

# Susan VanderPlas

## Curriculum Vitae

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### Education

2011–15

**Doctor of Philosophy in Statistics**, *Iowa State University*.

2009–2011

**Master of Science in Statistics**, *Iowa State University*.

2005–2009

**Bachelor of Science**, *Texas A&M University*.

Major: Psychology and Applied Mathematical Sciences (Statistics), Minor: Neuroscience

### Professional Experience

2018

**Research Assistant Professor**, *Center for Statistics and Applications in Forensic Evidence*, *Iowa State University*.

Developed an analysis pipeline to process thousands of shoeprint images, in order to identify important features, examine wear over time, and assess methods for automatic identification of shoeprint matches.

2015  
2018

**Statistical Analyst**, *Nebraska Public Power District*.

Conducted analyses to improve NPPD's data-driven decision making, including analysis of safety, profitability, and reliability data.

- Worked with IT and Strategic Management to develop a plan for analytics/data science maturity at NPPD.
- Designed a mentoring program to train individuals as embedded data scientists to increase the ability of NPPD to effectively utilize data.
- Modeled employee turnover to identify individuals likely to retire or resign.
- Established automated statistical monitoring of plant conditions, department turnover, and human performance errors.
- Predicted likely direction of tornadoes based on location and topological factors to establish the risk of tornado guided missile debris damaging critical equipment.
- Evaluated the risk of climate fluctuations on operational readiness.
- Identified site conditions statistically associated with water accumulation in radiation detectors at a nuclear plant.
- Improved engineering margin in thermal limits management in a nuclear reactor core.

2018

**Part-Time Statistical Analyst**, *Nebraska Public Power District*.

Provided individual mentoring and project leadership to continue the Business Intelligence Embedded Agent program and provide support for R-related projects.

2015

**Postdoc**, *Iowa State University*, Ames, IA.

Office of the Vice President for Research

- Evaluated faculty funding start-up packages to explore links between start-up funding and future productivity.
- Explored natural variation and underlying trends in grant receipts across Iowa State over a 20 year period.

2014

**Consultant.**

Developed web applications, interactive data displays, and statistical analyses for clients including the Iowa Soybean Association and Iowa State USDA Extension office.

[Example 1: Nitrogen Deficiency in Corn](#), [Example 2: Crop Yield Forecast](#)

## Research Interests

**STATISTICAL  
GRAPHICS AND  
VISUALIZATION**

- Visual Inference
- Human Perception
- Interactive Graphics
- Graphics for “Big” Data

**DATA SCIENCE**

- Data Mining
- Pattern Recognition

## Publications

- Submitted (2018) **Susan VanderPlas**, Ryan Goluch, and Heike Hofmann. Framed! reproducing 150 year old plots. *Journal of Computational and Graphical Statistics*, Submitted (2018).
- 2017 **Susan VanderPlas** and Heike Hofmann. Clusters beat trend!? testing feature hierarchy in statistical graphics. *Journal of Computational and Graphical Statistics*, 26(2):231–242, 2017.
- Lindsay Rutter, **Susan VanderPlas**, Dianne Cook, and Michelle Graham. ggeanealogy: An R package for visualizing genealogical data. *Journal of Statistical Software*, 2017.
- Heike Hofmann and **Susan VanderPlas**. All of this has happened before. all of this will happen again: Data science. *Journal of Computational and Graphical Statistics*, 26(4):775–778, 2017.
- 2016 **Susan VanderPlas** and Heike Hofmann. Spatial reasoning and data displays. *IEEE Transactions on Visualization and Computer Graphics*, 2016.
- 2015 **Susan VanderPlas** and Heike Hofmann. Signs of the sine illusion - why we need to care. *Journal of Computational and Graphical Statistics*, 24(4):1170–1190, 2015.
- 2010 Fadi Towfic, **Susan VanderPlas**, Casey A Oliver, Oliver Couture, Christopher K Tuggle, M Heather West Greenlee, and Vasant Honavar. Detection of gene orthology from gene co-expression and protein interaction networks. *BMC bioinformatics*, 11(Suppl 3):S7, 2010.

