

# Engineering New Directions

## Student Builds Career in Biostatistics

*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 working 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 opportunities. 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 collaborative research with medical professionals," he says. "My focus is on the design, implementation, and analysis of clinical trials."*