

B I - C O M A T H E M A T I C S C O L L O Q U I U M

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“Two Statisticians and One Serial Murderer”

Tuesday, April 15, 2008

Tea at 4:15 p.m. – KINSC Sharpless Auditorium
Talk at 4:30 p.m. – KINSC Sharpless Auditorium

Abstract: In 1998, Kristen Gilbert, a 32-year-old mother of two and highly skilled intensive care nurse, was put on trial for her life, accused of having killed several patients at the local veteran’s hospital. Much of the evidence against her was statistical. In my talk I’ll invite you to imagine yourself in two decision-making roles. First, as a member of the grand jury, you’ll see the evidence compiled and presented by my colleague Dr. Stephen Gehlbach, and I’ll ask you to decide whether Gilbert should be made to stand trial. Then, in the role of the trial judge Michael Ponser, you’ll hear a summary of the report I wrote arguing that the same statistical evidence should not be shown to the trial jury, and I’ll ask you to decide whether you find my argument persuasive. Taken together, your two roles will illustrate what can, and what can not, be learned from statistical hypothesis testing.

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