

## NEW FRONTIERS

### New Dean Brings a Vision of Improved Health Care for Nebraskans

*UNMC's College of Nursing recently added something more than another honor to its portfolio of accomplishments. The College's national reputation helped in recruiting a new dean: Dr. Virginia Tilden, formerly associate dean for research at Oregon Health & Science University School of Nursing.*

A nationally known expert in end-of-life care, she was a founder of the Center for Ethics in Health Care and a recipient of the Distinguished Faculty Award for Research. "Bringing in faculty of the caliber of Virginia Tilden will ensure that our students continue to have the opportunity to learn from the very best in the nation," said Chancellor Harold Maurer. Tilden is also expected to help UNMC maintain its momentum in the National Institutes of Health rankings, where it has already moved from 84th in 2001 to 21st in 2003.

Tilden turned aside opportunities to head up other nursing colleges to

come to UNMC. The reasons, she said, were basically three. "I was inspired by the vision and leadership of Chancellor Maurer," she said. "I saw that the College of Nursing had a stellar faculty and a tremendous momentum, and hopefully I can take it to the next level." During her recruitment visits, which took her across the state, Tilden said she fell in love with the people of Nebraska. "I knew this was where I wanted to spend the next years of my life," she said.

It's not surprising that one of her first priorities was to visit Scottsbluff, Kearney and Lincoln, where College of Nursing out-state campuses are located. Her goal was to meet the faculty, students and hospital and community leaders and to listen and learn from those she met.

She shared a vision of helping resolve two critical problems: a national nursing shortage and a growing number of medically underserved individuals. "To address these issues, nursing education needs to be accessible, affordable and geographically dispersed," Tilden said.

The UNMC College of Nursing is meeting those challenges. Enrollment is at an all-time high in the college, which offers students baccalaureate, master's and doctorate degrees in nursing through four campuses and 73 distance education sites.

Distance education is a bonus for students in greater Nebraska because they can access courses from their home communities and can often gain the required clinical experience there as well. It's also a benefit to rural Nebraska, as students tend to accept jobs and stay in the communities in which they receive their degree.

One student who has seen firsthand the benefits of UNMC's distance learning program is Lois Franzen, who is



Dr. Virginia Tilden will continue UNMC's tradition of making nursing education accessible through distance education.

earning her Bachelor of Science in Nursing right in her home community of Leigh, Nebraska. "I had been wanting to complete my degree for quite some time, but I needed an option that would allow me to continue working and stay in my community," said Franzen, who has worked as an RN for over 25 years in northeast Nebraska.

"UNMC's program allowed me to take classes around my work schedule. I love that flexibility. I can bring my laptop to work and watch a lecture during my lunch break, and I interact with the faculty and other students through an on-line discussion board." Franzen applies the theory she learns on-line to diverse clinical experiences in the community. "What I've learned in the 'classroom' has made me a better nurse," she said.

