Response from EAS to APC Recommendations to the Chancellor

November 5, 2025

We are grateful to the APC for their tireless efforts over the last several months. We are acutely aware of the challenges of carefully deliberating decisions that are existential to campus programs on such a compressed timeline. We also appreciate the general transparency reflected in the thorough discussion of the APC's recommendations. Below you will find our response to these recommendations which highlight where some of the APC reasoning lack clarity, is based on erroneous or misinterpreted data, and where assumptions need to be challenged. All text in blue has been extracted verbatim from the APC's recommendations. Text in black is our response.

Supporters of the proposed elimination of the Earth and Atmospheric Sciences (EAS) program acknowledge its contributions but argue that…

…its core expertise, particularly in meteorology and geology, can be retained through strategic reorganization within the university, especially by integrating faculty into the School of Natural Resources (SNR). They emphasize that this approach allows UNL to preserve critical research and instructional capacity while addressing budget constraints.

It is not clear what "strategic reorganization" actually means. This wording was not used in the original proposal or in additional guidance provided to the APC by the Chancellor and the ELT. Does this refer to actions proposed by the Chancellor and the ELT that have not been made public or instead to the rehiring of "high-performing faculty" included in the original proposal? If the latter, the faculty proposed for retention represent only a fraction of the "core expertise" of EAS. Areas of expertise with a track record of strong extramural support will be lost. These include radar meteorology, geophysics, and computational hydrogeology. Moreover, faculty retained through rehiring cannot maintain any semblance of their former productivity without the supporting BS, MS, and PhD programs. Existing academic programs in SNR cannot attract the students required to support these faculty.

It is unclear what preserving "instructional capacity" refers to in the APC response. Program elimination removes opportunities for teaching courses in the disciplines of retained faculty. Moreover, any program elimination that seeks to preserve research and teaching in the disciplines represented by that program is not a ***bona fide*** program elimination. The words "*bona fide*" would be redundant if not to prohibit actions exactly like the one being proposed. Therefore, budgetary savings through elimination of EAS while maintaining research and teaching pathways in geology and meteorology cannot be achieved through elimination of faculty, per the bylaws.

They noted that the program's degree production may be below CCPE thresholds,

The Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education (CCPE) requires a minimum of 7 graduates per year (averaged over 5 years) for baccalaureate degree programs, 5 graduates for Masters degrees, and 3 for PhD's. The Meteorology-Climatology BS degree averaged 5.8 per year between 2019-20 and 2023-24 and the Geology BS degree averaged 8.1 per year in the same time period. The Earth and Atmospheric Sciences MS averaged 9 degrees per year, and the PhD averaged 1.8 degrees per year. Thus, of the four degrees offered by EAS, two are below CCPE thresholds. If degrees granted were counted based on the department rather than the major, only one of our degrees would be below CCPE thresholds.

Since CAS reintegrated faculty into the recruiting cycle, first-year enrollment in Meteorology grew from a 3-year average of 10 per year (during which CAS restricted recruiting by departments) to 26 this year: the highest in nearly 20 years. Moreover, as of October 1, 2025, 31 first-year students have been admitted into EAS degree programs for the Fall of 2026 exceeding the number of admissions observed at the same time in 2024 (n = 27). Therefore, we expect B.S. degrees awarded for this major to grow in coming years. First-year Geology B.S. majors also increased this year compared to the previous 3-year average: 8 in 2025 compared to the three-year average of 6.

Below-threshold PhD production is partially due to faculty demographics, as older faculty have been reluctant to take on new PhD students as retirement nears and younger faculty have not yet graduated PhD students from their research groups. We also have established a dual-degree MS/PhD track for our graduate program that will undoubtedly increase PhD degrees awarded in future years.

…and that no viable alternative budget reduction was presented by the unit or CAS. However, with plans to retain key faculty and maintain essential academic pathways, some APC members viewed restructuring as a pragmatic solution that balances academic continuity with necessary financial adjustments.

Alternatives to program elimination were proposed (pp 39-41); notably, a merger with SNR that retains the degree programs and EAS faculty but increases pathways to degree completion, improves operational efficiency, and capitalizes on potential synergies currently occluded by cross-college obstacles. Moreover, members of the APC who oppose elimination agree that this alternative should be pursued. It appears that even some members who support elimination see this as a "pragmatic solution". What aspects

of the alternative are not "viable"? Surely, overcoming the challenges associated with cross-college actions is more viable than the elimination of an entire program. If APC members supporting elimination were dissatisfied because EAS failed to include budget estimates of the impact of such a merger, we would argue that 1) EAS, in our September 11 meeting announcing the proposed elimination, was explicitly instructed by EVC Button not to pursue such estimates and 2) there was not enough time to develop even remotely accurate estimates principally because such estimation would require extensive consultation with leaders of both CAS and CASNR. However, we would point out that estimates of mergers that were proposed by the Chancellor and ELT were nearly the scale of the budget savings estimated from elimination of EAS, which would suggest potential budgetary savings of similar magnitude could be realized.

The "abstain" voter felt that there had not been sufficient time to explore the viability of a merger of EAS with SNR to create an Earth Systems Science Institute, especially given the challenges involved in cross-College mergers. Without understanding the viability of the proposal, an "opposed" vote felt unjustified, but an "in favor" vote could not be justified because of the importance of the academic disciplines to the state.

While we feel strongly that a vote against elimination was justified without considering a merger with SNR, we appreciate the acknowledgement by the "abstain" voter that dismissal of the merger proposal as unviable also is not justified without full vetting.

In summary, the arguments made in favor of eliminating Earth & Atmospheric Sciences pale in comparison to those made by APC members opposing elimination. These include that "***elimination would severely weaken the university's research capacity and public service mission***, especially given EAS's role in training the state's geoscientists and meteorologists, its strong record in grantsmanship, and its distinguished faculty, including a National Academies of Science member and multiple NSF CAREER awardees. There was concern that ***dispersing faculty across other units will risk diluting EAS expertise*** and prompting departures that would leave UNL without critical capabilities" [emphasis added]. Also, it was stated in opposition to elimination that the "metrics used in the current proposal fail to capture EAS's full contributions, and ***eliminating the department would not only harm Nebraska's ability to respond to environmental challenges but also damage UNL's reputation and long-term competitiveness***" [emphasis added]. None of the arguments put forward by the "in favor" members dispute or falsify the arguments against elimination.