
Elimination of Statistics department

From Thomas Lumley <t.lumley@auckland.ac.nz>

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To Academic Planning Committee <apc@unl.edu>

Cc Tiffany Heng-Moss <thengmoss2@unl.edu>; Chancellor Bennett <chancellorbennett@unl.edu>; Bhaskar Bhattacharya <bbhattacharya8@unl.edu>

Caution: Non-NU Email

Dear Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, colleagues,

I am writing to express concern about the proposed elimination of the Department of Statistics at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, which I think would be a very harmful decision.

As you will be aware, the department has recently established an innovative undergraduate programme designed to train the computationally skilled applied statisticians and data scientists that the private and public sectors everywhere (in my experience) are trying to find. The first cohort will graduate soon. The department has significant expertise in this area, and your institution is about to see the benefits.

More generally, statisticians are an important component of a research university: statisticians not only do their own research (in forensics or data visualisation, for example); they improve other people's research. I am aware your institution has a Biostatistics department, but statisticians (like everyone else) specialise -- they will typically not have the expertise to support research areas where the Statistics department specialises, even if they have the spare capacity.

I realise that times are hard everywhere. It is possible that your other options are even more disastrous than eliminating the Department of Statistics, its new undergraduate program, and its collaborations across the institution. If so, you have my deepest sympathies.

Sincerely,

-thomas

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