IASUG
Iowa SAS Users Group

Official SAS® Users Group

Iowa SAS® Users Group
The 16th One-Day Conference

Thursday, May 15, 2026

Carver Conference and Learning Center

Corteva Agriscience

**Simon Geletta
Conference Co Chair**

**Alex Ollerton
Conference Co Chair**

Message from Conference Chairs

On behalf of the Iowa SAS Users Group, we are delighted to welcome you to this year's annual one day conference. Each year, this event brings together an exceptional community of analysts, programmers, data scientists, and business leaders who share a common purpose: to learn, to connect, and to push the boundaries of what's possible with SAS in our organizations. This year's program embodies that spirit of collaboration, curiosity, and growth.

As we stand at a pivotal moment in analytics—where trusted, rigorous statistical methods meet the accelerating power of artificial intelligence—the opportunities for innovation have never been greater. SAS continues to evolve alongside these emerging technologies, and together they open doors to new insights, faster solutions, and more impactful decision making. We hope today inspires you to imagine what this combination can unlock in your own work.

We are especially excited to feature presenters from SAS Institute, seasoned SAS practitioners who bring real world experience from across industries, and a professional trainer focused on practical, skill building techniques you can apply right away. A number of their presentations include AI related topics. Whether you are a long time SAS expert or just beginning your journey, we hope today's sessions spark new ideas, strengthen your expertise, and expand your professional network.

Thank you for being part of this community. Your participation is what drives advancement—in our organizations, in our profession, and in the broader analytics community. We're glad you're here, and we wish you a rewarding, energizing, and inspiring conference.

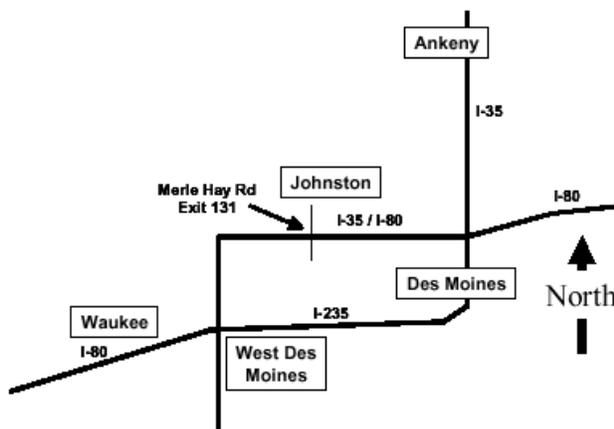Your Conference Chairs, Simon Geletta & Alex Ollerton, Iowa SAS® Users Group

Conference Committee

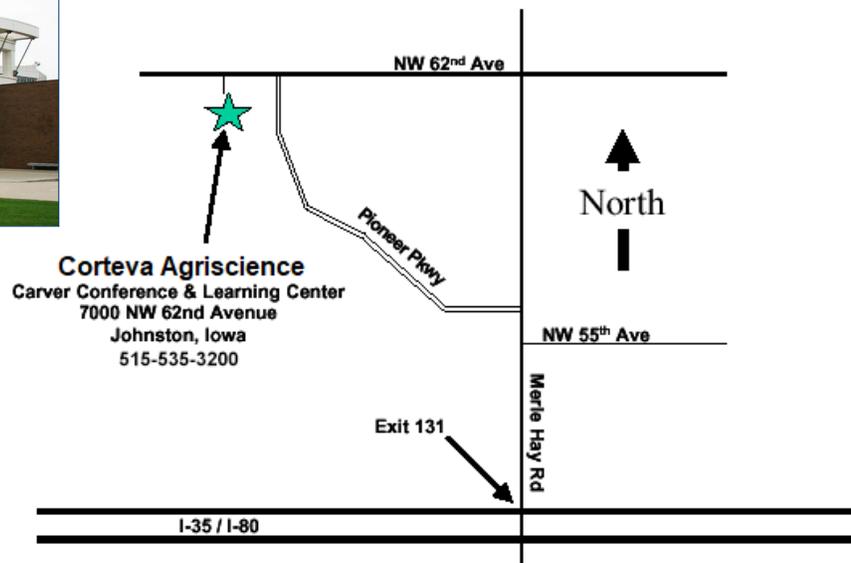|	
Alex Ollerton	Section Chair #1, Wells Fargo & Company
Michelle Baker	Section Chair #2, ABT Global
Walter Yu	Section Chair #3, SASNerd
Abebe Hasen	Facility Coordinator
John Xu	Registrar, 1ST Consulting
Simon Geletta	Web Master, Knowledge Delivery Services, LLC

