

UNC Department of Biostatistics Turns 60

The department of biostatistics at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill turned 60 in October. More than 300 faculty, students, friends, and alumni gathered at the George Watts Hill Alumni Center's Carolina Club for a five-day celebration that included lectures on cutting-edge developments in biostatistical theory and applications; updates on the department; reflections on the impact of the department on biostatistics, public health, and medicine; and a *festschrift* for Gary Koch.

Experts in statistics and biostatistics from around the country presented during nine panel discussions on topics such as categorical data analysis, randomized trials in clinical research, data analysis using auxiliary and latent variables, innovative clinical trial design, environmental statistics, faculty-student interaction in applied research, emerging applications in high-dimensional data analysis, population statistics, and non- and semi-parametrics. A key theme that emerged was the invaluable role of the student/mentor relationship in the department and how many of these relationships stay vibrant and alive beyond campus walls and graduation.

A dinner banquet featured Jim Grizzle, who gave a talk on the department's history and impact. A breakfast in honor of Larry Kupper also was held.

A highlight of the festivities was a *festschrift* in honor of the work of Koch—a UNC-CH biostatistics professor, philanthropist, and co-founder of Quintiles Transnational Corp. Guest editors John S. Preisser, Anastasia Ivanova, and William D. Johnson oversaw the contribution of 23 proposed scholarly articles that will be published in a special volume of *Statistics in Biopharmaceutical Research* to honor Koch. The volume also will include a commentary, biography, and excerpts from an interview with Koch.

A Brief History

Bernard G. Greenberg founded the department of biostatistics in 1949 with the support of Gertrude Cox and Harold Hotelling. The department, initially a joint venture of the departments of mathematical statistics and experimental statistics, was created primarily to teach service courses and provide statistical consulting for the school of public health faculty and other components of the health affairs division. The department quickly became a leader in the newly emerging field of biostatistics, adopt-



The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Gillings School of Global Public Health Biostatistics

ing rigorous academic standards and producing landmark papers, studies, and research programs.

In 1972, after 23 years as chair of the department, Greenberg became dean of the school of public health. James E. Grizzle, a full professor in the department, took over as chair, serving from 1972 to 1987. After a brief interim, Barry H. Margolin, then with the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, became the third chair. When Margolin resigned in 1997, C. E. Davis was appointed interim chair. In October 1998, he was named the fourth chair. Davis retired in 2005 and, after a brief interim with Jianwen Cai as chair, Michael Kosorok, professor of statistics and biostatistics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, became the fifth chair.

UNC Biostatistics Department Today

The mission of the department today is to forge advances in science that benefit human health through profound and paradigm-shifting innovations in biostatistical methodology and theory, as well as the thoughtful implementation of biostatistical methods in practice. The past decade has seen a broadening and strengthening of the faculty and a recommitment to the fundamentals of basic statistical research motivated by scientific collaboration.

The department encompasses more than 40 faculty members, 60 staff members, and 150 students and offers bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degree programs that provide a comprehensive and up-to-date coverage of applications, methods, and theory.

For more information about the department or to see pictures of the *festschrift*, visit www.sph.unc.edu/bios/bios_60th_and_festschrift_celebration_-_october_2009_13011.html. ■