

# American Statistical Association

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July 1, 2009

John Hitt, President  
University of Central Florida  
P.O. Box 160002  
Orlando, FL 32816-0002

Terry Hickey, Provost  
University of Central Florida  
P.O. Box 160065  
Orlando, FL 32816-0065

Dear President Hitt and Provost Hickey,

The leadership of the American Statistical Association has been informed of the proposed elimination of the UCF Department of Statistics and Actuarial Sciences at the end of the 2009–2010 academic year. In this age of increasing dependence on the analysis of data and the understanding of decisions made in the face of uncertainty, closing this department would be a disservice to your students, faculty, and state. We urge you to reconsider.

The statistics discipline is thriving in our information age—examples among many include data mining, clinical trials, quality control, analysis of huge data sets, and national security. In a study released this year by CareerCast.com, "statistician" is rated as the third-best job. "Actuary," the other career represented in the department you propose to eliminate, is ranked second. Further, Hal Varian, Google's chief economist stated in an interview with *The McKinsey Quarterly*, "The sexy job in the next ten years will be statisticians." He went on to say, "The ability to take data—to be able to understand it, to process it, to extract value from it, to visualize it, to communicate it—that's going to be a hugely important skill in the next decades." We believe eliminating the department that trains students for two of three "best jobs," jobs with a bright future and very low unemployment rate, would hurt the reputation of the University of Central Florida and deprive students in your area of important opportunities.

Because statistics is integrated into all the sciences to some degree and is fundamental to research, eliminating this department could also undermine both the research done at UCF and the training for other degrees. This is made clear in the June 16 memoranda you received from the College of Sciences Undergraduate Curriculum and Standards Committee and the College of Sciences Graduate Studies and Research Committee. These memoranda also point to the teaching activities and the ability of the students to find jobs.

A recent report from the Association of American Medical Colleges ("Scientific Foundations for Future Physicians") points to the importance of statistics in training pre-med students. (See also the related editorial in Science magazine, Vol. 324, Page 1241.) For a university with a medical school, elimination of statistics would place your students at a serious disadvantage when compared to those from other colleges and universities. Your faculty seeking NIH grants will be disadvantaged as well, and will have to seek statistical assistance from other universities, as those NIH grants often require a statistical consultant.

In summary, the ASA and its 18,000 worldwide members encourage you to reconsider the proposed elimination of this effective and important program. We stand ready to aid the university by suggesting outside evaluators of the program, if you so choose to employ additional objective criteria in reaching this decision.

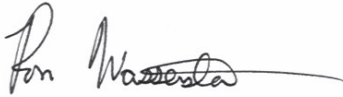
We are not unaware of the difficult budget decisions you face. One of us (Wasserstein) is a former provost, so we know how problematic such decisions can be. However, in the case of this department, the loss to the university, to the central Florida community, and, indeed, to the country will in the long run greatly outstrip any short-run financial savings that may appear to exist.

We wish you well as you deliberate these weighty matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Sally Morton", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Sally Morton, President

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Ron Wasserstein", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ron Wasserstein, Executive Director