Professor Jayaram Sethuraman

Teacher, Mentor, Father Figure, Friend, & Colleague

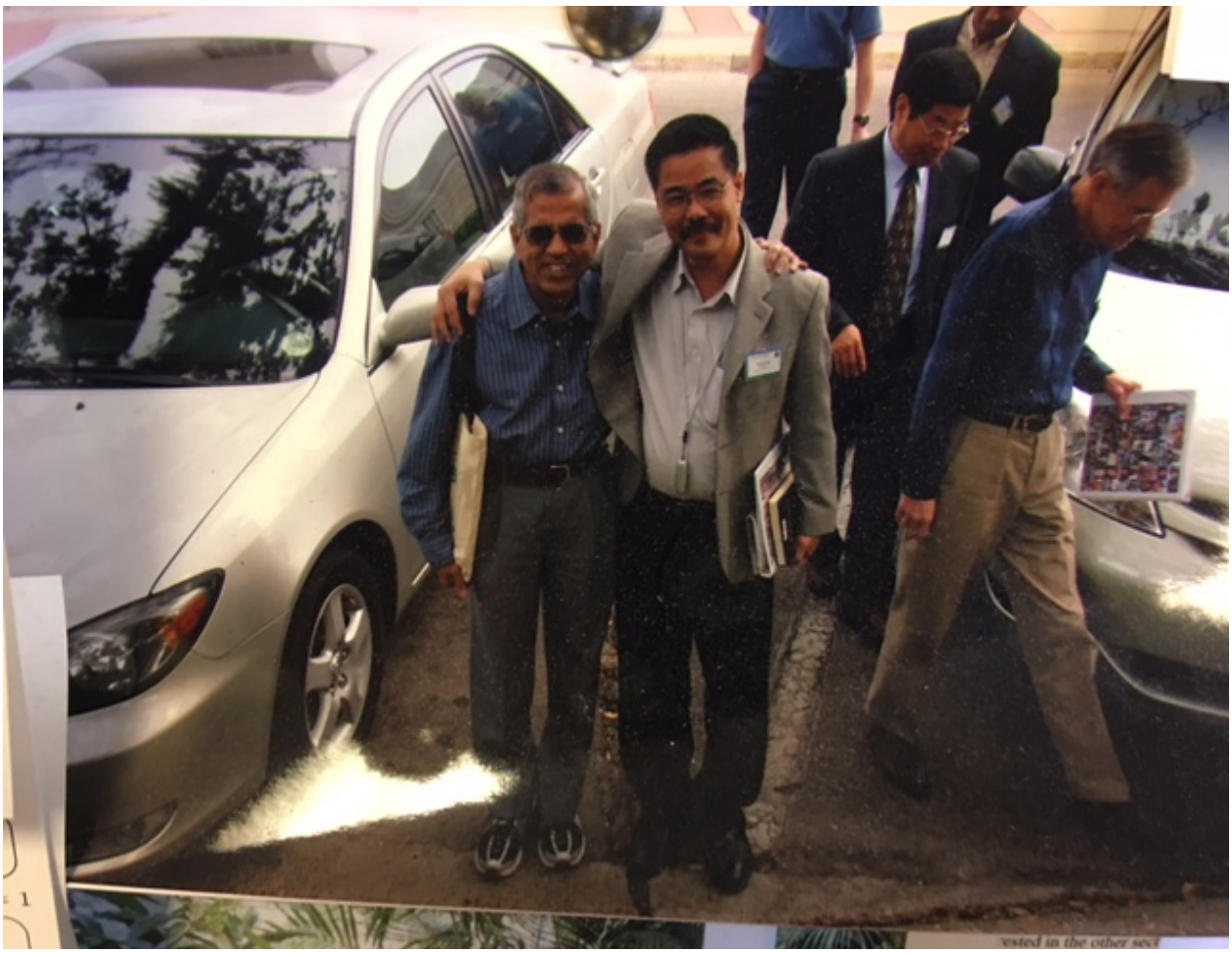
by

Edsel A. Peña, USC

1 A Wonderful Man

It is with great personal pleasure to be able to say a few words about our conference honoree, Professor Jayaram Sethuraman, before I yield the floor to Professor Bob Taylor. Ever since I came to the United States in 1982 as a graduate student at Florida State University, Professor Sethuraman (Sethu for short) has served as a teacher, a mentor, a father figure to many of us who came from afar, a friend, and a colleague. Personally, Sethu is one my heroes both from a personal and academic standpoints. Furthermore, he is one of my models in life and in my career, having risen from lowly beginnings in India to be one of the most respected and accomplished scholars in the statistics profession through hard work, dedication, and enjoyment of scholarly pursuits, and I am sure he would say, through some lucky turns as we will find out from Bob Taylor's talk.

