

People, Programs and Points of Excellence (P³E)

Report for December 6, 2024

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 at Kearney

1. UNK College of Business & Technology Internship Program Sets Record with 145 Students

UNK's College of Business & Technology Internship Program achieved a record-breaking year during the 2023-24 academic cycle, with 145 students completing internships across various disciplines. Recognized as "best in class" by peer institutions accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the program connects students with hands-on, real-world work experiences. Notably, 80% of the internships were based in Nebraska, with other significant placements in Colorado, Kansas, and Texas. The internship program played a significant role in CBT's overall placement rate of 94.7% for 2023-24, helping students transition successfully from academics to career opportunities.

Related Media Item: N/A

2. UNK Social Work Students Lead Behavioral Health Sessions at Goodwill Industries

Students from UNK's Department of Social Work recently brought life skills training to participants in Goodwill Industries of Greater Nebraska's behavioral health services program. As part of an upper-level course led by senior lecturer Nadine Stuehm, 16 social work students developed and delivered presentations on topics such as conflict and time management, relationship-building, effective communication, confidence/self-esteem and mindfulness. After refining their material in class, the students traveled to Grand Island to lead group sessions, where they connected deeply with participants living with mental illness or substance use disorders. These sessions sparked engaging conversations on sobriety, family relationships, household responsibilities and more, providing both students and participants with a rewarding and transformative experience.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2024/11/25/unk-social-work-students-gain-confidence-real-world-skills-through-partnership-with-goodwill/>

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

1. 1,100-plus degrees to be awarded during December commencement

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln will confer more than 1,100 degrees during commencement exercises Friday and Saturday, Dec. 20 and 21, at Pinnacle Bank Arena.

A special presentation prior to diploma distribution at the undergraduate ceremony will feature the official investiture of Rodney D. Bennett as the university's 21st chancellor. The investiture will last about 15 minutes.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/1100-plus-degrees-to-be-awarded-during-december-commencement>

2. University of Nebraska-Lincoln Wins the Abbott and Big Ten Conference's Nationwide 'We Give Blood Drive' Competition, Receives \$1 Million Grant from Abbott

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln is expected to be announced as the winner of the Abbott and Big Ten Conference's "We Give Blood Drive."

Thousands of Big Ten students, alumni and fans across the country donated blood as part of the Abbott/Big Ten nationwide competition this college football season.

Nebraska's win was announced at the Discover Big Ten Football Championship Game on Saturday, when the university received \$1 million from global healthcare company Abbott to advance student or community health.

Related Media Item:

- **Nebraska Today:** <https://news.unl.edu/article/husker-nation-wins-big-ten-blood-drive-1m-prize>
- **Big Ten:** <https://bigten.org/abbott/>

University of Nebraska Medical Center

1. One-Stop Cancer Shop

One-Stop Cancer Shop, a coalition of seven community partners that, supported by UNMC, Nebraska Medicine and the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center, provided cancer screenings to more than 140 community members at two events held in North and South Omaha this fall. Residents who came in to take part in the community events, held at Mount Calvary Community Church in September and the Nebraska Urban Indian Health Coalition in October, could receive free or low-cost cancer screenings for breast, lung, colorectal and prostate cancer.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2024/12/05/team-effort-brings-cancer-screening-to-the-community/>

2. Lions Eye Bank and Truhlsen Eye Institute partner to save sight of individuals

More than 3,000 surgical procedures were performed at the UNMC Truhlsen Eye Institute last year, many of which are sight-restoring – including corneal transplants, cataract surgeries, retinal detachments and vision correction procedures.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2024/11/21/a-gift-of-vision-eye-donation-benefits-patients-research-at-unmc/>

University of Nebraska at Omaha

1. Noise as therapy: UNO recognized for breakthrough study

Researchers at the University of Nebraska Omaha's Biomechanics Lab are gaining international recognition for their innovative work on "pink noise," a rhythmic pattern that may positively guide human movement. Using a custom-built device, they demonstrated how exposure to pink noise can improve movement synchronization, with potential applications in rehabilitation, energy efficiency, and recovery. Their findings, published in a leading scientific journal, pave the way for creating apps and tools to make this technology widely accessible.

Related Media Item: https://www.ketv.com/article/noise-as-therapy-uno-recognized-for-breakthrough-study/63000798?utm_medium=email&hsenc=p2ANqtz-8M9bnqiFv-1R-iDskRD-jwnER57gVmyLs3S7XcYCY-lyboqJv0uv9RzOOWQEFlrsNjCOP9hIOZlUMb6xkwt8Tz8NJgA&hsmt=335592470&utm_content=335592470&utm_source=hs_email

2. UNO's Nebraska Deterrence Lab Joins NATO Space Deterrence Wargames to Address Future Security Challenges

The Nebraska Deterrence Lab (NDL) at UNO has partnered with NATO to develop a space deterrence framework and participate in a series of wargames addressing future security challenges. Led by professors Michelle Black and Deanna House, the lab combines interdisciplinary expertise in political science and cybersecurity to shape strategies for protecting space assets and fostering international cooperation. Students gain valuable real-world experience, applying their skills to national security projects and exploring impactful career paths in defense and deterrence.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unomaha.edu/news/2024/12/unos-nebraska-deterrence-lab-joins-nato-space-deterrence-wargames-to-address-future-security-challenges.php>

