

# **The Southern Regional Council on Statistics (SRCOS) and the Summer Research Conference (SRC): A Historical Perspective Revisited & Updated**

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## **ABSTRACT**

We provide an update of the evolution of the Southern Regional Council on Statistics (SRCOS) and its Summer Research Conference (SRC) from 2005 through 2023. Their origin and evolution from 1966 through 2004 are described in an article by Taylor and Padgett (2006). The SRCOS was created to foster the advancement of statistics in the Southern Region of the United States via cooperation and collaboration between universities in the region. The primary and most visible activity of SRCOS is the SRC, which it created to fulfill a unique need for a small gathering of statisticians, biostatisticians and related scientists in the Southern Region. The goal of the SRC is to provide opportunities for young statisticians and biostatisticians (junior faculty and graduate students) to interact and engage with well-known senior researchers to enhance their research, networking, and career development.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Southern Regional Council on Statistics (SRCOS) Summer Research Conference (SRC) was initiated in a format similar to the well-known Gordon Research Conference ([www.grc.org/conferences](http://www.grc.org/conferences)). Locations for the SRC have ranged throughout the Southern Region, which included the following States: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia. Table 1 contains the location, dates and host of each SRC from 2005 through 2023.

The following quote is from the introductory statements of the *Purpose and General Comments* of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) Committee on Statistics (COS) in establishing the SREB 'Summer Conference on Statistics' in the mid-1960s and shows that the main purpose for such a conference still exists today.

“The field of statistics includes a wide spectrum of interests: vigorous abstract theory; varying philosophical or structural fundamental approaches to the subject; an extremely wide variety of applications in industrial and academic fields of research; research in new theory and methods with applications; problems of teaching rapidly changing material to differing groups of students. One method of bringing together such heterogeneous interests ...[is] by means of a leisurely and informal conference amid pleasant surroundings.”

Table 1. Location, Dates and Host of each SRCOS Summer Research Conference from 2005-2023

|      |                                                                                                |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2005 | Conference Center, Clemson, SC; June 5-8 (Clemson)                                             |
| 2006 | Inn of the Hills Hotel, Kerrville, TX; June 4-7 (Baylor)                                       |
| 2007 | Downtown Crowne Plaza Hotel, Richmond, VA; June 3-6 (Virginia Commonwealth)                    |
| 2008 | Embassy Suites Hotel, Charleston, SC; June 8-11 (MUSC)                                         |
| 2009 | Holiday Inn, Jekyll Island, GA; June 7-10 (Emory);                                             |
| 2010 | Virginia Beach Resort Hotel and Conference Center, Virginia Beach, VA; June 6-9 (Old Dominion) |
| 2011 | Hickory Knob State Park, McCormick, SC; June 5-8, (South Carolina)                             |
| 2012 | Holiday Inn, Jekyll Island, GA; June 3-6, (Emory)                                              |
| 2013 | Montgomery Bell State Park, Burns, TN; June 2-5, (Vanderbilt)                                  |
| 2014 | Grand Galvez Hotel, Galveston, TX; June 1-4, (Rice)                                            |
| 2015 | Courtyard by Marriott Hotel, Carolina Beach, NC; June 7-10 (UNC Wilmington)                    |
| 2016 | Double Tree Hotel, Bentonville, AK; June 5-8 (Missouri)                                        |
| 2017 | Villas by the Sea, Jekyll Island, GA; June 4-7 (Emory)                                         |
| 2018 | Virginia Beach Resort Hotel and Conference Center, Virginia Beach, VA; June 3-6 (Old Dominion) |
| 2019 | General Butler State Resort Park, Carrollton, KY; June 2-5 (Kentucky)                          |
| 2020 | Meeting Cancelled due to COVID-19                                                              |
| 2021 | Villas by the Sea, Jekyll Island, GA; October 3-7 (Emory)                                      |
| 2022 | Villas by the Sea, Jekyll Island, GA; October 2-5 (Emory)                                      |
| 2023 | Courtyard by Marriott Hotel, Waco, TX; June 12-15 (Baylor)                                     |

Although the SRC format has evolved over the years, its original spirit has been preserved. Young statisticians, biostatisticians and graduate students continue to be

given the opportunity to present an extended talk or a poster on their research and to interact in an unhurried and informal setting with more senior colleagues amid pleasant surroundings. Since all talks are invited, the quality of the sessions is excellent. It is traditional to have a “hospitality suite” open with soft drinks, water and snacks when no formal sessions are taking place. Sessions are held in the morning and early evenings, leaving afternoons free for attendees to meet informally in the hospitality suite or to enjoy some of the local attractions. Sometimes arrangements for playing golf, tennis, pickleball or hiking in the afternoons have been set up by the local host.