- 2009 Rachel Hull, Heather Bortfeld, and **Susan Koons**. Near-infrared spectroscopy and cortical responses to speech production. *The open neuroimaging journal*, 3:26, 2009.
- In Progress **Visual Inference for Bayesians** An examination of two-target statistical lineups as visual Bayes Factor analogs.
- Context Mediated Graph Perception** User Study of the influence of contextual information and expertise on the perception of polar plots used to display information in a compass-like setting.

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## Teaching Experience

### Teaching Assistant

Spring 2013

**Statistical Methods for Research**, *Iowa State University Stat Dept.*, Ames, IA. Held office hours and graded labs and tests for Stat 401, a class composed primarily of graduate engineering students.

2012  
2013

**Introduction to Business Statistics II**, *Iowa State University Stat Dept.*, Ames, IA.

Taught undergraduate business students statistical methods and use of JMP statistical software. Responsibilities included holding office hours and evening help sessions, developing lab materials, managing the course website on Blackboard, and grading labs, homework, and tests.

2011

**Statistical Methods for Research**, *Iowa State University Stat Dept.*, Ames, IA.

Taught graduate social science students statistical methods and use of SAS statistical software. Responsibilities included teaching lab sessions, creating lab materials, holding office hours and grading homework and lab materials.

2011

**Empirical Methods for Comp. Sci.**, *Iowa State University Stat Dept.*, Ames, IA.

Held office hours and graded homework for Stat 430, a class composed of graduate bioinformatics and computer science students.

### Other

2017

**Business Intelligence Embedded Agent Program**, *Nebraska Public Power District*, Columbus, NE.

Designed a program to mentor NPPD employees, providing instruction in data science and opportunities to apply new skills within the company. One-on-one and group mentoring sessions were used to create a sense of community and to reinforce skills learned through online courses.

2017

**R Course Instructor**, *Nebraska Public Power District*, Columbus, NE.

Taught a 3-day internal course on using R for data analysis, including use of ggplot2, dplyr, tidyr, knitr, and stringr.

2013  
2014

**R Course Instructor**, *Iowa State University Stat Dept.*, Ames, IA.

Designed and conducted workshops to teach R skills to the members of the university and local business community. Workshop topics included an introduction to R, ggplot2, data management with plyr, reshape2, and stringr, package development, document creation with knitr, linear models, and creating web applets with Shiny.

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## Presentations

2017

**A Bayesian Approach to Visual Inference**, *JSM Contributed Session*.

2016

**Clusters Beat Trend!? Testing Feature Hierarchy in Statistical Graphics**, *JSM Contributed Session*.

2015

**Visual Aptitude and Statistical Graphics**, *InfoVis*.

2015

**Animint: Interactive Web-Based Animations Using Ggplot2's Grammar of Graphics**, *JSM Invited Session*.

2015

**Animint: Interactive, Web-Ready Graphics with R**, *Great Plains R User Group*.

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2014

**The curse of three dimensions: Why your brain is lying to you**, *JSM Student Paper Award Session*.

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2014

**Do You See What I See? Using Shiny for User Testing**, *JSM Panel*.

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2013

**Signs of the Sine Illusion – why we need to care**, *JSM Contributed Session*.

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## Service

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2017

**Graphics Section Representative to the Council of Sections**, ASA.

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## Theses

### Dissertation

Title *The Perception of Statistical Graphics*

Committee Dr. Heike Hofmann (Chair), Dr. Dianne Cook, Dr. Sarah Nusser, Dr. Max Morris, Dr. Erin McDonald, Dr. Stephen Gilbert

Abstract Research on statistical graphics and visualization generally focuses on new types of graphics, new software to create graphics, interactivity, and usability studies. Our ability to interpret and use statistical graphics hinges on the interface between the graph itself and the brain that perceives and interprets it, and there is substantially less research on the interplay between graph, eye, brain, and mind than is sufficient to understand the nature of these relationships. This dissertation further explores the interplay between a static graph, the translation of that graph from paper to mental representation (the journey from eye to brain), and the mental processes that operate on that graph once it is transferred into memory (mind). Understanding the perception of statistical graphics will allow researchers to create more effective graphs which produce fewer distortions and viewer errors while reducing the cognitive load necessary to understand the information presented in the graph.

