Alumni Profile
Steven Kim – Statistics PhD Program

Career

Please provide a brief overview of your career path since graduating from UCI.

After completing the Ph.D. program of Statistics at UCI, I have been as a tenure-track faculty member (Assistant Professor of Statistics) in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics at California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB). I work for undergraduate statistics education (developing and offering statistics courses), and I conduct statistical research and interdisciplinary research with collaborators in environmental studies, marine science, plant science and agriculture, geriatric psychiatry, and kinesiology. Occasionally I have provided statistical consulting for my current institution and local organizations.

What made you get into the career that you are in?

While I was in the Ph.D. program, I received a high quality education from the professors in the Department of Statistics. I wanted to share the statistics education I received for my next generation. Near the end of the Ph.D. program, I had an interview with CSUMB, and this university was planning to develop a new B.S. program in Statistics. I would like to contribute to this new program by developing a rigorous curriculum, designing useful statistics courses, and providing undergraduate research opportunities based on the education I received at UCI. (I love statistics, school, and hardworking undergraduate students. Where else can I go?)

Your Time at UCI

When did you attend UCI?

I attended UCI between 2010 and 2015 and between 2003 and 2007.

What program were you in?

I was in the Ph.D. program of Statistics for 2010 – 2015 and the B.S. program of Mathematics for 2003 – 2007.

Why did you choose to come to UCI?

When I first became an Anteater as an undergraduate student in 2003, I did not consider seriously about my future career. As a first-generation student and an immigrant, I was not knowledgeable about how to choose a right university for myself. When I was accepted as a

graduate student in 2010, I had a more logical reason to choose UCI graduate school. Among other statistics programs I could choose, the faculty members in the Department of Statistics were most passionate about their research and education, and they had most diverse research areas. At that point, I was not certain what would be my research topic, but I felt that the department had professional and friendly environments, so I wanted to be a part of this community. On the visiting day, my advisor (Dr. Daniel Gillen) introduced his research areas, and I was attracted by his knowledge and kindness. Though I experienced a Ph.D. program only once in my life, I am confident that I made the best choice.

Reflections

What made you decide to pursue a graduate degree?

After receiving a B.S. degree in Mathematics at UCI, I was not still confident about my ability. I was not sure how my mathematical background could be meaningfully used in my career. I thought that I need a higher level of education in order to make positive contributions to our society.

Was there one thing or one person at UCI that really helped or made a difference in your graduate/postdoctoral career? If so, tell us about whomever or what it was?

All faculty and staff members in the Department of Statistics helped my graduate career. If I have to choose the most influencing person in my career, it would be Dr. Daniel Gillen. He taught me statistics in various perspectives, and I learned from him how to communicate statistical ideas with people in other areas and at different levels. When I work at CSUMB, I often ask myself "How would he explain this statistical concept to undergraduate students?" and "Which statistical methods(s) would he implement in order to address my collaborator's research question?" At CSUMB, his lectures are being reproduced at an undergraduate level, and I am working hard to provide a high quality of statistics education as I received from him and all professors at UCI.

Alumni Life

What advice would you give to a current graduate student as they look towards their future careers?

I have two pieces of advice for current graduate students. First, I believe that one's education is to benefit a whole, our society. While you are a graduate student, I think it is worth to ask yourself "How can I return my education to our society after graduation?" Second, when you apply for a position, express how much you are interested in and knowledgeable about the company/institution. Fit yourself to the applying position, not the other way. When I served as a reviewer of about 200 applications, it was easy to tell whether an applicant wants the position or the position wants this applicant.

What was your biggest obstacle transitioning from life of a graduate student to your career?

When I was a graduate student, most of my duties were fixed (e.g., course work and Ph.D. dissertation). As a faculty member in a university, many duties can be created at random basis in various ways. In addition, life after graduation is more diverse than my own discipline. When

I was a statistics student, I was free to use any statistical notation (heavy symbols) to demonstrate my ideas to professors and classmates. When I work with my current students and collaborators, I cannot. Knowing statistical theory and methodology is not enough in an interdisciplinary environment. I am still working on my communication skills to be a better statistics educator and collaborator.

How do you balance work/life?

From Monday to Friday, I work hard, but I do not miss family dinner (except for rare occasions). I sometimes need to spend an extra hour at night after my two children go to bed (grading, reviewing my lecture note, etc.). On Saturday and Sunday, I try my best to rest as hard as I can with my wife and children. I am not confident claim that I am doing a good job of balancing work and life, but I am happy because I love both workplace and home.