

# Advocates protest budget cuts as football fans make way to Memorial Stadium

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Advocates protest UNL budget cut before Husker football game



Jeraldine Mays signs a petition to support the faculty and degree programs that may be eliminated due to budget cuts before the Northwestern game on Saturday at Nebraska Union Plaza.

KENNETH FERRIERA, Journal Star

Against a backdrop of Husker football fans and tailgates, advocates at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln gathered to support the faculty and degree programs that may be eliminated due to budget cuts.

UNL faculty, students and community members — many wearing "One Faculty, One Nebraska" shirts — stood at the Nebraska Union Plaza on Saturday morning to gather petition signatures and educate passersby.

Their message: disinvesting in education at UNL will do more harm than good.

"We're trying to keep the university from hurting itself and hurting students," said statistics professor Susan VanderPlas.



Greg Simon, associate professor at UNL's Glenn Korff School of Music, left, speaks with alum Randy Gordon during an event to support the faculty and degree programs that may be eliminated due to budget cuts before the Northwestern game on Saturday at Nebraska Union Plaza.

KENNETH FERRIERA, Journal Star

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In an effort to address a \$27.5 million budget deficit, UNL's leadership has proposed to cut the entire Department of Statistics, which will save an estimated \$1.75 million. Five other degree programs would also be eliminated.

VanderPlas said she and other statistics professionals at UNL have identified flaws in the analysis used by UNL leadership to make the decisions. "People seem to think that if you have numbers, they mean something," VanderPlas said. "Some of the analysis here is like taking the average of all the numbers in the phone book. It just doesn't mean anything."

Arian Alai, a graduate student in statistics, said he came to the rally to show support for his classmates, many of whom are international students. They are now scrambling to figure out what their futures will look like if they no longer have an academic path at UNL, he said.

If not for Nebraska's graduate program, Alai said he would have left the state for his education. There's a chance that he might have never come back, he said, adding to Nebraska's brain drain — the loss of college-educated Nebraskans to other states.

"I think it's a net negative for not just those of us in the department, but also those in the university and in Nebraska," Alai said. "Now employers are going to have to hire people from other states to do statistics-related work."



UNL faculty gather signatures during an event to support the faculty and degree programs that may be eliminated due to budget cuts before the Northwestern game on Saturday at Nebraska Union Plaza.

KENNETH FERRIERA, Journal Star

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Jake Kirkland Jr., a leader in the Lincoln community, said he's concerned for the quality of education students will receive from Nebraska's land-grant university. "I just want to be a voice for them, so to speak," Kirkland said. "They seem to have limited say on who makes decisions around here."

Kirkland spent 30 years of his career working for UNL, much of that time spent in leadership roles. It doesn't surprise him that UNL now spends more on administrators than faculty, but he's still concerned. "Why doesn't anybody talk about releasing any administrators?" Kirkland said. "You're harming students, you're laying people off, but yet these administrators are still on

a platform, but they're still getting increases in salary. How do you work that out?"

Ethnic studies and Spanish professor Luis Othoniel Rosa said he's worried that cutting academic programs and majors will hurt the university's reputation as a quality research institution and risk the loss of federal funds.

"Research is producing new knowledge, and we're great at that," Rosa said. "This doesn't make economic sense."

Dewayne Mays, president of Lincoln NAACP, said the cuts to academic programs signal to him that educating students is not UNL's top priority. "If education is not important at a university, then what good is the university?" Mays said.

The Board of Regents is expected to vote on the proposed cuts at its Dec. 5 meeting.