He is also a close friend and colleague of my academic advisor, Professor Myles Hollander, and he was the doctoral adviser of our colleagues Professor Bob Taylor, who will present some personal tidbits about Sethu, and Professor Jim Lynch. Sethu was also in our faculty as a Distinguished Visiting Professor about five years ago and gave research seminars and taught some of our undergraduate and graduate courses.



2 Scholarly Accomplishments

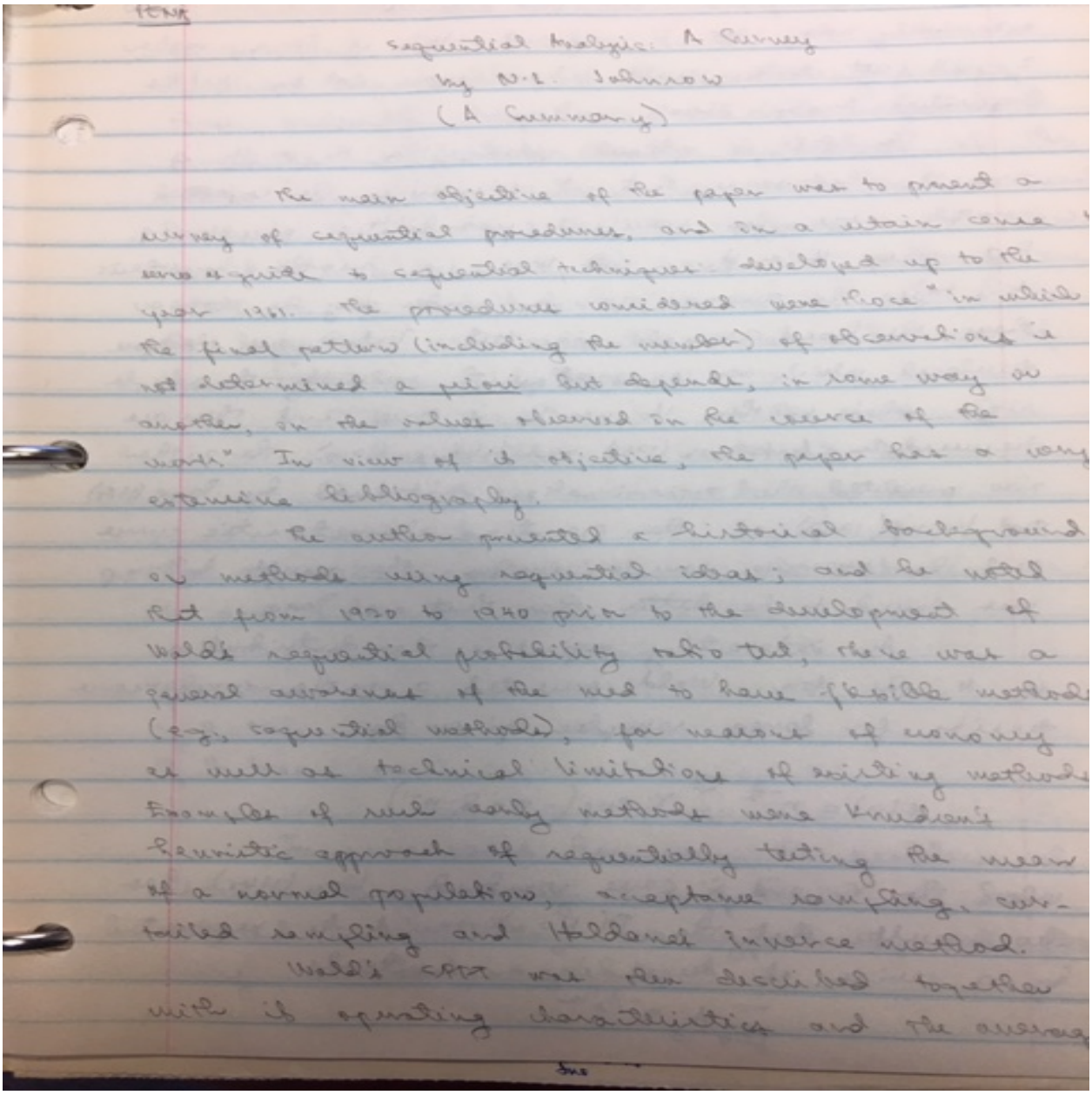
Sethu's research interests over the years have been vast, encompassing, and rigorous. He worked on Large and Moderate Deviations Laws, Weak Convergence of Probability Measures, Probability and Stochastic Processes, Bayes Efficiency of Nonparametric Test Procedures (Rubin-Sethuraman Efficiency), Bayesian Nonparametrics specifically creating nonparametric prior measures such as Dirich-

