
INFORMS Practice Section Newsletter – March 2025

President, INFORMS Section on Practice

By Rajesh Tyagi, GE Research (Retired); rajeshtyagi@yahoo.com



The INFORMS Analytics Conference in Indianapolis, IN, is right around the corner with many exciting Practice-related activities planned, including the Franz Edelman Award and the UPS George D. Smith Prize competitions.

I especially want to bring attention to two Practice Section community events planned this year at the conference: (1) A business meeting on Monday, April 7, 4:45-5:45pm, and (2) a joint breakfast session with the Analytics Society on Tuesday, April 8, 7-8 am. We have a panel discussion on “Future Directions for Analytics+” planned, including discussion on skills and workforce trends. The events are open to all and I invite you to come and network with fellow practitioners. No reservations needed.

In the rest of this newsletter, you will hear more details from the world of practice and get a preview of activities at the [INFORMS Analytics+ Conference](#), April 6-8. I hope to see many of you there!

Please visit the [Practice Section website](#) for more information on the section and all of its activities. We are always looking for ideas and volunteers. If you have suggestions for new activities and/or would like to volunteer to support the existing activities, please contact me at rajeshtyag@yahoo.com.

New Initiatives of the Practice Section of INFORMS

By Patricia Neri, Intelligent Analytics Solutions, LLC; patricianerib@gmail.com



As your newly elected VP of the Practice Section of InformS, I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude for your trust and support.

In this newsletter, I am excited to introduce three new initiatives that you are welcome to participate in.

#1 Practice Section Showcase Profile

In each newsletter, we will showcase profiles of our members. In this edition, you can read about Lavada Sharma, a Senior Associate Analytics Consultant at SAS Institute Inc., and Nitish Umang, a Senior Manager, Decision Optimization at Johnson & Johnson.

If you would like your profile to be showcased in a future newsletter, please send it to nitishumang86@gmail.com with the header “Practice Section Showcase Profile”.

#2 Student Corner and Early Career Practitioner Corner

We are excited to introduce a new “Student Corner” and “Early Career Practitioner Corner”. We invite you to contribute your articles (maximum 250 words) featuring past or upcoming events, opinions, opportunities, and more. Please send your contributions to patricianerib@gmail.com

#3 INFORMS mentoring program - Practice Section members

We would like to increase the participation of Practice Section members in the INFORMS mentoring program. The match will be of Practice Section seasoned practitioners with students and early career professionals, in particular with graduates of the Early Career Network Program (ECPN). We encourage experienced practitioners to give it a try and discover the energetic and rewarding experience of mentoring.

INFORMS organizes a successful mentorship program. You can learn more about the enriching experience for both mentors and mentees by visiting the [INFORMS Mentor Match](#) link. The mentorship experience offers opportunities for growth, learning, and sharing experiences.

Important dates to remember:

- Mentors can enroll between March 3rd and April 5th.
- Mentees can enroll and request a mentor between April 6th and April 20th.

Updates from the Edelman Award Committee Chair

By Irv Lustig, Princeton Consultants irv@princeton.com



We are gearing up for a great 2025 Franz Edelman Award Competition at the INFORMS Analytics Conference in Indianapolis this spring. The competition will take place on Monday, April 7, and will award the best work in the use of operations research, management science, and advanced analytics in practice.

The competition began in the fall of 2024 with a call for entries. A large selection committee composed of practitioners and academics narrowed the field down to 11 semifinalists. Each semifinalist underwent a thorough verification process to ensure that the claims about their work could be substantiated.

From the semifinalists, six finalists were chosen:

- Amazon
- Flipkart
- Lufthansa Group
- SF Express
- USA Cycling
- WM (Previously Waste Management)

Each team will make a presentation before a judging panel consisting of nine judges. All are invited to come to the competition and watch the presentations. The winner will reprise at the Annual Meeting in October 2025. We look forward to seeing all the Edelman fans at the contest in April!

More information about each of the finalists can be found in the INFORMS Press Release announcing the finalists at <https://www.informs.org/News-Room/INFORMS-Releases/Awards-Releases/2025-INFORMS-Franz-Edelman-Award-Finalists-Announced>

Updates from the Wagner Prize Chair

By **Konstantina Mellou, Microsoft Research**; kmellou@microsoft.com



The Wagner Prize is awarded annually by INFORMS to recognize and reward quality and coherence of analysis used in practice. This award, given in memory of the late Daniel H. Wagner, was established by a generous endowment from the firms Metron, Inc.; Daniel H. Wagner, Associates, Inc.; and Applied Mathematics, Inc.

In recognition of Dr. Wagner’s career-long efforts to encourage the application of strong mathematics to practical problems, supported by clear and intelligible writing, this prize emphasizes the quality and coherence of the analysis used in practice, good writing, strong analytical content, and verifiable practice successes.

