University of Nebraska System

2024 PRESIDENT'S EXCELLENCE AWARDS

August 8, 2024

Award Presentation

Jeffrey P. Gold, M.D.
President
University of Nebraska System

PRESIDENT'S EXCELLENCE AWARDS

The university's most prestigious awards for teaching, research and engagement recognize individual faculty members and units whose work has had a significant impact on students, the university and the state.

OUTSTANDING RESEARCH AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY AWARD

KRISTEN OLSON, PH.D.

Department of Sociology
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Kristen Olson, Ph.D., is the Leland J. and Dorothy H. Olson Professor in Sociology and Director of the Bureau of Sociological Research. Dr. Olson joined the faculty at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln in 2007.

Dr. Olson's research examines and improves the quality of data collected in surveys, blending social science and statistical approaches to a wide range of survey data collection problems. Her work has been fundamental to understanding the effects of interviewer- and self-administered modes of data collection on recruitment strategies, questionnaire design, and data quality. Her research program has received over $9 million in internal and external funding from agencies, including the National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health, and the United States Department of Agriculture.

Dr. Olson's work is highly translational. Dr. Olson chaired a task force for the American Association for Public Opinion Research on surveys that transitioned from telephone data collection to self-administered and mixed-mode surveys, forming the blueprint for survey organizations on changing survey modes. Her innovations in within-household selection and on-mode preferences have been implemented in and broadly affected the design of major state, national, and international surveys.

Dr. Olson has extensive professional service. She is Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Survey Statistics and Methodology*, has served on multiple committees for the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, and on advisory panels for federal agencies, including the National Science Foundation, Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Center for Health Statistics, Energy Information Administration, and U.S. Census Bureau.

Dr. Olson has a B.A. in Mathematical Methods in the Social Sciences and Sociology from Northwestern University, an M.S. in Survey Methodology from the University of Maryland, and a Ph.D. in Survey Methodology from the University of Michigan. She is a fellow of the American Statistical Association, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research.

OUTSTANDING RESEARCH AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY AWARD

JONATHAN VENNERSTROM, PH.D.

Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences
University of Nebraska Medical Center

Jonathan L. Vennerstrom is a Professor of Pharmaceutical Sciences at the UNMC College of Pharmacy. Dr. Vennerstrom received a Ph.D. in Medicinal Chemistry from the University of Minnesota in 1985. Before joining UNMC in 1987, he received post-doctoral training at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research.

He has been awarded numerous grants and contracts from the National Institutes of Health, the World Health Organization, and other public and private organizations to support his work in anti-infective drug discovery. He is widely published and cited in scientific literature and the mainstream media.

His work in antimalarial drug development from 2000 to 2010 began with the formation of an international team supported by the Medicines for Malaria Venture (MMV), a public-private partnership that receives most of its funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The team was comprised of researchers from UNMC, Monash University in Australia, and the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute in Switzerland. The team's first drug candidate, OZ277, or arterolane maleate, was developed by Ranbaxy Laboratories (now Sun Pharma) in India and was introduced to the market in 2012 as a drug combination product with piperaquine (Synriam®). Their second candidate, OZ439, a potential single-dose therapy, progressed to Phase IIb trials. Vennerstrom's work on antimalarial ozonides led to MMV Project of the Year Awards in 2001 and 2006 and the American Chemical Society Award for Creative Invention in 2019. Current drug discovery targets in the Vennerstrom lab include several bacterial pathogens and the neglected parasitic diseases schistosomiasis, leishmaniasis, and Chagas disease.

OUTSTANDING TEACHING AND INSTRUCTIONAL CREATIVITY AWARD

PHANI TEJ ADIDAM, PH.D.

Department of Marketing and Entrepreneurship
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Phani Tej Adidam is a Professor and Chair of Marketing and Entrepreneurship and the Director of the Center for International Business Initiatives at UNO's College of Business Administration. As a Fulbright Scholar and current Fulbright Specialist, he brings a wealth of global experience and insight to his roles.

