Inaugural SSC Student Conference Report

Submitted by:

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July 10, 2013

Statistical Society of Canada
Société statistique du Canada

Conference Rationale

This inaugural student conference was organized to meet the needs of undergraduate and graduate students pursuing careers in the statistical sciences, by focusing on research activities, professional skills, career development, and networking with faculty and peers. The conference, which is one of many events being organized within the framework of the International Year of Statistics (http://www.statistics2013.org/) also highlighted the relevance of the statistical sciences to today's society.

This student-led conference was held at the Central Academic Building at the University of Alberta on Saturday, May 25th, 2013.

Activities

Student Research Presentations: A poster session as well as three concurrent oral presentations provided a low-stress environment for students to discuss their research projects with their peers. Students gained experience in defending their ideas, learning about new areas of methodology, and applying statistical concepts to a diverse range of substantive topics. Eight posters and 16 contributed talks were presented, with nine undergraduate and 15 graduate students presenting.

Undergraduate Student Awards were given to the top ranked students in the Poster and Oral categories. Each category winner(s) gratefully received a $125 prize from PIMS:

Poster Award winners Kevin McGregor and Marla Cheston (University of Saskatchewan) with Mireille Schnitzer; **Oral Presentation Award** winner Gabriela Gonzalez Martinez (York University) with Mireille Schnitzer. Photographs courtesy of Prof. Peter Macdonald, McMaster University.

All remaining undergraduate presenters received book prizes from CRC Press.

Career speakers: Our three speakers spanned a variety of employment settings and career paths. Matthias Schonlau, PhD, is a faculty member at the University of Waterloo who spent 13 years at the Rand Corporation before moving into academia. Ori Stitelman, PhD., is Senior Data Scientist at Media 6 Degrees (m6d), a marketing company in New York City that devours big data. Our third invited speaker was Kathryn Mills, who is the manager of the Mathematics and Data Exploration Unit at Canada Border Services Agency. Students were able to learn first-hand about possible career paths in industry, academia and government.

Skill Development Workshops: Two options were available to the students, with about half attending each workshop. The University of Alberta Career Centre offered a workshop on resume preparation and a student panel gave insights into the opportunities and challenges of pursuing graduate studies.

Student Panelists / Panélistes (L to R):
Mireille Schnitzer, PDF, Harvard University
Oksana Chkrebtii, PhD student / étudiante de 3e cycle (Stat), Simon Fraser University.
Tim Guimond, PhD student / étudiant de 3e cycle (Biostat), University of Toronto;
Jonathan Lee, PhD student / étudiant de 3e cycle (Stat), University of Western Ontario;
Zheng Sun, PhD student / étudiant de 3e cycle (Stat), Simon Fraser University;
MC: Zhihui (Amy) Liu, PhD student / étudiante de 3e cycle (Biostat), McGill University

Photograph courtesy of Prof. Peter Macdonald, McMaster University.

Keynote speaker: Dr. Jeffrey Rosenthal, an eminent Canadian statistician with a global reputation on several fronts, spoke on *Lessons from a Twisted Career Path.* He shared the twists and turns in his academic career path, from his beginnings as a pure-math undergraduate student to his current position as a Professor in the Department of Statistics at the University of Toronto. He provided many valuable lessons for budding statistical scholars and researchers during his talk and afterwards at the Hudson's Canadian Tap House where participants gathered to informally conclude the conference. PIMS supported Dr. Rosenthal's travel to attend this first student conference.

Photograph courtesy of Prof. Peter Macdonald, McMaster University.

Acknowledgements:

The Student and Faculty Conference Chairs would like to acknowledge these individuals who made this conference possible:

SSC executives and staff, including Christian Léger, Tim Swartz, Russell Steele, Alan Kelm, and Sarah Watson.

Staff at the University of Alberta, including Leona Guthrie

Bud Homsy (PIMS) and David Grubbs (CRC Press)

Our keynote and invited speakers: Jeffrey Rosenthal, Ori Stitelman, Matthias Schonlau, and Kathryn Mills

Conference Photographer: Peter Macdonald

Student and faculty volunteers, including **Student Committee** members: Mahdis Azadbakhsh, Feng He, Amy Liu, Nathaniel Payne,Ying Yan, Dengdeng Yu and Qian Shi, and
Faculty Advisory Committee members: Cindy Xin Feng , Jinko Graham, Linglong Kong, Wendy Lou, Gorges Monette.

