

## **What Just Happened?**

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*Joseph Biggs is a doctoral student on the verge of his dissertation defense. As the event approaches, he is thrilled to learn that he can consult with an outside expert on his statistical analysis. Coincidentally, his boss' brother is a statistics instructor at a local institution and she arranges an introduction. Soon thereafter, Joseph is shocked to see his email so horribly misinterpreted and wonders what, if anything, can be done to salvage the relationships.*

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Staring, open-mouthed at the screen, Joseph stared back at his email in shock. Had this really just happened?

Joseph Biggs is a doctoral student in the public health program at a large, public institution. He had finished his coursework and successfully completed his comprehensive examinations and proposal defense.

Joseph attended a large, public university in the Northeastern United States. Having grown-up in Florida, adjusting to the climate of the north was a challenge, but he was pleased with the educational opportunities that his doctoral university had afforded him and had learned to adjust to the colder climate. Joseph was also pleased at the external opportunities he found in the city where his university was located. The metropolitan area had allowed him to easily find a position as he finished his coursework that would allow him to start paying down his student debt while finishing his Ph.D.

While working had helped him stay financially afloat after graduate school, it had an impact on his ability to progress as quickly through his research as he hoped. In fact, most of his cohort had moved past him in their writing and research and were entering their defense preparations. Joseph was disappointed but pleased that he had recently finished data collection and was on the verge of finishing his final chapter.

Although Joseph was a stellar student, he was very aware that statistics was not his forte. As he discussed his quantitative study with his advisor, he was relieved to hear that she encouraged him to seek outside assistance from tutors or statisticians to help him with his data analysis before his defense. At work, Joseph shared this news with one of his colleagues, Anna, and she mentioned that her brother was a statistics instructor at a lo-

cal community college. Anna told him that Rob frequently worked as a consultant and mentioned that he'd probably be happy to help him. Joseph was thrilled and told Anna that he'd really appreciate his insight. Although Joseph had taken several upper-level statistics classes during his graduate program, he knew he would greatly benefit from the insight of someone who specialized in data analysis.

The next day, Anna stopped by Joseph's desk to tell him that her brother said he'd be happy to work with him. As a courtesy, and to further their introduction, Anna forwarded Joseph's survey to her brother and copied Joseph on the exchange. Rob quickly responded that survey looked fairly simple and straight forward. He asked Joseph to email him separately to set-up a formal time to meet.

Joseph was thrilled. He agreed that his survey tool was fairly elementary and wouldn't require a heavy statistical analysis. Most of all, Joseph was thankful to have the help and insight of someone with a larger grasp of statistics to help him make sure that he didn't overlook any statistical tests due to his limited background. He pulled together a response and quickly sent it to both Anna and Rob express his gratitude.

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*From: Joseph@north.edu  
Sent: Tuesday, 8/5/2010 9:20am  
To: Anna@work.com; Rob@cc.edu  
Subject: Stats Help*

*Rob and Anna -*

*Thank you both for your time and assistance! It is a pretty straight-forward, descriptive study (thankfully) based on several calls for future research in public health. However, I would like to touch base with someone with a greater statistical expertise just to make sure that I'm not missing anything.*

*Rob -*

*After today, my schedule is fairly open in the late afternoon/evenings. Are you available to meet via phone or in person?*

*Again, thank you both!  
Joseph*

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A few hours later, Joseph was notified that Rob had responded to his message. He stopped working and switched over to check his email.

*From: Rob@cc.edu  
Sent: Tuesday, 8/5/2010 11:19 am  
To: Joseph@north.edu; Anna@work.com  
Subject: Re: Stats Help*

*I am not sure what you mean by someone with greater statistical expertise.  
I have a Ph.D. in mathematical sciences and am offended by your comment.*

*Best to find someone else.*

*Rob Brother, Ph.D.*

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Joseph stared open-mouthed at the screen. Wait... What just happened? "Find someone else?" I don't want to find someone else! Have I just offended my boss' brother after she went out of her way to introduce me to him? What is she going to say? No, seriously?!?!? What just happened? How do I fix this?