THE STATISTICAL CONSULTANT

Section on Statistical Consulting
Karen Copeland, Editor; Christopher Holloman, Assistant Editor

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IN THIS ISSUE

Upcoming Section Events

Watch your e-mail for two upcoming section events. The first will be an invitation to participate in a survey on consulting rates. The "Comments from the Chair" article contains more information on the survey. We hope all who charge for consulting will participate in the survey!

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The second event is a conference call roundtable event to be scheduled in January. The leader of the call *Regulations and Research? Can the Two Coexist?* will be Carolyn Apperson-Hansen from the Cleveland Clinic. She will lead a call focused on protected health information, de-identification, electronic records, and electronic signatures. These are the latest buzz words in the world of clinical research. What do they mean to you? The HIPAA Privacy and Security Rules as well as the FDA regulation, 21 CFR Part 11 have created challenges in the research environment. For example, a recent report suggests that the HIPAA rule has decreased survey followup response rates by at least 50%. So, how do we meet these challenges? We must understand the impact of the regulations on clinical research, balance a web of federal regulations, and show a good faith effort in becoming compliant. After a brief summary of the regulations, there will be an open discussion of how to best manage these regulations while continuing to do clinical research as well as an opportunity to share experiences with your colleagues.

Statistical Volunteerism

An ASA Special Interest Group in Statistical Volunteerism is forming. Statisticians perform many types of volunteer work for statistical associations and pro bono work to enhance human welfare. This group is in the process of delineating opportunities for volunteers and exploring ways of moving toward becoming an ASA section. People interested in volunteering their time and expertise can contact Jonathan Kurlander at jlk@mn.rr.com.

JSM 2006 Travel Award Winners

Congratulations go out to the three winners of the travel awards for organizing topic contributed sessions for the 2006 JSM in Seattle. The winners are are John Bartko, retired from the National Institute of Mental Health, Christina Gullion from the Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Research, and Dean Johnson from Washington State University.

Organizer: John Bartko, retired from the National Institute of Mental Health
Title: Reflections on a Career, Suggestion and Guidance for Those on the Way
Participants: John C. Bailar, Barbara Bailar, Thomas J. Boardman, Gerald van Belle

Organizer: Christina Gullion, Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Research
Title: Hiring a Consulting Statistician: What We Look For
Participants: K.B. Boomer, Brenda Gaydos, Fred Hulting, Christina Gullion

Organizer: Dean Johnson, Washington State University
Title: Proper Compensation for Statistical Consulting Services Provided in a University Setting
Participants: Sarah Boslaugh, Thomas Bishop, Linda Young, Barbara Mann, and Murray Clayton

JSM 2005 General Meeting Door Prize Contributors

Each year a highlight of the Consulting Section general meeting (held at the JSM) is the possibility of winning a door prize. Here is the list of contributors and the door prizes they contributed to the section.

- JMP–SAS: one free copy of JMP v.6.0
- SAS Publishing/Press: one book of your choice
- SAS Certification: 3 T-shirts
- Minitab: Polo Shirt
- Southwestern Publishers/Thompson: one book
- Comsys: Up to $75 towards purchase of a book at the conference from Taylor & Francis Group
- Systat: 1 year license to CART and SigmaStat 3.1 Statistical Advisory
- John Wiley $200 Credit towards Wiley book products
- Biostat: "Power & Precision" and "Comprehensive Meta-Analysis" computer programs
- Pearson/Prentice Hall: 1 book
- ASA/SIAM: 1 book
- Cambridge University Press: "The Cambridge Dictionary of Statistics"

JSM 2005 Roundtable Summary: "Working with Clients and Researchers: Communication Is the Key"

Thomas M. Loughin, Department of Statistics, Kansas Sate University*

Statistical consultants need more than just knowledge in statistics. In order to help clients and researchers develop solutions, statistical consultants need to communicate effectively and concisely in non-technical language. This process is rarely covered in a statistician's formal education, but without effective communication, problems can be misunderstood and solutions may be off-target. This roundtable luncheon was an opportunity for both new and experienced consultants to share their experiences and ideas for generating clear channels of communication between the consultant and client or researcher.