Conference Information

Our one-day conference provides opportunities to enhance your SAS® skills and improve your understanding of the SAS® System. There will be 3 concurrent sessions throughout the day! We've invited speakers from SAS® Institute, as well as other industry experts to join us to share their SAS® knowledge. Online Registration will start one month prior to the conference. Thanks to SAS® Institute's generous sponsorship, we are again able to offer free registration!

- **Free Registration - Again!!**

- **Network with Fellow SAS® Users**

- **Learn from the SAS® Pro's**

- **3 Concurrent Sessions**

**Directions to Corteva Agriscience
Carver Conference and Learning Center**

From I-80/35 take the Merle Hay Road exit #131. At the exit ramp, go north onto Merle Hay Road. Take Merle Hay Road north about 1 mile to Pioneer Parkway and turn west (left). Follow this divided boulevard all the way to its end at NW 62nd Avenue. Turn left to head west on NW 62nd Avenue. Continue to the main Corteva Agriscience entrance. Turn left onto the main driveway. Park in the designated spaces in front of the building or in the lot across the drive.

Corteva Agriscience
Carver Conference & Learning Center
7000 NW 62nd Avenue
Johnston, Iowa
515-535-3200

Conference Schedule

05/15	Session 1 (Room A: Auditorium) **Kirks Corner**	Session 2 (Room B) **SAS Presents**	Session 3 (Room C) **Tools & Integration**
7:30 - 8:30 a.m.	Check In & Networking		
8:30 - 9:20 a.m.	**Opening Session** Simon Geletta	Keynote: **Democratized Analytics is the Future, Not AI:** Dr. Meg Shaeffer	
9:30 - 10:20 a.m.	**Next-Gen Programmer: Thriving in the GenAI and AgenticAI Revolution** Kirk & Ryan Paul Lafler (1)	**SAS® for Microsoft 365** Shelby Taylor (4)	**Level Up with SAS®: From Base Skill to Pro Power Moves** Alex Ollerton (7)
10:30 - 11:20 a.m.	**SAS® Performance Tuning Techniques** Kirk Paul Lafler (2)	**Practical Tools for Ethical AI** Cat Truxillo (5)	**SAS® 9.4 M9 MFA Features and Configuration** Rafi Sheikh (8)
11:30 a.m. - 12:20 p.m.	**Regression Analysis Made Easy: A Comparison of R and SAS** Walter Yu & Kirk Paul Lafler (3)	**You + Me + ChatGPT Make Three: Getting Started with SAS® Coding** Melodie Rush (6)	**SAS Program Production Promotion and Migration** John Xu (9)
12:20 - 1:30 p.m.	Lunch		
1:30 - 2:20 p.m.	**The Battle of the Titans: DATA Step versus PROC SQL** Kirk Paul Lafler (10)	**No-code Data Generation using SAS® Data Maker** Cat Truxillo (13)	**SAS® Viya 4.x Deployment Pre-Install Considerations** Rafi Sheikh (16)
2:30 - 3:20 p.m.	**A Quick Look at Fuzzy Matching Techniques Using SAS® Software** Kirk Paul Lafler (11)	**Using SAS® Viya® Copilot to Develop Code, Reports, and Models** Shelby Taylor (14)	
3:30 - 4:20 p.m.	**Exploring the Skills Needed by Data Scientists** Kirk Paul Lafler (12)	**The Polyglot Data Scientist: SAS®, Python, & R in SAS® Viya® Workbench** Melodie Rush (15)	**Exploring the Parity Between SAS® & Python Code** Simon Geletta (18)
4:30 - 5:00 p.m.	**Closing Session/Door Prize** (iPad tablet computer and More)		

