Bethann Mangel Pflugeisen

MS in Statistics, 2010

Previous Education: B.A. in Community Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz; Master of Education, University of Washington

Hometown: Tacoma, WA

Current Job: Research Scientist, MultiCare Institute for Research & Innovation

Why did you choose Ohio State for your graduate degree in statistics?

Visiting the department left me with a distinct impression that this is a department who cares about their students. The personal connection was important to me because, as a learner, I do best when my teachers are accessible and are people with whom I can build relationships. Finally, I was drawn to OSU because of the thesis option at the Masters level.

What was your research focus during your graduate program?

With Dr. Kate Calder, and using data supplied by a professor from the Evolution, Ecology and Organismal Biology program, I wrote a Masters thesis that applied Bayseian hierarchical mixture models to otolith (ear stone) microchemical analysis data to classify natal origins of fish captured at disparate sites in Lake Erie.

Describe a memorable moment during your graduate program.

Kate Calder and Angela Dean were very inspiring teachers and I loved their classes (and studying for their classes at Stauf's in Grandview!). I had many good times with classmates, particularly studying and celebrating when we reached important milestones – the end of a term, graduating, one of them becoming a dad for the first time. Seeing my thesis in print was a very important moment for me – it signified to me the importance of communicating scientific ideas, that we are not here simply for the enjoyment of the work itself, but to contribute to a larger discussion and learning that happens with colleagues across the country. Dr. Calder encouraged me to see my thesis through to publication in a peer reviewed journal, and this cemented my love of writing for scientific purposes. Finally, I taught Stat 135 during my second year, which I absolutely loved – I enjoyed the students and the communication of statistical concepts.

Describe your current job and how your time in the program prepared you for a career in your field.

I now work as a Research Scientist in a young Research Institute embedded in a community hospital system. In this role I get to work on a range of indications, but I tend to focus on data associated with obstetric and pediatric patients. I help design studies, collect and analyze data, and publish findings. My time at OSU obviously gave me the technical skills to be able to perform data analysis, but I also learned tenacity, which is crucial for any research endeavor. The thesis experience was also critical for me. Because I knew that I wanted to participate in the research process beyond data analysis, learning how to write and collaborate with someone from an outside discipline was crucial. I still use those skills today as I work with pediatric surgeons on a child abuse project, obstetricians on a project evaluating patient satisfaction with virtual prenatal care, and oncologists on an adolescent and young adult oncology council.

Do you have any advice for prospective students or is there anything else you would like to share?

Become a very proficient coder in R or SAS; this will take you far. And before deciding whether to get a PhD, MS, or Applied Masters, try to envision your dream job – where do you want to live? Do you want to develop/explore new methodologies, or apply your statistics skills to current problems? Do you want to work in research? Tech? Private sector? Academia? And, importantly, take the time to get to know your professors – the OSU Stats faculty want to invest time and effort in their students, and you never know where your next idea or opportunity will come from.