In 2010, the Department of Statistics at the University of Wisconsin will celebrate its 50th anniversary.

The inspiration for a separate Department of Statistics came from several faculty members in the Business School, School of Agriculture, and other departments having a strong quantitative component. An international search for a chairperson resulted in the outstanding choice of George E. P. Box (1960-1991) as the founding chair.

George E. P. Box

His first new faculty members included John Gurland (1960-1987) and Norman Draper (1961-1999). Professor Box’s strong desire to have applications play a central part led him to create a department where some members held joint appointments with other departments having important applications. Towards this goal, he created joint faculty appointments for three students whose theses he had

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1 Numbers in parentheses indicator years as faculty member

The majority of the next hires strengthened the theoretical component of the program and ultimately led to its reputation for being strong and balanced. Jerome Klotz (1965-1999), five new assistant professors in 1966 including Gouri Bhattacharyya (1966-1995), Richard Johnson (1966-2008) and George Roussas (1966-1972), and then Steve Stigler (1967-1978) and Grace Wahba (1967-) were hired. Also, Bernie Harris (1967-2002) joined the department.

In 1967 the department moved into new building that was shared by Statistics, Computer Science, and an administrative computing group. Robert Miller (1968-2005) joint with Business School, and John VanRyzin (1969-1979) who guided an early group of biostatisticians increased connections with those areas.

During this time, George Box was doing pioneering work with G. Jenkins on time series. He also began his famous Monday night Beer & Statistics Seminar at his home. Interested students and faculty would listen to a short presentation of a statistical problem encountered by a scientist on campus. The discussions that followed were always interesting and informative. Often, the results of implementing some of the suggestions were reported in the following weeks.

The Statistics Department’s first decade was marked by an exceptional period of productivity and growth.

Over the next several years, the Department of Statistics developed a strong program that featured a balance of theory and practice. Advances in time series, design of experiments, and engineering applications continued to be highlights. Greg Reinsel (1976-2004) and Jeff Wu (1977-1990) were important contributors to time series and design, respectively.


Over the years, the joint appointment positions became concentrated in two programs, Biometry in the School of Agriculture and Life Sciences and Biostatistics in the Medical School. The Biometry program, begun in the late 1970s, has active collaborations, including a joint Masters degree, across the biology departments in agriculture, veterinary medicine and basic sciences. The current faculty associated with Biometry are Brian Yandell (1982- ), Murray Clayton (1984- ), Jun Zhu (2000- ), Bret Larget (2002- ), and Cecile Ane (2006- ).


Because this history is necessarily brief, there are certainly many persons who made important contributions while on the faculty but who are not mentioned.

Over the first 50 years, members of the faculty have published thousands of papers and over 30 texts and monographs.

The faculty are justly proud of 562 Master Degrees and 398 Ph. D's that have been awarded. Many recipients hold leading positions in academia, government, and industry.
To celebrate the 50-th anniversary, a research conference STATISTICAL SCIENCE-MAKING A DIFFERENCE will be held June 3rd and 4th, 2010 in Madison, Wisconsin. For more information, see www.stat.wisc.edu/Department/50th_Anniversary/50th.html.