Presentation Abstracts

Keynote Speech

Democratized Analytics is the Future, Not AI

By Dr. Meg Shaeffer, Global Health Advisor, SAS® Institute

Abstract
This keynote speech focuses on how SAS is embracing a collaborative, trustworthy approach to the evolving landscape of advanced analytics

(1) Next-Gen Programmer: Thriving in the GenAI and AgenticAI Revolution

Kirk Paul Lafler, SASNerd

The rapid rise of Generative AI and Agentic AI is redefining what it means to be a programmer. As machines gain the ability to generate, debug, optimize, and even deploy working code, developers face a pivotal moment: one of both uncertainty and unprecedented possibility. This presentation examines how AI-driven automation is reshaping the programming landscape and what it means for your career, your skill set, and the future of software development.
Attendees will explore critical questions: What becomes of programming when intelligent systems can handle entire workflows? Which risks must organizations and individuals anticipate - from security and trust to loss of visibility and human oversight? Where do the greatest opportunities lie to create value, accelerate innovation, and elevate human creativity? And how can programmers strengthen their adaptability, build AI-native skills, and embrace roles that blend engineering, orchestration, and strategic thinking? Through practical insights, real-world examples, and a candid discussion of ethical and strategic implications, we will equip programmers at all levels to navigate and thrive in the GenAI and AgenticAI era.

(2) SAS® Performance Tuning Techniques

Kirk Paul Lafler, SASNerd

The Base-SAS® software provides users with many powerful techniques for accessing, manipulating, analyzing, and processing data and results. With the availability of so many language features and the size of data sources, application developers, programmers and end-users can benefit from a set of guidelines for efficient use of the SAS software. Topics include several performance tuning techniques that can be applied to code and applications to conserve CPU, I/O, data storage, and memory resources while performing tasks more efficiently when sorting, grouping, merging (or joining), summarizing, transforming, and processing data.

(3) SAS® Performance Tuning Techniques

Walter Yu, Kirk Paul Lafler, & Zack Gao SASNerds

Regression analysis is a cornerstone of modern analytics, enabling practitioners to quantify relationships, test hypotheses, and generate predictive insights. Yet many analysts find the methodology – and the software used to implement it – overwhelming. This presentation demystifies regression modeling by providing a practical, side-by-side exploration of how core techniques are performed in both R and SAS.

Presentation Abstracts

(4) SAS® for Microsoft 365

Shelby Taylor, SAS Institute

Learn how to use SAS® for Microsoft 365 to seamlessly access and share analytical insights produced by SAS® Viya® in your Microsoft Office applications. You can integrate results and data from your SAS® Visual Analytic reports, SAS® Viya® Jobs, and SAS® programs into Microsoft Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook and Word.

(5) Practical Tools for Ethical AI

Cat Truxillo, SAS Institute

According to the World Economic Forum (2026), the greatest global risks of AI include environmental, geopoloitical, societal, and techological disasters. One of the most important upskilling priorities of the next 2-3 years is how to take advantage of the opportunities provided by AI while mitigating the harms, ultimately aiming to make the world a better place because of innovation. In this presentation you will see a variety of tools-- SAS tools as well as non-software-based tools -- to help you evaluate and implement AI systems responsibly. This session is a must-see for anyone who develops or makes decisions from AI systems.

