

To whom it may concern,

I am writing as a proud graduate (and the first PhD graduate) of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln’s Department of Statistics (Ph.D. in 2006) and as a professor at Winona State University. I was shocked and disappointed to learn about the proposed elimination of the Statistics Department, and I urge you to reconsider.

I was at UNL when the department was formed in 2003. That was a big step forward for the university, and I honestly cannot believe the progress that was made then could be undone only a few decades later. When I was a student, I was fortunate to work with faculty doing both research in statistics and extensive consulting across the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. That balance of theory and application was incredibly valuable. It was also one of the reasons I was hired at Winona State — the statistical knowledge and strong teaching and consulting experience I received at UNL made me stand out in a pool of applicants, and it continues to serve me well today.

Since then, Winona State has hired two more UNL statisticians, and we’ve sent several of our graduates to UNL’s graduate program in statistics, as well. They all received an excellent education, gained real consulting experience, and did research at a very high level. They’ve gone on to land highly competitive positions in academia and industry. This is proof that the department doesn’t just serve its own students; it raises the bar for research and teaching far beyond its walls.

Statistics is essential in today’s society. It is not merely a collection of service courses — it is the foundation of rigorous research across disciplines. A dedicated statistics department drives methodological innovation, supports faculty and student research through consulting and collaboration, and elevates the overall quality of scholarship across the university. Eliminating the Statistics Department at UNL would significantly weaken the university’s research infrastructure, hinder its ability to attract top-tier graduate students and faculty, and reduce competitiveness for external funding.

The impact goes beyond research. Several of the faculty slated for elimination are respected Fellows of the American Statistical Association and other professional societies — clear evidence of their national recognition and contributions to the field. Their expertise is not easily replaced, and without them, the university risks a decline in both research quality and academic reputation.

I am concerned about the proposed shift toward “a distributed model that leverages expertise embedded across IANR, UNL, and the NU system.” If this means relying on faculty from other departments to teach statistics and provide consulting services, it

raises serious concerns. Are these individuals trained statisticians, or simply faculty who have taken a few statistics courses? Both statistical consulting and teaching require deep, specialized expertise. Without the current faculty, it is unlikely the university will be able to recruit individuals with the necessary qualifications, and the quality of both services will inevitably decline.

Even if trained statisticians are hired, distributing them across other departments would dilute the cohesive identity and leadership that a centralized department provides. This approach was tried before the Statistics Department's creation in 2003, and it proved ineffective. Without a unified department, there is no clear hub for collaboration, no visible leadership in statistical research and education, and no strong voice advocating for best practices across campus. Dissolving the Statistics Department now would not be a step forward — it would be a return to a fragmented model that failed to meet the university's needs in the past.

UNL students will be adversely affected by this decision. What is the plan for teaching the many service courses currently handled by the Statistics faculty? Students deserve to learn statistics from professionals trained in statistics departments. There is a common misconception that anyone who has taken a few statistics courses is qualified to teach it. That is simply not true. I took several biology courses during my education, but I would never claim to be qualified to teach biology. Allowing underqualified instructors to teach statistics would do a disservice to students and diminish the quality of education across the university.

I know universities face difficult financial and strategic decisions, but cutting a department that is so central to campus-wide research, teaching, and the university's reputation is not a sustainable solution. I strongly urge you to explore other paths that would allow the UNL Statistics Department to continue its vital work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tisha L. Hooks". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tisha L. Hooks, Ph.D.