July 24, 2025

Dr. Joshua Colwell
Interim Dean
College of Sciences
University of Central Florida
CC10115 Dean's Office – Academic Administration
Orlando, FL 32816

Dear Dean Colwell,

On behalf of the American Statistical Association (ASA), I am writing to express my strong support for maintaining the Department of Statistics and Data Science at the University of Central Florida (UCF) as an **independent academic unit**, rather than merging it into the Department of Mathematics.

Across the United States, statistics has emerged as a standalone discipline that plays a unique and vital role in the modern data economy. While mathematics and statistics share common foundations, the two fields have diverged substantially in their methodologies, research priorities, and professional identities. Statistics, combined with data science, serves as a cornerstone for addressing challenges in healthcare, engineering, economics, environmental sciences, AI, and national security—areas where rigorous statistical methodology and computational tools are essential for discovery and decision-making.

The national demand for statistical and data science expertise continues to grow at an extraordinary pace. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, jobs for statisticians and data scientists are projected to grow by over **30% between 2022 and 2032**, significantly outpacing the average growth rate for all occupations. *U.S. News & World Report* ranks statistician among the **Top 30 Best Jobs**, including **#10 in Best Business Jobs** and **#16 in Best STEM Jobs**. The number of U.S. undergraduates earning degrees in statistics has increased more than six-fold since 2010, with over **5,400 bachelor's degrees awarded in 2022** and the number of institutions offering such programs nearly doubling over the same period (from 95 to 180). These trends reflect the central role of statistics and data science in today's workforce.

Merging Statistics and Data Science into a mathematics department risks diminishing its visibility, identity, and ability to respond strategically to this rapidly expanding demand. Preserving its independence will enable the department to:

- Expand academic programs to prepare UCF students for the explosive growth in data-intensive careers across industries;

- Recruit and retain top-tier faculty whose professional and research identities align with statistics and data science;

- Strengthen partnerships with industry, government, and interdisciplinary collaborators, where statistical and computational expertise is a key driver of innovation.

The ASA Board recently underscored the importance of statistics in the era of data science and artificial intelligence in its formal statement, *The Role of Statistics in Data Science and AI*. Maintaining UCF's Department of Statistics and Data Science as an independent unit reflects this reality and aligns UCF with the organizational structures at many leading research universities nationwide.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the University of Central Florida to preserve the **independence of the Department of Statistics and Data Science**. Doing so will ensure the department continues to thrive, serve UCF students, and contribute to the university's mission of advancing education, research, and economic development in the state of Florida and beyond.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ji-Hyun Lee, DrPH
President, American Statistical Association