September 21, 2025


Academic Planning Committee
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Re: Proposed elimination of the Department of Statistics


Dear Members of the Academic Planning Committee,

I write in my personal capacity; my UC Davis titles and affiliation are for identification only, and the views below are my own.

I encourage you to oppose the proposal to eliminate the Department of Statistics at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and to dismiss its tenured and tenure-track faculty. Removing a vital STEM discipline at a flagship land-grant research university would greatly damage UNL's academic quality, Nebraska's workforce, and the national research system in which UNL plays an essential role.

**Why a stand-alone Statistics Department matters:**

- Statistics is foundational: It supports discovery and decision-making in agriculture, life and environmental sciences, engineering, medicine, and social sciences. From experimental design and field trials to modern data science and AI, statisticians are the connecting link in a research university.

- Reputation and competitiveness: Disbanding Statistics would immediately weaken UNL's standing as a comprehensive, research-intensive institution. It would jeopardize collaborations across colleges, with federal agencies, industry, and other universities, and risk signaling a retreat from UNL's land-grant mission.

- Student demand and workforce needs: The need for statistics and data-science training is rapidly increasing nationwide at the undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels. Nebraska's public and private sectors—particularly agriculture and ag-tech, bioinformatics, climate and water resources, and public health—rely on a consistent flow of graduates who are quantitatively trained.

- Department versus scattering: The advantages of a unified statistics department—such as curricular coherence, faculty mentoring and retention, shared computing and consulting

resources, coordinated service teaching, and visible leadership in research and graduate training—cannot be achieved by dispersing a few statisticians across other units. Fragmentation consistently diminishes rigor, capacity, and innovation.

**Specific interactions and impacts:** I provide a few specific examples from my own experience that highlight the stature and influence of UNL Statistics.

- Professor Bertrand Clarke, whom I know through the statistical machine learning community, served as Editor-in-Chief of *Statistical Analysis and Data Mining*—a leading journal at the intersection of statistics and machine learning. His leadership in rigorous methodology and collaborative science demonstrates the kind of scholarship UNL Statistics contributes to the field.

- Professor Heike Hofmann is closely connected to this community; notably, one of her doctoral students went on to receive the field's most prestigious early-career award, the COPSS Award. This highlights the high quality of mentorship and training that UNL Statistics faculty members can offer and promote within our field.

- My former postdoctoral researcher, Dr. Xueheng Shi, entered the academic job market with multiple attractive opportunities. He chose to join UNL because of the department's reputation and the high quality of its research and teaching environment. The decision of talented early-career scholars to come to UNL is a testament to the department's national profile.

**UNL Statistics' broad contributions:** UNL's statisticians have long provided impactful teaching, collaborative research, and professional service that are essential to the university's research efforts and Nebraska's economic strength. These contributions cannot continue if the department is eliminated and its faculty appointments are terminated. The proposal, therefore, has consequences that extend well beyond a single unit's budget line.

**Constructive alternatives:** If financial pressures require change, there are less harmful options that preserve core capacity and tenure protections while achieving budget goals, such as strategic hiring freezes, administrative consolidations that maintain Statistics' academic integrity, shared service-teaching agreements, and targeted revenue-generating master's programs.

**Requested action:** I respectfully ask the APC to (i) oppose the elimination of the Department of Statistics and (ii) support a collaborative process that preserves UNL's long-term academic strength, advances its land-grant mission, and upholds the university's capacity in a discipline vital to modern research and education.

Thank you for your careful consideration. I would be happy to discuss further if helpful.

Yours sincerely,

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