We had a full table of 10 participants representing both industry and academia and covering a wide range of subject-matter emphasis. The participants first discussed where they "learned to consult." Most had some sort of course on consulting in graduate school, but most of those admitted that their courses did not truly prepare them for the reality of communicating with researchers on their own. Some were simply dropped into a consulting role and have had to develop their own methods of communication.

We next discussed the process of eliciting information from a researcher or client. Most agreed that this is one of the greater challenges of consulting because the other person rarely understands what information we need to address their problems. It was generally thought that asking lots of questions is vital but that another useful tool is repeating the implications of the client's answer back to the client. This allows the client to correct misconceptions on the part of the consultant or to address imprecision in the client's initial response.

Participants expressed that another challenge they face is trying to find a "common language" in which to speak. Because the people we work with are non-statisticians, they do not typically understand much of the technical language that we take for granted. However, we are also not generally subject-matter experts in whatever area our clients represent. Although we can learn some of their discipline (or at least its language) over time, early consulting work can sometimes be a challenge. It was argued, however, that it is the statistician's responsibility to ensure that communication takes place effectively. It is unprofessional, for example, to use, "Well, I didn't understand what you meant," as an excuse for incorrect or incomplete results, just as it would be poor form for a doctor to make the wrong diagnosis because s/he didn't understand the patient's complaint. We therefore must keep asking questions of our clients until they can break down the problem into language that we can understand. The same principles apply to the delivery of results to the client. These must be in a form that s/he can use without needing a translator.

As an aside, we discussed the matter of gaining formal recognition or compensation for consulting work in an academic setting. Examples of compensation for academic consulting are co-authorship on papers or remuneration through direct fees or inclusion on grants. Again here, the statistician should take responsibility to make sure that colleagues know what forms of compensation or acknowledgment are needed by the statistician. Colleagues in other disciplines may not realize that many statisticians' departments "count" consulting work toward tenure and evaluation only if there is some tangible product that the statistician can show for his/her efforts. It was the impression of several of the experienced academic consultants present that many colleagues in other departments are quite happy to share authorship (especially when there is already a "team

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effort" on the paper) and may think more carefully about including a statistical consultant in grant proposals when they know that it is important to the statistician.

A good summary of our luncheon would be to say that many of the difficulties associated with a statistical consulting position must be solved (or at least progress toward a solution must be initiated) by the statistician. In particular, the responsibility for good communication lies primarily with us.

JSM 2005 Session Review "Statistical Consulting: From Client Acquisition to Project Reporting"

Karen Copeland, Boulder Statistics*

As part of the section's travel grant program I organized a topic contributed panel session on client acquisition. The goal of the session was to discuss client acquisition, proposals, contracts, and results reporting. These are all critical to a successful consulting practice. The panel consisted of four members of our section representing a range of statistical consulting endeavors:

Charles Kincaid, National SAS Practice within COMSYS (Large Consulting Firm)

Susan Devlin, The Artemis Group (Small Consulting Group)

Pat O'Meara, Pat O'Meara Associates (Independent Consultant)

Karen Copeland, Boulder Statistics (Independent Consultant)

Charles spoke of statisticians being part of a bigger team consisting of a project manager, developers, statisticians, and QA/testers. In his business, statistics is used in a production environment so his projects have an end product that is software oriented. Thus, Charles is involved with projects that have specific timelines, budgets, and deliverables. Communication with the project team is of great importance to stay on track; this communication can be by email, conference calls, phone calls, or instant messages as all team members might not be in the same physical location. At the same time communication with the client is also important. One example of client communication is that COMSYS has a formal change request procedure to obtain client approval to any changes in the project scope, cost, or schedule.

Susan is a statistician in a small (3.5 person) consulting group. Susan discussed writing a business plan to focus your efforts and identify challenges to your business with provisions for growing bigger or getting out. She talked about the challenges of sales and marketing of a small group competing against larger firms. To be successful against larger firms she sells her company's flexibility and spends time on her proposals to tailor them to the specific project that she is bidding on, avoiding a "boiler plate" approach.

Pat and Karen both work as solo consultants in less formal settings. They generally provide services on an hourly rate basis and most often their contracts consist of verbal agreements (and perhaps signed non-disclosure agreements). Pat went into business after 15+ years in the pharmaceutical industry and has built his client base off of his industry networks. Karen started consulting

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after a relatively short time in industry and is building her client base with small local companies through networking.

