



September 23, 2025

Dear President Jeffrey Gold,

On behalf of the Cultivate ACCESS team, we write to express our deep concern about the proposed elimination of the Department of Statistics. As a program dedicated to preparing the next generation of students and educators to engage with complex challenges through data-driven inquiry, we know firsthand how essential Statistics is to the success of interdisciplinary initiatives across the university.

A prime example is the role of Dr. Erin Blankenship, Professor of Statistics, who has been an indispensable member of our Cultivate ACCESS leadership team. Erin brings a perspective that is both rigorous and accessible, ensuring that our work not only rests on a strong data science foundation but is also approachable to high school students and teachers.

Her expertise has directly shaped the design of our educational tools, including:

- **Community Action Projects:** Last year, 30 high school students completed projects that required them to collect, analyze, and communicate data to address community issues. We anticipate 30–50 students this year. Erin’s guidance ensured these projects were grounded in sound statistical reasoning, while still being engaging and achievable for students at an introductory level.
- **Teacher Community of Practice:** Erin developed and facilitated a highly impactful activity that asked teachers to make decisions about saving or deleting photos from a phone to illustrate trade-offs in data storage. This relatable example helped six teachers in last year’s cohort—and six more in this year’s cohort—translate data science concepts into accessible classroom lessons.
- **Educational Games and Tools:** Erin’s contributions have enhanced tools like Ripple Effects, helping students and teachers alike see the human side of data and decision-making.

Her involvement has not only advanced student learning but also contributed to programmatic success. The Cultivate ACCESS team successfully secured **\$750,000 in USDA funding**, in part because of the strength Erin brought to our proposals through her nationally recognized expertise in data science and statistics education.

Eliminating the Department of Statistics would have profound consequences for programs like ours. Without a home department, the university risks losing faculty who bring both technical knowledge and the ability to bridge disciplines. Erin’s work demonstrates the irreplaceable value of Statistics to interdisciplinary collaborations that directly serve students, strengthen teacher preparation, and enhance the university’s research and outreach mission.



We strongly urge you to preserve the Department of Statistics. Doing so ensures that the university can continue to deliver the kinds of student outcomes and external partnerships that are central to AAU priorities and to the university's future success.

Sincerely,

The Cultivate ACCESS Leadership Team

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