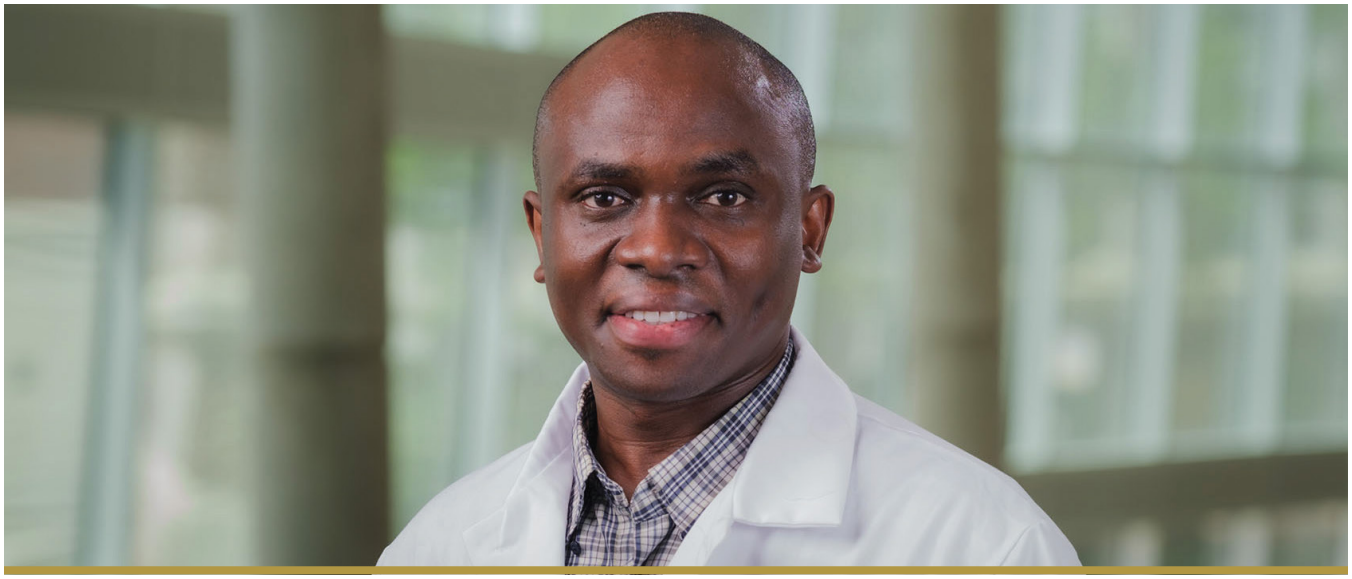
Dr. Adidam holds a Bachelor of Commerce (Honors) from Banaras Hindu University, India, an MBA from Institute of Management Technology, India, and a Ph.D. from Texas Tech University. He was honored with the Distinguished Alumni Award from the Faculty of Commerce at Banaras Hindu University, India. His dedication to teaching has earned him numerous teaching awards at UNO.

Dr. Adidam teaches sales, brand, marketing, and management strategies in the MBA, Executive MBA, and BSBA programs. His innovative approach has transformed key programs at UNO, including the Executive MBA and MBA programs. He has introduced dual-degree programs that have expanded UNO's global footprint, attracting international students and enriching the academic environment.

Beyond traditional degree programs, Dr. Adidam excels in engaging a wide range of stakeholders. He has conducted executive education sessions, workshops, and summits, benefiting countless executives, faculty, and students. His mentorship extends to entrepreneurs, and he actively supports industry associations and non-profits with his expertise in branding, digital marketing, and customer engagement.

Dr. Adidam's contributions to global education are unparalleled. He has taught at twelve prestigious international business schools and created global teaching opportunities for his colleagues. His leadership in international student immersion trips and the innovative Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) approach has provided enriching, cross-cultural experiences for students. Through global capstone projects and education abroad programs, he has prepared students for impactful careers worldwide, enhancing their international competencies. Dr. Adidam's research appears in several leading academic journals – *Journal of Marketing; Journal of International Marketing; Journal of Marketing Management;* among others.

INNOVATION, DEVELOPMENT AND ENGAGEMENT AWARD



BENSON EDAGWA, PH.D.

Department of Pharmacology & Experimental Neuroscience
University of Nebraska Medical Center

Dr. Benson Edagwa is a Professor in the Department of Pharmacology and Experimental Neuroscience at UNMC. He earned his undergraduate degree in 2005 from Moi University, Kenya, and a Ph.D. in Chemistry from LSU in 2012.

Dr. Edagwa has played a pivotal role in the development of several new inventions that have been licensed and further developed to treat chronic illnesses. While at UNMC, Dr. Edagwa has been listed as an inventor on 19 unique new invention notifications, leading to 84 patents and patent applications. He is also listed as an inventor on 45 pending patent applications and 11 issued patents. These numbers put Dr. Edagwa in the top 1% of all innovative faculty at UNMC. He has formed significant collaborations with the industry, having co-founded Exavir Therapeutics, a startup company created to develop the long-acting therapies he co-invented at UNMC. Exavir received UNeMed's "Startup of the Year Award" in 2022.

The goal of Dr. Edagwa's research is to transform daily therapies into novel ultra-long-acting safe medicines that can be dosed once every six months or even once a year to facilitate prevention and treatment of persistent illnesses such as HIV infection, viral hepatitis, tuberculosis, malaria, and opioid addiction. His volunteer experiences in helping patients living with HIV/AIDS in Africa have shaped his career goals. Dr. Edagwa has extended his academic expertise beyond the boundaries of the University of Nebraska in ways that have continued to enrich the broader community through research and teaching partnerships. In addition to mentoring numerous graduate students at UNMC, Dr. Edagwa has continued to provide research mentorship opportunities to undergraduate and high school students from diverse educational and socioeconomic backgrounds across Nebraska to enhance their interest in health sciences. His work has won numerous awards and is supported by the National Institutes of Health, the Nebraska community, and global pharmaceutical companies. His collaborative and transformational work promises to transform healthcare for the least fortunate.

FACULTY IP INNOVATION AND COMMERCIALIZATION AWARD

CARRICK DETWEILER, PH.D.