(6) You + Me + ChatGPT Make Three: Getting Started with SAS® Coding

Melodie Rush, SAS Institute

This hands-on workshop explores how large language models (LLMs), such as ChatGPT, can serve as a practical partner in SAS® code development—especially for those learning to code or working in new environments. We'll focus on three high-impact use cases: (1) generating a first draft of code to get you 80–90% of the way to a working solution, (2) understanding complex code written by someone else (or you, years ago), and (3) creating clear, maintainable documentation for your projects. You'll also learn best practices for prompting and interacting with LLMs to get higher-quality, more reliable results—so you can work faster without skipping the learning process.

(7) Level Up with SAS®: From Base Skill to Pro Power Moves

Alex Ollerton, Wells Fargo

In today's data driven environment, SAS certifications continue to serve as powerful credentials for analytics professionals seeking to validate their technical expertise and advance their careers. This session provides a clear, practical, and engaging walkthrough of two key SAS credentials: the SAS Certified Specialist: Base Programming Using SAS 9.4, which validates foundational skills such as reading and creating data files, generating reports, manipulating data, and identifying common syntax or logic errors; and the SAS Certified Professional: Advanced Programming, a performance based certification that assesses advanced techniques including PROC SQL, efficiency strategies, and macro programming, and requires the Base Programming Specialist credential as a prerequisite.
The final portion of this presentation includes organization-specific guidance and will apply only to Wells Fargo employees.

(8) SAS® 9.4 M9 MFA Features and Configuration

Rafi Sheikh, Analytiks International Inc.

This paper presents a technical overview of multi-factor authentication (MFA) capabilities introduced in SAS 9.4 M9. It examines supported authentication methods, configuration workflows, third-party integrations, and platform limitations. Through practical examples and implementation guidance, the paper equips administrators with best practices for securely enabling MFA in enterprise SAS environments.

Presentation Abstracts

(9) SAS Program Production Promotion and Migration

John Xu, 1st Consulting

This presentation will discuss the promotion of a SAS program into production environment. The topics include how to revise the code to make it production-ready, how to deal with dependency.
We will also talk about the SAS program related migration including to/from another language. The subtle difference between SQLs on different databases. We will also review the testing needed to make the migration a success.

(10) The Battle of the Titans: DATA Step versus PROC SQL

Kirk Paul Lafler, SASNerd & Ryan Paul Lafler, Premier Analytics Consulting, LLC

Should I use the DATA step or PROC SQL to process my data? Which approach will give me the control, flexibility, and scale to process data exactly the way I want it? Which approach is easier to use? Which approach offers the greatest power and capabilities? And which approach is better? If you have these and other questions about the pros and cons of the DATA step versus PROC SQL, this presentation is for you. We will discuss, using real-life scenarios, the strengths (and even a few weaknesses) of the two most powerful and widely used data processing approaches in SAS® (as we see it). We will provide you with the knowledge you need to make that difficult decision about which approach to use to process all that data you have.

(11) A Quick Look at Fuzzy Matching Techniques Using SAS® Software

Kirk Paul Lafler, SASNerd

Data comes in all forms, shapes, sizes, and complexities. Stored in files and data sets, SAS® users across industries know all too well that data can be, and often is, problematic and plagued with a variety of issues. When unique and reliable identifiers, referred to as the key, are available, users routinely match records from two or more data sets using merge, join, and/or hash programming techniques without problem. But, when a unique and reliable identifier is not available, or does not exist, then one or more fuzzy matching techniques must be used. Topics include introducing what fuzzy matching is along with examples of the SOUNDEX (for phonetic matching) algorithm, and the SPEDIS, COMPLEV, and COMPGED functions to resolve key identifier issues and to successfully merge, join and match less than perfect or messy data.

