* * BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH * *

Paul D. Minton, Ph.D.

(August 4, 1918 – July 10, 2007)

Dr. Paul Dixon Minton earned a bachelor's and master's degree from Southern Methodist University (SMU), a school to which he would return later to found and direct a Department of Statistics. His studies, interrupted by World War II, were during the time he worked as a cryptanalyst for the FBI. Following the war, he returned to Dallas as an instructor and graduate student at SMU in the Department of Mathematics. He took an introduction to probability and statistics by Edwin Mouzon, who wrote a dissertation on statistics at the University of Illinois. After completing his master's degree, Dr. Minton was encouraged by Mouzon to continue his graduate studies in the new program in statistics at The University of North Carolina (UNC), Chapel Hill. Dr. Minton earned a Ph.D. in statistics from North Carolina State University (NCSU) under the tutelage of Gertrude Cox, during the time the Institute of Statistics of the Greater University of North Carolina consisted of the Department of Mathematical Statistics at UNC Chapel Hill and the Department of Experimental Statistics at NCSU in Raleigh.

Dr. Minton returned once again to SMU and began to build a set of courses in mathematical and applied statistics for students from a wide range of subject-matter departments in the university. These offerings gradually evolved into the formation of the Department of Statistics at SMU, now known as the Department of Statistical Science. At the same time, Dr. Minton began to recognize the importance of computing in statistics, and because he his expressed opinions, he was assigned to direct the first computer center at SMU, which housed the Univac 1103, one of the few large scientific computers available at the time. Funded primarily by a training grant from the National Institutes of Health for training biostatisticians, Dr. Minton established a new Department of Statistics at SMU in 1962. It was significant in obtaining faculty approval of the new department that he had provided research consultation in either statistics or computing—or both—to every department in the university. The new department offered masters and doctoral degrees following the North Carolina model and received consultation and assistance from Gertrude Cox. The department subsequently expanded to offer degrees at all levels, to provide consultative assistance to faculty research and outside clients, and to conduct research in statistical theory and methods.

After 10 years of developing and administering the SMU department, Dr. Minton moved to Richmond, Virginia, to take the position of Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at Virginia Commonwealth University in 1972. There, in addition to his duties as Dean, Dr. Minton formed an Institute of Statistics—a form of liaison office between the Department of Mathematical Sciences in the School of Arts and Sciences and the Department of Biostatistics in the Medical College of Virginia. He also was active in statistical consulting in local industry. Dr. Minton was the recipient of numerous academic and professional awards, including a Fellow of the American Statistical Association (ASA) and being an early recipient of the ASA Founders Award for service to the association and the profession. In his honor, the SMU Statistics Department created the Paul Minton Award for the student who scores highest on the basic qualifying examination. The Southern Regional Council on Statistics created the Paul Minton Service Award, given annually since 1992. He founded the North Texas Chapter of the ASA. Later, he was very active with the Virginia Academy of Sciences (the Virginia Chapter of the ASA) and in organizing the Southern Regional Conferences on Statistics. He participated in numerous committees, task forces, councils, and boards, and he served one term as Vice President of the ASA.

On the lighter side, he entertained audiences with humorous statistical lyrics to well-known songs. These became another way for Dr. Minton to be an advocate for statistics and promote the profession to a wider world with a gentle temperament. He changed the lives of hundreds, if not thousands of statistical students, just as he changed the lives of many others who knew him outside the profession.

References:

Brock, DB, "Building a Department", AMSTATNews, September 2008, p. 13-14.