

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING



INTRODUCTION

We are excited to introduce Statistically Speaking, the official newsletter of the Department of Statistics, University of Pretoria. This publication serves as a platform to highlight noteworthy news, birthdays, achievements and celebrate our department's ongoing success.

As the first edition of its kind, Statistically Speaking aims to keep us all connected while showcasing the incredible work and milestones of our department and colleagues. Whether it's research breakthroughs, departmental events, social events or moments of recognition, we aim to ensure that no accomplishment goes unnoticed.

The year has already gotten off to a blistering start, with the December break feeling like a distant memory and our focus being on the heat of the first semester. Our wish for you in 2025 is that you'll pause, take a breath, and continue to live in the moment. This year has so much to offer and there are a multitude of opportunities just waiting for you to reach out and snatch them. While most of our existence these days is focused on planning ahead so that we aren't left behind, sometimes being still and living in the present is important, too. Stopping to smell the roses is not simply a cliché; it is a valuable lesson which teaches us that life is happening now, not just in the future.

We look forward to sharing this journey with you and welcome any contributions or suggestions for future editions. Here's to making Statistics more than just numbers – let's make them stories worth sharing!

Enjoy the first edition!

MESSAGE FROM THE ACTING HOD

It is with great excitement that we relaunch our departmental newsletter, newly branded **Statistically Speaking**. This refreshed platform embodies our renewed commitment to fostering community, celebrating excellence, and amplifying the transformative work of our department.

As we navigate the dynamic landscape of data science and statistical innovation, this newsletter serves as a vital bridge between our daily endeavours and the broader impact of our collective efforts. Whether highlighting ground-breaking research, student achievements, or collaborative milestones. It underscores our mission to advance knowledge while nurturing connections.

Beyond achievements, I also invite you to share personal stories—your journeys, challenges, and moments of growth. Whether it's a student's first research breakthrough, a staff member's passion project, or a team's collaborative triumph, these narratives remind us that our work is rooted in human connection. Let us use **Statistically Speaking** to celebrate not just what we do, but who we are as individuals and as a community. I encourage all departmental staff members to actively engage with this initiative—share your stories, submit updates, and leverage this space to inspire one another. Let us use **Statistically Speaking** in building a culture of inclusivity, curiosity, and pride in our shared purpose.

Together, we continue to shape a department where every voice matters and every achievement is celebrated. Finally, a special word of thanks to the marketing committee for taking the initiative of managing the newsletter.

HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT

The Department of Statistics at the University of Pretoria has a rich history, dating back to its foundations in 1920. From pioneering Statistical Education in South Africa to becoming the largest Statistics Department in the country, its journey has been marked by growth, innovation and academic excellence. Here is a brief historical timeline of our department:

1920s-1930s

- 3 June 1920: Prof AE du Toit inquires about Statistics at a Faculty of Commerce meeting.
- 1925: Statistics was given as part of the Mathematics Syllabi by BJ de Loor.
- 1938: Creation of the first “Departement Statistiek en Handelswiskunde.”
- 1939: Prof BJ de Loor becomes the first head of department

1940s-1950s

- 1946: Introduction of MCom and MSc in Statistics.
- 1949: Appointment of HS Steyn, the second staff member.
- 1955: DJ Stoker joins the Department.
- 1956: Mathematical Statistics introduced as a two-year major; department moves to the Physics Building.
- 1958: The department’s name changes to “Department of Statistics”.

1960s-1970s

- 1962: Prof De Loor passes away; Prof DJ Stoker becomes head of department.
- 1967: Mathematical Statistics becomes a three-year major.
- 1969: First Computer Science course offered in the department.
- 1975: Department renamed to “Department of Statistics and Computer Science”.
- 1977: Computer Science becomes an independent department in 1977 under Prof RJ van den Heever.

1980s-1990s

- 1981: Prof HS Schoeman becomes head of department.
- 1991: Prof NAS Crowther becomes head of department.
- 1992: Creation of STATOMET, the first departmental consultancy arm in South Africa under the directorship of Prof DJ Stoker.

2000s-2010s

- STATOMET rapidly grows, with a range high-profile projects in Europe, Africa and Asia.
- Creation of the BCom (Hons) in Survey Statistics and Economic Statistics.

2010s-2020s

- 2012: Prof Andriette Bekker becomes the first female head of department.
- 2022: Prof Samuel Manda appointed head of department.
- 2024: Prof Manda steps down as head of department.
- 2025: Prof Sollie Millard becomes the acting head of department.

