

September 21, 2026

President Barbara Snyder and Board of Directors
American Association of Universities

By email to: barbara.snyder@aaup.edu and associated addresses

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing in my capacity as President of the American Association of University Professors to raise serious concerns that actions taken at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln compromise UNL's status as a leading research university and, consequently, its candidacy for renewed membership in the American Association of Universities.

The AAU and AAUP have long operated within a shared framework of norms that promote excellence in academic research. Chief among these are the principles articulated in the *1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure (with its 1970 Interpretive Comments)*, along with the broader system of shared governance. These principles function as the de facto standard at leading research universities. They are not merely aspirational ideals, but the operating conditions that make excellence possible.

In a significant departure from these standards, the University of Nebraska Board of Regents recently approved the termination of 58 faculty members, including 39 tenured professors, through the closure of four academic departments: Educational Administration; Earth and Atmospheric Sciences; Statistics; and Textiles, Merchandising and Fashion Design. These decisions have had immediate consequences for students, research programs, and faculty leadership, including members of the UNL AAUP chapter.

While fiscal pressures driven by state disinvestment are real, UNL's response raises fundamental concerns. The elimination of entire departments to achieve relatively modest short-term savings risks long-term damage to research capacity, student enrollment, and institutional reputation. More importantly, the process by which these decisions were reached appears to have violated core principles of shared governance and relied on evaluative tools inappropriate for personnel actions of this kind.

The use of external metrics from the Academic Analytics Research Center—tools whose developers explicitly caution against their use as punitive measures—to justify the termination of tenured faculty is particularly troubling. Such actions call into question UNL's commitment to research excellence and undermine confidence in institutional decision-making.

These concerns have been underscored by statements from Jeffrey Gold, President of the University of Nebraska System, who publicly acknowledged a breakdown of trust in the

process. While the UNL Chancellor who proposed the department eliminations has resigned following a historic vote of no confidence by the UNL faculty senate, UNL continues to carry out the program cuts he set forth. I have been in direct dialogue with President Gold, who has declined to rescind the closures and terminations.

As you know, the University of Nebraska–Lincoln has expressed interest in rejoining the AAU. Membership in the AAU signals a university's standing as a leading research institution, defined by the breadth and quality of its graduate education and research. Those standards cannot be achieved or sustained without strong academic governance, academic freedom, and institutional integrity. In light of the actions described above, we believe it is appropriate for the AAU to consider whether UNL currently meets the conditions necessary to uphold those standards.

Accordingly, I urge the AAU to withhold consideration of UNL's readmission unless and until the institution demonstrates a clear and credible commitment to restoring shared governance, protecting tenure, and aligning its practices with the principles that define leading research universities.

This is not simply a matter concerning one institution. It speaks directly to the conditions under which research universities can sustain excellence and public trust.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further.

With respect,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Todd Wolfson', with a stylized, flowing script.

Todd Wolfson
President
American Association of University Professors

CC:

Douglas Girod

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