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Dear faculty and administrators at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the September 12, 2025, proposal for reducing the budget at UNL. **In this letter, I would like to explain how the Department of Statistics transformed me—a first-generation college graduate and son of a living Nebraska veteran who has spent 49 years paralyzed—from a mediocre high school graduate to a full professor at an R1 university by age 38.** I would then like to explain how the elimination of the Department of Statistics at UNL will benefit me at KSU, but perhaps with thoughtful leadership, the program can be saved. I will then conclude with an invitation to the students and faculty at UNL to come to KSU.

As a Lincoln native, I was a first-generation college applicant with close to the bare minimum requirements to be admitted as an undergraduate student at UNL. I was fortunate to have Chapter 35 GI Bill benefits and a tuition waiver from the Nebraska Department of Veterans Affairs. This enabled me to fully dedicate myself to the fisheries and wildlife program within the School of Natural Resources. Very early in my undergraduate career, I realized two things. First, while I found the fisheries and wildlife undergraduate program fun, engaging, and beneficial, a career directly in that field was better suited for students with tremendous family support, both financially and in caregiving. Second, I could still do what I love—working on important environmental problems—and get paid well as a statistician. And so, I forged a path forward and created a program that should have but didn't exist at UNL. I took about a dozen statistics and related classes. I engaged with several current faculty members in the Department of Statistics, who were instrumental in ensuring I succeeded in upper-level and even graduate-level statistics classes during my undergraduate studies and helped with my UCARE project. I graduated in 2010 with Highest Distinction and 169 credit hours (enough for a triple major at most universities). But it was 2010, there was a financial crisis, no jobs and all I had was a nearly worthless degree in fisheries and wildlife.

With little or no job prospects, I remember thinking that it sure would have been nice to have an undergraduate degree in statistics at UNL—something most other R1 universities have. Sure, I had an undergraduate experience that resulted in four published scientific papers, but having that statistics degree would have made me employable. I would also like to add that I did all this while being the sole caretaker for my father, the Nebraskan veteran who has spent 49 years paralyzed and still lives in Lincoln.

I graduated into the 2010 economy, which had a ~10% employment rate and little or no opportunities for a young adult with family caretaking responsibilities, and with a college degree in fisheries and wildlife that was basically designed to increase enrollment without any thought about employability. In what I can only describe as pure luck, UNL landed an NSF IGERT award in 2009, and I was fortunate to be selected to be part of that program. This was by far the best-paying “job” I could find at the time. This enabled me to obtain a graduate fellowship and pursue the first joint PhD in Statistics and Natural Resources Sciences, which I finished in three years and nine months. And again, I did all of this as the sole caretaker for my father, which included a gruesome injury that resulted in a leg amputation during my first year as a PhD student. **I am truly grateful for the faculty of the Department of Statistics at UNL, who created an environment where I could thrive despite what was going on in my personal life.**

I would try to stay as close to Lincoln for as long as possible, but it was clear again that Nebraska (including UNL) had little or no job opportunities. At age 28, with my PhD in hand and all six chapters of my dissertation published in scientific journals, I headed to Colorado State University for a brief postdoc and then to Kansas State University (KSU) to start a tenure-track faculty position in the Department of Statistics. **While I loved the topics of Natural Resources at UNL, it would be the statistics program at UNL and the faculty that would launch me.** The rest of the story is short and academic. I would write my first 500+ page graduate-level textbook on Bayesian statistics by age 32, tenured at age 34, co-director of an institute at age 36, and full professor with 80+ published papers by

age 38. While all of these personal boasts are research-heavy, I am most proud of my teaching evaluations and students. **Statistics, unlike many of the undergraduate degrees offered at UNL, enables students from lower- and middle-class Nebraska families a path to an engaging, fun and well-paying career.** Again, if it were not for the Department of Statistics at UNL, I am nearly certain I would be just another graduate with a fisheries and wildlife degree, either working at the Cabela's call center (a job many of my fellow students took) or selling used cars (another common job for my peers). I absolutely get a thrill out of helping and watching undergraduate and graduate students from working-class backgrounds launch into the career field of statistics, where they can expect plentiful, high-paying jobs that are interesting and provide a positive benefit to society!