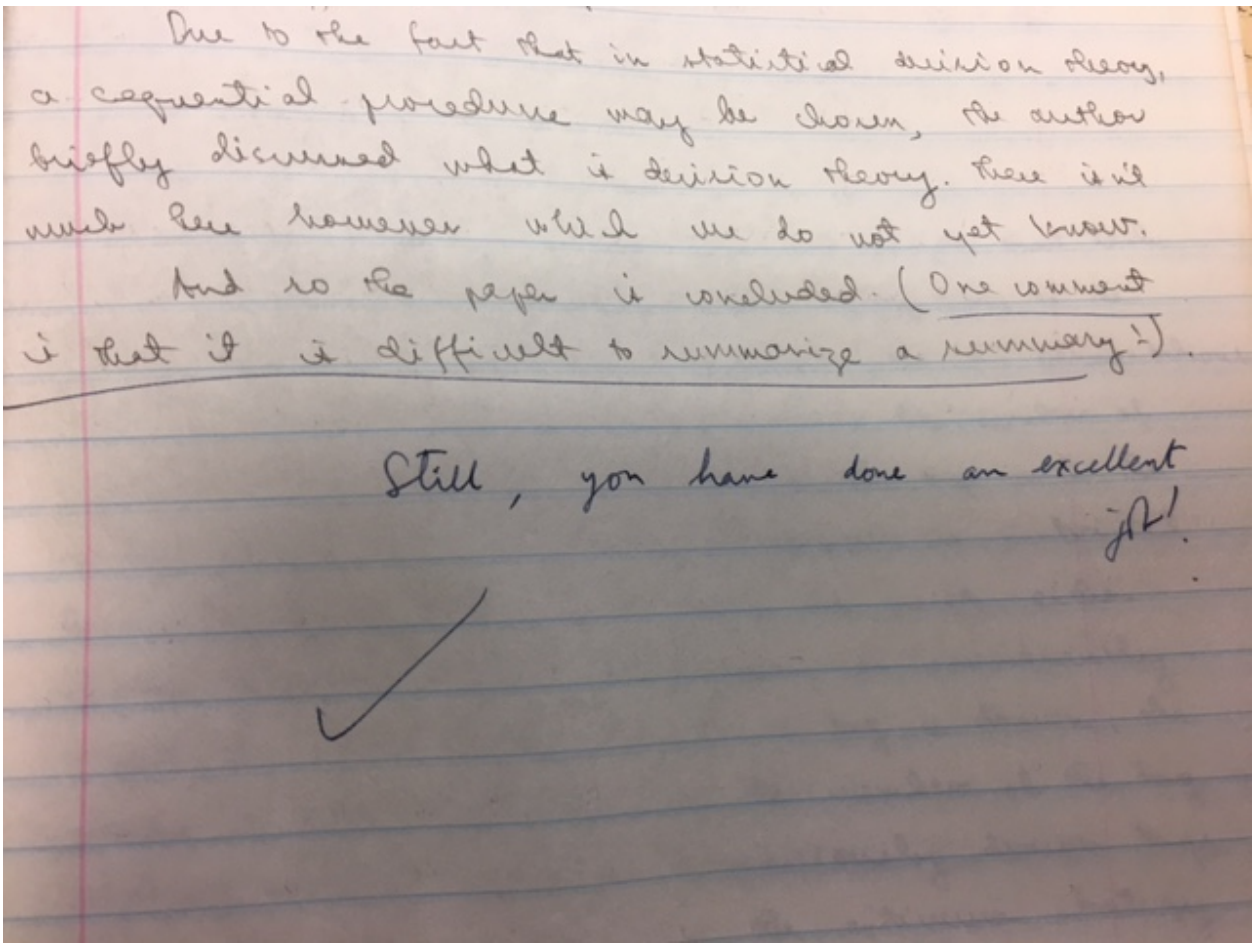
let processes and Polya trees, Sequential Nonparametrics (with IR Savage), and Reliability Theory (with Myles and Frank Proschan) specifically inequalities and dynamic repair models. For his research accomplishments, he has been awarded many honors: Fellowships of the ASA and IMS, elected membership of the ISI, Wilks award, Lawton Professorship at FSU, Bharghavi and CR Rao award at Penn State, Fulbright Lecturing Awards, and the Noether Senior Scholar Award of the ASA. Inspite of the many honors that he garnered, Sethu has remained a very humble and magnanimous person.

