

Remembering Dr. Jim Stapleton



Dr. James Stapleton, much admired professor and friend, passed away on June 17, 2022. James ("Jim") H. Stapleton received his A.B. degree from Eastern Michigan University and his M.S. and Ph.D. in Mathematical Statistics from Purdue University in 1957. In 1958, after working as a statistician for General Electric, he joined the faculty of the Department of Statistics and Probability at Michigan State University.

Although Jim's dissertation research was rather theoretical, he quickly became interested in applied statistics and provided leadership in this area during his tenure at MSU. In particular, he directed the statistical consulting service in the Department of Statistics and Probability for many years, was a statistical consultant for many corporations and government agencies and wrote a graduate-level textbook on *Linear Statistical Models*, published in 1995 and updated in 2009. His interest in graduate curriculum and teaching led him to work on an additional text, *Models for Probability and Statistical Inference*, published in 2007.

Jim provided invaluable service to the department

and the profession. Some examples of this include his tenure as Acting Chairman and Chairman from 1967-1975, his presidency of the mid-Michigan chapter of the American Statistical Association from 1987-1989, and his 20-year service as graduate director of the Department of Statistics and Probability, ending in 2006, which made him the face of the Department for many of our alumni. Jim was awarded the 2009 Meritorious Faculty Award from the MSU College of Natural Science Alumni Association and the 2010 Annual Globie Award, which recognizes outstanding service to international students and scholars at MSU.

During retirement, Jim continued working on his textbooks and spent time traveling with his wife Alicia. He often visited the department and will be greatly missed by all who knew him.



Professor Elijah Dikong

Department of Statistics and Probability, Michigan State University

"What a bitter and profoundly painful news! Oh Lord, receive him into your lovely arms and may he eternally rest in peace in your bosom. Dr. Stapleton was just more than a colleague. He came across to me like a friend, an uncle, a father, a mentor, to name these few. Each time I had to stop by at his office to say hello! I made sure I had at least an hour, because the ensuing discussion will not only center on academics, but also on family, social matters, sports, etc. He took particular interest in making colleagues of non-American roots to feel welcome to the department. This was apparent to me during my very first chat with him dating back to the day I gave my job-hiring presentation in the department. I could read from his lips, 'if you just want to, you are welcome here.' When I was hired, Dr. Stapleton called me over the phone to inquire if I needed assistance in finding accommodation for my family. I was in Missouri at the time. I tried to persuade him not to worry and that I will sort things out to no avail. He sacrificed his time and energy to check on apartments around Lansing and East Lansing area and emailed me the addresses. After I made the choice on apartment complex to live in, Dr. Stapleton took the pains to contact the management and visited the apartment complex to ascertain it was a good living environment. This has remained indelible in my mind. There's a lot I can say of Dr. Stapleton, but I spare you the reading. I think the gods of the English language have not yet come up with the right adjectives to describe his kindness, generosity, welcoming spirit, simplicity, camaraderie, to mention these. I join the family in tears."

Professor Leonard Johnson

Department of Statistics and Probability, Michigan State University



"Dr. Stapleton was a kind and welcoming man. He loved to help students and was very good in helping in-coming international students navigate the new environment and culture. I was one of those international students hosted by Jim and his wife many years ago! Dr. Stapleton gave me my first Statistics textbook by John Rice when I was in the Math department, and he encouraged me to take STT 861. I remember him saying 'take STT 861 and see whether you like it.' And that's how my story with Statistics began. Jim was a good soul, and he will surely be missed by many."

Professor Shlomo Levental

Department of Statistics and Probability, Michigan State University

"Here is something about Jim that perhaps many are not familiar with. Before joining the department, Jim was working in General Electric (GE) which at that time was a very important company. Why has Jim decided to move from GE to MSU? Jim explained that his boss in GE wanted to impress the management with the importance of Statistics, which at that time (65 years ago) wasn't obvious to many of them. But in doing just that, his boss was willing to greatly exaggerate in what Statistics can do. Jim wasn't willing to participate in this type of presentation, so he quit GE. By quitting, Jim demonstrated that he isn't willing to compromise on integrity, and that is a good principle for all of us. Jim was an excellent person who was a very good friend to many in the department including students, staff, and colleagues."