(12) Exploring the Skills Needed by Data Scientists

Kirk Paul Lafler, SASNerd

As 2.5 quintillion bytes (1 with 18 zeros) of new data are created every day, the age of big data has taken on new meaning. More organizations across industries are embracing Data Science / Analytics skills resulting in an emerging demand for qualified and experienced talent. To prepare for this growing demand, many colleges, junior colleges, Universities, and vocational training organizations offer comprehensive degrees and certificate programs to fulfill the increasing demand for analytical skills. This paper and presentation explore the skills needed by the Data Scientist / Analytics professional including technical skills like data access, data wrangling, statistics, use of general-purpose programming / statistical languages such as Python, R, SAS®, Structured Query Language (SQL), Microsoft Excel, and data visualization, along with non-technical skills such as collaboration, critical thinking, business acumen, and verbal / written communications.

(13) No-code Data Generation using SAS® Data Maker

Cat Truxillo, SAS Institute

This hands-on workshop gives you an opportunity to try out SAS® Data Maker and learn about some of the methods and metrics available. SAS® Data Maker provides an environment for generating synthetic data that are statistically similar to a reference data set. Synthetic data can be ideal for such scenarios as masking sensitive personal information, balancing data with rare target events, and simulatingdata for large optimization models.

Presentation Abstracts

(14) Using SAS® Viya® Copilot to Develop Code, Reports, and Models

Shelby Taylor, SAS Institute

SAS® Viya® Copilot is your conversational generative AI partner for next-level productivity in the data and AI life cycle. Viya® Copilot transforms natural language into analytical actions, recommendations, and explanations - helping every user turn questions into answers faster. Attend this session to learn how SAS® Viya® Copilot integrates with Visual Studio Code, SAS® Studio, Visual Analytics, and Model Studio. We will focus on using SAS® Viya® Copilot to develop code, reports, and models.

(15) The Polyglot Data Scientist: SAS®, Python, & R in SAS® Viya® Workbench

Melodie Rush, SAS Institute

This hands-on workshop shows you how to seamlessly work across Python, SAS®, and R within a single environment using SAS® Viya® Workbench—so you can truly use the right tool for the job (or simply, the tool you already know). You'll play data detective in a real-world scenario: helping my family find a new neighborhood near the SAS® campus in Cary, NC. Along the way, you'll wrangle data in Python, build optimization models in SAS®, and create beautiful maps in R—all within the same platform. By the end, you'll see how SAS® Viya® Workbench enables polyglot analytics workflows without forcing you to choose just one language.

(16) SAS® Viya 4.x Deployment Pre-Install Considerations

Rafi Sheikh, Analytiks International Inc.

This paper provides a technical overview of critical pre-installation considerations for SAS Viya 4.x deployments. It examines infrastructure readiness, Kubernetes architecture, security prerequisites, storage planning, and network dependencies. Through practical guidance and real-world examples, the paper helps administrators mitigate risks, streamline installation, and ensure stable, scalable, and compliant Viya environments.

(18) Exploring the Parity Between SAS® & Python Code

Simon Geletta

Python and R have emerged as the tools of choice for data science and machine learning. Not only do they have extensive tools, packages and engines to support machine learning operations, Python in particular has emerged as the formidable tool of choice for AI development. This presentation focuses on the data manipulation and analysis power of Python and R side by side with SAS - the traditional tool of choice for analytics operations. The presentation demonstrates how one code system can easily be translated into the other for diversified analytic service provision.

Thanks to Our Sponsors!

Post Conference Door Prizes

Apple iPad   Amazon Fire HD tablet   Wireless Earbud

More!

Training Courses taught by Kirk Paul "sasNerd" Lafler

Although no SAS® classes are currently scheduled for the 2026 IASUG conference, if your company is interested in learning SAS, SQL, Analytics, Python, or Excel techniques in popular training classes, please contact John Xu (515-778-4093, johnxu@1st-consulting.com). We can invite Kirk Paul "sasNerd" Lafler, the professional trainer, to come back to Iowa to teach one or more classes.

