It’s been another productive semester for the SGSA!

We started off the academic year with our second annual Welcome Week BBQ at Hillegass-Parker Co-op, home to a surprisingly large percentage of current stats grads. The BBQ was generously funded by Ani Adhikari and Jim Pitman and attended by stats and biostats students, new and old. Lead organizers were the external social committee co-chairs: Yev Grechka, Geoff Schiebinger, and Fu Shi. We continued transitioning into the new semester with a special internship experience seminar organized by Angie Zhu, where three of our students shared details about their summer internships at Google, MSR, and LinkedIn.

In collaboration with new department chair Philip Stark, representatives from the SGSA -- Wayne Lee, Miki Racz, Jonathan Terhorst, and Vince Yates -- made a cameo appearance at the renowned NightLife event at the Cal Academy of Sciences on September 13, where they shared the beauty and subtlety of statistics with members of the wider Bay Area community.

Another major event was the annual statistics department fall party at the Albatross Pub in Berkeley. The fall party was extremely well-organized and well-attended, and was a great time for stats community members and their friends and significant others to unwind over plentiful pizza and beer. Kudos to Adam Bloniarz and Jonathan Terhorst for their commendable organizational efforts!

On the academic side, student seminars and productivity seminars continued on a near-weekly basis, thanks to seminar committee co-chairs Ngoc Tran and Angie Zhu. Due to unexpectedly high interest in student research talks, we held seven student seminars and three productivity seminars -- twice as many seminars as were planned for the semester! Seminar topics included crowdsourcing, functional PCA, inferring local genealogies, Git, and SQL, and we even heard research talks from two first-year grads. In addition, students from Berkeley carpooled over to Stanford for the biannual Berkeley-Stanford Joint Colloquium (BSJC) on October 30, where two of our grads gave research talks during the self-organized grad seminar after the main colloquium talk by Jianqing Fan. Thanks to Miles Lopes for coordinating the BSJC with our colleagues at Stanford every semester.
Other exciting highlights from the fall semester included the weekly Freedman Hospitality Hours following the Neyman seminar, made possible by a generous donation from the Freedman family. These hospitality hours, begun in early September, have already noticeably increased peer-to-peer and student-faculty interaction, contributing to a greater sense of camaraderie within the department. The SGSA also developed a relationship with the new Undergraduate Statistics Association (USA), and grads Josh Abramson and Jonathan Terhorst volunteered to share their experience with stats-related jobs with the undergrads during a career panel in early October.

The SGSA is extremely grateful to the faculty for their interest in hearing feedback from students on general departmental issues. At the start of the semester, we sent out a survey to the grads that was made with input from our department chair. The survey included questions such as, “What are strengths and weaknesses of the department?” “What should a PhD thesis look like?” “How many conferences should grad students attend?” and the SGSA was given an opportunity to discuss the results of the survey at the October faculty meeting. In addition to gauging the overall level of student satisfaction in the department, the survey identified a collective interest in career development. As a result, Tamara Broderick organized a career development panel in mid-November, where students were able to ask candid questions about the highly-competitive job market to the current hiring committee.

For the second year in a row, Terry Speed generously funded a graduate fellowship workshop, where students were guided through the process of applying to fellowships such as the NSF, NDSEG, MSR, and Ford fellowships. The fellowship workshop was coordinated by Linda Tran and Suzette Puente, who attended the 2011 fellowship workshop and were NSF fellowship awardees in the spring. Applicants received valuable feedback from students and faculty as they prepared their submissions for the fellowship competitions.

Finally, the SGSA social committee continued their weekly Friday wind-downs throughout the term, including a few creative twists, such as a Big C hike to spy on the Bob Dylan concert and a spontaneous visit to Cheeseboard. On the athletic front, the stats soccer team known as the Outliers, led by captain Miki Racz, finished the season with 16 goals and a 3-3-1 record. The foosball tournament was also a smashing success.

Thanks for all your support this semester! We’re looking forward to more great events in the spring.

Congratulations to Riddhi Basu, Jack Kamm, Hongwei Li, and Rachel Wang for passing quals!

Our very best wishes to Josh Abramson (class of ’09), who graduated in December 2012.

Happy Holidays!

The SGSA

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