Professor Mingfei Li

Bentley University

"Oh, mine! What a sad news! I remember Dr. Stapleton very well. He was the first professor I met in the department. I was in his sampling class. He has been always so nice to us, and was always willing to chat with us, answer our questions, gave us suggestions, and helped us as far as he could. This is a sad news to all of us. We will remember him forever. Thank you for letting me know this news. I will pass this news to some friends who know him as well."

Professor Tapabrata Maiti

Department of Statistics and Probability, Michigan State University

"Whenever I met STT alumni, Jim was always part of our discussion. He was so helpful to graduate students and STT members that it is difficult to forget him. STT lost one of its founders. Keeping his family in my thoughts and prayers. My deepest sympathy."

Professor Vince Melfi

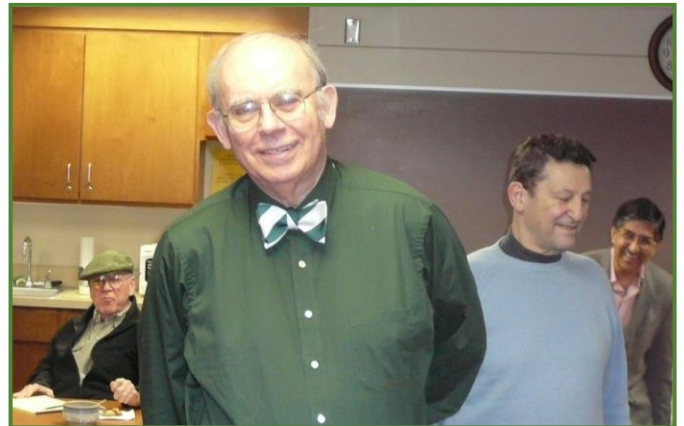
Department of Statistics and Probability, Michigan State University

"Those who have been in the department for a while know Jim and his contributions well. For those who have not, Jim was in many ways the heart and soul of the department. He served in a variety of roles, including chair in the 1960s and graduate director for many years. Jim also wrote two well-regarded books, one on linear models and the other on mathematical statistics. Jim was always happy to welcome, listen to, counsel, and console his colleagues in the department. He had a special place in his heart for graduate students, and he and his wife Alicia hosted many graduate students for holiday dinners over the years. Jim was a unique and lovely person and will be missed by so many."

Professor Luda Sakhanenko

Department of Statistics and Probability, Michigan State University

"Jim was very approachable, generous, and caring; his office door was always open. I got lots of advice from him during all 20 years that I had privilege to know him. Each Spring semester for many years Jim organized March Madness contest in STT. He involved the basketball and statistics enthusiasts in STT to try to predict the winners. It was a nice team building event that brought together students, faculty, and their significant others. He even got some of our alumni at Kansas State University organizing these contests. Now March Madness time will remind me of Jim."



Professor Veronika Skorokhod

Department of Statistics and Probability, Michigan State University

"I've known Dr. Stapleton for over 20 years since my first semester as MS student in STT: he taught me STT 861 and some more courses later. I can't believe that he is gone! He was a great man! May his soul rest in peace. My thoughts and prayers are with his family."

Professor Yimin Xiao

Department of Statistics and Probability, Michigan State University

"It is difficult to digest this sad news. Jim served as a role model for many of us for many years. He was always generous with his time to help others, especially junior faculty members and graduate students. His office door was always open, and people could chat with him in his office or the lounge. He often showed me the new Chinese words and phrases he had learned or the simulation of fractional Brownian motions that he had made. At the end of February this year, he showed me the simulation work he did on the eigenvalues of random matrices from chi-square goodness statistics which seemed to be 'too small' and asked me if I knew any 'other sequences of processes that converge too fast.' That was an interesting phenomenon. We looked for an explanation. Then our conversation went from math/stat to families, and he told me "Your 'boy distribution' reminds me of my own family ..." Everything was so vivid as if it happened yesterday. It was great to have Jim as a friend, a colleague, and a mentor. He will be deeply missed. My best wishes to Alicia and the whole family."