Agriculture and Natural Resources

1. Lynch grocery cooperative launched with help of Nebraska Extension hits \$1 million in sales

The Valley Foods Cooperative grocery store in Lynch, Nebraska, reached a major milestone on October 24, hitting \$1 million in total sales just 33 months after opening in February 2022. Originally, the co-op's founders anticipated it would take 4-5 years to reach this goal, but strong community support accelerated the timeline. The store was established to address Lynch's status as a food desert, and has quickly become a central part of the town, which has fewer than 200 residents.

The success of the co-op was greatly influenced by guidance from Nebraska Extension's Nebraska Cooperative Development Center (NCDC). Charlotte Narjes, director of the NCDC, and Jordan Rasmussen, program leader for Rural Prosperity Nebraska, provided essential support in the co-op's development. Their expertise helped ensure the store's financial and operational sustainability, allowing it to thrive ahead of expectations.

While factors like inflation and summertime tourism have played a role in the store's growth, David Barnes, the volunteer general manager, credits the local community for the co-op's success. "Without the locals, it wouldn't work," he said, emphasizing that every customer who made a purchase contributed to the achievement. The milestone underscores the power of local collaboration, aided by expert guidance, in revitalizing rural communities.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/lynch-co-op-hits-1-million-in-sales>

2. Rural Poll captures rural Nebraskans' perceptions of AI

The 2024 Nebraska Rural Poll, one of the only annual surveys of rural Americans and managed by Nebraska Extension, reveals that most rural Nebraskans are not well-informed about artificial intelligence (AI) and are not confident it is being used for the public's benefit. The poll, which has been conducted for three decades, found that about 27% of respondents have used AI tools, with usage higher among younger people—55% of those under age 30.

In terms of AI knowledge, more than half of respondents report being either "not at all" (18%) or "slightly" (35%) informed. Only 13% are very or extremely informed about AI. This lack of knowledge is linked to lower confidence in AI's use for the public good. More than half of respondents are not at all confident (51%) or only slightly confident (31%) that AI is being used in the public's best interest. Conversely, those who are more informed about AI tend to have more trust in its potential benefits.

The survey also shows mixed opinions on AI's broader impact. While many rural Nebraskans express concerns about its negative effects on jobs, society, and the economy, others see AI as having a positive influence on healthcare (44%), agriculture (40%), and information access (43%).

The Rural Poll's findings highlight both the challenges and opportunities AI presents, underscoring the importance of education and awareness in shaping public perceptions of this rapidly evolving technology. The Rural Poll, which surveyed over 1,000 households across 86 of Nebraska's 93 counties, serves as a valuable tool for understanding rural Nebraskans' views on critical issues like AI.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/rural-poll-shows-many-unfamiliar-with-and-distrustful-of-ai>

University of Nebraska Foundation

1. UNO Alumni Larry and Cindy Bradley Establish First Endowed Professorship for Goodrich

University of Nebraska at Omaha alumnus Larry Bradley credits the Goodrich Scholarship Program for his success as a first-generation college student. In gratitude, he and his wife, Cindy, have pledged \$550,000 through the University of Nebraska Foundation to establish the first endowed professorship for the program.

Bradley says the Goodrich Program helped lay the groundwork for his professional career. He currently oversees more than 90,000 employees as global head of audit at KPMG International, where he has worked for over 40 years.

Related Media Item: <https://nufoundation.org/uno-alumni-larry-and-cindy-bradley-establish-first-endowed-professorship-for-goodrich/>

2. Night at the Durham Celebrates Durham Science Center Renovation

The stunning transformation of the UNO Durham Science Center was celebrated during Night at the Durham on Dec. 3. The \$35 million project was made possible by a public-private partnership with \$15 million in state dollars and \$20 million from the philanthropic community. The renovated building is a testament to UNO's commitment to STEM education and innovation, made possible by the unwavering support of the philanthropic community.

It features bright, inviting study areas, creating a welcoming environment and highly utilized spaces. Fixed classroom spaces were replaced by flexible, modern environments designed for active learning and collaboration.

Growing Nebraska's workforce in key areas, especially in STEM fields, is a priority of the University of Nebraska's historic fundraising campaign, *Only in Nebraska: A Campaign for Our University's Future*.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unomaha.edu/about-uno/buildings-and-maps/durham-science-center.php>

Buffett Early Childhood Institute

Buffett Early Childhood Institute invests \$75,000 to support cutting-edge doctoral research projects across NU campuses and further early childhood research

The Buffett Institute's Graduate Scholars program funds one-year fellowships worth up to \$25,000 each to doctoral students in the University of Nebraska System who conduct research concerning the development and education of young children.

