportunities for their spouses but with the dean's support we were able to hire excellent junior faculty with expertise in modern statistical areas and a passion for academia. Many thanks to all the students who studied in our programs. On so

many occasions I was complimented by your future employers on how well you were prepared for the job, how open minded and well-rounded was your skillset. The credit had to be given to dedicated faculty, the variety of offered electives and perhaps a part of that was due to our weekly colloquium with a wide spectrum of talks – from technical to applied, to even just sharing of stories and experiences from our former graduate students. The friendly atmosphere was further supported by Michelle who saw to many details such as making sure coffee, cookies and other treats helped sustain us. And the coffee with cookies that Michelle always made sure were there. I remember many students very well, too many to name, but I would at least like to mention ten of my PhD advisees: Sauwanit, Hend, Ron, Matt, Kira, Marwan, Bob, Eunice, Sanduni, and Guohao. It was my pleasure to work with you and to see how you developed to become full-fledged researchers by your final defense day.

And last but not least – many thanks to Cheryl and Michelle, our office coordinators. They kept me in line and the ship afloat! No easy task. Lately Michelle and I got to the point where I would ask her to take care of something only to hear “already done.” She was very efficient and could anticipate necessary work to help maintain order. Many thanks Michelle, and congratulations on your new job in the Computer Science department, which is much larger, but you have always liked challenges.

Thank you very much for 20 very good years at WMU. It is important for me to remember that while one door may close, another one will open. As George and I are moving to Florida soon, we will miss WMU and the wonderful people that we have gotten to know during our time in Kalamazoo. We will never forget the unpredictable Michigan weather, Lake Michigan, and the Gilmore Festival. We will miss the farmer’s market, blueberry farms and the train to Chicago....

With warmest wishes

Magdalena

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