School of Computing
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Carrick Detweiler received his B.A. in 2004 from Middlebury College and Ph.D. in 2010 from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, focusing on robotics. In 2010, he joined the faculty of the School of Computing at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL). He co-founded and co-directs the Nebraska Intelligent MoBile Unmanned Systems (NIMBUS) Lab at UNL, which focuses on developing novel drone algorithms and systems that interact with the environment. He is a Faculty Fellow of the Robert B. Daugherty Water for Food Institute, a Faculty Fellow of the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center, and a Senior Member of the National Academy of Inventors.

Carrick is also the co-founder and CEO of Drone Amplified, which has grown to over two dozen employees. The technology behind Drone Amplified was developed as part of National Science Foundation research at UNL and is exclusively licensed from NUtech Ventures. Drone Amplified's mission is to develop, market, and sell integrated drone systems, services, and data analytics for aerial ignition and forest fire mapping. Its signature product, IGNIS, is a drone-based system that allows firefighters to remotely ignite backburns and prescribed burns while staying out of harm's way. Drone Amplified's technology is redefining fire management practices, enabling the semi-autonomous dropping of ignition spheres and the monitoring of fires while keeping personnel far from the fire with lower cost and higher availability. The technology is exponentially less costly to purchase and operate, more readily available than helicopters, safer than sending personnel on foot or ATV into dangerous fires, and more efficient for managing large and complex areas. There are now hundreds of IGNIS systems operating on nearly all major wildfires.

INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE COLLABORATION AWARD

THE DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY COLLABORATION

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

The Digital Accessibility Collaboration at the University of Nebraska is a pioneering initiative focused on enhancing digital accessibility and implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) across campus. The mission of the Digital Accessibility Collaboration is multifaceted: it aims to create institutional dialogue about accessibility, provide training and resources to promote the creation of accessible digital media and foster a campus culture where accessibility is integral to all activities. This approach ensures that all students have equal opportunities to interact, learn, and succeed, regardless of ability.

The Digital Accessibility Collaboration was established by three members of the Center for Transformative Teaching in January 2020 as a response to faculty inquiries on how to make courses more accessible and meet accommodations for students with disabilities. Additional campus units joined the Collaboration as the need for a larger, more unified university response became apparent. Since its inception, the Collaboration has involved 21 people from seven units across UNL and the NU System.

To fulfill the Collaboration's mission, the Collaboration developed the Accessibility and Universal Design for Learning Instructor Resource, which has been viewed thousands of times. Then, they developed the Bridge Digital Accessibility Training program, which has seen unprecedented completion from over 800 people representing every institution within the University of Nebraska System. Now, the Collaboration is conducting a longitudinal, multimethod research study examining the impact of accessibility training on instructors, course materials, and students. This research will allow the Collaboration to continue to improve trainings and contribute to the larger research on increasing digital accessibility in higher education institutions. The Digital Accessibility Collaboration is comprised of the following units:

- Center for Transformative Teaching, UNL
- Information Technology - Academic Technology, UNL
- Information Technology - Enterprise Services, NU System
- Institutional Equity and Compliance, UNL
- Office of Diversity and Inclusion, UNL
- Services for Students with Disabilities, UNL
- University Libraries, UNL

UNIVERSITY-WIDE DEPARTMENTAL TEACHING AWARD

PHYSICAL THERAPY PROGRAM

University of Nebraska Medical Center

The University of Nebraska Medical Center's Department of Physical Therapy, within UNMC's College of Allied Health Professions, has educated Nebraskans and numerous others for over 50 years, filling crucial workforce needs throughout our state and beyond. Its mission is to advance health for all by optimizing movement through high-quality and accessible educational programs for physical therapy, creating contemporary clinical and educational scholarship, and engaging in professional service at the local, state, national, and international levels. It brings this mission directly to Nebraskans. More than 60% of recent graduates are employed within the state, nearly half in rural and underrepresented areas. Recent graduates work in Brown, Thurston, Dundy, Jefferson, and Phelps counties, to name a few. UNMC PT grads also currently practice throughout the U.S., from Alaska to Florida.

Its three-year professional curriculum, which enrolls approximately 200 students annually and leads to a Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) degree, is the only public program in Nebraska for the professional education of physical therapists. One of the first nationally to adopt the doctoral degree, the department celebrated 20 years of DPT graduates in 2024.

The department is at the forefront nationally in using teamwork and technology in teaching, and a dozen faculty have earned national recognition for instruction and education from the American Physical Therapy Association. Innovative methods include simulation experiences that allow students to practice in realistic, hands-on clinical scenarios.

The physical therapy department educates future physical therapists on UNMC's Omaha campus and at the Health Science Education Complex (HSEC) on the Kearney campus. Its competitive admissions program searches for outstanding candidates throughout Nebraska, including through the Rural Health Opportunities Program (RHOP) and Kearney Health Opportunities Program pathways (KHOP).

U.S. News & World Report ranks UNMC's Department of Physical Therapy No. 33 among 279 accredited programs.

University of Nebraska System