The program supports high-quality research from diverse fields, including health, education, social work, music, art, psychology, the neurosciences, and others. Students receive a monetary award, but the Institute also nurtures and amplifies the work of these graduate students. That fosters the growth of ambitious and diverse researchers, who gain mentoring by experts within the NU system and access to opportunities to communicate, network, and collaborate across campuses, breaking down silos and promoting cross-disciplinary work.

Students and faculty further the university's research agenda by engaging in in-depth explorations of vital early childhood issues, including childhood allergies, the development of early math skills, assessments of autism spectrum disorders, and depression and anxiety in mothers of premature babies. In 2023, UNL engineering student and Scholar Kazi Albab Hussain garnered international headlines for his project measuring microplastics in baby food and products.

Past Graduate Scholars and their faculty mentors have leveraged this investment to generate additional external funding, and several Scholars have gone onto faculty positions with the University of Nebraska System—allowing NU to truly “grow its own” by investing in students and keeping them in-state.

The 2024-25 Graduate Scholars are:

—Matthew Brooks, who studies in the UNL Department of Educational Psychology. His project examines whether connecting with nature, a frequent recommendation for healthy child development, can also help alleviate stress and burnout in early childhood professionals.

—Kaitlin Fraser, a student in the UNO Department of Biomechanics. She is studying how children with upper limb loss use and feel about their prosthesis by interviewing them and conducting gesture analysis.

—Weiman Xu, a student in the UNL Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies. She is analyzing intergenerational caregiving, specifically the role of grandparents in China and the social-emotional development of their young grandchildren.

On Nov. 5, the Scholars, their faculty mentors, and members of the Graduate Scholars selection committee attended a welcome reception at the Institute. The Scholars gave an overview of their research projects and answered questions. Scholars will give an update on their research findings in the spring at another reception.

Related Media Item:

- **Reception Post and Photos:** <https://www.facebook.com/BufettECI/posts/pfbid02vW297FN4UcEwhkgrzbZ4NQCH3oy68zTS7rrKRtYDsi afrCrgYp3LorknMeZwpdYvl>
- **CYFS Blog:** <https://cyfs.unl.edu/news/?p=7315>
- **Wired:** <https://www.wired.com/story/for-the-love-of-god-stop-microwaving-plastic/>
- **Buffett Institute:** <https://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/about-us/graduate-scholars>

Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute

Chandra awarded 2024 Early Career Excellence Award

DWFI Research Program Manager Ankit Chandra was awarded the 2024 Early Career Excellence Award by the Department of Biological Systems Engineering (BSE) at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL).

The award is reserved for alumni of UNL BSE Department who have excelled and provided valuable leadership in their profession. The nomination is a testament to an impactful career and unwavering dedication to the values and aims of the BSE Department.

Related Media Item: <https://bse.unl.edu/alumni-hall-fame-awards/>

National Strategic Research Institute

NSRI's national security R&D portfolio reaches \$293M, spans 65 active projects

The National Strategic Research Institute (NSRI) at the University of Nebraska (NU) has published the 2024 biennial report, Strategic Deterrence & Global Resilience: Advancing Integrated Readiness, to document the institute's mission, financial and collaborative achievements throughout the last two years and since it was established in 2012.

Characterized by tumultuous real-world events, a steady stream of new and evolved U.S. national security strategies and significant scientific disruptions, the timeframe of this report from July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2024, demonstrated the continually advancing nature of deterrence and defense — and the critical need for leading research and development.

"Though NSRI's work seems complex, its value over the two years covered by this report is seen in simplicity — respond, advance, deliver," writes Maj. Gen., USAF (Ret.) Rick Evans, NSRI executive director, in his opening message of the report. "As a UARC, NSRI strives to create a bridge from the possibilities of science and research to the realities faced by the Nation's warfighters and decision makers. Since its founding in 2012, the institute has steadily enhanced its ability to swiftly initiate research and development, ensuring readiness for action on the battlefield, during emergencies and in real-time situations."

NSRI reports \$293 million in total award value for 188 contracts since 2012 and \$150 million in total executed research.

To provide context to its mission space, the report features summaries of context and capabilities from each of NSRI's research focus areas. During the reporting period, NSRI's research teams from each of these areas worked closely with 33 DOD and federal government sponsors and 62 NU faculty and students through 65 active projects. They tackled emerging challenges, leveraging research to identify new threats, applying new concepts and technology to mitigate risks and pioneering capabilities to serve as a force multiplier for the Nation's defense and intelligence communities.

To demonstrate the effectiveness and relevance of NSRI's capabilities and commitment, the report features 27 deliverables within four themes:

- Foresight for tailored solutions
- Thought leadership for actionable outcomes
- Rapid response to real-time challenges
- Optimized data and skills for efficient decision making

"The NSRI team is proud to serve in the capacities represented by this report," Evans writes. "We hope readers feel called to join us as we work with our protectors to proactively deter, rapidly respond to and safely mitigate the ever-changing threats to our Nation."

Related Media Item:

- **Report:** <https://nsri.nebraska.edu/report24>
- <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7269729417055100928>