3 As Teacher and Mentor

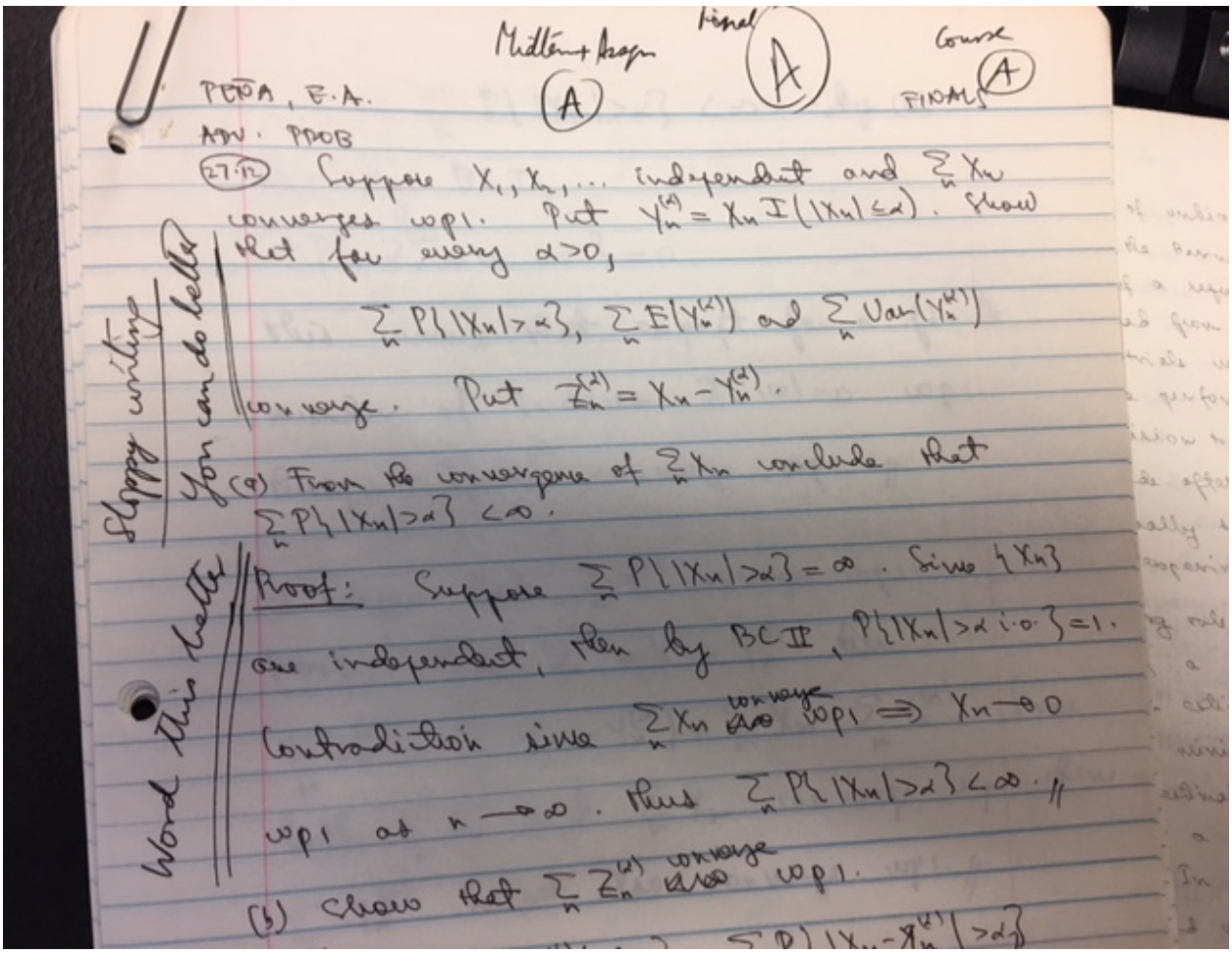
Sethu is also a wonderful and model teacher. For those of us who took his classes while we were students, Sethu is the most intimidating professor we had! He comes to class without notes and still lectures on very difficult topics flawlessly. He served as one of my models as a teacher. I still remember on my first semester of my first year at FSU taking a Sequential Analysis class under Sethu, where my classmates where on their last two years of their graduate studies. I was totally confused since he was dealing with integrals with $dP(x)$ instead of just dx, and that was the first time I've ever seen such. He calls me in his office and asks me if I understand anything, and I tell him 'NO'. But I said I promise to catch up and he says OK. And I caught up eventually - but I think instead of giving exams in this class (which might have led to my failing the class, losing my assistantship, then going back to the Philippines) he instead asked us to read a paper and to write a summary of the paper, perhaps to make sure that I pass the class! And the paper that I read was by Norman Johnson on Sequential Analysis,

which introduced me to some of the fun problems in probabilistic decision-making such as the Secretary Problem and the Dowry Problem.