NOTABLE NEWS

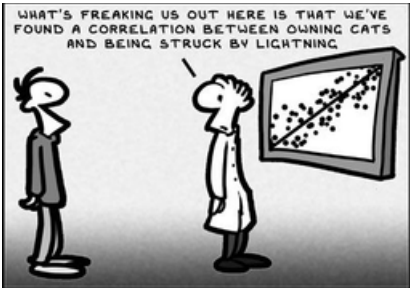
We would like to congratulate the following individuals on their new roles:

- Prof Sollie Millard to Acting HOD
- Dr Brenda Otieno Mac’Oduol to Senior Lecturer

These are both extremely well-deserved, and we recognise their incredible hard work and dedication to our department. We all wish them well in their new roles.

We bid farewell to the incredible Prof Johan Ferreira, who has left our department after 12 years of service. We wish him all the best on his new journey, and look forward to collaborating with him in the future.

The Marketing Committee, comprised of Renate, Gamu, Jason and Gopika successfully organised the Statistics stand at the UP open day on 8 March, 2025. Prof Millard extends a special thanks to the marketing committee and all the colleagues who volunteered for the NAS/EBIT Open Day. Your contributions helped to make the day a great success for the Department and the University.



NOTABLE NEWS (CONTINUED)

The Department of Statistics at the University of Pretoria (UP) is partnering with the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) to develop and validate the first-ever Global Volunteer Index Framework. This framework will provide a standardised method for measuring the significant contributions of volunteerism toward achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. This pioneering initiative is both timely and essential, as volunteerism plays a vital role in global development, yet its contributions often go unmeasured. The Global Volunteer Index will help highlight the value of volunteer efforts on individuals, communities, and economies. The data derived from the empirical computations of the Global Volunteer Index will help shape policies and investments aimed at maximising the impact of volunteer actions.

The project will be led by Prof. Samuel Manda as Project Director and Prof. Sollie Millard as Co-Director, who are closely collaborating with UNV, Northumbria University, and the International Labour Organization on this landmark project. This initiative exemplifies UP's commitment to turning research excellence into real-world impact. The project will span 20 months, starting in October 2024, and it held its first technical consultation workshop in Bonn, Germany, on March 11-13, 2025, with global practitioners and experts in attendance. A formal launch is scheduled for June 3, 2025.



THINGS TO REMEMBER

Operational Budget

All study material, including tests and examinations must be printed via the official printing process. Departmental printing of study materials is not feasible under the current operational budget constraints.

✉ Enquiries: ellen.mataboge@up.ac.za

Postgraduate Admissions (2025)

The postgraduate applications opened on **1 April, 2025**. Selection will only commence once first-semester results have been made available.

✉ Enquiries: postgrad.statistics@up.ac.za

MCom/MSc/PhD title registrations and examiner recommendations

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are available in the departmental shared folder.

📁 Shared Departmental Folder Link

✉ Enquiries: postgrad.statistics@up.ac.za

List of Committees and Members

The updated list is accessible in the departmental shared folder.

✉ Enquiries: sollie.millard@up.ac.za

Semester Test 1 Marks

An Excel summary sheet will be circulated by the Teaching and Learning Committee to record Semester 1 test marks—essential for faculty reporting.

✉ Enquiries: inger.fabris-rotelli@up.ac.za



QR Code for Shared Departmental Folder

Thank you for your cooperation in supporting the success of our department.

CONFERENCES, SYMPOSIUMS & SEMINARS

As a department, we are looking forward to hosting some interesting seminars, symposiums and conferences within the next few months. Please take note of the following dates and events:

- **Seminar:** Andre Zitzke SAS seminar **15 May @ 17:30** in the **Postgrad Centre**, titled “How SAS Elevates Your Career Opportunities” - With a legacy of 50 years, SAS continues to drive innovation into the future. In today’s AI-driven world, what sets SAS apart is its commitment to empowering the next generation of professionals with cutting-edge technology. To ensure aspiring talent is well-equipped, SAS offers students free eLearning courses, hands-on opportunities to apply AI skills, and a wealth of resources to help them stand out in their first job interviews. By bridging the gap between education and industry, SAS is shaping the future of AI talent.
- **Symposium:** International Symposium on Modern Statistics and Biostatistics (SYMSTAT25) on **2-4 July** at the **Future Africa Campus** - The Department of Statistics looks forward to hosting the 5th Annual SYMSTAT Symposium, which aims at bringing experts to up-skill local students and academic staff members, with a focus on student development. This symposium will consist of plenary speakers, interactive workshops and postgraduate student presentations.
- **Conference:** The 2025 SASA Conference will take place from **24 to 28 November** at the **Riverside Sun Hotel in Vanderbijlpark**. Further information on the conference and the conference website is expected to go live in May.