Kirk Paul "sasNerd" Lafler teaches dozens of popular cutting-edge SAS®, SQL, Analytics, Python, and Excel® training courses to users around the world. Whether you're a beginner, intermediate or advanced user, you'll find quality and affordable training courses to develop and elevate your skills and knowledge in today's ever-changing technology space. Attendees learn practical, result-oriented techniques and solutions that are designed to enhance skills and elevate knowledge to new levels. Courses are available virtually and in-person and are taught in an instructor-led and hands-on format. Here's a list of a few popular courses taught by Kirk:

- Data Literacy Masterclass

- SAS Programming Masterclass

- SQL Programming Masterclass

- Analytics Masterclass

- Python Programming Masterclass

- Excel Masterclass

- SAS Programming: The Basics and Beyond

- SQL Programming: The Basics and Beyond

- Analytics: The Basics and Beyond

- Python Programming: The Basics and Beyond

- Excel: The Basics and Beyond

- Introduction to Reporting Using SAS

- Introduction to Reporting Using Python

- Introduction to Reporting Using Excel

And more . . .

Biographies

Meg Shaeffer serves as the Global Health Advisor at the SAS Institute, where she leads initiatives in technological modernization and population health across the United States and internationally. She brings more than fifteen years of governmental public health experience as an epidemiologist, complemented by executive leadership roles within managed care organizations. During her tenure in government, Dr. Schaeffer directed and supported responses to outbreaks of measles, mumps, rare and emerging infectious diseases, and the 2009 A(H1N1) influenza pandemic. She has authored multiple peer reviewed publications, held adjunct faculty appointments at Drake University and Des Moines University, and chaired the Iowa Child Death Review Team for over a decade

Simon Geletta is a professor emeritus in the College of Health Sciences at Des Moines University in Des Moines, Iowa. He is currently retired from his teaching engagements and working to expand his consulting and service business - Knowledge Delivery Services, LLC - a systems consulting and service business focused on data engineering and data science development using SAS® and other vendor platforms.

Abebe Hassen is a research scientist and biostatistician working in the Seed Product Development department at Corteva Agriscience. He has been a valuable member of the IASUG logistics team. He currently serves as IASUG board member.

Kirk Paul Lafler is a SAS, SQL, RDBMS, Excel, and Python educator, developer, programmer, consultant, and data analyst; and works as a lecturer and adjunct professor at San Diego State University; and an educator teaching SAS, SQL, Python, Excel, and cloud-based technology courses, workshops, and webinars to users virtually and in-person around the world. Kirk has nearly 50 years of data, analysis, and programming experience in a number of industries using SAS software, SQL, RDBMS technologies (Oracle, SQL-Server, Teradata, DB2), Python, and other languages and productivity tools. As a published author, Kirk's most recent books include Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) By Example (PB&J Press. Fall 2025), Data and Analytics Literacy By Example (PB&J Press, Fall 2025), PROC SQL: Beyond the Basics Using SAS, Third Edition (SAS Press. 2019), and other books along with numerous papers and articles on a variety of SAS, SQL, and Python topics. Kirk is actively involved with international, special-interest, regional, and local SAS, SQL, and Python user groups and conferences as an Invited speaker, educator, keynote, and section leader; and is the recipient of 29 "Best" contributed paper, hands-on workshop (HOW), and poster awards.

Biographies

Ryan Paul Lafler is the President, CEO, and Lead Consultant of Premier Analytics Consulting, LLC, a San Diego–based consulting firm specializing in applied AI and machine learning systems, big data engineering, statistical analysis, and developing custom full-stack analytics platforms. He partners with enterprise organizations, public-sector agencies, and research institutions to help clients process, analyze, and model complex data in support of informed decision-making.

Alex Ollerton is a dynamic professional with a diverse background in science and analytics. Armed with a bachelor's degree in chemistry and a Master of Data Analytics, Alex has seamlessly blended his academic prowess with practical experience in both healthcare and finance. Currently serving as a Lead Financial Reporting Analyst for the External Regulatory Reporting team (specifically FR Y-14Q) at Wells Fargo. Alex thrives in leveraging data analytic tools, like SAS, to support data-driven insights to inform strategic decisions. Beyond his professional endeavors, Alex enjoys spending time with his wife and dog, going to Broadway shows, and trying new cuisines. Alex is committed to excellence, leadership, and community empowerment in all facets of his life.

