

People, Programs and Points of Excellence (P³E)

Report for July 18, 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 at Kearney

1. UNK receives \$1.8 million grant for student support program

UNK has received a \$1.8 million federal grant from the U.S. Department of Education to continue funding its TRIO Student Support Services program, which provides essential resources for first-generation, income-eligible and disabled students. The grant—\$353,851 annually for five years—allows UNK to support more than 200 students each year with academic advising, tutoring, peer mentoring, financial literacy, career development and more. Now in its 32nd year, TRIO has helped over 1,600 students graduate from UNK since 1993.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2024/09/16/unk-receives-1-8-million-grant-for-student-support-program>

2. Service Learning: UNK students deliver free medical care during outreach trip to Guatemala

Twenty-two UNK health science students recently traveled to Guatemala for a 14-day medical outreach trip, delivering free care to over 840 patients in underserved rural communities near San Pedro. Organized by UNK's chapter of VAW Global Health Alliances, the trip gave students hands-on experience in mobile clinics and exposed them to real-world health disparities. It was described by students as life-changing and reaffirmed their career paths in health care and global service.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2025/07/08/unk-students-deliver-health-care-during-outreach-trip-to-guatemala>

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

1. Nebraska U remains among world's best for earning patents

Strengthening its role as a driver of research, innovation and economic growth, the University of Nebraska remains one of the world's top institutions for earning patents.

In the latest report from the National Academy of Inventors, the NU system climbed six spots to No. 49 nationally and remained among the top 100 globally after securing 47 U.S. utility patents in 2024.

Related Media Item:

- Nebraska Today: <https://news.unl.edu/article/nebraska-u-remains-among-worlds-best-for-earning-patents>
- Silicon Prairie News: <https://siliconprairienews.com/2025/06/the-university-of-nebraska-system-ranks-in-the-top-100-globally-in-u-s-utility-patents/>

2. Liu's research expands, connects autonomous vehicle capabilities

A University of Nebraska–Lincoln research project aims to transform how autonomous vehicles operate by connecting them to broader networks, making them smarter and more reliable.

Current autonomous vehicle models use sensors, hardware and AI-based software to perceive and react to their surrounding environments. Because the software and hardware in these vehicles are typically tightly linked, upgradability options for drivers are limited. Liu's project proposes a solution through access to a broader network of devices and shared information.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/lius-research-expands-connects-autonomous-vehicle-capabilities>

University of Nebraska Medical Center

1. UNMC innovators' product launches nationwide

MicroWash, a nasal sample collection device invented at UNMC and developed through the university's product commercialization process, now is available nationwide. MicroWash is a self-contained irrigation device that allows clinicians to collect samples easily and painlessly from a patient's nasal cavity. The innovation spawned from the frustrations and marked discomfort of the traditional nasal swabs that gained notoriety during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was invented by Thanh Nguyen, PhD, an assistant professor of emergency medicine, department chair Michael Wadman, MD, and Wesley Zeger, DO, professor in the department.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2025/07/14/unmc-innovators-microwash-product-launches-nationwide/>

2. Autism care for toddlers clinic opening in Fremont

The Autism Care for Toddlers Clinic is the third ACT Clinic opened by UNMC and the Munroe-Meyer Institute, and the first outside of the Omaha metro area. The clinics provide one-on-one care for toddlers diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder and caregiver training and support.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2025/07/11/community-celebrates-grand-opening-of-fremont-act-clinic/>

University of Nebraska at Omaha

1. UNO FBLA-C Returns Victorious from FBLA-C National Competition

The University of Nebraska at Omaha's Future Business Leaders of America - Collegiate chapter (FBLA-C) recently competed at the 2025 FBLA-C National Leadership Conference (NLC) in Dallas, TX from May 30-June 1. The group of 7 returned to Omaha with 10 top 10 placements in the national competition, including two national champion titles. In addition to personal success, the chapter was one of the ten chapters in the nation to earn a Distinguished Chapter Award.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unomaha.edu/college-of-business-administration/news/2025/07/fblac-national-july.php>

2. Omaha Police Break Mental Health Stigma with Help from UNO Researchers

Researchers at the University of Nebraska Omaha are partnering with the Omaha Police Department to evaluate the impact of annual mental health check-ins for officers in high-trauma units. Funded by an \$88,777 federal grant, the study builds on a successful pilot that showed reduced stigma and increased support for mental health care. The expanded evaluation will include nearly triple the number of participants and aims to provide national insights into how mental health programs can improve officer wellness. Early findings suggest that proactive, structured support may be key to changing departmental culture and saving lives.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unomaha.edu/news/2025/07/omaha-police-break-mental-health-stigma-with-help-from-uno-researchers.php>