Marketing and Lead Generation

Several ideas were offered for finding leads and marketing your capabilities:

- Build off of your knowledge base, such as contracting for a former employer or working for former colleagues. However, most consultants will need to expand into the unknown.
- Teach workshops or offer webinars in outreach education settings, where clients are likely to participate.
- Publish applications articles or distribute white papers in media outlets that clients will read.
- Network (*e.g.*, participate in local business groups, professional societies, alumni groups, etc.).
- Advertise and write articles in newsletters that clients read.
- Send marketing material to potential clients.
- Get in the news (*e.g.*, announce awards, write editorials or letters to the editor).
- List services or products through the web (*e.g.*, use key words on your website to be picked up by Google, list on Knowledgestorm, list on the section e-directory of consultants to be launched in 2006)
- Subcontract through another company to leverage their sales forces.
- Build alliances with consultants (or larger consulting groups) in another field (*e.g.*, regulatory or marketing) to form a full solution option for a client.

It was emphasized that one approach is not enough; some research suggests that recognition peaks when a name has been seen through three independent sources.

Contracts and Proposals

Views on contracts depended on the nature of your work, the size of the organization, and the requirements of the client. With smaller organizations, often "a handshake and an hourly rate" is enough, whereas larger engagements often require more formal contracts. Non-disclosure agreements are one type of contract often required; the advice here was to read them carefully, in particular, beware of "non-compete" clauses. When dealing with a project that requires a proposal, invest time in the proposal. A detailed proposal generates confidence and differentiates you from others, especially if you are biding against an entrenched vendor or a "big gun." Increased "win rate" outweighs additional preperation cost.

Presentation of Results

It was agreed that the way in which results are presented to your client is important. As Pat said, "Retaining clients is a natural result of a good report." That is, your current project sells your capability for future projects and for referrals. Some ideas for reports are summarized below. Keep in mind that many reports are sent in electronic form, often without a formal verbal presentation.

- Start with Business Needs
- Organize around key business outcomes/learnings.
- Statistics should play a secondary role to justify conclusions.
- Tailor the presentation to the level of sophistication of the client and their presentation norms.
- Longer is not better.
- Don't undervalue format and polish (page numbers, table of contents, date, etc.).
- Polished graphics or colors linked to business or product logo can increase perceptions of perceived value and enthusiasm.
- End with Next Steps - outline steps needed to take action or expand business value.

Editor's Note

Do you have a networking or marketing tip you would like to share? If so please please send them to me, (`karen@boulderstats.com`), and I will include them in the next newsletter.

JSM 2005 Session Review: "Evaluations of Statistical Consulting Programs in an Academic Setting."

Manuela Huso, Department of Forest Science, Oregon State Univeristy*

As a direct result of having received the Statistical Consulting Section Travel Award, I was able to attend my first JSM and chair a Topic Contributed Session entitled "Evaluations of statistical consulting programs in an academic setting." I was interested in this topic because, as a consultant in a very small statistical consulting service (there are only two of us) in the Department of Forest Science at Oregon State University, I wrestle with how best to measure how well we are serving the needs of our research community. To address this question I invited Bruce Craig, Director of Purdue's Statistical Consulting Service; KB Boomer, Director of the Penn State University Statistical Consulting Center; and Edward D. Rothman, Director of the Center for Statistical Consultation and Research at the University of Michigan to describe their programs and the metrics they use to evaluate the efficacy of their programs. I also invited Dean Johnson, a Clinical Assistant Professor

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in the Department of Statistics at Washington State University, and M. Bridget Zimmerman, Director of the Biostatistics Consulting Center at the University of Iowa, to serve as discussants and to offer their synthesis of the presentations. The following is a summary of the presentations and the discussants' comments.

As might be expected, there was a huge range in the size of the programs, but there was a common thread among them: all were growing. Two of the programs were housed in the Department of Statistics and thus justified budgets and programs at the Departmental (Head), College (Dean), and Administrative (Provost) levels. The program at the University of Michigan, by far the largest program represented, is independent of any department and answers directly to the Vice President for Research at the university. Funding for this program comes partially through the university's general fund and partially through grants and contracts. A small portion comes from workshops given to both internal and external audiences.