This article describes enhancements of the SRC including poster sessions for graduate students and young faculty, the SURE program for undergraduates, and an increasing emphasis on biostatistics.

## **SUMMER RESEARCH CONFERENCES**

### **1. POSTER SESSIONS**

To increase opportunities for graduate students to attend the SRC and present their research, a graduate student poster session was first introduced in 2000. Beginning in 2002, National Science Foundation grants have consistently funded travel costs for students who present posters. These travel awards are named to honor Boyd Harshbarger, a former Chair of the Department of Statistics at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Thanks to the continued support of the NSF, the student poster session has grown from the original three supported students in 2000 to regularly supporting 30 or more graduate students per year. In 2022 the NSF grant, combined with SRCOS support, funded 43 graduate students, each of whom presented a poster.

Graduate students who present a poster are eligible to win the Clint Miller Award, given to the student judged to have the Best Graduate Student Poster. This award honors Clint Miller, former Chair of the Department of Biostatistics at the Medical University of South Carolina, who was a long-time participant and supporter of SRCOS. Judges also identify one or two students to receive the R. L. Anderson Award, recognizing Honorable Mention posters. These awards honor R. L. Anderson, a former Chair of the

Department of Statistics at the University of Kentucky. The high quality of the research and posters has made judging very challenging.

All students who present a poster receive Boyd Harshbarger Travel Award certificates and travel funds. Those students chosen to receive the Clint Miller Award or an R. L. Anderson Award also receive additional certificates plus cash awards. Due to the popularity of the graduate student poster session, the total number of SRC attendees has doubled, going from an average of 45 attendees to an average of 90 attendees.

Figure 1 is a photo of the 2018 Boyd Harshbarger Travel Award recipients.

Figure 1: Recipients of Boyd Harshbarger Travel Award, 2018



In 2009, SRCOS introduced the Junior and Isolated Faculty poster session with the goal of allowing junior faculty and isolated faculty at smaller institutions the opportunity to participate in the conference. To support the travel of the faculty to the conference, Mike Kutner (a former Chair of the Department of Biostatistics at Emory University) and the American Statistical Association (ASA) have generously reimbursed the travel costs for those participating in the Junior and Isolated Faculty poster session. An investment of this type continues the SRCOS tradition of finding new financial support initiatives to improve the excellence in the statistical and biostatistical science arena. Typically, the Kutner/ASA Junior Faculty and Isolated Faculty poster session provides travel support for up to ten attendees per conference. Recipients are required to present their posters, and their posters are also judged with the best poster receiving the Kutner Award for the

Best Poster. All Kutner/ASA poster presenters receive certificates and travel support funding. The addition of this program has increased the average SRC attendance to approximately 100 attendees (excluding attendees in the undergraduate SURE program, described below). Figure 2 is a photo of the 2019 Mike Kutner/ASA Junior Faculty and Isolated Faculty recipients.

Figure 2: Recipients of Mike Kutner/ASA Travel Award, 2019



The addition of these two poster sessions has continued a long tradition of providing a unique format and opportunity for junior and isolated faculty and graduate students to explore new statistical concepts and practices. All students receiving Boyd Harshbarger Travel Awards and all faculty receiving Kutner/ASA Travel Awards are expected to attend the entire conference to optimize the time to interact and engage with other participants. Box or buffet lunches are provided after each of the poster sessions to encourage further discussion of the posters.

## **2. THE SURE PROGRAM**

With the success of the Boyd Harshbarger Travel Award for graduate students and the Mike Kutner/ASA Travel Award for isolated and junior faculty, SRCOS discussed ways to engage undergraduate students in the SRC, particularly students from under-represented or marginalized groups. This led to the Statistical Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE) program, designed to recruit under-represented students in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) field to participate in a two-day program that introduces statistical concepts and practice to encourage these students to consider graduate programs in statistics and biostatistics.

NSF encouraged SRCOS to add the SURE program to the SRC grant proposal for the 2019 meeting. The NSF support allowed SRCOS to run the SURE program concurrently with the SRC program. In the inaugural year a total of 38 students were recruited to attend the SURE program; see Figure 3 for a photo of the participants. The University of Kentucky provided the additional funding necessary to cover the support for all 38 students who applied. In 2022 there were 25 undergraduate students recruited that attended the SURE/SRCOS SRC with NSF funding. The NSF-funded SURE program now supports roughly 25 to 30 undergraduate students each year. The special opportunity for SURE students to interact with distinguished senior faculty is illustrated by the photo in Figure 4 of a lunch conversation with ASA President Kathy Ensor at the 2021 SRC.