The competition is held each year at the INFORMS Annual Meeting. The award consists of a cash prize and a citation plaque giving the authors’ names and a summary or title of the work. Upon satisfactory submission of a paper acceptable to the editor(s) designated by The Practice Section, the winning team receives the cash award, certificates and winners’ plaques; all other finalists receive certificates.

We will recognize the winners of the 2024 Wagner Prize (Shuo Sun, University of California, Berkeley; Zuo-Jun Shen, JD.com & University of Hong Kong; Yongzhi Qi, JD.com; Hao Hu, JD.com; Ningxuan Kang, JD.com; Jianshen Zhang, JD.com; Xin Wang, JD.com; Xiaoming Lin, JD.com) for “JD.com Improves Fulfillment Efficiency with Data-driven Integrated Assortment Planning and Inventory Allocation” at the Edelman Gala during the 2025 INFORMS Analytics+ Conference in April. This team will also reprise its Wagner presentation during this conference.

Arnie Greenland, guest editor for INFORMS Journal on Applied Analytics (IJAA) Wagner Prize special issue, is also currently working with the finalists from the 2024 Wagner Prize Competition and IJAA Editor-in-Chief Alexandra M. Newman to produce the 2025 special issue.

The deadline for submissions for the 2025 Wagner Prize is 11:59pm EDT on May 1.

THE UPS GEORGE D. SMITH PRIZE UPDATE

By Anne G. Robinson, 2025 Chair; anne.robinson@stanfordalumni.org



Are you headed to Indianapolis for the INFORMS Analytics+ Conference? Please join us on Sunday morning, April 6, 2025 for this year's INFORMS George D. Smith prize competition. This prize is awarded to an academic department or program for effective and innovative preparation of students to be outstanding practitioners of operations research, management science, analytics, and data science. This year we had an impressive group of submissions from all over the world. Following a rigorous semi-finalist round, the judging committee selected three finalists.

The finalists for the 2025 Smith Prize are:

- Georgia Institute of Technology, Master of Science in Analytics
- National University of Singapore, Master of Science in Business Analytics
- University of Waterloo, Management Science and Engineering

As INFORMS members, I continue to advocate that it is our professional responsibility to ensure that future O.R. and analytics practitioners are being effectively educated with innovative methods, practical experiences, and inspirational examples of success. The UPS George D. Smith Prize is an excellent way to elevate and acknowledge our academic counterparts who deliver programs that create outstanding practitioners in our field.

For more details on the UPS George D. Smith Prize, visit: <https://www.informs.org/Recognizing-Excellence/2024-UPS-George-D.-Smith-Prize>

Updates from the Early Career Professionals' Network Chair

By Heather Moe; hmoe@esri.com



The ECPN is a full day colloquium with those that are about to graduate or who have recently started their career in analytics/OR. During this day we will discuss the soft skills needed to be successful and the challenges between transitioning from academia to industry. We also emphasize how to build a professional network by engaging in INFORMS. We had a highly competitive application set this year and selected 20 people to participate in the colloquium.

At this year's event we will have several activities. They will start their day with a role-playing exercise where the participants interview employees and determine how they can help this company. We will then spend a significant amount of time for speed mentoring allowing the participants to get insights directly from senior practitioners. Finally, the day will end with an interactive workshop on developing an elevator speech.

The hope is that all these programmed events as well as any of the folks that stopped by to introduce themselves result in an engaging and meaningful day for the 20 participants helping connect them to their peers as well as experienced practitioners throughout the conference and for years to come. We will be encouraging the ECPN participants to sign up for the next round of mentorship through the INFORMS program and would love to have members of the Practice Section join as mentors to support them as they join the work force and navigate the transition from academia into practice.

This is also the 20th anniversary for the ECPN and its two predecessors the INFORMS Professional Colloquium (IPC) and the Early Career Connection (ECC). We will be celebrating with a special session on Tuesday bringing together ECPN alumni, mentors, and leaders to share their experiences with this program. All are invited to join us for this session.

This event would not be possible without the INFORMS professional staff, volunteers, and sponsors. I would like to truly thank the Practice Section for not only sponsoring this event but for the many members that have volunteered to help with this event.

AI in (and for) the 2025 INFORMS Analytics+ Conference

By **Segev Wasserkrug, IBM Research, and Research Fellow, Faculty of Data and Decision Science, Technion; segevw@il.ibm.com**



INFORMS' upcoming 2025 Analytics+ Conference will have many sessions about AI and Generative AI, underscoring once again INFORMS' commitment to educating its members about this important topic. Indeed, out of the approximately 60 invited speakers, about a third (21) will contain content directly related to AI, including the keynote given by Cassie Kozyrkov from Data Scientific titled: "[The Future is AI First: Are you Ready to Lead?](#)". Moreover almost half of these AI sessions (nine) will be about various aspects of Generative AI.