The objectives of each program determine the services offered and the cost structure for the services. At Purdue, emphasis is placed on providing an educational experience for the statistical student consultants as well as developing collaborative research with faculty members across the university. The staffing structure reflects these objectives. At Purdue there are only two 0.5 FTE faculty members (one is the director) and 2.5-3.5 FTE graduate students. These consultants are supported by a 0.75 FTE manager and 1.0 FTE information processor. The program makes extensive use of student "volunteers" who gain consulting experience while earning credit for a consulting course offered through the Statistics Department. Purdue offers consulting services free of charge to anyone associated with the university. Walk-in statistical software consulting is available as well as appointment-based consulting on design and analysis.

Penn State has similar objectives to provide statistical consulting experience to between 20-45 students annually. The permanent staffing is comprised of three 0.75 FTE PhD faculty consultants, one or two 0.5-1.0 FTE MS level consultants, two-four 0.5FTE Graduate Research Assistants and two-four 0.25 FTE undergraduate students, all supported by an administrative assistant, bookkeeper, and computer administrator. Penn State offers free "on-call" consulting to answer quick questions, free short-term consulting by graduate student consultants limited to two meetings, and long-term consulting that provides analytical support for a fee.

The University of Michigan's Consulting Service's purpose is to provide free statistical consulting to faculty, primary researchers, graduate students and staff of the university. The consulting center is open 50 hours per week for drop-in and phone consultations. It currently has three full-time and two half-time Ph.D.-level consultants on staff, six M.S.-level and four-five 0.5 FTE Graduate Research Assistants (who cover the drop-in program.) There is no consulting course associated with the center that would allow students to earn credit for consulting experience. In addition, the center offers workshops on a variety of topics. One of the primary roles of the statistical consulting center is to collaborate in preparing contract and grant applications, which when awarded, provide funding for the statistical researchers. Most of the faculty are at least partially supported by competitive grants awarded to the university (these totaled $20 million last year.)

Evaluation of such diverse programs will necessarily take on many forms. Purdue has developed three primary metrics that are in line with Purdue's Strategic Plan. These metrics include the number of clients per year, the number of "return" clients or clients recommended by former clients, the percentage of clients that have competitive funding, and the number of collaborations, i.e., funding opportunities, developed. Other metrics reflect student course work and achievements, and placement of students after graduation. Purdue uses surveys to assess students' consulting skills and to request information on significant findings, funding received, or papers published after assistance from the statistical consulting service. An important component in the mission of the

consulting program is outreach to the larger community, for example, through service to state of Indiana companies, or through the Statistics in Community program in which graduate students offer free statistical consulting services to government and nonprofit groups.

Penn State relies on surveys directed at client satisfaction, client expectations, and consultant satisfaction to evaluate the efficacy of their program. Immediately following the consulting session, clients are asked to evaluate the interactions with the consultants and describe the intended use of the services, i.e., will the client use the recommendations? Does the client expect the research for which assistance was sought to be published and/or funded? Client expectations are assessed relative to types of consulting sought (collaborative research, advice, statistical programming, etc.), who should pay for the service, and the knowledge and skills expected of the consultant. From the consultant's perspective, the surveys seek to discover both positive and negative aspects of the consultant-client interaction and included questions on how the client's level of statistical sophistication impacted the process, what was most useful question asked at the first meeting, what question did the consultant wish s/he had asked, how did the consultant perceive the client's response to the recommendation.

Success of the University of Michigan's program is measured by the number of clients seeking statistical advice and the number of those that return, the number of people attending workshops, the number of projects on which consulting staff are co-Principal Investigators, and the amount of money brought into the university through grants on which faculty from the consulting center are involved. Client satisfaction is measured in surveys sent to workshop participants asking for feedback, but center staff also attend workshops to offer peer review.

Some of the unique aspects of each of these programs are worth mentioning. At Purdue, faculty advisors are required to attend the statistical consultations with their graduate students, at least the initial one. The philosophy behind this is that ultimately it is the faculty member who is the client behind every graduate student. Also at Purdue, there is a strong emphasis on service to the community, exemplifying what our president, Fritz Scheuren, spoke about in his address at the JSM. The Technical Assistance Program and the Statistics in the Community Program are both shining examples of statisticians using our discipline to enhance human welfare.

