

People, Programs and Points of Excellence (P³E)

Report for June 6, 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 undergraduate researchers explore Nebraska's bat populations through hands-on fieldwork

University of Nebraska at Kearney students Dawson Kosmicki and Joe Paysen are conducting hands-on wildlife research through a unique undergraduate opportunity led by Biology Professor Dr. Keith Geluso. Their work focuses on bats—often overlooked yet vital creatures in Nebraska's ecosystem. Using field methods like radio-tracking, roost surveys, and museum specimen analysis, the students are making new discoveries and contributing to species conservation.

Both students are gaining valuable experience that supports their career goals: Kosmicki is preparing for graduate research at the Sternberg Museum in Kansas, and Paysen hopes to pursue a professorship working with reptiles and amphibians. The pair emphasized how rare it is for undergraduates to lead meaningful research projects—something Dr. Geluso says sets UNK apart from larger institutions.

Related Media Item: <https://youtu.be/l14M99a3fCI?si=su9-OCYD09slui3K>

2. 'A really meaningful experience': Teachmates program builds bonds between future educators

The Teachmates program at the University of Nebraska at Kearney is strengthening connections between aspiring educators at UNK and local high school students with similar career goals. Launched through the Kearney Education Collaborative—a partnership between UNK's College of Education and Kearney Public Schools—the mentorship program pairs UNK teacher education seniors with Kearney High students.

This year, 10 UNK students mentored 10 high schoolers, including Allysen Gross and Karsyn Vasko, who quickly formed a meaningful bond. The program offers encouragement, insight into teaching, and a professional support system. Gross recently graduated and was hired as a special education teacher at Sunrise Middle School in Kearney, while Vasko plans to pursue a teaching degree at UNK.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2025/05/25/a-really-meaningful-experience-teachmates-program-builds-bonds-between-future-educators/>

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

1. Husker engineers advance work on intelligent, self-healing technology

Husker engineer Eric Markvicka recently presented a paper at the prestigious IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation in Atlanta. The paper was among the 39 of 1,606 submissions selected as an ICRA 2025 Best Paper Award finalist.

Related Media Item:

- **Nebraska Today:** <https://news.unl.edu/article/husker-engineers-advance-work-on-intelligent-self-healing-technology>
- **KOLN/KGIN:** <https://www.1011now.com/2025/06/05/team-husker-engineers-create-self-healing-robot-skin/>
- **Science Daily:** <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2025/05/250530151849.htm>

2. Construction to launch on affordable homes project in Omaha

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln College of Architecture, in partnership with Partners for Livable Omaha and Holy Name Housing Corp., has launched an innovative housing initiative to address Omaha’s growing demand for affordable, age-friendly homes.

The homes are the first constructed designs in the OurStory project, a collaboration between the College of Architecture and Livable Omaha. The initiative explores scalable solutions to Omaha’s housing affordability crisis by developing small, sustainable homes tailored to both older adults and first-time homebuyers.

Related Media Item:

- **Nebraska Today:** <https://news.unl.edu/article/construction-to-launch-on-affordable-homes-project-in-omaha>
- **Nebraska Public Media:** <https://nebraskapublicmedia.org/en/news/news-articles/unl-architecture-students-break-ground-on-new-approach-to-affordable-housing-needs/>
- **Omaha World Herald:** https://omaha.com/news/local/article_fb711c5-5ea6-4936-911d-4b23bd0aff70.html
- **WOWT:** <https://www.wowt.com/2025/06/02/benson-housing-project-creates-new-option-older-adults-first-time-homebuyers/>

University of Nebraska Medical Center

1. UNMC research team finding may explain how lung cancer evades immune system

UNMC research team, including postdoctoral research associate Muthamil Iniyan Appadurai, PhD, and assistant professor Imayavaramban Lakshmanan, PhD, has identified a novel mechanism that may help explain not only how lung cancer evades the immune system but also uncovered a potential new therapeutic target.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2025/05/30/unmc-researchers-find-promising-target-for-lung-cancer-treatment/>

2. Catalyst opens; new era of innovation begins

University leaders and partners in the development of the Catalyst building came together Wednesday, May 28, to celebrate the opening of the 170,000-square-foot office, meeting and community space in the renovated Omaha Steel Castings plant.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2025/05/30/leaders-cut-ribbon-on-catalyst-project-new-era-of-innovation/>

University of Nebraska at Omaha

1. UNO Flight Team Coach Wins National Coach of the Year

Lowell “Skip” Bailey, Head Coach and Faculty Advisor of the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) Flying Mavs, has been named the 2025 National Coach of the Year by the National Intercollegiate Flying Association at SAFECON. Since joining the team in 2018 and stepping into the Head Coach role in 2023, Bailey has helped maintain the Flying Mavs’ 16-year streak of national qualifications, with consistent Top 10 finishes. A retired U.S. Air Force pilot with over 25 years of service—including missions aboard the E-4B “Nightwatch”—Bailey brings unmatched professionalism, discipline, and mentorship to his students. His leadership blends technical precision with personal guidance, shaping future aviation professionals and continuing UNO’s legacy of excellence in collegiate flight.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unomaha.edu/college-of-public-affairs-and-community-service/news/2025/05/skip-bailey-coach-of-the-year.php>