And our sponsors!

Thank you ! Merci !

Conference Evaluation

We conducted our own conference evaluation, so we are selectively reporting results here that would have been captured using the PIMS evaluation form.

Of the 73 conference registrants, six were faculty members, nine were undergraduate students and the remaining 58 were graduate students. Summary statistics are based on 51 responses received (70% response rate) and were compiled by Kristine Einarson and Dr. Lisa Lix, University of Manitoba.
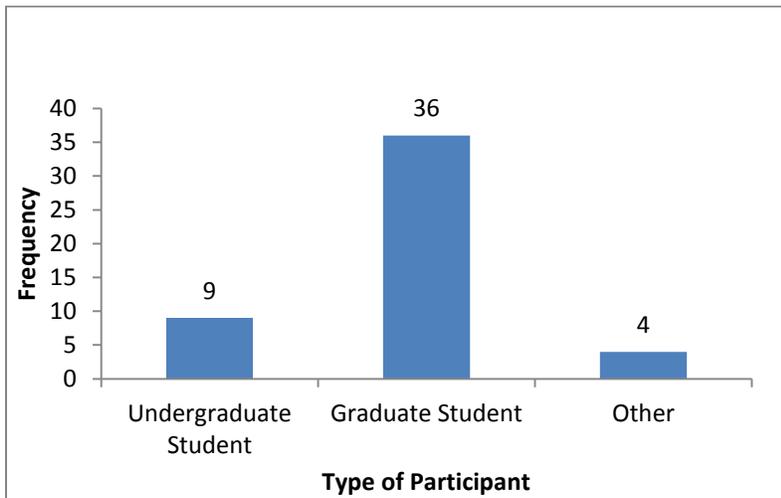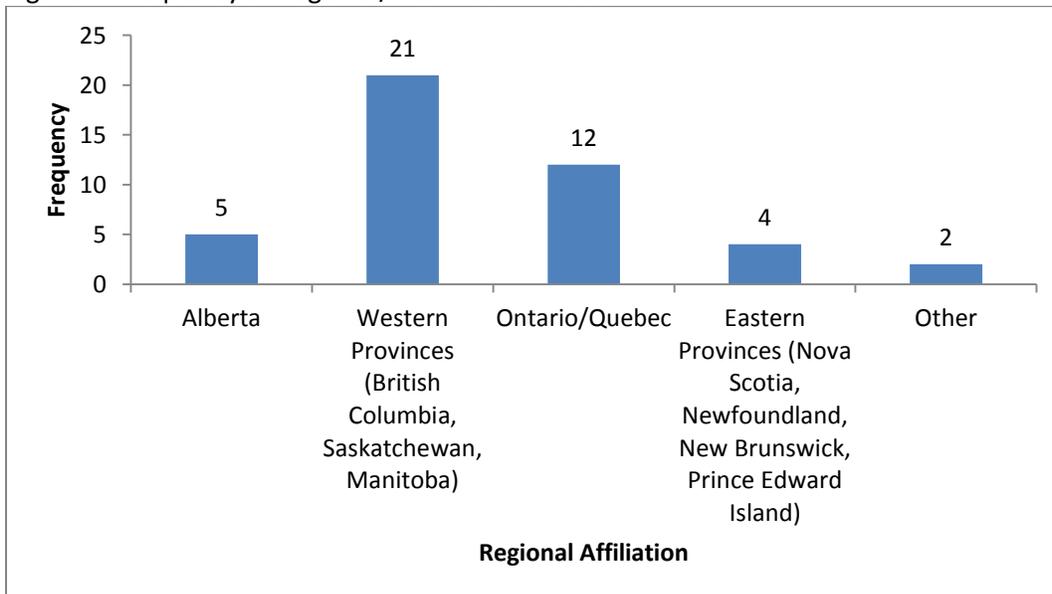
Figure 1: Frequency of Participant Type