To see whether the perception of a consultation changes over time, Penn State sent out a client satisfaction survey identical to the one clients had completed five years earlier following their statistical consultation. They found that the overall level of satisfaction of clients among the different areas dropped between 12 and 33% over the five years and in no case did it increase. As this was a very informal survey, these results could be due simply to a propensity for clients with "bones to pick" to respond. Or it may be that after the papers have been published (or not) and the grants received (or not) the perception of the success of the consulting is seen in a different light. Or it may be a "regression towards the mean' in that the original satisfaction levels were very high (the percent of respondents indicating high satisfaction was over 90% in almost all areas) so there was only room to go down.

The consulting program at the University of Michigan spreads the word about their field and their services through various workshops. They even give workshops in the Art History and Archeology departments. Maybe they'll develop one for English Literature, too!

At all of these schools, a common factor in their success has been very strong support from the faculty. I think that is achieved through strong communication and efforts to strengthen collaborations across the disciplines.

I truly appreciate the work all of the presenters and discussants at this Topic Contributed Session and their willingness to share their experiences and perspectives. I also would like to thank the Section on Statistical Consulting for awarding me a travel grant. They gave me the opportunity

to attend the JSM, to begin a discussion on how we might best evaluate our respective consulting programs, to meet many energetic and active people, and to hear some very inspiring talks.

The Statistical Consulting Center at Grand Valley State University

Dr. Neal Rogness and Dr. Phyllis Curtiss, Statistics Department, Grand Valley State University *

Grand Valley is a comprehensive, state-funded university with a primary teaching mission, located in Allendale Michigan. GVSU offers 69 undergraduate majors and 25 masters-level degrees. The Statistics Department was created in 2000. Prior to 2000, the statistics faculty were members of the Mathematics and Statistics Department. GVSU has approximately 22,500 students, of which 40 are statistics majors. In addition to the Statistics majors, the department offers both an Applied Statistics minor and a Statistics minor. The Statistics Department has 13 tenure-track faculty with additional contributions from visiting and adjunct faculty members.

The Statistical Consulting Center (SCC) began operating in fall 2001. The hours of operation and use have increased each year since its beginning. We would like to share information about our center with other academic institutions. We are hoping that other institutions will do the same. In this way, we can give each other ideas on structuring a statistical consulting center.

Who does the statistical work? What is the work-load?

The director of the SCC is a faculty member who receives a half-time appointment to operate the center. The center has had three different directors since its opening in 2001. The director is appointed by the department chair with affirmation from the faculty for two-years.

Since the SCC has a paramount teaching mission, the center typically employs two student assistants, who are upper-level statistics majors. The SCC currently makes available 16 hours each week for consulting and averages approximately 5 appointments per week. The student workers each devote an average of 10 hours to the SCC each week.

How are students involved?

When schedules permit, the student assistant joins the initial consulting session. The student researches answers to the client's questions and/or conducts any data analyses under the supervision of the director. In the follow-up meeting with the client, the director normally takes the lead in explanation, drawing in the student where appropriate.

In addition, internships have been created for students seeking consulting experience. Statistics majors at GVSU are also required to take the course Statistics Project which provides the students with consulting experiences. Students in this course are required to participate in a minimum of two consulting experiences at the SCC.

For whom do you consult?

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At GVSU the SCC provides statistical advice to all faculty and staff as well as students. Students must supply a letter from a faculty member, defining the amount of assistance they should receive from the center. If approached by external clients, the SCC will meet for up to two hours at no charge. If additional assistance is desired, the SCC serves as a liaison in finding a faculty member in statistics who will consult with the external client. It is up to the faculty member whether to assess an hourly charge. Additional assistance from the SCC is available to non-profit organizations.

Does the center charge for statistical consulting? How does the fee structure for external clients differ from internal clients?

Currently, the SCC does not charge any fees for the services provided. Depending on the volume of projects in the center, large or complicated projects may be outsourced to faculty who, in turn, may or may not charge a fee. In situations in which clients are seeking data entry, the SCC serves as a liaison in finding a student whom the client pays directly to do data entry.