In the conference AI and Generative AI will be discussed from a variety of perspectives, including, among others: using various AI techniques, such as reinforcement learning and machine learning to optimize supply chains and industrial processing; enhancing and simplifying analytics using Large Language Models; AI ethics, literacy and trust; improving pricing systems in Walmart using AI and Generative AI; blending traditional and Generative AI; the use of Generative AI tools in Amazon; and the influence of AI on life and work.

Another notable aspect was the use of Generative AI to efficiently analyze and curate AI-related content from the conference submissions, thereby facilitating the above summary of the conference's AI content. Warren Hearnese, INFORMS' Vice President of Technology Strategy and Chair of the 2025 AI Integration committee, developed a Python-based script with generative AI that systematically extracted all speaker presentation abstracts directly from the INFORMS website and then leveraged GPT-4o, through its API, to summarize each abstract and determine whether the talks specifically addressed generative AI or broader AI topics. This process enabled rapid consolidation and analysis of

data, serving as a practical proof-of-concept demonstrating how INFORMS could effectively integrate generative AI to enhance member value - one of the goals of the INFORMS AI Integration committee.

Wishing everyone a great 2025 Analytics+ conference!

Practice Section Showcase Profile

By Lavada (Blanton) Sharma, SAS Institute Inc.; Lavada.Blanton@sas.com



My name is Lavada Sharma, and I am a Senior Associate Analytics Consultant at SAS Institute Inc with 3 years of experience in the Healthcare, Energy, and Education sectors. In my role, I have completed crucial analytics and operations projects for several government and private entities.

I hold a master's degree in business analytics and data science from Oklahoma State University where I won several case competitions and presented at the 2021 INFORMS Annual Meeting. This allowed me to see the positive impact of our community (and honestly pretty cool stuff), from optimizing hurricane evacuation routes to building a robust energy infrastructure to power the country and everything in between. This interest has led me to assist in the development of an Operations Research team within the SAS consulting branch.

INFORMS has been a great resource for me in learning about the Operations Research field and obtaining the networking skills greatly needed in our current environment. As a new member of the Practice Section, I am inspired by the innovative projects that have won the Wagner Prize, Franz Edelman Award, and UPS Prize.

I am currently an Industry Liaison for the Women in Operations Research and Management Science (WORMS) group. I hope my involvement in both groups can help foster engagement across our field and promote research exchange.

By Nitish Umang, Johnson & Johnson; nitishumang86@gmail.com



It is my great pleasure to finally contribute a piece to this newsletter, which I have been editing since 2021. I am a mid-career professional and an operations research practitioner with over 10 years of experience in developing and applying analytical methods to solve real-world business problems.

In my current role at Johnson & Johnson, I work as part of a team responsible for developing, implementing, and deploying analytical solutions in OR/ML to address complex supply chain decision-making challenges. At J&J, and previously as a scientist at GE Global Research in Niskayuna, NY, I have been fortunate to work across a wide range of application domains, including logistics, transportation, supply-chain management, healthcare, energy, and manufacturing systems.

I became involved with the INFORMS Practice Section in 2021 as a board member and newsletter editor. This experience has allowed me to connect with highly accomplished professionals and dedicated volunteers, gain exposure to incredible initiatives for professionals at different career stages, and witness the rigorous planning and execution behind some of the most prestigious awards in the operations research field, such as the Edelman award, Wagner Prize and UPS Chair prize.

I encourage you, especially early-career professionals, to become members of the Practice Section and take advantage of the various initiatives, such as those outlined by Patricia Neri above. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to me.

A Monthly Virtual Networking Happy Hour!

By Zohar Strinka, Principal Consultant, Analytics Strategies; zstrinka@gmail.com

By Kathryn Walter, Avista; kathryn.walter@avistacorp.com



Join your fellow analytics practitioners and students in a monthly virtual happy hour. With networking as the focus, everyone is welcome. Invite your colleagues!

The one-hour Zoom call will be at 5 pm Eastern on these Fridays:

| Month | Date |
|-------|-----------|
| Mar | 28-Mar-25 |
| Apr | 25-Apr-25 |
| May | 30-May-25 |
| Jun | 27-Jun-25 |
| Jul | 25-Jul-25 |
| Aug | 22-Aug-25 |
| Sep | 26-Sep-25 |
| Oct | 24-Oct-25 |
| Nov | 21-Nov-25 |
| Dec | 19-Dec-25 |

Sign up here to get the Zoom link: [Virtual Happy Hour - The Practice Section of INFORMS](#)
