



Statistical Sciences

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

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Academic Planning Committee
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

To: President Gold, Chancellor Bennet, Professor Bhattacharya, Vice Chancellor
Button, Corporation Secretary Hoffman, Vice Chancellor Heng-Moss,

and the Academic Planning Committee, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Dear colleagues:

The faculty in the Department of Statistics at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln are well-known nationally and internationally, and the department's activities are commensurate with other land-grant universities across the United States. It is puzzling to me that a discipline of study as central to the university as statistical science could be on the chopping block. In today's world, an understanding of data and reasoning under uncertainty are as essential as computation and critical thinking.

By way of introduction, I am a University Professor of Statistics at the University of Toronto. My research field is theoretical statistics, with emphasis on likelihood and its extensions, foundations of inference, and asymptotic analysis. During my 45-year career as an academic, I have witnessed the field of statistical science grow from a small branch of mathematics to a central STEM field. At the University of Toronto, a large public university, we have more than 4000 students enrolled in honours, majors, and minors programs in statistical and data science. Our department was once small; indeed it was threatened with closure during a particularly difficult time. It is now one of the largest in the Faculty of Arts and Science. I relate this information simply to emphasize the central position that statistical science has come to occupy in the realm of higher education.

Statistical work will go on at UNL with or without the department, as it is a necessary component for progress in nearly every field in science, social science, and increasingly in the humanities. Students will still sign up for courses, and graduate

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students in many departments will flood the planned “coordinated statistical consulting”. But this work will be second-rate, the teaching will be scattered, and you will not be training any students to an appropriate level of expertise in one of the highest-demand STEM fields. Curriculum development will stagger to a halt, as you will not have on-campus expertise keeping up with the latest developments. You will not have any graduate students in statistics or data science qualified to serve as TAs for undergraduate courses. You will have scientists in other fields who are expert in the statistical methods that have become routine in their discipline, and this will be adequate for a time. But soon your leading scientists will find that they do not have access to research collaborations at the level of expertise they will need and demand.

Statistical science is much more than applications of tools for particular scientific problems. It is a developing field of enquiry, advancing quickly, motivated by scientific applications, and grounded in a thorough understanding of mathematics, probability, and computer science. Its importance and influence around the world is stronger than at any time in my long career. UNL is fortunate to have faculty members in the Department of Statistics who are contributing to this at the highest level.

Difficult decisions are required of university leadership at every turn, and I can imagine that you are facing similar campaigns from other units at risk of closure. You have the unenviable task weighing many competing claims in what appears to be a budgetary disaster. President Gold’s strategic plan is presumably guiding this very painful process. Statistical science touches on nearly all the pillars of this plan, including multidisciplinary learning for students, integrated cross-campus research programs, partnership in Nebraska in agriculture, health care, military and industry, and data-driven decisions for stewardship. The decisions made now will reverberate for a very long time. I urge you to reconsider the decision to shut down research and teaching in an area as central to modern learning as statistical science.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Nancy Reid".

University Professor of Statistical Sciences
University of Toronto