"Community support is essential

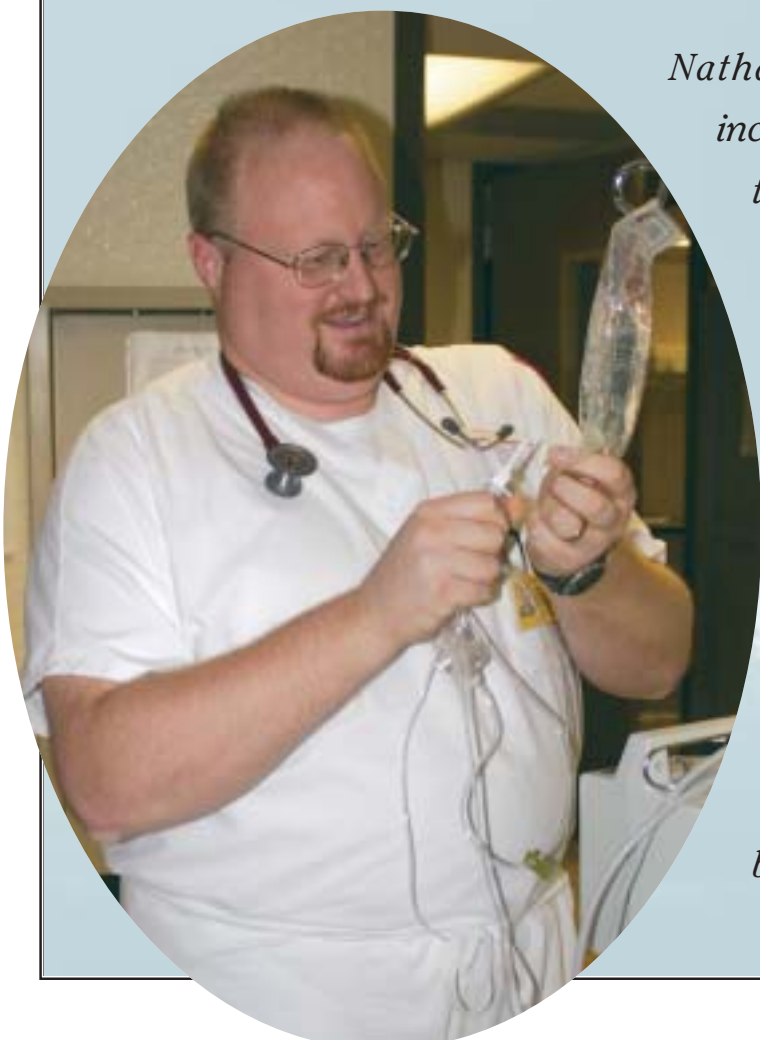
to the success of our program," Tilden said. "Our partnerships with local hospitals and health care professionals provide our students with top-quality, hands-on clinical experiences. Students gain experience handling a wide range of health issues from elder care to health education, and we help meet the needs of the medically underserved individuals throughout the state." Programs such as a diabetes clinic in Scottsbluff, a senior care facility in Lincoln, the Family Health Care Center in Omaha and the Mobile Nursing Center—which travels throughout the state offering nursing, dental, pharmacy and allied health services—help ensure that all Nebraskans have access to excellent medical care.

### Many UNMC College of Nursing Students Hope to Return to Their Home Communities When They Graduate

*Nathan Mattox took it one step farther...he completed his nursing degree program, including his clinical experience, without ever leaving his hometown of Scottsbluff. Mattox took classes at the College of Nursing Scottsbluff campus, participated in two distance education courses the College offered and completed his clinical rotations at local medical facilities.*

*"Highly educated people in the medical field are staying in the area, eliminating local 'brain drain,'" he said. "Plus, it is a great bonus to have local people caring for local people." Mattox is one of a growing number of men entering the nursing field, and UNMC has been recognized nationally for its efforts to increase the number of male and minority students.*

*Formerly a paramedic, Mattox was accustomed to dealing with critical health problems, but was rarely able to follow his patients through to recovery. Today, with a degree in nursing (awarded in December 2003) and a focus on critical care, he can do both. Mattox and his wife, a family practice physician, will stay in Scottsbluff.*



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## Great Teaching at the Core of the University of Nebraska

*Remember the teacher who made a difference in your life? An inspiring lecture, a unique teaching style, a gentle push toward a different career path...whatever the circumstances, the result was unforgettable.*

*From Scottsbluff to Omaha, on campus or off, University of Nebraska faculty members like those featured here make a difference as they help students prepare for the future.*



Longo, with freshman Siobhan Duffy, a pre-med student from Omaha, and Nick Branting, a senior from North Platte. Both students cite small class sizes as one of the primary reasons they chose UNK.

Dr. Peter Longo, political science professor at the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK), has a Ph.D. in political science and a law degree. He is the former director of UNK's Honors Program and the chair of its political science department. He has received the Ak-Sar-Ben Outstanding Nebraska Educator Award and been voted "Faculty Person of the Year" four times by the students at UNK. There is apparently only one thing he's blown in his career: the average class size at UNK.

Average class size at UNK is 16 students; Longo's classes routinely exceed that number.

Students clamor to get into Longo's classes not only because he clearly knows the subject matter, but also because his passion for knowledge is contagious.

"He probably is, well, he is the motivating factor that sent me to law school," said Anthony Schutz, a 1998 graduate of UNK.

Schutz, who grew up on a farm near Elwood, said that before he took

an undergraduate civil liberties class taught by Longo, it hadn't occurred to him to consider law school. "He recognized that I had the ability to do well in law school, and he told me that," he said. "He planted that seed." Schutz ultimately graduated number one in his UNL law school class and now clerks for Judge Arlen Beam, of the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals.

