

People, Programs and Points of Excellence (P³E)

Report for December 5, 2025

The People, Programs and Points of Excellence (P3E) is a biweekly update from across all four campuses of the University of Nebraska System leaders that focuses on the best work happening across the University of Nebraska and allows us to recognize and lift up the outstanding efforts of our faculty, staff and students.

University of Nebraska Office of the President

1. New "Heart to Heart" podcast episode features conversation with President Gold, Aksarben Foundation's Mike Cassling

On this episode, Dr. Gold is joined by Mike Cassling, chairman of the Aksarben Foundation Board of Governors. They discuss the Aksarben Foundation's recently released workforce development study, its role in shaping Nebraska's future and how organizations like the Aksarben Foundation and the University of Nebraska can work together to keep our state strong.

Related Media Item: <https://youtu.be/eUp5q1LuXpE>

2. President Gold joined by NU System SVP/CFO Anne Barnes in new "Shaping the Future" video

The newest "Shaping the Future" episode features a conversation between President Gold and Anne Barnes, the University of Nebraska System's senior vice president and chief financial officer. Their conversation includes a discussion on Anne's journey to the University of Nebraska, navigating a difficult budget environment, major capital projects happening at UNMC and more.

Related Media Item: <https://youtu.be/tz0VQpCYfG0>

University of Nebraska at Kearney

1. UNK Professor Expands Language Learning Opportunities On and Off Campus

Associate professor Chris Jacobs has built a dynamic language-learning community at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, where he teaches Italian, French, Spanish and linguistics. Fluent in seven languages, Jacobs brings global experience from living in Spain, Italy and France to his work in rural Nebraska, where nearly 90% of residents speak only English.

Beyond the classroom, he leads weekly World Language Conversation Tables, directs multiple study abroad programs to France and Italy, and presents widely on innovative language teaching strategies. This year he was named president of the Nebraska International Languages Association (NILA), supporting world language educators across the state. UNK hosted the organization's annual conference in October, where Jacobs presented a session on teaching and learning slang.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2025/11/11/unk-professor-expands-language-learning-opportunities-on-and-off-campus/>

2. Public History with Purpose: Will Stoutamire documents stories from the Heartland

Associate professor Will Stoutamire directs UNK's undergraduate and graduate public history programs, emphasizing "history applied" — connecting scholarly research with public audiences. After discovering his passion for public history as a student at Florida State, Stoutamire built a career focused on storytelling, accessibility and community engagement.

His current research centers on oral histories of Nebraska farmers and ranchers, documenting multigenerational resilience, environmental challenges and family knowledge systems. Supported by a Nebraska Research Collaborative Initiative grant, the project includes interviews with 19 families across four counties and will be publicly accessible at nebraskaproducers.com.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2025/11/07/public-history-with-purpose-will-stoutamire-documents-stories-from-the-heartland/>

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

1. Poust's expertise helps confirm Nanotyrannus was distinct species from T. rex

Nebraska's Ashley Poust helped a national research team finally settle a long-running dinosaur mystery: Nanotyrannus was its own species, not a tiny T. rex. Their fresh look at a key fossil opens new ways to understand how dinosaurs lived and how ancient ecosystems worked.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/pousts-expertise-helps-confirm-nanotyrannus-was-distinct-species-from-t-rex>

2. Huskers give back, gain experience through Volunteer Ambassadors program

Nebraska's Ben Bentzinger turned a few volunteer hours into meaningful experiences through UNL's Volunteer Ambassadors program. Mentoring, community service, and nonprofit engagement have given Ben — and other Huskers — a firsthand look at the impact they can make in their future careers.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/students-give-back-gain-experience-through-volunteer-ambassadors-program>

University of Nebraska Medical Center

1. UNMC launches faculty mentoring initiative

UNMC Academic Affairs has introduced a new faculty mentoring initiative aimed at supporting faculty through meaningful, cross-campus mentorship. This new mentoring program will be one of the initiatives to strengthen faculty mentoring and retention, a goal identified in the UNMC Strategic Plan.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2025/12/02/unmc-launches-new-faculty-mentoring-initiative/>

2. NU Board of Regents advances joint accreditation for UNMC, UNL

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the University of Nebraska Medical Center are one step closer to joint accreditation following action by the University of Nebraska Board of Regents on Nov. 21. At the meeting, the board unanimously approved a motion granting the joint accreditation and delegating to NU President Jeffrey P. Gold, MD, the authority to determine the final effective date of the new joint accreditation.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2025/11/24/nu-board-of-regents-advances-joint-accreditation-for-unl-and-unmc/>

University of Nebraska at Omaha

1. Gurpreet S. Dhillon Named College of Business Administration Dean

The University of Nebraska at Omaha has appointed Gurpreet S. Dhillon, Ph.D., as the next dean of the College of Business Administration, effective January 12, 2026, pending Board of Regents approval. Dhillon currently serves as the G. Brint Ryan Endowed Chair of AI and Cybersecurity at the University of North Texas and brings more than 20 years of global leadership and research experience. University leaders highlighted his innovative vision and expertise at the intersection of business and technology, aligning with UNO's metropolitan mission. Dhillon's distinguished career includes numerous publications, international recognition for scholarly impact, and leadership roles across multiple continents.

