
Request to Reconsider the Proposed Elimination of the Statistics Department

From James Schnable <schnable@unl.edu>

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To Chancellor Bennett <chancellorbennett@unl.edu>; Tiffany Heng-Moss <thengmoss2@unl.edu>;
president@nebraska.edu <president@nebraska.edu>

Cc Karen Griffin <kgriffin2@unl.edu>; Bhaskar Bhattacharya <bbhattacharya8@unl.edu>

Dear Chancellor Bennett, Vice Chancellor Heng-Moss, and President Gold,

I am writing to ask that you reconsider the decision to close the Statistics department here at UNL. The elimination of our institution's statistics capacity will reduce the quality and competitiveness of research and graduate training both within IANR and across the university.

While no one is happy to see further rounds of budget cuts, I, like many members of the university community, was relieved to read that this time the objective was to make vertical cuts that specifically sought to do "less with less" rather than additional reductions in the shared support that enables all of our work and missions at UNL. However, the decision to close the statistics department does not reflect that philosophy, as the work of Statistics supports that of every other unit within IANR, and many across the university.

The training and teaching provided by Statistics faculty is critical to the training of the vast majority of graduate students throughout IANR who work on projects relevant to agronomy, plant breeding, animal science, and value-added agriculture.

The training my own students receive from Statistics -- from coursework, from collaborators, and from Statistics faculty on their thesis and dissertation committees -- is essential to our ability to win and execute upon large federal research awards. Our institute's capacity to train students whose expertise bridges quantitative techniques and in the field understanding of crop systems is why I receive e-mails from Corteva, Syngenta, and Bayer asking when my next lab's next PhDs will be graduating.

I don't envy any of you the hard decisions you have had to make over the past year, or the hard decisions you will continue need to make in the coming year. However, in this particular case I urge you to reconsider cuts that will reduce our ability in all areas of agricultural and natural science research and explore alternative budget cuts that explicitly reduce the scope of the IANR mission while keeping in place the support structure that allows us to train world class scientists and execute upon world class research in the remaining mission areas most critical to our stakeholders here in Nebraska.

Sincerely,
James

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