Other students say the same—Longo has inspired them, opened their eyes to possibilities they hadn't seen before. Ely Colindres, a UNK

sophomore from Lexington, is the first in her family to attend college. Longo has "made a difference," she said, whether it is encouraging her to attend a pre-law institute, writing her a letter of recommendation or teaching her in class. Consequently she is now also considering a career in law.

"He reached out and helped me a lot," she said. "He's always very supportive, and I'm thankful for that."

Longo is quick to return the praise, calling UNK students "a good-natured, kind, gentle, inquisitive community of students." And he praises the University's values, on campus and off, rooted in the old-fashioned notion that if you send your children to college, you can expect them to receive a solid undergraduate education.

"Your teaching had better be good here," Longo said. "That's the culture."

That back-to-basics philosophy is reflected in UNK's improved ranking in the most recent *U.S. News and World Report*, "America's Best College" issue. The report noted UNK's high freshman retention rate (80 percent); its high percentage of full-time faculty in the classroom; and its very low percentage (6 percent) of classes with 50 or more students.

As a state-supported university, some say it's simply the obligation of the faculty to provide an excellent experience for students. Longo would take it a step further.

"We don't find that to be a burden," he said. "That's a labor of love."

## Faculty Make a Difference at UNK

Ely Colindres is quick to cite professors who have made a difference in her academic career at

the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Peter Longo, professor of political science, and Peg Camp, associate professor of accounting/finance, are two who come to mind.

From Camp, she learned the principles of accounting. The subject can be frustrating, Colindres said, and spending two hours on one problem is not unusual. But Camp makes it clear that all a student

needs to do is ask for help.

"She'll work it through with you until you say 'ohhhh,'" Colindres said.

Longo recruited her into the UNK Honors Program and encouraged her to participate in the NU College of Law Minority Pre-Law Institute. "Ely will be highly successful in life," Longo said. "It is clear her world view is looking outward, not inward."



UNK's women's basketball team had the highest cumulative G.P.A. (3.723) for the 2002-03 academic year for all NCAA, NAIA programs.



Both undergraduate and graduate programs at NU are moving up in the rankings.



UNO offers a First Year Connection program that pairs new students with faculty and staff mentors.



Experience a year at Nebraska through videos and stories of three UNL students. Log on to [www.realnebraska.unl.edu](http://www.realnebraska.unl.edu)

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UNO's service-learning curriculum injects students into the community to experience real-life situations. Here, Dr. Benjamin-Alvarado reviews Arturo Miranda's community experience report.

## UNO Transforms People and the Community

Locating housing and employment for a family new to the area or translating a legal document for a non-English speaker are not the usual assignments facing today's college students—unless they are enrolled in Dr. Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado's Latino Politics course. For the past two years, the UNO assistant professor has integrated service-learning into his political science curriculum to help students experience something beyond reading assignments and essay tests.

The University of Nebraska at Omaha is one of the nation's leading adopters of service-learning curriculums, offering more than 60 different courses during the 2002/2003 school year across subjects and disciplines. The courses are designed to take students out of the classroom and inject them into the community where they take part in community service opportunities with nonprofit agencies.

Benjamin-Alvarado's efforts are part of an interdisciplinary service-learning team at UNO whose focus is on affordable housing. This focus is spearheaded by the Service-Learning Academy at UNO with support from an anonymous donor. He partnered with various organizations in the Latino community, including Family Housing Advisory Services, the Chicano Awareness Center and Nebraska and Iowa Immigrants' Rights to expose his students to the top three issues facing Omaha Latinos—immigration, employment and housing.

"I front-load my course with lots of reading on the issues facing Latinos," said Benjamin-Alvarado. "Then after a mid-term at four weeks, I send students into the community to make a concrete connection between the

literature they've read and where they will be working."

Benjamin-Alvarado's students are required to work a minimum of four hours per week for the organizations with which he has partnered. Students are also required to report back to Benjamin-Alvarado via an on-line journal, provide examples of their accomplishments with the organization and complete a research report. Additionally, students are evaluated by the organization for which they work. Many of Benjamin-Alvarado's students provide more than the minimum four hours of work each week and at least one uncovered an employment opportunity (see sidebar story). All are changed by the experience.