### MS Creative Component

Title *Nonparametric statistical analysis of Atom Probe Tomography spectra*

Committee Dr. Alyson Wilson (Chair), Dr. Alicia Carriquiry, Dr. Krishna Rajan

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## Research Projects

### Perception of Statistical Graphics

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2015

**Independent Research**, Auburn, NE.

Designed and analyzed experiments to understand human perception of statistical graphics and optimized graphics to clearly communicate statistical results.

- Hierarchy of Graphical Features: Which features of statistical graphics dominate the perceptual experience? Do colored points matter more than trend lines? ([Paper](#))
- Reproducibility of Plots in the 1870 Statistical Atlas ([Paper](#))
- Bayesian Analysis of Statistical Lineups ([Working Project](#))

2012–2015

### **PhD Research, Iowa State University, Ames, IA.**

Designed and analyzed experiments to understand human perception of statistical graphics and optimized graphics to clearly communicate statistical results.

- The [Sine Illusion](#) in Statistical Graphics: How does this common illusion effect the information we take in from graphs?
  - Won the ASA Student Paper Award (2014) for the Graphics Section ([Paper](#))
  - Created Shiny applets to [demonstrate the illusion](#) and [test it's effect](#).
- Statistical Graphics and Visual Aptitude: How are spatial reasoning abilities related to the ability to read statistical graphics? ([Paper](#))
- Hierarchy of Graphical Features: Which features of statistical graphics dominate the perceptual experience? Do colored points matter more than trend lines? ([Paper](#))

## **Visualization of Genetics Data**

2013  
2015

### **Research Assistant, USDA Soybean Genome Project, Iowa State University, Ames, IA.**

- Analyzed large quantities of soybean genetics data to identify inheritance, important genes, single nucleotide polymorphisms, and copy number variation.
- Created interactive applets presenting the data and appropriate graphics designed to encourage exploration of the results by biologists.
- Assembled a database of known soybean parantage to facilitate further research, and created an interactive applet to display the lineage of any variety in the database.

Advisor: Dr. Dianne Cook, Dr. Michelle Graham

## **Software Development**

2013  
2014

### **Statistics Teaching Applets, Iowa State University, Ames, IA.**

Created and redesigned web-based applets to teach statistical techniques interactively. Applets covered topics such as the method of least squares, ANOVA, k-means, regression diagnostics, and t-tests.

2013  
2015

### **Animint Developer, R Project, Google Summer of Code.**

Worked to develop the `animint` package for R to translate `ggplot2` into d3 interactive JavaScript graphics. Participated in the project in 2013, adding support for all `ggplot2` geoms as well as most scales and axes. Returned to serve as a mentor for the project in 2014 and 2015.

## **Materials Informatics**

2010  
2011

### **M.S. Research, Iowa State University, Ames, IA.**

Worked with materials scientists and engineers to develop and implement nonparametric methods for automatic peak detection in mass spectroscopy data. Fit systems of differential equations to spectroscopy data based on theoretical concepts from quantum physics to facilitate inference about the atomic structure of a material.

## Other

2012

**Research Assistant, Iowa Dept. of Transportation, Iowa State University, Ames, IA.**

Developed a hierarchical Bayesian model to determine the effectiveness of road interventions on traffic accidents and fatalities. Discovered a previously unknown error in the data used in prior analyses using exploratory techniques, and developed a method to compensate for the missing data.

2009

**Research Rotations in Bioinformatics, Iowa State University, Ames, IA.**

Explored applications of the EM algorithm to next-generation sequencing data error detection and modeled the relationship between age and fertility in reptiles. Each project lasted about 6 weeks; rotations were structured to allow new students to explore several facets of bioinformatics, and included wet-lab and computational experiences.

2009

**NSF Research Experience for Undergraduates, Iowa State University, Ames, IA.**

Worked with biologists and bioinformaticians to compare homologous gene expression in humans, pigs, and mice.

2008

**NSF Research Experience for Undergraduates, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE.**

Created a mathematical model describing electrical impulse transmission and decay along neurons with varying states of myelination.