Melodie Rush With over a decade of experience in data analytics and machine learning, Melodie Rush brings a wealth of expertise to her role as a Data Scientist. Her passion for solving complex problems with innovative technology has made her an essential member of the SAS team. Melodie's work involves developing and deploying advanced models that help businesses make better decisions based on their data insights. She is constantly exploring new ways to improve analytical methods and technologies, striving to create systems that are faster, more accurate, and more efficient than ever before. In addition to her technical skills, Melodie is also known for her ability to communicate complex concepts in simple terms.

Rafi Sheikh Founder of Analytiks International, is a globally trusted SAS and Viya architect who transforms complex analytics ecosystems into resilient, high-performance platforms. Since 2005, he has helped enterprises modernize, optimize, and unlock measurable value from data through precision-engineered SAS solutions and cloud-ready analytics strategies. Rafi's latest field of interest is exploring AI within the context of Cyber Security. Rafi is an avid reader, a foodie, and in spare times likes to hike and travel with his spouse.

Biographies

Shelby Taylor is a Senior Associate Technical Training Consultant at SAS Institute. She specializes in integrating SAS with other tools such as Microsoft Excel, R, and Python. She graduated from Brigham Young University with bachelor's and master's degrees in statistics with an emphasis in biostatistics and applications in public health. In her free time, she enjoys paddleboarding and camping with her husband.

Catherine (Cat) Truxillo, Ph.D., is Director of Analytical Education at SAS. She has been at SAS since 2000 and has written or co written SAS training courses for advanced statistical methods including multivariate statistics, linear and generalized linear mixed models, multilevel models, structural equation models, imputation methods for missing data, statistical process control, design and analysis of experiments, and cluster analysis. She leads a team of data scientists and statisticians in developing educational assets using SAS software.

John Xu is the Director of Consulting of 1ST Consulting LLC, a West Des Moines based consulting company specialized in SAS® related services. He has over 30 years of SAS® experience in Financial, Insurance, Marketing, Government, Education, and Pharmaceutical industries. John is Vice President of MidWest SAS® Users Group. He is currently leading the activities of Iowa SAS® Users Group and also supporting Nebraska SAS® Users Group.

Zheyuan "Walter" Yu is a skilled data analyst with a Master of Science degree in Biostatistics from the University of California, Davis. With expertise in data analysis tools like Python, Excel, R, and SAS, he has honed his analytical abilities through his work in the dental supply industry.

Iowa SAS® Users Group

Iowa SAS® Users Group is a local users group organized to

- Facilitate communications with SAS Institute, Inc., and among users of SAS® in Iowa

- Instruct members how to better use SAS® programming tools

- Keep members informed about new SAS® versions and products

- Inform and educate the public about the value and benefit of SAS® software.

We have had 15 1-day conferences with attendance range from 100 to 340 at Corteva Agriscience's conference center. The one-day conference is typically scheduled in May or June.

Iowa SAS® Users Group maintains a web site at: http://www.iowasasuser.org.

The meeting information is e-mailed to the members through Yahoo Group IowaSASUser. It is also posted on the web site. The web site has a local SAS® news section and a local SAS® jobs section. Job postings are free although donations are welcome.

There is no membership fee. To join the group, please join the Yahoo group IowaSASUser. You may also send name, company, U.S. mailing address, email address, and work phone to johnxu@1st-consulting.com. Or call John Xu directly at (515) 778-4093

Current Board of Directors:

President	John Xu, 1ST Consulting LLC
Member	Alex Ollerton, Wells Fargo
Member	Simon Geletta, Knowledge Delivery Services
Member	Abebe Hassen, Corteva Agriscience

Notes