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StatFest 2026

— September 17th
and 24th, 2026 —

7PM–9PM EST

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Welcome to StatFest 2026!

On behalf of the Committee on Minorities in Statistics and the entire StatFest leadership team, I am delighted to welcome you to this year's event. StatFest is designed to introduce undergraduate students from historically underrepresented groups to the exciting opportunities available in statistics, data science, and related fields. Whether you are exploring career options, considering graduate school, or just simply curious, we are thrilled that you have chosen to join us.

This year's program is organized as a two-session experience, giving participants multiple opportunities to learn, engage, and connect. During the first session, you will hear from speakers and panelists who will share insights into the statistics and data science profession, including perspectives from graduate students and professionals working in a variety of industries and sectors. The second session focuses on practical next steps for your journey, including opportunities to explore the expo, network with organizations and professionals, and learn more about graduate school preparation and internship opportunities.

We encourage you to take full advantage of everything StatFest has to offer. Ask questions, participate in discussions, visit the expo hall, and introduce yourself to speakers, panelists, and fellow attendees. We would also love for you to join the American Statistical Association (ASA) after StatFest and stay connected with the ASA's Committee on Minorities in Statistics.

Most importantly, remember that you belong here. The statistics and data science communities thrive because of diverse perspectives, experiences, and ideas. We hope the sessions, speakers, and networking opportunities inspire you to envision your own future in these fields and help you take the next step toward achieving your goals.

Thank you for being part of StatFest 2026. We are excited to learn alongside you, celebrate your potential, and support you as you explore the many possibilities that statistics and data science have to offer. We hope you have a rewarding, engaging, and memorable experience.

Thanks!



Portia Exum
Chair of StatFest 2026

About StatFest

By attending StatFest, you are taking part in an initiative that is in its 26th year. The first "Mini StatFest," as it was then called, was organized by Dr. Nagambal Shah in 2001 at Spelman College in Atlanta, GA. The annual conference has since been held at locations across the United States, allowing students from different regions to have the opportunity to participate. It is an ongoing initiative of the American Statistical Association's (ASA) Committee on Minorities in Statistics.

StatFest is a free conference aimed at encouraging undergraduate students from historically underrepresented groups to consider careers and graduate studies in the statistical sciences. The program has three primary goals:

1. Expose participants to a broad range of graduate study and career opportunities in statistics and data science,
2. Assist participants in networking and building relationships with others outside their institution, and
3. Connect participants to future opportunities within statistics and data science.

AirMeet Information

StatFest 2026 will be hosted virtually on [AirMeet](#).

Registrants will receive an email from

notifications@airmeet.com one hour before each event with a unique link that will allow you to enter the event.

Please add this address to your contacts in the account you used to register for StatFest or check your spam folder.

The **StatFest Expo** will be available throughout the event. We encourage participants to arrive early and/or stay late, making use of the Exhibitor Booths in the StatFest Expo to learn more about our exhibitors and to schedule 1-on-1s with representatives. A representative for each booth will be available on the 24th.

View the [AirMeet Attendee Guide Playlist 2025](#) to learn more about the platform ahead of the event or review their [Attendee Checklist](#).

ASA Code of Conduct

Code of Conduct

The ASA is committed to providing an atmosphere in which personal respect and intellectual growth are valued and the free expression and exchange of ideas are encouraged. Consistent with this commitment, it is the policy of the ASA that all participants in ASA activities enjoy a welcoming environment free from unlawful discrimination, harassment, and retaliation. We strive to be a community that welcomes and supports people of all backgrounds and identities. This includes, but is not limited to, members of any race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, color, immigration status, social and economic class, educational level, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, age, size, family status, political belief, religion, and mental and physical ability.

All participants—including, but not limited to, attendees, statisticians, students, registered guests, staff, contractors, and exhibitors—agree to comply with all rules and conditions of the activities. See the [ASA Code of Conduct](#) for details.