Agriculture and Natural Resources

1. Nebraska U ranks in top 10% worldwide for agriculture, natural resources

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln's agriculture and natural resources programs have been ranked in the top 10% globally by the 2024 QS World University Rankings, placing 46th out of 475 institutions. The university also ranked third among Big Ten land-grant universities in employer reputation, a metric that reflects how well graduates are

prepared for the workforce. This recognition highlights the strength of Nebraska's research, teaching, and Extension efforts across the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR).

The ranking affirms the university's impact statewide and beyond, driven by innovative curricula, experiential learning, and meaningful partnerships. In addition, strong faculty, creative students, and a collaborative culture have fueled growth in research expenditures and positioned the university as a leader in agricultural innovation.

The university also scored highly in research productivity, including citations per paper and H-index citations. With continued investment and industry collaboration, UNL aims to further elevate its global profile in agricultural research and education, supporting Nebraska's producers and communities for the long term.

Related Media Item:

- IANR News: <https://ianrnews.unl.edu/article/nebraska-u-ranks-in-top-10-worldwide-for-agriculture-natural-resources>
- Nebraska TV: <https://nebraska.tv/news/local/unl-agriculture-programs-shine-in-top-10-worldwide-ranking>

2. New report details global drought impacts

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln's National Drought Mitigation Center and the United Nations' Convention to Combat Desertification have released a report outlining the impacts of drought around the world since 2023.

The report was released July 2 at the fourth International Conference on Financing for Development in Seville, Spain.

The report covers food, water, energy crises and human tragedies resulting from drought events in dozens of countries around the world. It shares impacts within the most acute drought hotspots in Africa, the Mediterranean, Latin America and Southeast Asia based on more than 250 studies, data sources and news reports.

The report underscores it is crucial to act now to reduce effects of future droughts by working to improve access to food, water, education, health care and economic opportunity.

Related Media Item:

- Nebraska Today: <https://news.unl.edu/article/new-report-details-global-drought-impacts>
- KLKN 1011: <https://www.1011now.com/2025/07/09/university-nebraska-lincoln-drought-report-calls-global-conditions-catastrophe/>

University of Nebraska Foundation

1. UNK Alumni Give \$500,000 to Create Business Scholarships

University of Nebraska at Kearney alumni Merle A. and Kay Horst of Miromar Lakes, Florida, have made a \$500,000 gift to endow the Horst Brothers UNK Business Scholarship in the College of Business and Technology.

The scholarship will help undergraduate students from Nebraska farming communities complete their education while easing their student debt. Three scholarships will be awarded annually to students — a sophomore, a junior

and a senior — majoring in accounting or business administration. Merle and Kay are both University of Nebraska Foundation trustees.

Related Media Item: <https://nufoundation.org/unk-alumni-give-500000-to-create-business-scholarships/>

2. Carl Mammel Receives Inaugural Scott Medal for Achievement in Philanthropy

The University of Nebraska Foundation has bestowed its inaugural award for lifetime achievement in philanthropy on Carl G. Mammel of Omaha, a prominent business leader and philanthropist.

The Ruth and Bill Scott Medal for Lifetime Achievement in Philanthropy was established by the University of Nebraska Foundation Board of Directors in November 2024 to recognize those whose legacy of philanthropic support has provided exceptional benefits in furthering the goals and mission of the University of Nebraska over a sustained period.

As president of the Mammel Family Foundation and a University of Nebraska–Lincoln alumnus, Mammel’s generosity has deeply impacted the university across multiple campuses. His largest gift to the university system was the largest ever in the history of the University of Nebraska at Omaha and supported the construction of Mammel Hall, home of UNO’s College of Business Administration. Mammel made another gift a decade later to support a building addition to accommodate enrollment and faculty growth in the college.

His other major gifts include supporting the Mammel Business Scholarship Fund and the College of Public Affairs and Community Service building renovation at UNO; Project Health and the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center at the University of Nebraska Medical Center and Nebraska Medicine; and Husker Athletics and the Beta Theta Pi fraternity at UNL.