Related Media Items: <https://www.unomaha.edu/academic-affairs/news/2025/12/cba-dean-appointed.php>

2. From Student to Mentor at UNO

Fabio Gbetanou, a UNO admissions representative and proud alumnus, uses his own educational journey to inspire future students. After navigating early challenges and finding his path through UNO's supportive advising and interdisciplinary programs, he graduated with a degree that blended art and communication. Now, he shares his passion for UNO and Omaha with prospective students, helping them discover opportunities that shaped his own success.

Related Media Items: <https://www.unomaha.edu/news/2025/11/from-student-to-mentor-at-uno.php>

Agriculture and Natural Resources

1. Poll: Rural Nebraskans concerned about biosecurity, hopeful for bioeconomy

The 2025 Nebraska Rural Poll — the state’s longest-running survey of rural perspectives — provides a crucial window into how rural Nebraskans understand and prioritize biosecurity and the bioeconomy. Most respondents are familiar with biosecurity and express strong concern about threats such as contaminated food and water, cyberattacks, natural disasters and invasive species. They place high trust in local, science-based information sources, especially University Extension, health care professionals and scientists.

The Poll also shows broad support for expanding Nebraska’s bioeconomy, which many believe would strengthen jobs, innovation, communities and environmental sustainability. By systematically capturing these views statewide, the Rural Poll plays an essential role in revealing rural priorities and guiding policy discussions.

Related Media Items: <https://ianrnews.unl.edu/article/poll-rural-nebraskans-concerned-about-biosecurity-hopeful-for-bioeconomy>

2. Overton FFA named National Champion in Environmental and Natural Resources CDE, marking historic win for Nebraska

Nebraska celebrated a landmark achievement when the Overton FFA Chapter won the National Champion Team title in the Environmental and Natural Resources Career Development Event at the 98th National FFA Convention—Nebraska’s first-ever ENR national championship.

A key contributor to this success is UNL faculty member Andy Little, associate professor in the School of Natural Resources, who has led Nebraska’s ENR CDE since 2019. Little designs and oversees the rigorous state contest that builds students’ ecological knowledge and problem-solving skills, helping prepare teams for national competition. He credits the students and teachers, but his leadership and coordination are central to Nebraska’s growing prominence in natural resources education.

Related Media Items: <https://ianrnews.unl.edu/article/overton-ffa-named-national-champion-in-environmental-and-natural-resources-cde-marking>

University of Nebraska Foundation

Investors With Purpose Program Connects Students to Finance Leaders, Internships

Thirty-two University of Nebraska–Lincoln students are gaining hands-on experience in investing and wealth management through the sixth class of the Investors With Purpose program in the College of Business. The selective program brings together high-achieving students with investment professionals for a semester-long course emphasizing real-world application, mentorship and networking.

Through the program, four students are interning with the University of Nebraska Foundation, and another student interned with the Nebraska Investment Council. Since its inception, the program has been completed by nearly 150 students, forming a community of alumni who will strengthen ties between industry and the university, now and into the future.

Investors With Purpose was created by Douglas Waggoner, a Husker alumnus who spent 25 years as a senior leader at BlackRock. He is a member of the University of Nebraska Foundation Board of Directors, a foundation trustee and a member of the College of Business Campaign Committee for Only in Nebraska: A Campaign for Our University's Future. Brian Neale, chief investment officer for the University of Nebraska Foundation, teaches the course.

Related Media Items: <https://business.unl.edu/news/investors-purpose-program-connects-students-finance-leaders-internships/>

Buffett Early Childhood Institute

Buffett Early Childhood Institute Graduate Scholars Share Ambitious Research Projects at Welcome Reception

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute welcomed its 2025-26 Graduate Scholars from the University of Nebraska Medical Center and University of Nebraska-Lincoln at a reception on Dec. 2. Each scholar gave an overview of their Institute-funded research projects and fielded questions from Institute staff.

