

September 15, 2025

Re: Concern Regarding Proposed Elimination of the Department of Statistics at UNL

Dear Chancellor Bennett and Members of the Administration,

I am writing to you in my capacity as Head of the Department of Statistics at Texas A&M University and as a former Program Director for Statistics at the National Science Foundation. I was both surprised and genuinely puzzled to learn of the proposal to eliminate the Department of Statistics at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

I fully recognize that universities across the country face difficult financial decisions. Still, closing a strong and visible Department of Statistics is a shortsighted response that will ultimately create larger costs than the savings it may achieve in the short run.

Statistics and Data Science are not only core academic disciplines but also among the fastest-growing and most in-demand professions. Universities across the U.S. are making strategic investments to build or expand their Statistics and Data Science departments, precisely because these areas attract students, generate research funding, and support excellence across the sciences, engineering, medicine, agriculture, and the social sciences.

The long-term consequences of dissolving a statistics department are severe:

- (i) Agencies such as NIH, NSF, USDA, and DOE expect a strong institutional presence in statistics when awarding large research grants. Eliminating the department will send a negative signal to funders, and the resulting shortfall in research funding will, over time, exceed the current budget savings.
- (ii) A university without a Department of Statistics risks being viewed as out of step with national and international trends. This will make it harder to recruit top faculty and graduate students across disciplines. Closing a department is administratively easy, but rebuilding one of the caliber that UNL currently has would take years and far greater resources than the modest savings realized.
- (iii) A centralized Statistics Department provides essential consulting, collaboration, and training for research across all colleges. Dispersing faculty into a “distributed model” weakens this role and undermines interdisciplinary strength.

- (iv) If a core, high-demand discipline such as Statistics is subject to elimination, it sets a troubling precedent that no department is secure. This will have a chilling effect on recruitment and retention across campus.

UNL has long enjoyed a strong reputation in statistics, and I fear this decision would jeopardize that standing for many years to come. At a time when peer institutions are strengthening their commitment to quantitative sciences, UNL's proposal runs in the opposite direction.

I respectfully urge you to reconsider. Protecting and investing in Statistics is not only in the best academic interest of UNL but also in the best financial interest of the university, its students, and its research enterprise.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brani Vidakovic", with a stylized, flowing script.

Brani Vidakovic
H.O. Hartley Chair and Department Head
Department of Statistics