
Urgent: Oppose elimination of UNL Department of Statistics

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To president@nebraska.edu <president@nebraska.edu>; Chancellor Bennett <chancellorbennett@unl.edu>;
EVC Mark Button <EVCTButton@unl.edu>; Academic Planning Committee <apc@unl.edu>;
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Caution: Non-NU Email

Dear President Gold, Chancellor Bennett, Executive Vice Chancellor Button, and Members of the Academic Planning Committee,

I write as Chair of the **Department of Statistics** at **Columbia University** to register my strong opposition to the proposal to abolish the University of Nebraska–Lincoln’s Department of Statistics and terminate its tenured and tenure-track faculty. This would be an unprecedented step for a flagship, land-grant, R1 university and would set a damaging national precedent.

I visited UNL this summer as **Program Chair of the [IISA 2025 conference](#)**, a major international meeting that brought leading statisticians and probabilists to campus. I was struck by how lovely and modern the IISA 2025 venue was—the infrastructure was first-rate; I genuinely found myself wishing we had something like that at Columbia. **Sourav Chatterjee (Stanford)**—arguably the most influential probabilist/statistician of his generation—delivered a keynote, underscoring the scholarly profile UNL can attract. I met many members of your department; they were collegial, ambitious, and committed to elevating UNL’s stature. In particular, **Prof. Bertrand Clarke** is a distinguished scholar whom I hold in the highest regard—an asset to UNL. The department is trying to **grow**; in a moment when Statistics, Data Science, and AI are central to society and the economy, **abolishing** a statistics department makes no sense.

Why a strong statistics department matters at UNL?

Statistics is foundational. It powers work in agriculture, life sciences, engineering, medicine, social science—even AI. Removing it would blunt UNL’s research and teaching strength.

Peers aren’t doing this. Sixteen of eighteen Big Ten schools have standalone statistics departments. Closing yours would set UNL apart in the wrong way.

Short-term cuts, long-term costs. You might save now, but you risk grants, partnerships, enrollment, and reputation for years to come.

In the early 1990s, Columbia’s Statistics department was very small (fewer than five faculty) and at risk of closure. Instead of eliminating it, the university supported a strategy to **build**—notably a world-renowned **MA in Statistics** program that attracted talent and generated resources for the

university. Today, Columbia Statistics ranks among the **top five** departments nationally, with **27 ladder faculty**—larger than our Mathematics department. That outcome was only possible because the institution chose to invest in a foundational discipline rather than dismantle it.

Instead of elimination, there's a practical path that meets fiscal realities while preserving the discipline:

- **Hit pause.** Don't abolish the department—bring faculty and campus partners to the table for a focused plan.
- **Get a quick outside read.** Ask a small Big Ten peer panel to suggest fiscally responsible ways to **keep Statistics intact** (leaner department or a cross-college institute, but with real authority over hiring/promotion/curriculum).
- **Back UNL's mission.** Invest where Nebraska is strongest—agriculture and life sciences—while maintaining the core stats training students across campus rely on.
- **Find savings without wrecking the core.** Share admin services, slow hiring, tighten curricula—**but don't dissolve the discipline.**

I urge UNL to withdraw or substantially revise the proposal and work with the Statistics faculty on a solution that meets budget realities **without sacrificing** a core discipline central to UNL's academic identity and Nebraska's future.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
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