

Office of Biostatistics Statistical Consulting Service: Policies and Expectations

Welcome to the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) Office of Biostatistics Statistical Consulting Service.

The Office of Biostatistics (OBIOS) provides statistical support services to all faculty, staff, and students at UTMB. Members of OBIOS work on statistical applications including study design, basic summary testing, complex model building, and graphical presentations. While initial consultation (see definition below), and some grant development activities, are provided for free, other statistical services may be paid for by including portions of a member's salary on a funded project or through billing on an hourly basis:

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| • Senior Biostatistician | \$150 |
| • Biostatistician | \$100 |
| • Programming | \$75 |
| • Statistical Assistant/Data Entry | Case by Case |

OBIOS can also provide services to entities outside the UTMB community. These can be academic or industry organizations. For further details of pricing and available services, please contact the director of OBIOS, Dr. Yong-Fang Kuo, <yokuo@utmb.edu>.

The primary purpose of this document is to make you aware of how the process of consulting with OBIOS works, particularly with respect to expectations of the working relationship for the client and the biostatistics consultant. These expectations facilitate a process that efficiently uses the client's time and ensures that the consultant has the opportunity to provide the best and most reliable statistical and scientific work for all clients in a timely fashion.

Your reasonable expectations as a client may include:

- An initial meeting to map out the expected structure of the project, and what can be done to ensure all parties are given the best chance to achieve their goals. The purpose of this meeting is to explain the research methods and goals to the consultant. The consultant should learn enough about your project to effectively help with the design of the research or analysis of the data. Once this initial process is completed, usually within an hour or so, all arrangements should be agreed upon, including compensation structure and an initial understanding about the potential for co-authorship and the scope of the requested collaboration.

- The services of a consultant, who will be responsive to communication and discussion. In many cases, the consultant will also contribute as a collaborator, who is interested in the ultimate scientific questions
- A schedule that, as much as possible, meets any deadlines you have, while also allowing the consultant to have enough time to fully address your questions, as well as attend to other duties beyond your specific project.
- An estimate of time needed on the project, should you request it; the consultant will contact you with revisions of that estimate, should unexpected circumstances make that necessary. If another consultant can better handle the project or adhere to a specific schedule, the consultant will make you aware of those options.
- A timely request for payment once significant portions of the project have been completed. Payment details may be discussed at the initial meeting. Larger projects may require compensation for completion of portions of the project before the final project is finished.
- Aid in presenting results for poster/oral presentations and manuscripts, including some writing of methods and results, as well as tables and figures.

The biostatistics consultant's reasonable expectations include:

- Delivery of this biostatistics consulting service document to whomever is ultimately responsible for the dissemination and funding of this project, so that they are aware of OBIOS policies on consulting and compensation.
- An initial opportunity, typically in person, to discuss the scope of the project and to begin to address all statistical needs prior to completing the project. These meetings typically take place in the consultant's office, although alternative arrangements can be made on a case-by-case basis. Topics for this meeting include the aims of the project, the design of the study, the types and amounts of data collected or to be collected, objectives for dissemination, and timelines for all aspects of the project.
- A reasonable timeline that conforms to the consultant's schedule, as well as meeting potential deadlines. Projects that must be rushed or cannot be reasonably completed in the time allotted may be refused by the consultant or the OBIOS service. As such, it is important to contact the consultant with data and a research plan as soon as possible to allow for the best chance of satisfactory completion of the analysis.
- Timely delivery of data in a reasonable form that corresponds to the aims of the project. Data management can often be the largest contributor to time taken on a consulting project. Data

should be delivered in a small number of files in a reasonable file format (Excel spreadsheets, for instance). **Data should be de-identified.** Columns should be labeled so that the consultant can clearly match variable names to column headers. If necessary, the consultant may ask for specific locations of variables (or a subset of the larger dataset) if the file is too large or the headings are ambiguous. While it is generally preferable and more cost effective for the client, OBIOS can provide data management services. This should be discussed during preliminary planning phases of the project.

- To manage and clean their own data, OBIOS can provide data management services. This should be discussed during preliminary planning phases of the project.
- Reasonable flexibility from the client with respect to choice of methods and software. Statistical consultants are members of OBIOS, in part, because of their expertise in design and data analysis. Thus, their judgment and approach should be respected as part of the collaborative process. Should a specific statistical approach be desired, the client should be prepared to discuss their reasons for wanting this approach, allowing for changes that the consultant finds necessary.
- The potential for co-authorship, when it is understood that the consulting work is sufficient to warrant citation for contribution to the work. Authorship is independent of compensation, as is the norm in academia. Significant contributions to project design, analysis, and interpretation should be considered as sufficient to warrant authorship. (For more specific guidelines, see the authorship guidelines of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors.) Often this understanding is discussed at the initial meeting, although changes in understanding may occur as projects develop.
- Provision of draft manuscripts so the consultant can check that all statistical work is properly reported.

Our goal for OBIOS is to provide the best possible quality in statistical and scientific output for UTMB. We believe that adhering to these expectations on the clients' and consultants' part improves the process of scientific research and makes for the best use of everyone's time and money. If you have additional serious questions that cannot be addressed by the consultant, you should feel free to contact the director of OBIOS, Dr. Yong-Fang Kuo, <yokuo@utmb.edu>.



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