

December 7, 2023

Dear Chancellor Bennett:

We are writing as a collective from our organization, AFIRE (Advocating for Inclusion, Respect and Equity), a group that advocates for equity and inclusion at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. AFIRE is an organization of scholars, teachers, students, and human science professionals in the College of Education and Human Sciences (CEHS) who deeply understand the necessity for the work that the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) and the Office of Academic Success and Intercultural Services (OASIS) carry out. Therefore, we have deep concerns with the \$800,000 recommended budget cuts from these offices. **We, along with other concerned UNL faculty, staff members, and student organization leaders including those from Afrikan People's Union, MASA, Spectrum, TRANScend, oSTEM, First Generation Student Organization, Asian Student Union, and The National-Pan Hellenic Council among others (207 signatories as of today and ongoing), urge you to reconsider.**

Budgets are moral documents as they reflect the values of an organization. Such a drastic cut to diversity and inclusion efforts within our campus is the antithesis to the [mission](#) of the university, which states UNL “promotes respect for and understanding of cultural diversity in all aspects of society. It strives for a culturally diverse student body, faculty, and staff reflecting the multicultural nature of Nebraska and the nation.” ODI and OASIS engage in critical work that not only attracts Students of Color and minoritized college students more broadly to enroll at UNL but also supports their success to degree completion.

Decades of research have established the need for concerted diversity and inclusion work on college campuses—work that can be profoundly impactful on the lives and academic trajectories for minoritized college students. Research on colleges and universities has shown that Students of Color enroll in and graduate from colleges and universities at lower rates [when compared to their white peers](#) largely as a result of racism, unwelcoming campuses, and microaggressions. Considering the disparities in educational attainment among Students of Color and their White peers, it is important that educators promote practices that have shown to be effective in supporting these students through their academic journeys, which is precisely the work that ODI and OASIS engage in. Furthermore, these offices provide critical professional development opportunities for faculty and staff that strengthen inclusive educational practices. Distributing this work to colleges and units will likely result in disjointed and uneven efforts across the institution and/or add extensive unpaid labor to faculty and staff that disproportionately take on equity and inclusion work.

Among UNL's [core values and beliefs](#) is the insistence that “words and actions matter [and that] the absence of action and words also matter” in striving for an environment of respect and inclusion of differences. It is imperative that our University reconsiders these extreme budget cut recommendations in light of the ramifications they will have on current and future UNL students.

Sincerely,

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