On September 12, I looked at a text from a colleague with a link to a proposed budget reduction. My first reaction was that it had to be some kind of cruel joke. My colleague said that it felt like a friend—the UNL Department of Statistics—had died. On the national stage, UNL has been a poster child of how to grow a modern statistics program from scratch. Founded in 2003, they grew, and grew, and grew and produced so many successful graduate students—many of whom work and live in Nebraska. At any given point, the program had two, three, and currently four fellows of the American Statistical Association. At the national level, it was clear that UNL was headed to be a top statistics department embedded within a land-grant institution that produced high-earning graduates that, for the most part, stayed in Nebraska.

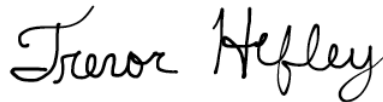
On September 12, this all came crashing down. The public announcement of a proposal to eliminate the Department of Statistics, along with some half-hearted plan (I am trying to be really nice here) to offer selected undergraduate and graduate courses and provide coordinated statistical consulting not only makes UNL look incompetent, it will have long-term consequences. **Publicly announcing such a foolish plan means that no reasonable statistician will want to work for UNL.** Remember that statistics is a healthy profession where there are more jobs than trained statisticians and this is even more true at the PhD level. While I appreciated my time at UNL, my post-graduate interactions with administrators, in addition to hearing first-hand how the faculty are treated, have always left me running back to Manhattan. Remember, I have a father who is a paraplegic veteran who lives in Lincoln and two young children (9 months and 4 years old) who would love to live in the same location as their beloved grandpa. I cannot imagine a person who wanted to live in Lincoln and work in the Department of Statistics more than I did. With 11 years of mostly negative experiences with administrators and watching UNL faculty, many of whom are personal friends, be ground into dust as administrators pursue Big 10 ambitions, my gut told me that UNL had a toxic atmosphere brewing. But I was not prepared for the level of foolishness that was announced on September 12. **At this point, I am embarrassed to say that I attended UNL.**

A lot of damage has been done. Elimination of the Department of Statistics or not, there is no self-respecting professional trained in statistics who will consider UNL a reasonable place to work. But what does UNL look like without a Department of Statistics? I've personally thought that UNL is perhaps the weakest institution in the Big 10, and the proposed budget reduction confirms what I have long thought. Major research schools have a Department of Statistics, and if they do not, they are trying to establish one just like UNL did in 2003. Again, UNL has been a poster child of how to grow a statistics program from scratch, while serving the land-grant mission. Many other insinuations, including KSU, looked up to UNL for direction because what the faculty in the Department of Statistics was innovative and transformative. The faculty provided scaffolding that could lift a quantitatively illiterate campus full of life science researchers and students to the level that the Big 10 demands.

But what about the students? While the damage has been done, there is a window of opportunity to help the state of Nebraska. The newly established undergraduate program at UNL is one of the best-designed programs in the nation. **Do the citizens of Nebraska not deserve an opportunity to utilize a world-class undergraduate program in statistics that has already been developed and paid for?** Do you really want to end a graduate program that is only about 20 years old and has produced outstanding students who: 1) tend to stay in Nebraska; and 2) earn high salaries that contribute to the state tax base? While I am personally embarrassed to be associated with UNL, there is an opportunity to make the right decision. Do it.

My colleagues and administrators at KSU await with open arms for the students and faculty in the Department of Statistics. Before 2003, KSU was the destination for Nebraskans who wanted to be trained in statistics, and we welcome more Nebraskans who want to pursue the lucrative, fun, and creative degree in statistics. As for the faculty in the Department of Statistics at UNL, I feel sorry for you. It is as if the proposal to eliminate the department was designed to be cruel. You put your heart and soul into building a statistics program and department that people admired locally and nationally. You are no ordinary faculty, and the department that you built was the poster child of success. **Every single faculty member in the Department of Statistics at UNL is outstanding; there are no duds.** You would have to look into other parts of UNL to find the duds. The faculty will land on their feet at better universities that will not only pay them better but treat them with respect. Look around at respectable Big 10 schools like UW-Madison and MSU that take teaching, research, and outreach seriously. They all have departments of statistics with outstanding faculty, just like what UNL built. Finally, I would like to end by inviting any faculty at UNL who are interested in joining the Department of Statistics at KSU to contact me. Multiple deans are aware of what UNL is doing and are working with faculty to make plans to hire. I would be overjoyed to have any members of the UNL faculty as my colleague at KSU.

Go Cats,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Trevor Hefley". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Trevor" and last name "Hefley" clearly legible.

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