"It's a very transforming experience," Benjamin-Alvarado said. "Some of the students had never visited the neighborhoods they were serving, and were not aware of the conditions and issues facing residents. Their experiences gave them a better understanding of situations in Omaha's Latino communities and as a result, made them better people and better citizens."

Benjamin-Alvarado actively recruits students for his service-learning course and plans to continue teaching it. He also is in contact with colleagues at other schools to help them adopt similar curriculums.

"Universities today are being challenged to be responsive to the needs of communities. This is a means for us to apply all that we know, in a way that hasn't been done before. It is a new mode of civic involvement that is helping to change people's outlooks and create a new level of understanding."

Since implementing service-learning courses in 1998, more than 2,700 UNO students have completed the classes.

## A New Career

*Arturo Miranda turned his UNO service-learning experience into a new career.*

As a student in Dr. Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado's Latino Politics Course, Miranda performed his voluntary work for a number of organizations focusing on immigration rights. During that time Miranda learned that Family Housing Advisory Services, an organization for which he was not volunteering, was hiring. The organization's mission statement—"Helping people secure and maintain decent, safe, and



affordable housing and strengthening our community through education, counseling, dispute resolution and advocacy"—caught his attention.

"I am very interested in housing issues, and when I heard they were looking for someone bi-lingual I applied," Miranda said. With Benjamin-Alvarado's recommendation, Miranda won the job. Since December 2002, Miranda has been an Intake Specialist with Family Housing Advisory Services, taking and directing incoming calls,

and handling special discrimination cases that fall under the fair housing law.

"I love what I do," Miranda said. "I am able to apply what I've learned in class and help other people in the community. This really gives me satisfaction, and helps me pay back the community for what it has done for me."

Read more about Today's Pioneers—faculty who are making a difference—at [www.nebraska.edu](http://www.nebraska.edu)



## On Campus or Off: Kearney Supports its Students

When Nick Branting walked into a Kearney furniture store recently to buy a new bed, he knew he had made the right choice.

Not about the bed, but about selecting the University of Nebraska at Kearney for his undergraduate education.

"The guys there were really excited about my basketball game," said Branting, a senior from North Platte and an Academic All-American power forward on UNK's basketball team.

That's not at all unusual in Kearney where the entire community provides a support system for students even when they're off campus.

On campus, faculty show their support by making it their mission to

deliver a great undergraduate education to students. As a pre-med student, Branting said the school's reputation for doing this was important to him because he wanted to absolutely master the fundamentals such as organic chemistry, molecular biology and gross anatomy before moving on.

"My teachers all know me by name and I have a couple classes that only have 6 to 8 people in them," he said.

That small class size is one of the reasons students at UNK are getting a good education. For example, in Branting's anatomy class, all students work on the cadaver. Branting's sister took the same class at an out-of-state university, but due to the large class size, only half the class worked on the cadaver, the other half were observers.

Branting said UNK teachers are also adamant about making sure students "get it" before moving on to other subject matter.

"They are very focused on the teaching aspect of their job," he said.

Branting cites a favorite professor, Dr. Don Kaufman, who has taught

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## Undergraduates Find Enriching Research Experiences at UNL

*Cleaning out beakers and vacuum parts might pass for an “undergraduate research” project at some universities, but don’t try that at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.*