September 17th Schedule

All times are in Eastern Standard Time (EST)

Activity	Speakers	Start	End
Welcome/Intro to Stats		7:00pm	7:30pm
	<i>Chair</i> Portis Exum, SAS Institute		
The Graduate Student Experience		7:30pm	8:15pm
	<i>Moderated by</i> Elyse McFalls, North Carolina State University		
	<i>Panelists</i> Deborah Bennor, University of Wisconsin Nimo Ismail, Drexel University Steven Lawrence, New York University Tatyana Bowers, Duke University		
Career Panel		8:15pm	9:00pm
	<i>Moderated by</i> Brittney Bailey, Amherst College		
	<i>Panelists</i> Ana Maria Ortega Villa, Biogen Erica Dawson, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Jami Jackson Mulgrave, Large Tech Company Praveen Gupta, Large Tech Company Montserrat 'Montse' Fuentes, St. Edward's University		

September 24th Schedule

All times are in Eastern Standard Time (EST)

Activity	Speakers	Start	End
Expo Intros		7:00pm	7:30pm
	<i>Chair</i> Portia Exum, SAS Institute		
Expo Hall and Networking Tables		7:30pm	8:30pm
Preparing for Graduate School		8:30pm	9:00pm
	<i>Speaker</i> David Apilado Jr., University of California Berkeley		

Speakers & Panelists

September 17th: **Opening/Closing Remarks**



Portia Exum

Portia is a Software Development Manager at SAS Institute Inc. where she enjoys building teams and solving complex problems. She holds both a BA in Mathematics/Statistics and Economics from Smith College and an MS in Statistics from NC State University. With almost a decade and a half of Software R&D and Analytics experience, she's served in a variety of analytical software testing, automation, and management roles throughout her career.

She is a co-founder of the Black Initiatives Group (BIG) at SAS and a member of the American Statistical Association's Committee for Minorities and Statistics. She is also a recipient of the 2022 CEO Award of Excellence, a peer nominated award for exhibiting SAS values and demonstrating a commitment to excellence. Portia is invested in creating a diverse pipeline into the field and collaborates to recruit, retain, and develop the next generation of statisticians, data scientists, and computer scientists.



Praveen Gupta



Praveen Gupta Sanka is a Staff Data Scientist at Meta with more than a decade of experience applying statistics, machine learning, and data science to large-scale industry problems. His work spans privacy-preserving machine learning, data and model reliability, advertising systems, and credit-risk modeling, with prior experience at Amazon.

Praveen is actively involved in the broader statistics and data-science community through conference programming, peer review, mentoring, and invited presentations. He has presented his work at forums including the Symposium on Data Science and Statistics (SDSS), Joint Statistical Meetings (JSM), Symposium of Usable Privacy and Security (SOUPS), IEEE events, and university programs.

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Jami Mulgrave



Dr. Jami Mulgrave is an experienced data scientist at Meta Platforms, Inc. who is currently focused on building propensity and uplift models for targeting marketing campaigns. She has experience building marketing mix models and using machine learning and causal inference to improve the performance of the ads. Her previous experiences include working as a research scientist in marketing science and people analytics at Meta. She was a National Library of Medicine postdoctoral research fellow at Columbia University in the Bioinformatics department and she earned a PhD in Statistics from North Carolina State University. She was a recipient of a National Science Foundation graduate research fellowship and received a \$10,000 scholarship as a runner-up for a Pepsi-Co "Hidden Figures" search.

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Erica Dawson



Dr. Dawson is a statistician in the Division of Population Health/Population Health and Surveillance Branch (PHSB) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). She began her career at CDC as an Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS) officer in the former Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention. During her tenure as an EIS officer, she partnered with different community-based organizations to investigate HIV outbreaks in several states. In her current role as a statistician in PHSB, she performs data and statistical analyses, and provides technical assistance to states on data and statistical programming related issues pertaining to the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). In addition to her role as a statistician, she assists PHSB with BRFSS questionnaire development and acquiring regulatory approval for survey data collection. She is passionate about disease prevention and promoting healthier lifestyles. Dr. Dawson obtained a BS in Mathematics from Fort Valley State University, an MA in Mathematics from the University of Northern Iowa, an MS in Statistics from Iowa State University, and a PhD in Biostatistics from The University of Alabama at Birmingham. In her spare time, Dr. Dawson enjoys cooking, doing community outreach, and spending time with her family.