## **SOUTHERN REGIONAL COUNCIL ON STATISTICS(SRCOS)**

To better achieve its mission, SRCOS has adapted to changes in the profession and society. As described above, it initiated poster sessions, travel support, and the SURE program to increase the pipeline of students into statistics and biostatistics careers and to assist networking and career development of young and isolated faculty. The value of these programs has been recognized by annual funding from the American Statistical Association and increased conference support by the National Science Foundation. Next, we describe recent initiatives and continuing activities of SRCOS that benefit the statistics community in the South and the nation.



Figure 3: Participants of the SURE Program 2019



Figure 4: Interactive session of the 2021 SURE Program participants with Dr. Kathy Ensor, ASA president and past SRCOS president.



## **1. INCLUSION OF MORE BIOSTATISTICS DEPARTMENTS**

In 2008-2009, SRCOS only had five Biostatistics Departments as members: namely, Emory University, Medical University of South Carolina, Johns Hopkins University,

University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, and Vanderbilt University. With the enormous growth of Biostatistics Departments in the Southern Region, SRCOS initiated a campaign to involve Biostatistics Departments to become members. In 2009 the cumbersome requirement of requiring universities to re-sign the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) every five years was eliminated. This policy change was followed by an organized effort of contacting statistics and biostatistics departments directly, inviting them to become SRCOS members. In addition, this made it possible for institutions with both a statistics department and a biostatistics department to have each unit participate in SRCOS as a member with full voting rights and privileges. SRCOS now has 46 voting members, 16 (35%) of which are Biostatistics Departments. The following universities in the Southern Region have both Statistics and Biostatistics Departments: Alabama, Arkansas, Duke, Florida, Georgia, Johns Hopkins, Kentucky, and South Carolina. Virtually all of these universities have both departments participate as full SRCOS members.

## **2. ANNUAL SRCOS BUSINESS MEETINGS**

The annual business meetings, chaired by the current President, are typically held in the fall on the campus of one of the member institutions. All member institutions/departments are expected to send a representative. The business meetings also allow non-voting observers to attend from institutions who are potentially interested in joining SRCOS. Table 2 contains the list of host institutions with dates for the annual SRCOS Business Meetings, 2005-2023.

The agenda for an annual business meeting includes planning for the SRCOS SRC conferences, a treasurer's report, 5-minute reports from the institutional representatives and the election of officers. The 5-minute reports provide valuable information while sharing success stories, best practices, as well as while providing other organizational insights. Important other issues such as data science, artificial intelligence, statistical education, and big data might also be discussed. It has been a tradition to end the Business Meeting with a bit of light-hearted humor reported by the Resolutions Committee.



Table 2. Location and Dates of SRCOS Business Meetings 2005-2023

|      |                                                                               |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2005 | Southern Methodist University, October 7-8                                    |
| 2006 | University of Kentucky, September 22-23                                       |
| 2007 | Emory University, October 5-6                                                 |
| 2008 | University of South Carolina, October 3-4                                     |
| 2009 | University of Missouri, October 16-17                                         |
| 2010 | Rice University October 8-9                                                   |
| 2011 | North Carolina State University, October 28-29                                |
| 2012 | Georgia Regents University (Augusta University), October 5-6                  |
| 2013 | Medical University of South Carolina, October 4-5                             |
| 2014 | Baylor University, October 3-4                                                |
| 2015 | University of Kentucky, September 25-26                                       |
| 2016 | Virginia Commonwealth University, October 7-8                                 |
| 2017 | University of Louisville, October 6-7                                         |
| 2018 | North Carolina State University Institute for Advanced Analytics, October 5-6 |
| 2019 | Augusta University, October 11-12                                             |
| 2020 | Meeting held by Zoom                                                          |
| 2021 | Jekyll Island, GA; October 2-3                                                |
| 2022 | Jekyll Island, GA; October 4-5                                                |
| 2023 | University of South Alabama; October 6-7                                      |

### 3. ELECTION OF SRCOS OFFICERS

The current organizational leadership is provided by four elected officers; namely, the President, the President-elect, the Secretary and the Treasurer. Officers are elected every other year, with the President-elect serving two years in that position. The President-elect is automatically elevated to President to serve a two-year term. Both the Secretary and Treasurer each serve two-year terms, with the option of re-election to each of these positions.

The four officers noted above plus ex officio members form the Executive Committee (EC). Typically, the EC is responsible for selecting the SRC program co-chairs at an Annual Business meeting. Then along with the President the three of them will put together the next SRC program. The list of those EC members who have served as SRCOS Presidents from 2005 through 2023 can be found in Table 3.