Figure 2: Frequency of Regional/Provincial Affiliation

Overall Evaluations: the conference and venue was at or above most participants' expectations in all of the categories as Figures 3a and 3b show. Several participants commented about the great networking opportunity. Every session received great ratings and the diversity of sessions was appreciated. The lengths of the career, skills, contributed oral talk and contributed poster sessions were acceptable.
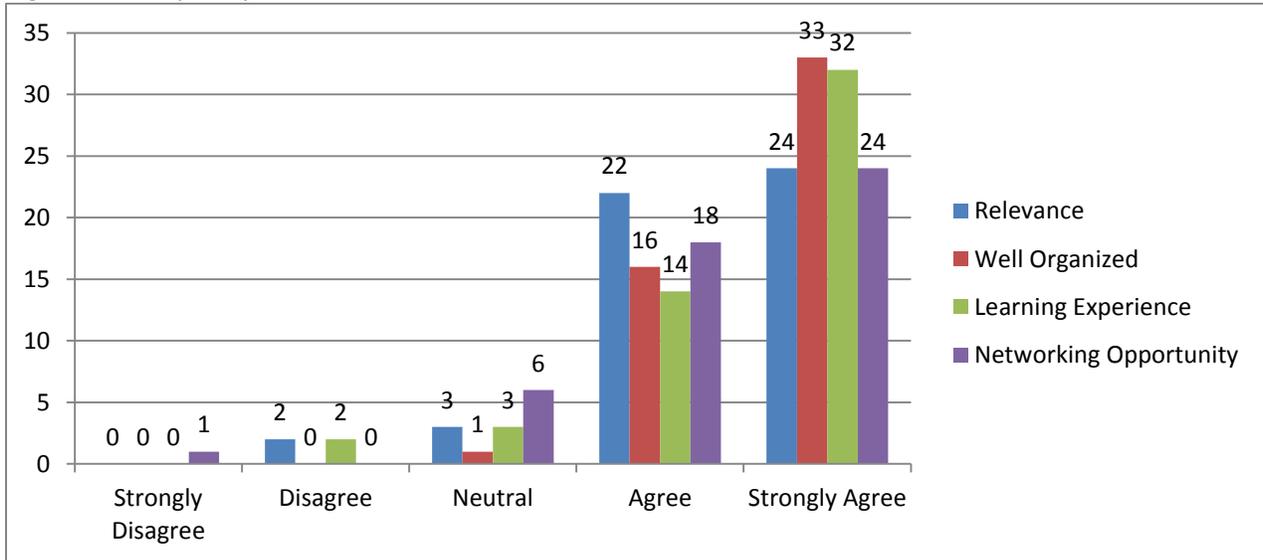
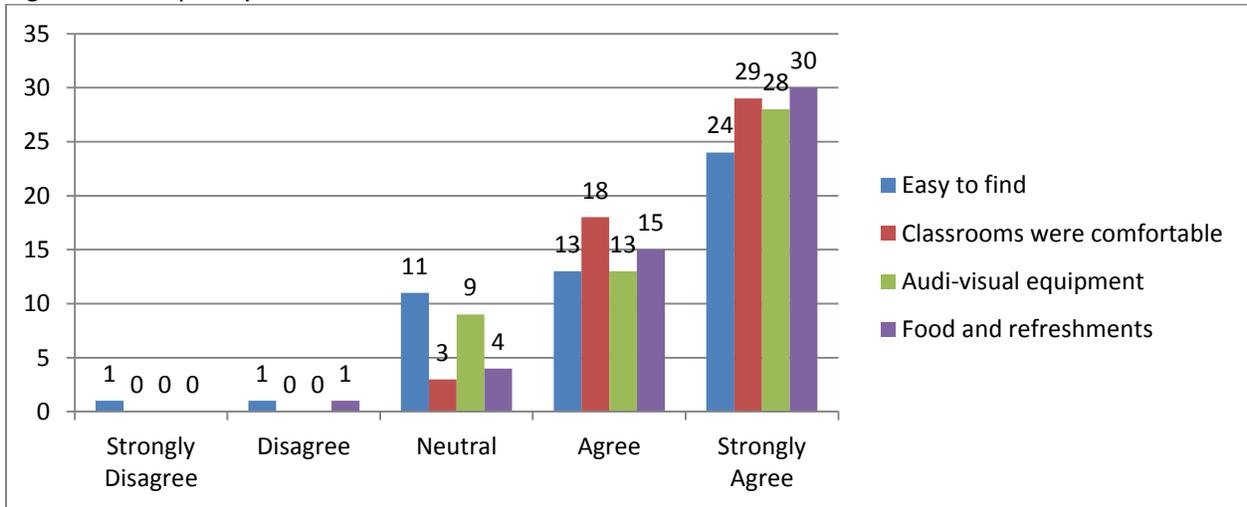Figure 3a: Frequency of Overall Evaluation Criteria