Ana Ortega Villa

Ana Ortega-Villa, PhD is an Associate Director of Biostatistics at Biogen. Prior to this role, she served as a mathematical statistician at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID). She completed postdoctoral fellowships at the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the National Cancer Institute, and earned her PhD in Statistics from Virginia Tech, where she currently serves as an Adjunct Professor.

Her interests include design and analysis of clinical trials and observational studies, longitudinal data, mixed models, postpartum depression, immunology, research capacity building, statistics education, and initiatives that foster a culture of belonging. Dr. Ortega-Villa is a COPSS Emerging Leader, the Chair of the American Statistical Association Biometrics Section, a member of ENAR RECOM, and an Associate Editor of Statistics in Medicine.



Montserrat “Montse” Fuentes



Dr. Montserrat “Montse” Fuentes is an internationally recognized statistician, distinguished scholar, and academic leader whose career has combined research excellence, faculty leadership, and institutional impact. She has authored more than 100 peer-reviewed publications, received more than 8,400 citations, and led over \$30 million in competitive research funding. Her scholarship in spatial statistics, Bayesian modeling, environmental and health analytics, forecasting, and uncertainty quantification has had broad interdisciplinary impact. She is a Fellow of the American Statistical Association and a recipient of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Scientific and Technological Achievement Award. Dr. Fuentes has held distinguished faculty appointments throughout her career, including serving as the inaugural Goodnight Distinguished Professor of Statistics at North Carolina State University, where she also led the Department of Statistics and developed major interdisciplinary research initiatives. She has mentored generations of students and scholars, including chairing 24 doctoral dissertations, while advancing new academic and data science programs and building collaborative research partnerships across disciplines. She later served in senior academic leadership roles at Virginia Commonwealth University and as Executive Vice President and Provost at the University of Iowa before becoming the 24th President of St. Edward’s University, where she holds an appointment as Professor of Mathematics. A first-generation college graduate, she earned degrees in mathematics and music from the University of Valladolid in Spain and a PhD in Statistics from the University of Chicago. Across her career, she has remained deeply committed to scholarship, mentorship, student success, and creating environments in which faculty and emerging researchers can thrive.



Brittney Bailey

Moderator



Dr. Brittney Bailey is an Assistant Professor of Statistics at Amherst College. She graduated with a BA in Mathematics from Messiah College and completed her PhD in Biostatistics at The Ohio State University. Her research explores statistical methods for dealing with missing data and clustered clinical trials, and her collaborations have focused on social and behavioral interventions to improve mental health and well-being. As a Black woman in STEM and a first-generation scholar from a low-income background, Dr. Bailey is dedicated to supporting students with similar experiences and works to create environments where all students can thrive.

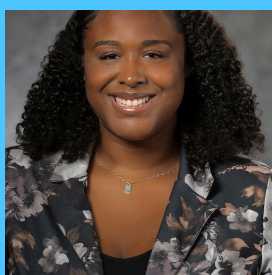
September 17th: The Graduate Student Experience



Deborah Mensah Bennor



Deborah Mensah Bennor is a third-year PhD student in Statistics, pursuing the Biostatistics degree option at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. I hold a bachelors degree in Statistics and a masters degree in Mathematical Statistics. My research interests include missing data methods for high-dimensional data and the application of statistical methods to healthcare and biomedical data. Beyond research, I am passionate about teaching, mentorship, and creating supportive spaces for students from diverse backgrounds in statistics.



Tatyana Bowers



Tatyana Bowers is a second-year Master of Biostatistics student at Duke University. She earned her bachelor's degree in Mathematics from Winston-Salem State University. Her interests include health disparities, women's health, clinical trials, and using biostatistics to improve health outcomes in underserved populations. Her previous experiences include cardiovascular health research at Columbia University and, most recently, an internship at SAS, where she worked with the education team to test and provide feedback on educational resources for students learning data science and analytics.



