Mississippi State University
College of Business and Industry
Dividends
Growth & Advancement
Joe Sullivan is the kind of professor who makes a statistics class actually enjoyable, in part because of his wit and compassion for students. Another part is his teaching style. And part is his mastery of the subject matter.

Perhaps some of Sullivan’s ability to relate to students is that he has found himself in the role of student himself fairly regularly. He holds a bachelor’s, two master’s and two doctoral degrees in the areas of math, electrical engineering, finance, and statistics. He managed to complete most of his degrees while working full time. He notes that he was “just following his interests.”

“With his previous work experience at AT&T, Bell Labs, Texas Instruments, and Booz Allen Hamilton, Joe makes statistics practical, relevant, and clear; heightening student involvement,” says Brian Engelland, chair of the Marketing, Quantitative Analysis, and Business Law Department. “Students regularly rate his teaching as ‘outstanding’ on course evaluations.”

STUDENT PRAISE OF SULLIVAN IS INDEED NOT UNCOMMON.

“I had a lot of anxiety about being able to succeed in such a difficult class after so much time had elapsed,” former master’s student Karen Goodwin remarks about enrolling in her first statistics class after being out of school for several years. “Dr. Sullivan went the extra mile to help me understand, finding new ways to explain and demonstrate concepts when I was still confused and even helping me remediate some forgotten mathematics skills. As long as I was willing to give the effort, he was willing to do whatever it took to help me learn and succeed.”

Sullivan does not teach from the standard classroom statistical software which would be simpler for him to use, but opts to use Microsoft Excel because of a very practical consideration – it is what his students will be using in their future workplaces.

Dr. Mark Schmidt, assistant professor at St. Cloud State University, received his Ph.D. from MSU. He recalls seeking Sullivan’s advice on conducting logistic regression analysis only to find out he did not have the correct software on his computer.

“He [Sullivan] said, ‘That’s no problem. We can do that in Excel.’ He then proceeded to write formulas by hand to do logistic regression in Excel. His advanced statistical knowledge and advanced Excel knowledge was very impressive.”

Sullivan’s acumen has earned him many accolades, among which are editorship of the Journal of Quality Technology, the MSU Alumni Association Award for Outstanding Graduate Level Teaching, the COBI Award for Graduate Teaching and also for Outstanding Research, and the MSU Office of Research Award for the College of Business & Industry.

“Graduate surveys reveal that our master’s and doctoral graduates possess very strong statistical and methodological skills, and this achievement is primarily the result of this one professor,” says Engelland.

Ph.D. student Kirk Ring sums it up well. “I worked hard and truly learned the material, but that would not have been possible without Dr. Sullivan’s continued support and assistance.”