HELLO WORLD!



We would like to congratulate Dr René Stander and Dr JP Stander on the birth of their baby girl, **Leah**. May your little princess bring you and your family much joy!

She was brought into the world on 12 February, 2025 at 10:30, weighing 2.9kg and measuring 51cm tall!



BIRTHDAYS

We would like to wish the following staff members a very happy (belated) birthday:

HAPPY BIRTHDAY COLLEAGUES!

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|---|---|---|
| January 16: Gopika Ramkilawon 25: Arno van Wyk | March 3: Albert Whata 9: Sphiwe Skhosana 12: Samuel Manda 21: Arno Otto 24: Iketle Maharela 27: Lizelle Venter | April 5: Andries Masenge 16: Jason Pillay 24: Tristan Harris 29: Gamu Malela |
| February 1: Gandhi Jafta 2: Loina Coetser | | |

WELCOME TO THE TEAM!

Life is full of twists and turns, and despite our fitting skillset, unpredictable. But, life is not just about the curveballs, it hands us unexpected chances—small moments that, with a dose of grit and commitment, can grow into something incredible.

This is why we celebrate new beginnings! Every fresh face in our department brings with them new ideas, energy and unlimited potential. In this segment, we introduce our newest member of our team —their journey, aspirations and the exciting opportunities they are about to seize.



The Stats Department has a new face—well, a familiar one! After bravely venturing into the depths of industry, Jason has returned to the world of academia, officially joining us as a permanent lecturer since November 2024.

With an undergraduate degree in Applied Mathematics and an Honours and Master's in Mathematical Statistics, Jason's love for Statistics is boundless, so much that he's now tackling a PhD! When he's not guiding first-year students through the joys (and occasional woes) of Mathematical Statistics or supervising Honours Research, he's deep in his own research, aiming to present at an International conference and publish his key research findings.

Beyond academia, Jason enjoys the thrill of a challenging Sudoku puzzle—because clearly, Statistics clearly isn't enough mental gymnastics! He's also diving into Turkish vocabulary and discovering its linguistic connections to Persian, Hindi, and Urdu.

We love a multi-faceted talent—we're excited to have you on board, Jason!

PUBLICATIONS AND BOOK CHAPTERS

Our esteemed colleagues have gotten their academic works published in the first quarter of 2025:

- Ramagole, D.A., van Rensburg, D.C.J., Cowie, C., Mehta, R., Ramkilawon, G., Pluim, B.M., Kerkhoffs, G. and Gouttebarga, V., 2025. Gynaecological health patterns and motherhood experiences of female professional football players. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 22(2), p.136.
- Burger DA, van der Merwe S, van Niekerk J, Lesaffre E, Pironet A. Joint quantile regression of longitudinal continuous proportions and time-to-event data: Application in medication adherence and persistence. *Statistical Methods in Medical Research*. 2024;34(1):111-130.
- Otto, A.F., Ferreira, J.T., Bekker, A., Punzo, A. and Tomarchio, S.D., 2024. A refreshing take on the inverted Dirichlet via a mode parameterization with some statistical illustrations. *Journal of the Korean Statistical Society*, pp.1-28.
- Bekker, A., Kheyri, A. and Arashi, M., 2025. Augmented Graphical Ridge Estimation with Application in the Cryptocurrency Market. *Computational Economics*, pp.1-45.
- Botes, R., Fabris-Rotelli, I., Mahloromela, K. and Chen, D.G., 2024. An optimised rabies vaccination schedule for rural settlements. *Spatial Statistics*, p.100877.
- Tshabalala, K.M., Fabris-Rotelli, I., Basu, D., Myburgh, M. and Abdullah, F., 2025. Mortality trends and causes of death in a South African hospital complex pre-and during COVID-19. *Southern African Journal of Infectious Diseases*, 40(1), p.9.
- Bell, C.S., Krüger, E., Vermeulen, R., Masenge, A. and Pillay, B.S., 2025. Self-perception and clinical presentation of eating and swallowing difficulties within elderly care. *South African Journal of Communication Disorders*, 72(1), p.6.

SUDOKU PUZZLE!

Get new sudokus at <https://sudoku.cba.si/>

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Can't solve it? Check the solution at <https://sudoku.cba.si/>

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