

People, Programs and Points of Excellence (P³E)

Report for July 4, 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. ‘Once in a lifetime’: UNK students soak in New York City’s vibrant art scene

UNK art and design professor Mallory Wetherell led 17 students on an eight-day trip to New York City as part of the “Cultural Studies Through Art” course. The class blended art history with immersive, real-world experiences, including visits to renowned museums like the Met and MoMA, graffiti workshops, Broadway shows, and other cultural landmarks. Designed to broaden students’ artistic perspectives, the course emphasized experiential learning, critical thinking, and creative reflection through sketchbook journaling. Students described it as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that left them inspired and more confident to pursue future artistic and academic endeavors.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2025/06/18/once-in-a-lifetime-unk-students-soak-in-new-york-citys-vibrant-art-scene/>

2. Making History Matter: A passion for the past guided Broc Anderson’s future

UNK graduate Broc Anderson is using his passion for public history to preserve Nebraska’s heritage and share the stories of its people. A member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, Anderson earned his master’s degree in history from UNK and now serves as director of historic sites for the Nebraska State Historical Society. His work includes overseeing five major historic sites and leading projects such as restoring a 90-year-old theater curtain and rediscovering a rare Lakota winter count ledger. Anderson credits his UNK experience, including hands-on learning, faculty mentorship and impactful research opportunities, for shaping his career in public history.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2025/06/26/making-history-matter-a-passion-for-the-past-guided-broc-andersons-future/>

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

1. New center will address rural attorney shortage, support Nebraska children

The Nebraska Children’s Justice and Legal Advocacy Center is a new initiative of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln’s College of Law focused on addressing the shortage of qualified attorneys in rural communities across the state.

Of the state’s more than 5,500 attorneys with active licenses, only 7% practice in rural areas. The situation is particularly dire for juvenile court cases, where about 60% of abuse and neglect petitions originate from areas outside Lincoln and Omaha. Currently, 12 Nebraska counties have no attorneys, and many rural counties lack advocates with experience in child welfare.

The center will transform juvenile court advocacy by equipping attorneys with the knowledge, skills and support needed to provide high-quality, trauma-informed representation.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/new-center-will-address-rural-attorney-shortage-support-nebraska-children>

2. Bureau of Sociological Research helping steer ag policy research

The expanses of land across farms and ranches are wide, but the University of Nebraska–Lincoln’s Bureau of Sociological Research has years of experience gathering perspectives from producers — no matter the geography — helping inform agricultural research, practices, and state and federal policymaking.

BOSR has been conducting survey research and providing research assistance to faculty, departments, administrative units, students, and various government agencies and nonprofit organizations since 1964.

Research conducted in partnership with BOSR over the last year explored women in agriculture, grazing, soil health, precision agriculture practices, social networks and grain marketing.

Related Media Item:

- Nebraska Today: <https://news.unl.edu/article/bureau-of-sociological-research-helping-steer-ag-policy-research>
- Nebraska TV: <https://nebraska.tv/news/local/unl-research-informs-new-agricultural-policies>

University of Nebraska Medical Center

1. KUMC, UNMC announce major grant

The University of Kansas Medical Center has named UNMC its partner in the institution's five-year, \$31 million grant from the National Institutes of Health to coordinate clinical trials for infants and children in rural and underserved areas. In partnership with UNMC, KU Medical Center will serve as the Data Coordinating and Operations Center for the Environmental influences on Child Health Outcomes Institutional Development Award States Pediatric Clinical Trials Network.

The DCOC will provide data coordination and biostatistics support, facilitate multisite study design and results dissemination, help coordinate with local health systems and train researchers and clinicians to increase their capacity to conduct pediatric research.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2025/06/27/ku-medical-center-unmc-to-lead-clinical-trials-center/>

2. Regents approve diabetes center of excellence

The University of Nebraska Board of Regents approved the creation of the Diabetes Center of Excellence in Diabetes Care, Research and Education (C-DIACARE) at the UNMC Omaha campus, pending approval by the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. The designation of this Board of Regents center unifies research and education efforts across the university system, bolstering statewide diabetes prevention and care.

