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To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to express my strong support for the University of Nebraska–Lincoln's Department of Statistics, which I understand is currently being considered for termination due to budget constraints. I took classes in the Statistics Department beginning as an undergraduate mathematics student at UNL, and I went on to earn both my Master's and PhD in Statistics, graduating in 2023. As a proud member of the UNL and statistics alumni communities, I am seriously troubled that this would be such an immense loss for the university's students, faculty, staff, and UNL's overall standing in the landscape of higher ed across the country.

Beyond serving its own graduate students, the Department has elevated statistical literacy and rigor across IANR, CASNR, and the broader university community. Students from a wide range of disciplines have benefited from its coursework, consulting services, and faculty–student collaborations. Master's and doctoral students throughout IANR routinely include faculty from Statistics on their committees, relying on their expertise to strengthen thesis and dissertation projects and to ensure graduates are well prepared to enter the workforce in their respective fields. These contributions have measurably enhanced the quality, reproducibility, and impact of research conducted at UNL. Within the wider academic community, there is an ongoing effort to integrate data analysis and quantitative literacy more effectively into diverse programs. A dedicated, disciplinary hub for statistical training and scholarship, such as a statistics department, provides the most effective and sustainable means of achieving this goal.

During my time in the department, I benefited from exceptional faculty mentorship, rigorous training, and a vibrant intellectual community that continues to shape my work as a Biomedical Data Scientist at the University of Kentucky (UKY). My work colleagues and faculty mentor at UKY complemented my statistical consulting and collaboration skills, as well as the knowledge I learned on the statistics fundamentals. I would never have been in the place I was leaving graduate school if not for the support of the faculty in this department. Their comprehensive curriculum over the years, including experimental design, regression, multivariate, and categorical analyses, spatial and time-series modeling, and more, prepared students to enter the workforce with highly sought-after skills.

In addition to my own training, I contributed to the department's growth by working alongside Dr. Kathy Hanford, Dr. Reka Howard, Dr. Walt Stroup, and Dr. Bert Clarke to strengthen the Statistical Consulting and Cross Collaboration Lab (SC3L). The SC3L has become a cornerstone of research support across the university, assisting countless students and faculty in producing higher-quality, more rigorous research. Graduate students and faculty in the department have served as collaborators or consultants on hundreds, if not thousands, of research projects, theses, dissertations, and peer-reviewed manuscripts. These contributions are foundational to maintaining UNL's status as a top-tier R1 research university. Without this support, students across the university would lose access to critical expertise in applying statistical methods to their research. At the same time, aspiring statisticians would be deprived of the hands-on experience with real-world data and collaborative projects. This type of training is essential for their development as professionals and would disappear without the Department.

National trends also highlight the growing importance of statistics education. In 2023, master's degrees in statistics increased by 13%, biostatistics master's degrees grew 23%, and data science and analytics degrees doubled or tripled compared with previous years[1]. This growth demonstrates an increasing demand for statistical literacy, data skills, and rigorous research training across disciplines. The UNL Statistics Department provides precisely these essential skills, preparing students not only for statistics-focused careers but also for success across academia, government, and industry.

In today's rapidly evolving research landscape, marked by the rise of AI, a pressing need for data literacy, and increasing emphasis on rigorous and reproducible research methods, no other department has the capacity to fill the gap that would result from eliminating this department. Foundational courses in introductory inferential statistics, experimental design, and advanced statistical methodology are irreplaceable and essential for preparing students and researchers across disciplines. Statistical training should be a core component of higher education, as the skills gained from statistics courses strengthen students' résumés, CVs, and academic portfolios, with these skills being in demand across academia, government, and industry. Everything I learned in the department and the experience I gained working at the SC3L directly enabled me to secure and succeed in my current position. Many alumni I know from the department have successfully obtained positions that align closely with their skills, and they've been able to apply the training they received at UNL to advance their careers.

Eliminating the Department of Statistics would create a critical gap that no other department or single, independent statisticians on staff could fully address. The faculty's expertise spans statistical methodologies and specific domain knowledge across agriculture, natural resources, public health, animal genetics, consulting, and more. This expertise supports UNL's diverse research portfolio and strengthens its reputation nationally and globally. Alumni of the program are leaders in numerous fields, further demonstrating its lasting impact.

I strongly urge you to reconsider this proposed change and explore alternative solutions to the removal of the entire statistics department. The value of the Department of Statistics cannot be measured solely in financial terms; its contributions to scholarship, innovation, and the university's reputation are immeasurable. Losing these faculty and resources would be a devastating setback to research and education across the institution. **The training and mentorship I received at UNL were instrumental in shaping my career as a statistician, and I feel it is both a privilege and a responsibility to speak up on behalf of the faculty who made that possible.**

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact me at Kelsey.karnik@uky.edu if I can provide further insight into the department's contributions to my career or its critical role at UNL.

Sincerely,
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[1] https://magazine.amstat.org/blog/2024/11/05/data-science-analytics-degrees-see-explosive-growth/