September 18, 2025

The Academic Program Council
University of Nebraska Lincoln
Lincoln, NE 68523

Dear Academic Program Council members,

On behalf of the American Statistical Association (ASA), I write to urge UNL to preserve the Department of Statistics as an independent academic unit. Eliminating or merging it would weaken UNL's academic profile and diminish the university's ability to lead in the data-driven research and teaching that define a modern research institution.

Across the United States, Statistics has emerged as a standalone discipline that plays a vital role in the modern data economy. Eliminating Statistics at UNL would undermine the university's national reputation, weaken critical collaborations, and diminish the discipline itself. As the foundation of data science, Statistics is indispensable to advances in healthcare, engineering, economics, environmental sciences, artificial intelligence, and national security—fields where rigorous methodology and computational tools drive both discovery and decision-making.

The national demand for statistical and data science expertise continues to grow at an extraordinary pace. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, jobs for statisticians and data scientists are projected to grow by over **30% between 2022 and 2032**, significantly outpacing the average growth rate for all occupations. *U.S. News & World Report* ranks statistician among the **Top 30 Best Jobs**, including **#10 in Best Business Jobs** and **#16 in Best STEM Jobs**. The number of U.S. undergraduates earning degrees in statistics has increased more than six-fold since 2010, with over **5,500 bachelor's degrees awarded in 2023** and the number of institutions offering such programs nearly doubling over the same period (from 95 to 184). For Master's level, statistics degrees increased 150% since 2010 to 5,150 in 2023, while data science and analytics-related degrees increased 15-fold to more than 12,000 in that period. The number of universities granting statistics and data-intensive degrees grew from 70 to 300.[1] These trends reflect the central role of statistics and data science in today's workforce.

Eliminating Statistics would extinguish a vital hub for research and teaching, inflicting irreparable harm on UNL's reputation as a comprehensive, research-intensive university. Merging it into another department would erode its visibility, dilute its identity, and weaken its ability to respond strategically to the rapidly expanding demand for statistical expertise. Preserving Statistics as an independent department will:

- Expand academic programs to prepare UNL students for the explosive growth in data-intensive careers across industries;

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[1] https://magazine.amstat.org/blog/2024/11/05/data-science-analytics-degrees-see-explosive-growth/

- Recruit and retain top-tier faculty whose professional and research identities align with statistics and data science;

- Strengthen partnerships with industry, government, and interdisciplinary collaborators, where statistical and computational expertise is a key driver of innovation.

The ASA Board recently underscored the importance of statistics in the era of data science and artificial intelligence in its formal statement, *The Role of Statistics in Data Science and AI*. Maintaining UNL's Department of Statistics as an independent unit reflects this reality and aligns UNL with the organizational structures at many leading research universities nationwide.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the University of Nebraska Lincoln to **preserve the independence of the Department of Statistics**. Doing so will ensure the department continues to thrive, serve UNL students, and contribute to the university's mission of advancing education, research, and economic development in the state of Nebraska and beyond.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ji-Hyun Lee, 2025 President   Ron Wasserstein, Executive Director