The creation of a new, regent-approved Center of Excellence shows once again how UNMC is raising the bar in its research and clinical care, in this case as related to diabetes, which is annually among the top 10 leading causes of death in the U.S.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2025/06/20/regents-approves-diabetes-center-of-excellence-at-unmc/>

University of Nebraska at Omaha

1. UNO Theatre Summer Musical Theatre Academy Presents "The SpongeBob Musical"

This summer, UNO Theatre's Summer Musical Theatre Academy (SMTA) presents The SpongeBob Musical, featuring high school students from across Omaha in a vibrant, high-energy production. Performances took place June 27–29 at UNO's Black Box Theatre, with an additional free outdoor show on July 1 at the Gene Leahy Mall. Directed and choreographed by Omaha theatre professionals and faculty, the show included a live orchestra made up of local musicians, UNO students, and talented high school instrumentalists. SMTA is a tuition-free, four-week intensive program that provides students with professional-level training in all aspects of musical theatre production.

Related Media Item: <https://events.unomaha.edu/event/unotheatre-summer-musical-theatre-academy-presents-the-spongebob-musical>

2. Inside look at UNO pitching lab that's helping athletes improve their game

As the College World Series continues in Omaha, KETV got a look inside UNO's cutting-edge pitching lab, which held an open house Friday. The facility uses clinical data and motion capture technology to enhance athletic performance and prevent injuries, analyzing one of the most extreme motions in sports: the baseball pitch. Researchers highlighted how the shoulder can rotate up to 7,200 degrees per second during a pitch. The lab also serves as a training ground for students pursuing careers in sports science, with some graduates landing roles with MLB teams like the Chicago Cubs.

Related Media Item: <https://www.ketv.com/article/omaha-pitching-lab-helps-athletes-improve-their-game/65135197>

Agriculture and Natural Resources

1. Op-ed: Federal support for university research is a success story for our country

Derek McLean, dean of UNL's Agricultural Research Division, authored an op-ed that ran in the Nebraska Examiner on the importance of university research, and ag research in particular. A summary of major points follows: The partnership between the federal government and universities has fueled decades of U.S. innovation and global leadership — and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has been central to that success.

As a land-grant institution, UNL is deeply invested in agricultural and natural resources research, driving real-world results for Nebraska producers and communities. From developing drought-tolerant crops and precision ag technologies to improving cattle nutrition and genetics, NU research delivers science-based solutions that strengthen rural economies and boost productivity.

Federal investments — like those made through the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture — have helped ensure this research reaches the fields and pastures of Nebraska. But continued progress is at risk as federal research support faces increasing scrutiny. Cuts or delays not only threaten our state's ag sector but also jeopardize America's global competitiveness. Sustained investment in university research is critical to keeping Nebraska agriculture strong — and ensuring U.S. leadership in innovation for generations to come.

Related Media Item: <https://nebraskaexaminer.com/2025/06/27/federal-support-for-university-research-is-a-success-story-for-our-country/>

2. Northeast Nebraska Education Compact expands outreach to students

The University of Nebraska—Lincoln is leading a powerful statewide collaboration through its role in convening the Northeast Nebraska Agricultural Science and Natural Resources Education Compact. Since 2019, the compact has connected more than 1,500 students with hands-on STEM and agricultural learning. Its growing network—now including 20 school districts, tribal colleges, community colleges, and universities—offers expanded educational opportunities for students across rural Nebraska.

UNL's Haskell Agricultural Laboratory near Concord serves as a key site for events like Biology Day, Physical Science Day, and elementary STEM camps, giving students direct exposure to science and agriculture in action. A recent middle school STEM camp at Northeast Community College brought students from 15 districts together to explore robotics, drones, and water science—experiences many would not otherwise access.

With leadership from UNL's College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, and support from partners like Nebraska EPSCoR and Nebraska Extension, the compact is creating a sustainable model for rural education. By aligning resources and expertise, UNL is helping ensure that Nebraska students—regardless of location—can explore careers, build skills, and imagine a future in science and agriculture.

Related Media Item: <https://ianrnews.unl.edu/article/northeast-nebraska-education-compact-expands-outreach-to-students>

University of Nebraska Foundation

Mark and Catherine Houser create Pediatric Nephrology Professorship

University of Nebraska Medical Center alumni Mark, M.D., and Catherine Houser, M.S.N., spent much of their health care careers caring for pediatric patients. Inspired by a desire to give back to UNMC, the couple decided to leave a legacy by investing in the care of children with kidney disease in their home state of Nebraska.