Since 2016, the Buffett Institute has invested \$750,000 through its Graduate Scholars program to support the research of Ph.D. students from University of Nebraska campuses related to early childhood education and development.

The program awards one-year fellowships worth up to \$25,000 to a maximum of four NU doctoral students every year. Alexandra Daro, the Institute's director of applied research, leads the program.

The 2025-2026 Graduate Scholars are:

Colman Freil, an M.D./Ph.D. student in the Department of Cellular and Integrative Physiology at UNMC. His project examines why babies of mothers with diabetes may have higher risks for heart problems, and whether a natural molecule from omega-3s could help protect their blood vessels. His mentors are Dr. Ann Anderson Berry and Paras Kumar Mishra.

Rebekah Rapoza, an M.D./Ph.D. student in the Department of Pediatrics at UNMC. She is studying how exposure to adverse maternal stressors, such as low food security or an income below the federal poverty level, can negatively impact the course of pregnancy and have lifelong consequences on maternal and infant health. Her mentor is Dr. Ann Anderson Berry.

Ali Shull, a Ph.D. student in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her project analyzes how exposure to parenting content on social media impacts parent stress, self-confidence, and parent-child relationships. Her mentor is Carrie Clark.

They will share their research findings at a symposium in the spring.

These students further the university's research priorities by exploring vital early childhood issues. Past scholars' research, like UNL's Kazi Albab Hussain's study of microplastics in baby food, has garnered national and international headlines.

Related Media Items: <https://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/news-and-events/news/2025/08/buffett-institute-202526-graduate-scholars-to-explore-infant-cardiovascular-health>

Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute

Three visiting scholars from India complete WARI program

The Water Advanced Research and Innovation (WARI) program, a partnership between the Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute, the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and several institutions in India, is an initiative that connects Indian students and early-career faculty with U.S. counterparts for collaborative, water-related research.

Three visiting scholars—Jew Das, who studied flash droughts; Mithun Karayi, who researched surface water monitoring for organic contaminants; and Deepak Verma, who assessed dam deformation—are completing their fellowships at the end of 2025 and returning to India. The scholars uniformly praised the program for providing valuable opportunities to access advanced research facilities; develop interdisciplinary problem-solving skills; and build professional networks crucial for their future careers. The three WARI scholars agreed that their experiences studying and living in Nebraska are impactful both personally and professionally.

Related Media Item: <https://waterforfood.nebraska.edu/news-and-events/news/2025/11/three-visiting-scholars-from-india-complete-wari-program>

National Strategic Research Institute

NSRI launches study of emergent technologies to help protect warfighters from gamma radiation

The National Strategic Research Institute (NSRI) at the University of Nebraska has launched a study for the Office of the Assistant Secretary of War for Nuclear Deterrence, Chemical, and Biological Defense Policy and Programs (OASW ND-CBD) to understand emergent technologies that could offer warfighters increased protection from gamma radiation.

OASW ND-CBD serves as the U.S. Department of War (DOW) lead for Radiological and Nuclear Defense Capability Development (RND CD), which aims to efficiently deliver modern, innovative capabilities to the Joint Force.

Through a one-year, \$288k project, NSRI will conduct a literature review and technology assessment to help the DOW leverage existing and next-generation capabilities for shielding from and delivering medical countermeasures against gamma radiation effects.

"As a DOW-designated University Affiliated Research Center (UARC), NSRI is in a unique position to provide an objective overview of the leading-edge tech that may be of critical use for our warfighters," said Maj. Gen., USAF (Ret.) Rick Evans, NSRI executive director. "We are a trusted partner to the federal government and a strategic resource the DOW calls upon to gain this type of independent analysis."

Dr. Terry Thiem, NSRI director for medical countermeasures, is leading the study. Given recent significant advances, including innovations in nanocomposites and medical countermeasures, the DOW can incorporate new technology into personal protective equipment (PPE) to survive, campaign and prevail in a radiological and nuclear environment, he said.

With colleagues, Dr. Thiem will deliver a comprehensive study that summarizes the current state of science that may be available and makes recommendations for an integrated, innovative solution to protect the joint warfighter from the effects of gamma radiation.

"Assessing the current state-of-the-art in protection is the first step to developing solutions, which may include an entirely new physical suit," Dr. Thiem said. "The data we collect will be used to help define the specifications and composition of radiation PPE that is vital to keeping our warfighters safe."

Learn more about NSRI medical countermeasures research at nsri.nebraska.edu/medical.

Related Media Item: <https://nsri.nebraska.edu/news/news-releases/2025/12/nsri-launches-study-of-emergent-technologies-to-help-protect-warfighters-from-gamma-radiation>