Mark Daniel Ward

Associate professor of Statistics

With wild gesticulations and often jogging in place while extolling the virtues of data analysis or probability, it's easy to see why Mark Daniel Ward, associate professor and undergraduate chair of the Department of Statistics, is a popular and busy faculty member.

He exudes enthusiasm that his students absorb, even during 7:30 a.m. classes.

Ward is a pioneer of living-learning communities within the College of Science. He received a $1.5 million, five-year grant from the National Science Foundation to form a learning community for sophomores studying statistics. Students are roommates, classmates and colleagues. Classes are full of group interaction and one-on-one discussions with Ward.

While his research focuses on probability theory and asymptotic analysis, working with an eclectic mix of undergraduates has become a passion for Ward.

- **7:30 a.m.** – Wednesdays are heavy teaching days for Ward. His earliest class is his largest, and up to 90 students cram into a small Stanley Coulter Hall room for an introduction to data analysis.
- **8:30 a.m.** – Ward checks in on his learning community in a Stanley Coulter Hall computer lab. It's Week 2, and they're working together comfortably.
- **9:30 a.m.** – The learning community marches over to University Hall to join 20 other students for probability class. Group work is key to this class as well, and fittingly, the 10 small groups are chosen at random.
- **10:30 a.m.** – Ward sits in on a promotions meeting for his department. The meeting helps decide who gets bumped up on the tenure track.
- **11:30 a.m.** – Ward gathers with fellow professors, friends and students for lunch every day. Ward says he used to eat in his office, but dining with his colleagues brings bonding, research news and ideas.
- **1 p.m.** – Ward connects by Skype with Milan Merkle, the editor-in-chief of "Applicable Analysis and Discrete Mathematics" journal published by the University of Belgrade in Serbia. Ward has been the managing editor since 2013 for this selective semiannual publication, which publishes only about 10 papers per issue.
- **2:15 p.m.** – Fulya Gokalp Yavuz, a postdoc in applied statistics, swings by Ward's office for an informal meeting. The two look at some data she is using for a research project and discuss methods for analyzing the data.
- **3:05 p.m.** – After a long day of research discussions, teaching and meetings, Ward sits down to write the annual report for his learning community. The report is sent to the National Science Foundation, and it is full of positive updates.
  "The students give me feedback," Ward says. "I report all of the different aspects of the grant to the program directors at NSF. They in turn talk to the division directors, and sometimes Congress looks at what the NSF is doing. It really puts what we are doing in a broader perspective."