Nimo Ismail



Nimo Ismail is an incoming PhD student in Biostatistics at Drexel University's Dornsife School of Public Health. She earned an MA in Statistics and Data Science through the Bridge to a Doctorate Program at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School and a BS in Mathematics from Rhodes College. She has also completed graduate coursework in biostatistics at the University of Michigan. Her research interests include causal inference, statistical modeling, Bayesian methods, machine learning, and longitudinal data analysis, with applications to substance use, mental health, and racial health disparities. Nimo's master's thesis examined the long-term effects of exposure to gun violence. She currently contributes to the ASCEND study, which is an observational study about children with acute respiratory distress syndrome requiring ECMO support.



Steven Lawrence



Steven Lawrence recently graduated with a doctoral degree in Biostatistics from New York University (NYU) School of Medicine. His research focused on evaluating assumptions when building geospatial models motivated by measuring pharmacy access in New York City. While at NYU he built HIPAA-compliant pipelines for measuring proximity to pharmacy using patient addresses directly and contributed to multi-disciplinary clinical and public health teams. Steven attributes earlier experience in research and summer training programs while at CUNY Medgar Evers College, and having numerous mentors as the main drivers of his career choices and success. Thus, Steven is passionate about motivating the next generation of biostatisticians and therefore regularly volunteers his time sharing his journey to Biostatistics at high schools in collaboration with the Bridge to Biostatistics Program at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. Recently, Steven has joined the Research Foundation for Mental Hygiene as a research scientist where he will be contributing to analytical efforts to improve access to life changing care to incarcerated populations.



Elyse McFalls

Moderator



Elyse McFalls is a second-year PhD student in Statistics at North Carolina State University. She is broadly curious about the intersection of statistics and the social sciences. Her research interests include causal inference, data privacy, and survey methodology.

Prior to graduate school, Elyse graduated from Duke University with a major in Statistics and minor in Sociology. While at Duke, she interned at the Urban Institute where she researched data privacy methods and contributed to their open source codebase for evaluating synthetic data. She also interned at SAS Institute as a software developer and helped develop, test, and maintain code for managing models. She transitioned into a full-time role at SAS after graduation and worked there for a year before starting graduate school. Outside of work and school, her interests include knitting, baking, and (occasionally) running.

September 24th:

Preparing for Admission to Graduate School



David Apilado Jr.



I'm the Graduate Advisor and Program Coordinator for the MA in Statistics program at UC Berkeley, where I support students from their very first questions about grad school all the way through graduation. With over 10 years in higher education, I'm passionate about helping students navigate the application process, discover their strengths, and build connections that will carry them into their careers. I lead our recruitment efforts with a focus on diversity and access, creating partnerships with UC/CSU campuses, attending national conferences like StatFest and SACNAS, and launching a Peer Ambassador Program to connect current and future students. I hold an MA in Educational Studies and an MA in Adult Education & Training from the University of Phoenix, and I know firsthand both the challenges and rewards of graduate education. What I love most is seeing students grow in confidence and achieve their goals.

StatFest Exhibitors

Tap the exhibitors names to be taken to their websites!

Industry Exhibitors

[Merck](#)

[Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center](#)

Graduate Programs

[Brown University](#)

[Emory University - Department of Biostatistics and
Bioinformatics](#)

[NC State University - Department of Statistics](#)

[NYU GPH - Department of Biostatistics](#)

[University of Kansas - Dept of Biostat & Data Science](#)

[University of Pennsylvania - Division of Biostatistics](#)

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Biostatistics](#)

Statistical Community Organization

[ASA JEDI Outreach Group](#)

Thank you to our StatFest Planning Committee!

StatFest Leadership

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Felicia Simpson, Vice Chair
Kristin Mohebbi, Co-Chair
Michael Thomas, Marketing Lead

StatFest Planning Committee Members

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Thank you to the ASA Partners and StatFest sponsors whose contributions helped make this year's event possible.

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