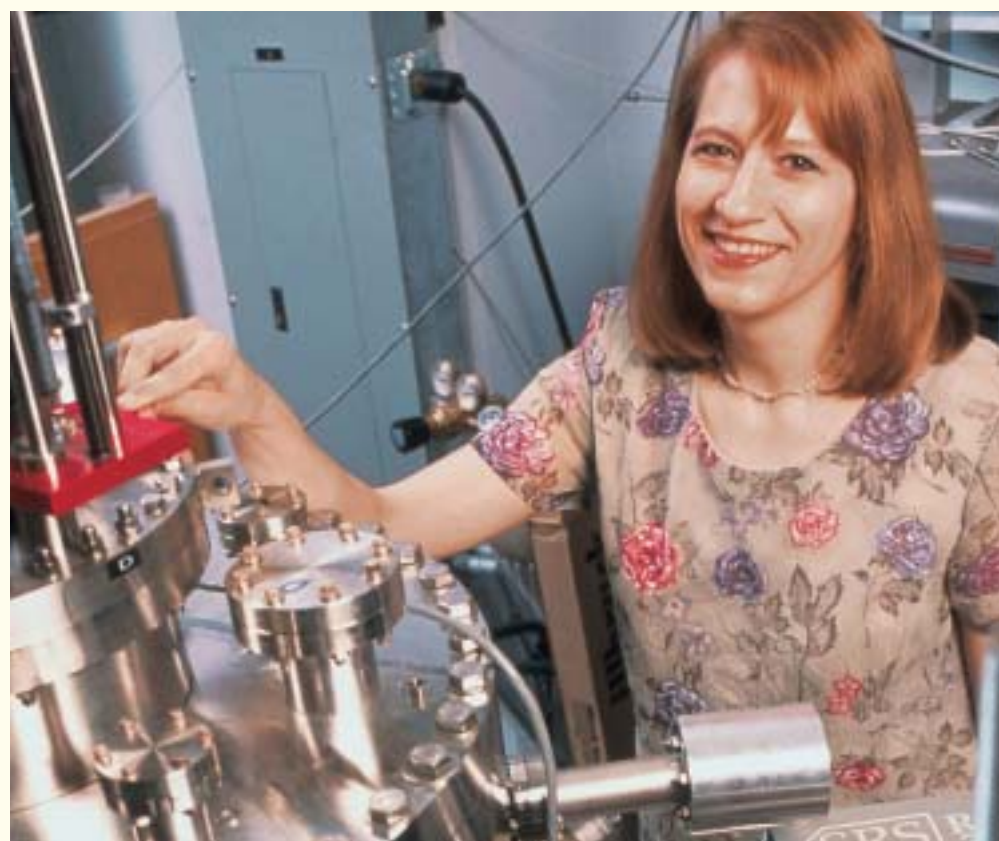
“We involve undergraduates at a much deeper level, and we expect them to make a contribution,” said associate professor of physics Dr. Diandra Leslie-Pelecky. “We involve them in the science.”

Leslie-Pelecky’s area of research, in nanomagnetism, is a good example. The ultimate goal of the research project is to improve the detection and treatment of cancer. Specifically, she’s working on nanoparticles that only attach to certain types of tissue, such as tumors. The idea is to put the nanoparticles in the human body to improve a new magnetic imaging technique. If the image comes up clear, there are no cancer cells. If there are cancer cells, the nanoparticles can be used in their treatment.

Her type of research is also an example of why UNL likes to get students started as freshmen on undergraduate research projects. “Science doesn’t go quickly,” Leslie-Pelecky said. “You want them to have the opportunity to stay with it and see the results. That keeps them motivated in the sciences, and that’s what science is all about—discovering things. Why not introduce them to that at the earliest point in their career?”

Students not only make fundamental discoveries within their disciplines, but the research affords them the opportunity to pick up other skills as well.

Raymond Lemoine, a senior physics major, started doing research with Leslie-Pelecky his freshman year. This year, another undergraduate student and a high school teacher joined the research team. Lemoine leads the group’s effort to develop a new way of creating nanoparticles.



Leslie-Pelecky says the laboratory research offers UNL students the chance to “come in and solve a problem nobody has solved before.”

“Regardless of where you go, the ability to communicate with people and work as a team to get something done is one of the most important skills you can have,” Leslie-Pelecky said. “That’s true whether they stay in science or go into something else.”

However, Leslie-Pelecky makes it clear she expects students to contribute to the science as well. So Lemoine has been working on design elements related to the nanoparticles involved in her research. He’s addressing issues like the size of the

nanoparticles, how to make them compatible with the body, how to make sure they don’t clump together. Lemoine also has built a vacuum chamber needed to actually create the nanoparticles, a critical first step in the research, Leslie-Pelecky said.

