

BI-CO MATHEMATICS COLLOQUIUM

Lily S. Khadjavi
Loyola Marymount University

*“Social Justice and Mathematics:
Analyzing police practice
in Los Angeles”*

Monday, February 18, 2013

Talk at 4:00 – Park 338
Tea at 3:30 – Park 355, Math Lounge

Abstract:

Although racial profiling is not legal, national polls indicate that most Americans believe it is a regular police practice. Beginning in 2002, under the terms of a Consent Decree with the United States Department of Justice, the Los Angeles Police Department collected and publicized general tallies of all traffic stops, the outcomes of those stops, and the race/ethnicity of drivers. Surprisingly, there have been few studies based on this data set.

Originally motivated by the desire to use real-world data and examine social justice issues in introductory statistics courses, this project has resulted in interdisciplinary research in collaboration with a law professor. Through the ACLU, we were able to gain access to disaggregated data from the City of Los Angeles. As in many other parts of the country, we find significant racial and ethnic disparities, for example in search rates. Perhaps most notably, there are significant disparities in the police's use of searches based solely on driver consent, which are less likely to yield discoveries. Since drivers almost universally agree to such searches, we are led to question whether or not legal consent can be understood as an expression of free will. This talk tells the story of this project, including an overview of the data, the social and legal issues raised, and the statistical techniques used, and will be accessible to students and scholars from across disciplines.

BRYN MAWR COLLEGE