A is the first to admit his field of study
can be somewhat intimidating. “People often look confused
when I mention biostatistics,” says Prucka, a second-
year Ph.D. student at UAB. “Biostatistics is difficult
to explain since it’s a diverse field that summarizes large
amounts of diverse biological information into a simple
compact form. Furthermore, as the amount of biological
information generated by new technologies increases, so does
the need to extract meaning from the accumulated data.”

Prucka, who earned both B.S. and M.S. degrees in
engineering from the University of Michigan, was work-
ing as a consultant in Birmingham when he decided to
make a career change. After discussing his options with
a UAB professor, the new path he
wanted to take became clear.

“The faculty in the biostatistics
department has been outstanding at
helping me achieve my goals,” he
says. “UAB has a National Institutes
of Health training grant, which has provided me with
funding and career-growth opportunities. My advisor,
Dr. Christopher Coffey, has been an excellent mentor,
encouraging me to get involved in research and stay
focused on the important aspects of my training.”

Prucka says originally he was interested in genetics
and the mathematical and statistical problems involved
with determining the function and nature of the human
genome. “My current interest is of a more clinical
nature,” he says. “I’m exploring the combination of
genetic factors that impact the nature of cardiovascular
disease and affect pharmacological treatment outcomes.”

Prucka also serves as a departmental representative
to the Public Health Student Association (PHSA). “I
joined PHSA so I could become involved in the larger
field of public health and provide student leadership.
The role of the association is to represent public health
students by addressing their concerns.

“PHSA also offers social and public service opportuni-
ties. Recently I enjoyed helping with a trip to the Epic
School—near the UAB campus—where we created an
assembly to discuss public health topics for children K-5.
Another memorable event was cooking dinner for the guests
of the nearby Ronald McDonald House. I had a great
time making spaghetti for everyone, especially those parents
who had children hospitalized with very serious diseases.”

On schedule to complete his doctorate in 2008,
Prucka is already focusing on the future. “I hope to
achieve a faculty position where I can conduct collabora-
tive research with medical professionals,” he says. “My
focus is on the design, implementation, and analysis of
clinical trials.”