Table 3. Presidents of SRCOS

|           |                                                |
|-----------|------------------------------------------------|
| 2005      | Jack Tubbs, Baylor University                  |
| 2006-2007 | John Wierman, Johns Hopkins University         |
| 2008-2009 | Michael Kutner, Emory University               |
| 2010-2011 | D'Arcy Mays, Virginia Commonwealth University  |
| 2012-2013 | Don Edwards, University of South Carolina      |
| 2014-2015 | Jane Harvill, Baylor University                |
| 2016-2017 | Elizabeth Slate, Florida State University      |
| 2018-2019 | Arnold Stromberg, University of Kentucky       |
| 2020-2021 | Lori Thombs, University of Missouri            |
| 2022-2023 | Edward Boone, Virginia Commonwealth University |

Most SRCOS Presidents stay involved in SRCOS after their terms end. The continued participation and support of former officers and institutional representatives has kept SRCOS to be a vibrant organization for many years. This loyalty to SRCOS has continued to play a significant role for statistics and biostatistics institutional programs in the southern region. Many of these leaders have made SRCOS an integral part of their professional careers, helping to make SRCOS a more stable organization. Furthermore, SRCOS participation has helped prepare SRCOS representatives and officers to achieve more prominent leadership positions in academia, ASA and NSF. Recent examples include Kathy Ensor (Rice), Sastry Pantula (NC State) and Brani Vidakovic (Texas A&M).

#### **4. PAUL MINTON SERVICE AWARD**

The Paul Minton Service Award, established by SRCOS in 1992, continues to recognize valuable contributions that statisticians and biostatisticians in the Southern Region have made to their discipline and to SRCOS. The selection criteria include contributions to statistical education, promotion of the use of statistics, SRCOS activity, and service to professional organizations. The first recipient of the service award was Paul Minton himself, former representative of Southern Methodist University and Virginia Commonwealth University. Figure 5 shows Mike Kutner, Chair of the Awards Committee in 1992, presenting the inaugural award to Paul Minton. Table 4 lists the recent recipients honored to receive the Paul Minton Service Award (2005 -2023).

Table 4. Paul Minton Service Award Recipients

|      |                                                                                |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2005 | Tom Bratcher – Baylor University                                               |
| 2006 | Dick Kryscio – University of Kentucky                                          |
| 2007 | Bill Wilson – North Florida University                                         |
| 2008 | Jack Tubbs – University of Arkansas/Baylor University                          |
| 2009 | Bill Schucany – Southern Methodist University                                  |
| 2010 | Tom Gerig – North Carolina State University                                    |
| 2011 | Herman Senter – Clemson University                                             |
| 2012 | John Wierman – Johns Hopkins University                                        |
| 2013 | D’Arcy Mays – Virginia Commonwealth University                                 |
| 2013 | Dan Solomon – North Carolina State University                                  |
| 2014 | Katherine Ensor – Rice University                                              |
| 2015 | Don Edwards – University of South Carolina                                     |
| 2016 | Sastry Pantula – North Carolina State University/Oregon State University       |
| 2017 | Jane Harvill – Baylor University/Mississippi State University                  |
| 2018 | Edward Boone – Virginia Commonwealth University                                |
| 2019 | James Thompson, Rice University                                                |
| 2020 | Arnold Stromberg, University of Kentucky                                       |
| 2021 | Lori Thombs, University of Missouri/University of South Carolina               |
| 2022 | Elizabeth Slate, Florida State University/Medical University of South Carolina |
| 2023 | To Be Announced                                                                |

## **FUTURE OF SRCOS AND SUMMER RESEARCH CONFERENCES**

The SRCOS Summer Research Conferences have provided valuable contributions to the statistical profession. The value of the enhancements during the 2005 to 2023 period have been recognized by generous financial support from SRCOS member institutions, the National Science Foundation, the American Statistical Association, the National Institute of Statistical Sciences (an annual co-sponsor), and Mike Kutner. Thanks to this support, the current level of activities has a stable financial base for continuing these activities and expanding them in the future. The SRC has an increasing national impact, with a growing number of attendees from outside the Southern Region. This has been reflected by inviting prominent plenary speakers from throughout the nation, including Dennis Cook and Chris Nachtsheim from Minnesota,

Xiao-Li Meng and Susan Murphy from Harvard, Rod Little and Naisyin Wang from Michigan, and Terry Therneau from the Mayo Clinic. SRCOS will continue to explore ways to make the Summer Research Conference experience as professionally beneficial and enjoyable as possible. Plans are underway for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary SRC in 2025 to be held at the Villas by the Sea, Jekyll Island, Georgia, with all interested statisticians, biostatisticians, and data scientists encouraged to join the celebration.

Figure 5: Mike Kutner Presenting the Inaugural Minton Award to Paul Minton in 1992



## REFERENCES

Guidelines for the Operation of the SRCOS Annual Meeting <http://www.srcos.org>

Guidelines for the Operation of the SRCOS Summer Research Conference  
<http://www.srcos.org>

Taylor, R. L. and Padgett, W. J. (2006) The summer research conferences and the SRCOS: a historical perspective. *Journal of Statistical Computation and Simulation*, 76:5. 373—383.