Burkardt Consulting Center – FAQ

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Services

What services are offered by the BCC?

The services we provide include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- Assistance in formulation of research questions to which statistical methods are applicable.
- Planning at the sampling or data collection phase of a study.
- Advice on statistical methods and statistical software.
- Data analysis and/or explanation of analysis results.
- Assistance in writing up results and/or preparing for a presentation.
- Statistical seminars on a particular statistical topic.
- Mathematical modelling (typically "farmed out" to Mathematics faculty within the Department)

Who may request the services of the BCC? How do I request the services of the BCC?

We accept requests from students, faculty, and staff of NKU. We also accept requests from businesses and other entities in the Northern Kentucky region and beyond.

To make a request, navigate to the Request Our Services link and fill out our consultation request form. The more information you are able to provide, the better we will likely to be able to assist you.

I already have some training in statistics and usually perform my own statistical analyses in my research. How can the BCC help me?

While many faculty and students at NKU have some training in statistics, we find that most projects can benefit from a thorough review by a professional statistician. In 1-2 hours, we can generally provide a brief review of your study design and/or analysis plans. We can often make suggestions that may help improve your statistical technique and also your chances of publication. And because the first three hours of service are free, there is often no charge for this review!

Does the BCC provide tutoring for NKU courses?

No, we do not. Please refer to http://lap.nku.edu/mathcenter.html for tutoring services for STA 113, 205, 212, or 250 (as well as many MAT courses).

Does the BCC provide data management?

We can suggest strategies for data management, but we do not write data management programs. We do have a relationship with the Center for Applied Informatics (http://cai.nku.edu/) through which we may be able to assist you with this need.

Does the BCC provide data entry services?

The BCC typically does not provide data entry services. On occasions where we agree to do this, the $40 fee would be applied to the entirety of time spent entering data (with no discount).

We can provide as part of our services an Excel template to help you with data entry, and in fact we encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity. We will set up the format for the file, type in column headings, and provide data entry safeguards to minimize typos.

Also, during analysis we will do the best we can to check for data entry errors. But please realize that there may be mistakes that we cannot possibly detect; so it is important for you to verify your data entry.

Hours and Procedures

When is the BCC open during the year?

We are typically open full-time during the academic year when classes are in session (late August thru early May). We may not be open during NKU breaks, although we typically try to at least keep up with e-mail communications during those times. During the summer sessions we are usually open part time and will do the best we can to accommodate you.

Does the BCC take walk-ins?

Because our schedules are varied, most of our work with clients is by appointment. You are welcome to drop by (or call) unannounced but should be aware that we may not be able to provide immediate assistance unless all you need is some quick advice. Clients with projects new to the center are always expected to fill out the consultation request form.

Does the BCC fulfill all submitted requests?

No – due to staff limitations, we may not be able to take all projects even when they are within the scope of the center. When this occurs, we offer clients a position in the wait-list. Projects deemed to be outside the scope of our services will be declined.

Does the BCC charge for its services?

Yes, all services incur a charge of $40 per hour. New projects are given a $120 discount (meaning that the first three hours of a project are free). This will generally be enough to cover the initial meeting and some basic analysis. More complex analyses are likely to incur a fee. After the initial meeting, if it seems likely that your project would exceed 3 hours, we will provide an estimate indicating how much time we think it might take.

How is my request for services followed up?

After we receive your request for a consultation, you will generally be contacted by email or phone within 1-3 business days (if you don't, please feel free to send a follow-up email to bcc@nku.edu). If your request falls within the scope of BCC services, we may do one or more of the following depending on its complexity:

- Begin handling your request by email/phone (if it is simple).
- Schedule an initial consultation meeting to discuss your project (if the request is complex or we will be substantially involved in the analysis).
- Assign the project to a consulting team generally consisting of a student consultant and a faculty mentor. Both generally play key roles in a project.
- Postpone consultation because of time constraints and place you on a waiting list if desired.

If the request is outside the scope of the center or if current staffing has insufficient expertise in the requested area, we will decline the consultation. If possible we will try to refer you to someone else on campus who might help.

How do I request a seminar on a statistical topic?

Please contact Dr. Nolan directly at nolanj1@nku.edu.

The Initial Consultation

How long is the initial consultation and am I charged for that time?

The length varies, but typically ranges from 30 minutes to 60 minutes. This time will be part of the initial 3 hours which our clients receive free of charge. Eventual consulting on the project exceeding 3 hours will be billed at a rate of $40 per hour.

What is needed for an initial consultation meeting?