Editor's Note

I want to thank Neal and Phyllis for agreeing to write this inaugural article in what I hope will become a series on academic statistical consulting centers. If you are involved in an academic consulting center and would be willing to write a similar article on your center please let me know (karen@boulderstats.com).

Comments from the Chair

Susan J. Devlin, The Artemis Group*

In my final newsletter note as 2005 chair of the Statistical Consulting Section, I would like to summarize the initiatives we have launched or are launching this year and thank those who have contributed so greatly to these efforts.

Electronic Newsletter - This note is in our first electronic newsletter. Thanks goes to Karen Copeland for this transition, which will save the section a significant amount of money to help fund other initiatives underway. As you can see, we have also increased the content. Thanks also go to our retiring editor, Tzu-Cheg Kao and a hardy welcome to our new assistant editor, Christopher Holloman.

Consulting Rates Survey - Shortly, you will be asked to complete an anonymous rates survey if you provide consulting for a fee. This effort will help us understand what the going rates are for the services we provide. Several times this year, I have been asked for this kind of information for organizations wanting to increase rates but keep them competitive or for those launching a new practice. Thanks go to Tim Max and Karen Copeland for making this idea a reality.

E-Directory of Statistical Consultants - We hope to have the website launched in the first quarter of 2006, thanks to help from Steve Porzio and his staff at ASA headquarters. We just

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have a few final format wrinkles to work out. I could not have succeeded in making this idea a reality without the help of committee members Anamaria Kazanis, Harold Dyck, Deborah Fripp, Anamaria Kazanis, and Charles Mann.

JSM Sessions - Our sessions at the annual meetings in Minneapolis were excellent, thanks to Susan McGorray, and we are going to have a record breaking number of sessions in Seattle, including our own pair of Introductory Overview Lectures, thanks to Todd Nick.

Consulting Snapshot Articles - Christina Gullion, our publications officer, is launching a series of articles for Amstat News, which will feature the thoughts of statistical consultants working in a broad range of application areas. Thanks to help from Anamaria Kazanis, these have started.

Mentoring & Support - This and the next initiative are in the research and planning stages. To better support those launching new consulting practices and to provide a source for advice for isolated consultants, we hope to set up a mentoring network. Brenda Gaydos has agreed to lead the planning of this effort. Borrowing from the success of IsoStat, the list server for isolated academic statisticians, Bonnie Dumas has agreed to plan the launch and advertising of a similar information source for the isolated statistical consultants. I have initiated conversations with the chair of the Committee on Applied Statisticians to see how we might work together on these and other activities of mutual interest.

Brochures - Phil Dixon, our chair for next year, has agreed to lead an effort to update our brochure, perhaps through a set of shorter brochures to better reflect the diverse applications of statistical consulting.

Charter Review - Our recently elected chair elect-elect (chair for 2007), Stuart Gansky, has agreed to chair a charter review committee which includes Jane Pendergast, Caroline Aperson Hansen, and myself. Soon, you will be asked for your input in the form of a vote on possibly streamlining and clarifying our section management.

I am sure that I am leaving something out - though not intentionally. This has been a year of new ideas and activity, continuing the momentum started by our past chair Jane Pendergast last year. This would not be possible without the very strong committed executive committee we had this year, good advice and encouragement from ASA President Fritz Scheuren, and the feedback received from you, the section membership. Thank you.

Notes from the Editor

Errata: In the previous newsletter, the article by Anamaria Kazanis contained a reference that should read as below:
Berman, N., Gansky, S., Gullion, C., Loughin, T. and Sanchez, M. (2003), "When You Consult A Statistician - What To Expect," *The Statistical Consultant* 20(3).

I am happy to have our new Editor, Karen Copeland, who will assume the responsibility of the Editor of The Statistical Consultant. I would like to thank a number of people for their help

and support during my tenure as Editor. They included all the authors who have contributed to publish their research results related to statistical consulting, all the section chairs (Matilde Sanchez, Jane Pendergast, Susan Devlin) and section officers from 2003-2005, Karla Genter for continuing assistance in typesetting our section newsletter, and Karen Copeland who has served as a Co-Editor with me since summer of 2005.

Tzu-Cheg Kao, Past Editor

I would like to thank all of those who submitted articles for this first electronic newsletter, your submissions and feedback on content and style are always welcome.

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