

Clemson center expands data pool

Staff report

A group of Clemson University math experts has begun working to expand a center that helps researchers analyze the huge amounts of data they collect as they study everything from energy use to the prevalence of canine heartworm.

The Statistics and Mathematics Consulting Center serves researchers at the university and in commerce, industry and government, Clemson officials said.

Researchers whose expertise lies outside math and statistics bring their data to the center for help. Short-term assistance for Clemson researchers is free.

Ben Sharp, the center's director, said he sees an opportunity to grow.

"This generation has tons and tons of data, and it's sitting out there," Sharp said. "We can help make sense of it all."

Joe Burgett, an assistant professor in the Construction Science and Management Department, said he turned to the center when he needed a partner to get a grant that would allow them to do some stats-heavy research into energy modeling.

He was put in touch with Julia Sharp, who is Ben's wife and one of the center's experts.

"We got together and submitted the grant," Burgett said. "We were successful, and we're working on it."

With the center's help, Burgett is using a large government survey that includes demographic information and the types of appliances people own to come up with a model of how energy is used.

A core group of seven faculty members contributes its expertise to the center. Among them is Jim Coykendall, chair of the Mathematical Sciences Department.

"I'm excited about getting our department intermingling with the rest of the Clemson University community," he said. "From a personal standpoint, I get a real charge out of being able to take some of the skills I have and help students."

Ben Sharp said it's important for researchers to contact the center early on in their studies, even before they start collecting data.

The center's experts can help researchers refine their questions, which prevents having to do damage control later, he said.

Faculty involved in the center also include Billy Bridges, Pat Gerard, Sophie Liu and Matt Saltzman. Other faculty in the math department are welcome to contribute when interest and expertise match up, Sharp said.

The center is open to researchers from a broad range of disciplines. Services offered include data analysis, statistical guidance and interpretation, problem solving, scientific computing and mathematical modeling.

The Statistics and Mathematics Consulting Center is in 0-110 Martin Hall. For more information, call 864-656-3433 or visit the website at www.clemson.edu/centers-institutes/sbcc/