Ideally **prior to the initial meeting**, please provide us with as much information as you can regarding your project. Much of this should be given when you fill out the service request form. If you have preliminary ideas on how you will collect data, it is useful for us to hear about those before the meeting. Or if you already have data, it can also be useful for us to have seen that prior to the initial meeting (please make sure to remove personal identifiers before sending it to us).

At the initial meeting, our goals will be to identify your research goals and the ways in which we can help you meet them. It will help if you are prepared to:

- Briefly describe your problem
- Discuss your research goals (what questions do you hope to answer?)
- Discuss variables that you plan to measure and analyze
- Discuss your progress with the project to date
- Determine what types of assistance we may be able to provide.

Most importantly, please feel free to ask a lot of questions! If you don't understand something, please ask. We will do the same of you. We are not experts in your field, so we may need to ask you several questions in order to understand the project.

Procedure After Initial Consultation

What happens after the initial meeting?

If we are able to accept your project, we'll continue to work on it (see "how is my request for services followed up") and will be in frequent communication with you regarding that work. As work progresses, we may schedule additional meetings as needed for clarification and/or explanation of results.

What should I do if I modify my study after the initial consultation?

Let us know what change(s) you have made, however small they seem to be. You can do that with a simple e-mail message. Even the smallest modification can lead to a major change in the way your data should be collected. We may be able to handle the modifications through e-mail, or perhaps we will need to schedule an additional meeting. If you change your research topic completely, please fill out another consultation request form on our website.

When I submit a dataset for analysis, what should it look like?

It can be a substantial time (and cost) saver if your data is submitted in a ready-to-analyze form. In most situations this means a single EXCEL spreadsheet in which columns represent variables to be analyzed and rows represent single observations. We can assist you in developing the form of the spreadsheet.

How long does it take to finish the analysis?

This varies substantially from client to client. It depends on the complexity of the analysis, how many projects we are working on at the same time, how clean your data is (i.e., free of data entry errors), and how many consultants we have working in the BCC at that time. Generally speaking please allow up to 6 weeks (exclusive of university breaks) from initial request to the point in time at which you need things to be done.

What does the final report look like?

This depends in large part on the nature of your request. Often, a report including the results is created (typically in a Microsoft Word document) and e-mailed to you as an attachment. It is typical for us to give you more analysis than you will actually need to include in a manuscript. In addition to the analysis, we will try to provide you with details of the statistical interpretation. It will be up to you to decide what parts are most relevant and interesting.

Will you assist in writing a manuscript for journal submission?

Generally, yes – we can assist with the statistical parts of a manuscript. However if our assistance is substantial, then co-authorship should be offered. A note for graduate students: we typically will not assist in writing of a thesis or dissertation (beyond the report described above) unless your faculty research coordinator gives us permission to do so.

Will you go over the analysis with me to help me understand it? Can I contact you again later to ask questions?

We will certainly do that by request. We can either set up another face-to-face meeting (or phone conference) to go over the results. We can also answer questions by email.

Sometimes after you have a chance to think about the analysis and results, you may find that you have additional questions or you would like additional analyses. Please don't hesitate to ask questions. All of the faculty members who work in the BCC are also teachers, so we are used to answering such questions, and we really enjoy this "teaching" aspect of the consultation process. Please feel free to contact us. We are happy to help.

What computer software is used for analysis?

We typically use SPSS for Windows, SAS, Minitab, StatCrunch and/or R to analyze data. We try to accommodate the preferences of a client when it is reasonable to do so.

How do I acknowledge the BCC when publishing my work?

Please review our acknowledgement document. It is important to properly acknowledge the contributions of the BCC when you publish your work.

Other General Questions

Why are students involved in working on my project and how will correct results be ensured?

The BCC serves as an important training ground for our students to gain experience in statistical consulting. Students always work under the guidance of a faculty mentor in order to ensure quality of work. That faculty mentor will have carefully reviewed your final report before it is sent.

I am a student at NKU. How do I apply to become a student consultant?

Generally, the minimum qualification to become a student consultant is to have completed at least one of our applied statistics courses at the 300 level. Applications for Fall are generally accepted in late Spring. As needed, applications for Spring may be solicited in October. Because there are a limited number of openings, the application process is competitive. Students are chosen based on their application materials and an interview process. Contact Dr. Nolan (nolanj1@nku.edu) for further information.

Statistical Links

UCLA Statistical Consulting Seminars http://www.ats.ucla.edu/stat/seminars/

http://www.ats.ucla.edu/stat/