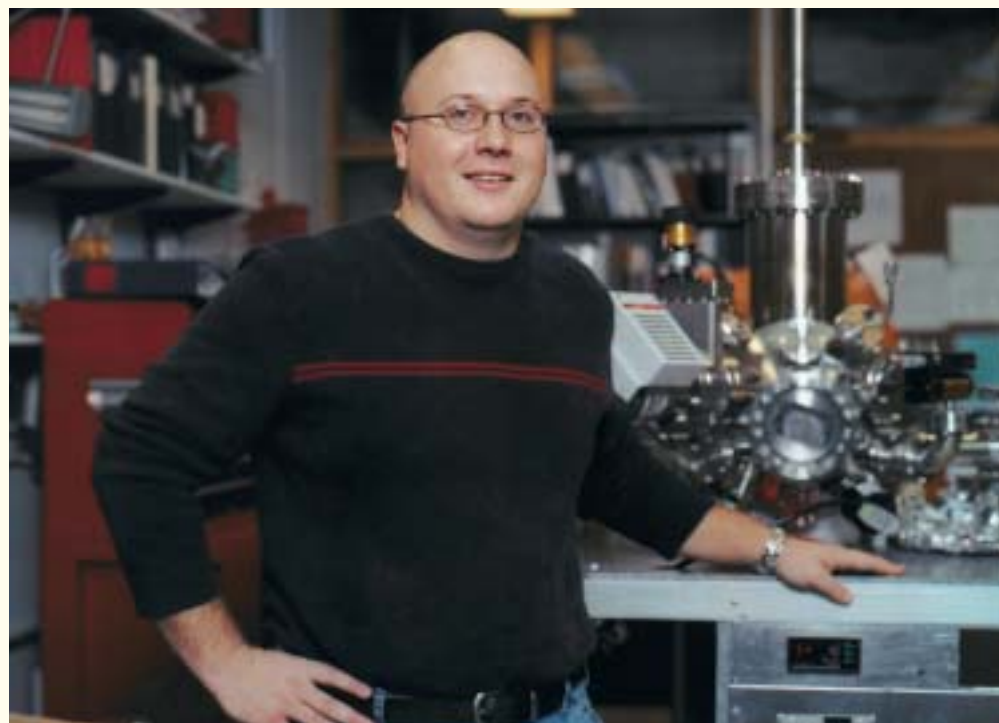
Perhaps the ultimate test of whether undergraduates are making meaningful contributions with their research is summed up by Leslie-Pelecky this way: “Ray is an integral part of the lab,” she said. “I would hire him as an employee right now.”

## Raymond Lemoine Looks Forward to Monday Mornings

That’s when researchers from the physics department at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln get together to exchange ideas and discuss their research from the last week. Everybody from the newest undergrad to the ranking faculty member participates. The ability to problem solve with colleagues is invaluable, said Lemoine, a senior physics major from Gering. But the meetings also remind him how far off his first impressions were of UNL.

“The chair of the physics department gave me a tour and mentioned the undergraduate research, but coming from the outside, I was thinking that probably won’t be me,” he said. “It seemed like a long shot.” Now Lemoine says in many ways, the research is the largest part of his education.

“Especially in physics, I don’t think you can even put a value on everything you learn in research,” he said. “The classroom is okay, you learn the fundamentals. But the lab is where they all come together.”



Lemoine says lab research provides him the opportunity to put his finger “on the pulse of the University.” Lemoine is planning to pursue his master’s in physics at UNL.

In his case, it’s where physics and medicine are coming together. Lemoine is working to create a nanoparticle that might some day change the drug delivery system for cancer patients.

He finds the science itself exciting, but equally so is getting to work with people from around the world and learning about another culture. They’re from India, Vietnam, Brazil and he says with a chuckle, New York.

“These people have masters, Ph.D.s,” he said. “You learn about physics but you are interacting with and learning about other people too.”

He praises the UCARE (Undergraduate Creative Activities and Research Experiences) program, which

gives grants to undergraduates to work with a faculty mentor on research. It helped make his research possible and gave him the opportunity to work with associate professor of physics, Leslie-Pelecky. “She’s my boss but in a lot of ways she’s a mentor,” he said.

Just like the Monday meetings, she helps keep him in focus and on track. And he has advice for anyone who thought like he did, that such opportunities don’t exist for undergraduates at UNL.

The hands-on opportunities are invaluable, he said, and Leslie-Pelecky is “awesome.”

“She really gives you a feeling of being plugged into the University setting,” he said.



him a year of chemistry. Even to a pre-med student like Branting, chemistry is not always exciting subject matter. But Kaufman keeps the students engaged, Branting said. “He’s an unbelievable teacher.”