The Housers have made a multi-year commitment to create the Mark and Catherine Houser Professorship in Pediatric Nephrology at UNMC. The couple also made a deferred pledge to endow the position later through their estate.

A top priority of the Only in Nebraska campaign is to create new endowed chairs and professorships to recruit and retain preeminent educators and researchers in every field.

Related Media Item: <https://nufoundation.org/mark-and-catherine-houser-create-pediatric-nephrology-professorship/>

Buffett Early Childhood Institute

Buffett Institute-led Native Nations Event Draws Leaders from 40+ Tribal Nations to Nebraska

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute and the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska hosted a first-of-its-kind convening in June of early childhood leaders from more than 40 Tribal Nations from Alaska and Maine to Arizona and New Mexico. The attendees worked to develop an early education vision and blueprint for the future of Native American children and families.

The “Native Nations: Honoring Culture and Shaping Futures for Children and Families” meeting took place June 9-11 at Educare Winnebago in northeast Nebraska.

Nearly 60 people participated, including Native American early childhood leaders from Head Start, health care, home visiting programs, Tribal colleges, parents, community elders, and more. They engaged in a Future Search process to identify eight priority areas for action, including the Tribal early childhood workforce and the preservation of Native culture and language.

Maria Garcia from the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska and Amy LaPointe-Houghton from the Winnebago Tribe represented Nebraska, and the group toured the Educare Winnebago early childhood facility.

In coming weeks, the Institute will work with an advisory committee representing the larger group to further define the blueprint and lay out action steps to improve Native families’ and children’s access to early care and learning opportunities.

The Heising-Simons Foundation funded this exciting opportunity and the conference’s planning committee included the Buffett Institute’s Linda Smith, Hanna Junus, and Michelle Sarche.

Related Media Item: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7341200718684442625>

Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute

Nebraska Farmer feature: The economic impact of groundwater regulation in Nebraska

A recent story in Nebraska Farmer titled "The truth about how groundwater regulations affect land values" highlighted DWFI's work on the economic impact of groundwater regulation in Nebraska.

In Nebraska, a state heavily reliant on irrigation, the management of groundwater resources through its unique Natural Resources Districts serves as a national model for addressing groundwater depletion. A yet-to-be-published study, "Economic Impact of Groundwater Regulation in Nebraska: A Hedonic Price Analysis," supported by USDA and highlighted by DWFI in a March blog, examined the effects of new well moratoriums and groundwater irrigation allocations on farmland values. The study found that while new well moratoriums led to a 9% drop in dryland farmland values, groundwater allocations had no significant impact on farmland values, suggesting that these regulations do not reduce farmland value and can help ensure groundwater sustainability.

Related Media Item: <https://www.farmprogress.com/farm-policy/nebraskas-groundwater-regulation-model-balancing-farmland-value-and-resource-preservation>

National Strategic Research Institute

NSRI strategic deterrence interns supporting JEMSO research deliverables

Students and recent graduates from the University of Nebraska System (NU) and beyond have joined the National Strategic Research Institute (NSRI) at the University of Nebraska to contribute their time and talent to two projects in support of U.S. Strategic Command's mission for joint electromagnetic spectrum operations (JEMSO).

One project will provide a foundational prototype to explore feasibility of basic frequency capture and retransmission functionalities. It is led by Dr. Andrew Harms, assistant professor of electrical and computer engineering at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL).

A second project aims to develop a system for accurately geo-locating emitters in a congested environment using Software Defined Radio (SDR) receivers. It is led by Dr. M. Can Vuran, Dale M. Jensen Professor of Computing at UNL.

"Having a father in the U.S. Marines, the goals of national security hit close to home for me," said Robert Garcia, a graduate student in telecommunications engineering at UNL. "Electromagnetic warfare is going to become one of the most vital forms of conflict as radio and cellular communications continue to become more commonplace and necessary for advanced warfare. The potential for interference, deception, jamming and electromagnetic pulse attacks against communication systems becomes higher and higher if the proper steps aren't taken to prevent and strengthen these systems against adversaries."

Related Media Item: <https://nsri.nebraska.edu/news/news-releases/2025/06/nsri-strategic-deterrence-interns-supporting-jemso-research-deliverables>