WILEY

Date: September 17, 2025

To: Chancellor Bennett, President Gold, Interim Vice Chancellor Heng-Moss, and members of the Academic Planning Committee and Board of Regents

Hello,

My name is Aimee Schwab-McCoy, and I'm a three-time UNL graduate (BS Mathematics 2010, MS Statistics 2012, PhD Statistics 2015). I am writing to express my extreme disappointment in the APC's recommendation to dissolve the Department of Statistics. The Department of Statistics plays a vital role in the UNL community, and dissolving the department will have negative impacts across the university.

Impact on undergraduate general education

STAT 218 is taken by students across all campuses and departments. Having taught the course myself for over four years, I know that my students wouldn't have had the same quality experience without the support of the Statistics faculty – in particular, Erin Blankenship. Her mentorship and innovative GTA training program became a [model for statistics departments nationwide](#), and led to many of my cohort becoming tenure-track faculty ourselves. Moving to a "distributed" model for STAT 218 and STAT 318 will have direct, negative impacts on the student experience. Without a centralized home for these courses, instructional quality will drop and content coverage will diverge.

Impact on undergraduate majors and recruitment

In the age of GenAI, demand for data-driven majors like Data Science and Statistics will continue to grow. AI relies heavily on techniques from statistics, and without a robust statistics department, the ability to support programs in AI and Data Science will be greatly diminished. Although the Data Science majors can continue in other departments, the degree requirements will be heavily impacted by the loss of the required statistics courses. The Actuarial Science program also relies heavily on the Statistics department for the STAT 462/463 sequence, which is required for students wanting to earn actuarial credentials through the Society of Actuaries and Casualty Actuarial Society. Before the undergraduate Statistics major was available, many students "emphasized" Statistics through the Mathematics department to create our own majors – myself included. Discontinuing a new major before the first cohort has even graduated sends a poor signal to prospective undergraduates, and discourages enrollment at UNL in other new programs.

Impact on graduate general education

Courses like STAT 801/802 and STAT 870 are taken by graduate students from all departments. Without the statistics department, programs will be forced to offer graduate-level training in statistics within their own departments by non-trained faculty. Like the undergraduate courses, overall quality and consistency of instruction will suffer. Especially at the graduate level, statistics instruction should go beyond a mere tour of hypothesis tests. Graduate students benefit from learning about regression analysis, experimental design, and statistical/distributional thinking with students from other departments.

Impact on research

The Statistical Consulting Center provides a valuable service to both graduate researchers and faculty, and often leads to deeper collaboration. Members of the Statistics department collaborate with faculty in IANR and beyond and improve research in other disciplines by developing and using cutting-edge and robust statistical methods. Since UNL wants to improve its research profile and eventually rejoin the Association of American Universities, reducing our ability to produce cutting-edge and statistically robust research feels counterintuitive to that goal.

Impact on graduate students

I am a Nebraska native, who was able to attend UNL thanks to a Regents Scholarship. Without the grants and graduate assistantships I received through the Department of Statistics, I would not have been able to afford graduate school, and most likely would have left Nebraska. Instead, I discovered a passion for statistics and data science education because I was encouraged to experiment and take risks as an instructor. I built a career in academia and industry as a data science educator because of the opportunities I had at the department.

A modest proposal

Faculty in all departments are skilled academic writers and communicators. Rather that dissolving the Department of Statistics, consider applying the "distributed" model to English and Communications. Faculty can teach writing and communication courses within their departments, resulting in much higher savings than dissolving the Department of Statistics.

Ridiculous? If other departments are able to teach statistics effectively, why not writing and communication? **Or perhaps, statistics instruction and research, which is vital to a vibrant research community, is best left to statisticians.**

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PhD in Statistics – 2015
MS in Statistics – 2012
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