Figure 3b: Frequency of Overall Evaluation Criteria for Conference Venue

Selected Qualitative comments:

1. What did you like the **best** about this conference?
- A great opportunity to meet other students and profs
- The timing relative to the regular [SSC] conference
- Meeting colleagues/students and hearing about their work
- Polite people and a great opportunity to learn lots
- The opportunity as a student to actually present my work in an academic setting
- A great experience as the first experience for an undergraduate student can be
- Networking opportunities
- Variety of talks; really interesting to learn about other disciplines
- Good chance to practice showing results to others
- Student run
- Diversity of sessions; career, skills, research
- The organizers are very friendly and helpful
- The graduate panel was very useful to me as I am just beginning my graduate studies. It addressed a lot of my questions.
- Being able to interact with people from different universities and heat about their experiences
- Networking
- Stats

2. What did you like the **least** about this conference?
- Allow more days
- Three sessions at once might have been too much relative to audience size
- The poster session maybe should have been a little longer
- The food (I am vegan) **Note: 1/3 of sandwiches were vegetarian but signage might have been the problem; afternoon snacks were fresh fruit and cookies**
- Perhaps the timing. It would be nice to start a little earlier and have more time throughout the day for breaks
- I was lost in the U of A for approximately 40 minutes looking for the building. Please set some signs for the next time.
- Too short, hopefully it can be lengthened with more students attending over the years. (Canadian Undergrad Math conference lasts for approximately 3 days)
- Timing – It would be better if we have such seminars at the morning
- The classrooms were a bit cold
- Finishes too late
- There was either not enough time for oral presentations or too many oral presentations
- Food (lunch)
- Some contributed oral talks were not well prepared – some students may need guidance to speak in public

- Very interesting and exposed me to a lot of biostats; however, this is not my research interest
- Maybe that some speakers didn't speak loudly enough and microphones might be helpful for them
- I felt that the oral sessions were too short, the speakers tended to be rushed through their topics
- No on-site registration
- Getting trouble finding the classrooms where I selected to show up in some sessions

3. Do you have any other suggestions for improving this conference?
- For a 1.5 hour session the panel talk spent too much time introducing themselves leaving about 1/3 of the time for actual questions & discussions.
- Your question on contributed talks being relevant to my career is a little odd as its unlikely more than one or two would be in a given student's research area
- For those who are presenting, give feedback
- All the career session speakers seemed good. It would have been nice to hear all of them
- I really liked the panel and the keynote, more personal and about different paths
- Already good enough
- If people agree, circulating email contacts of participants at least presenters to aide networking
- A small group breakout session for people with similar interests to have an open discussion might help with networking
- Separate panel specifically geared towards every participants. I felt kind of isolated among other students as majority are Masters students and I couldn't bond easily
- Encourage more undergrads to attend
- Recommend that oral presenters or chairs bring laser pointer and/or slide controller
- Would like another session with career speakers
- Have the career session as a panel instead of concurrent sessions to allow students to hear about all aspects
- I think student conference is a very good idea
- Add some breaks between each session to have more change for communicating
- It was really nice, thank you
- Career panel discussion, it would be good to see the different options at once, and discuss the overlaps and other things, I've been awake for too long
- Longer talks for students (20 minutes even) would be better
- Conference was wonderful but seemed to always be pressed for time
- Contributed oral talks would benefit from thematic titles. They fit general themes well
- 5 minute breaks between session would help absorb the overtime issues that stack up throughout the afternoon
- Make clearer what happens with posters after session
- Email the schedule earlier