Related Media Item: <https://nufoundation.org/carl-mammel-receives-inaugural-scott-medal-for-achievement-in-philanthropy/>

Buffett Early Childhood Institute

In Unanimous Show of Support, Buffett Institute Contract to Lead Superintendents’ Early Childhood Plan Work Extended Through 2028-29

On June 26, the Coordinating Council of the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties unanimously approved a four-year contract renewal for the Superintendents’ Early Childhood Plan. The vote reaffirms their support for the Buffett Early Childhood Institute’s implementation of the program and their commitment to ensuring all children get a strong start through access to quality early learning experiences, while recognizing the plan’s impact across the region since its start in 2015.

The Buffett Institute partners with the Learning Community to provide leadership and support for the plan—a collaborative initiative of the 11 Omaha metro-area school districts to develop programming for young children and families facing persistent economic and social challenges.

With the renewed contract, the Superintendents’ Plan will continue through the 2028-29 school year in the following school districts: Bellevue Public Schools, Bennington Public Schools, Douglas County West Community Schools, Gretna Public Schools, Elkhorn Public Schools, Millard Public Schools, Omaha Public Schools, Ralston

Public Schools, Papillion La Vista Community Schools, Springfield Platteview Community Schools, and Westside Community Schools.

Prior to the contract renewal, all 11 current district superintendents voiced support for the Institute's leadership and the innovative plan, which helps children learn long before they enter school, in an opinion piece published by the Nebraska Examiner.

Today, more than 4,440 students are enrolled at the Plan's 10 School as Hub sites with the impact reaching far more educators and students through professional development workshops and specialized district consulting.

Related Media Item: <https://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/news-and-events/news/2025/07/learning-community-council-extends-superintendents-early-childhood-plan-work-through-2028-29>

Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute

DWFI releases report on irrigation and mechanization opportunities in Niger

DWFI has released a report advocating for increased investment in small-scale irrigation in Niger to address food insecurity and promote economic growth. The report, authored by DWFI Global Fellow Douglas J. Merrey, Ph.D., highlights that while Niger has significant untapped groundwater potential, its agriculture is primarily rainfed, leaving its 26.2 million people vulnerable to climate-related disasters. The report suggests that while large-scale irrigation projects have often struggled with sustainability, small-scale irrigation and climate-smart practices have shown success in increasing food production and farmer resilience but remain underfunded. The report calls for long-term, interdisciplinary research and patient engagement from development partners to address these challenges and unlock the potential of irrigation to improve livelihoods in Niger.

Related Media Item: <https://waterforfood.nebraska.edu/news-and-events/news/2025/07/dwfi-releases-report-on-irrigation-and-mechanization-opportunities-in-niger>

National Strategic Research Institute

University of Nebraska researchers at forefront to address agriculture-related cyber vulnerabilities

American agriculture has a growing need to strengthen its defenses against cyber assaults. The computers, sensors, GPS and cloud-based data systems that help producers boost productivity also increase the chances for cybercriminals to worm their way into producers' operational systems and data.

Cyberattacks on agribusinesses in recent years have demonstrated hackers' ability to shut down processing plants, halt livestock purchases and cost corporations millions through ransomware attacks.

In the face of these threats, the University of Nebraska System (NU) is a key resource for strengthening agricultural cyber defenses. Multiple NU projects with various funding sources, including federal government grants, are in the forefront of analyzing and addressing key vulnerabilities.

"Many of the technologies used in precision agriculture, such as drones, have been designed for use and affordability before data security. They are also readily available off the shelf, making them potential targets for

those with malicious intent," said Meghan Jackson, director for food, agriculture and environment security at the National Strategic Research Institute (NSRI) at the University of Nebraska. "Disruptions to an automated irrigation system or hacking of a dairy's industrial control system could result in the failure of an entire season and even death of animals. Building resiliency into existing and new precision agriculture is critical to protecting America's growing digital landscape."

As one of only 15 University Affiliated Research Centers (UARCs) in the country designated by the U.S. Department of Defense, NSRI provides perspective and clarity regarding the evolving national security concerns of stakeholders within the federal government. It partners with the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR) at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL), which brings forward 150 years of experience in agricultural research and a deep commitment to producers and consumers, to forge research and development that matters to the DOD and beyond.

Among the many examples of NU's growing impact on agricultural cybersecurity, researchers have strengthened the defense of autonomous agricultural vehicles against hacking, collaborated to research cyber effects and created a cybersecurity curriculum for producers and food processors.

Related Media Item: <https://nsri.nebraska.edu/news/news-releases/2025/07/nu-researchers-at-forefront-to-address-ag-related-cyber-vulnerabilities>.