Sethu has also instilled in his students the need to be clear, concise, and rigorous, and this has benefited many of us in our own careers. When I took his advanced probability class, I remember proudly submitting a proof to one of the problems, but he did not give me full credit on this problem and wrote on the margin on my paper that I could still be more elegant and rigorous in my proof. I never forgot this and everytime I write a paper this incident is always a reminder for me to make my writing to be more elegant, clear and concise.



Sethu has also helped high school students with his annual summer mentoring program for several high school students. In addition, whatever topic you would like to discuss, be it science, religion, politics, etc., Sethu is always ready to share his thoughts and views. I should mention that he nearly even converted me to become a vegetarian! Finally, it should be noted that Sethu is a wonderful family man. He and Brinda have nurtured two very successful children, both of whom are also pursuing academic careers.

4 Bob Taylor

With this, I would like to introduce Bob Taylor, who is Sethu's second PhD student at FSU, who will tell us more detailed personal tidbits about Sethu. Bob, who hails from Tennessee, got his PhD in 1971 from FSU. He then joined USC and stayed here from 1971-1983. He then moved to the University of Georgia, became Head there, and stayed there until 2003. He then moved to Clemson University as Department Chair and stayed at Clemson until 2013, when he retired. Bob was also a prolific researcher with papers in the top journals of the probability and stochastic process fields. For his accomplishments, he has been awarded fellowships by the ASA and IMS, and is an elected member of the ISI.

Bob, the floor is yours!