2. UNO Mourns the Passing of Chancellor Emeritus John E. Christensen, Ph.D.

Chancellor Emeritus John E. Christensen, Ph.D., who led the University of Nebraska at Omaha from 2007 to 2017, passed away on May 28 at age 76. A first-generation college student and UNO alumnus, Christensen was instrumental in transforming the university into a nationally recognized metropolitan institution, advancing academic excellence, community engagement, and Division I athletics. His legacy includes the creation of the Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center, Baxter Arena, and several major initiatives that strengthened UNO’s mission and national standing. Colleagues remembered him as a visionary leader devoted to service, student success, and the Maverick spirit.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unomaha.edu/news/2025/05/uno-mourns-the-passing-of-chancellor-emeritus-john-christensen.php>

Agriculture and Natural Resources

1. Nebraska Rural Poll celebrates 30 years of capturing rural voices

The Nebraska Rural Poll — the longest-running survey of its kind in the nation — is celebrating 30 years of amplifying the voices of rural Nebraskans and shaping conversations around economic development, public policy, and quality of life. Conducted by the University of Nebraska–Lincoln’s Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, the poll has gathered insights since 1996 on key issues including employment, education, community engagement, and technology access.

Over the past three decades, the Rural Poll has become a trusted resource for policymakers, researchers, and community leaders. Its findings have influenced legislation, guided community development efforts, and supported successful grant applications across the state. Leaders cite the poll as a vital tool in understanding and addressing rural challenges, offering data that drives informed decision-making and advocates for the needs of small communities.

New in 2024, the All Things Nebraska mapping platform offers interactive access to the latest poll data, providing more localized insights than ever before. As Nebraska’s rural landscape evolves, the Rural Poll continues to serve as a cornerstone for community growth and a catalyst for conversation, helping ensure that rural voices are heard — and acted upon — at every level.

Related Media Item:

- Rural Radio: <https://ruralradio.com/kneb-am/news/nebraska-rural-poll-celebrates-30-years-of-capturing-rural-voices/>
- Tri-State Livestock News: <https://www.tsln.com/news/nebraska-rural-poll-celebrates-30-years-of-capturing-rural-voices/>

2. Website showcases thousands of ways UNL serves Nebraska

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln has launched a new online hub to better connect Nebraskans with its wide range of programs and services. Developed by the Engagement Collaborative and Nebraska Extension, the Community Resources Database brings together hundreds of resources across 20 categories — including agriculture, education, health, and technology. Users can easily find classes, workshops, professional development, community services, and more, each with summaries and contact details for university experts.

Previously, these resources were scattered across different university web pages, making them difficult to locate. “Now, everything’s in one place, organized in a way that’s easier to navigate,” said Jentry Barrett, who led the project.

A companion Engagement and Outreach Map highlights more than 3,500 university-led projects happening across Nebraska, from Extension programs to research initiatives and public events. Together, the database and map demonstrate the university’s commitment to serving all Nebraskans — including farmers, educators, business owners, families, and community leaders.

Both tools are updated regularly and are available at engage.unl.edu.

Related Media Item: <https://ianrnews.unl.edu/article/website-showcases-thousands-of-ways-unl-serves-nebraska>

University of Nebraska Foundation

UNO Hosts Ceremonial Groundbreaking for \$17.1 Million Biomechanics Addition

The University of Nebraska at Omaha hosted a groundbreaking ceremony May 29 for a \$17.1 million addition to the Biomechanics Research Building, celebrating philanthropic support for the transformative project. Recognized at the event were the principal benefactors, Omaha philanthropist Ruth Scott and the William and Ruth Scott Family Foundation.

The phase three expansion, which is entirely privately funded, supports the Division of Biomechanics and Research Development's rapid growth and rising national prominence. It will house, among others, the Center for Cardiovascular Research in Biomechanics (CRiB), established in 2024 after UNO received an \$11 million grant from the National Institutes of Health. The center's aim is to develop innovative materials and devices to address the pressing challenges posed by vascular diseases.

Related Media Item: <https://nufoundation.org/uno-breaks-ground-on-17-1-million-biomechanics-addition/>

Buffett Early Childhood Institute

Buffett Institute's Michelle Sarche Receives National Award for Prevention Research

In late May, the national Society for Prevention Research honored Michelle Sarche, Buffett Institute professor and project lead, with an award for her prevention science work. Sarche is an expert in Native American child development, parenting, and early care and education.

She was recognized for her work incorporating culture into prevention science and developing effective prevention strategies for under-resourced populations. Sarche has worked with Native American communities for more than 25 years to conduct research to improve access and quality in Tribal early childhood programs.

Her current projects include the Tribal Early Childhood Research Center (TRC), the Native Children's Research Exchange (NCRE) Conference and Scholars program, the Center for Indigenous Research Collaborations and Learning in Home Visiting (CIRCLE-HV), and the CIRCLE P50 Center of Excellence. The CIRCLE Center is funded by the National Institutes of Health and serves as a hub for research to address substance-use issues, prevention, and recovery in Tribal communities.

Throughout her career, Sarche has brought in millions of dollars in grant and contract funding from sources such as the federal Administration for Children and Families, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

Related Media Item:

- **BECI Press Release:** <https://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/news-and-events/news/2024/11/national-expert-on-native-american-early-childhood-development-joins-buffett-institute>
- **Society for Prevention Research Facebook post:** <https://www.facebook.com/PreventionResearch/posts/pfbid02DyA2TwvVKmnjLUZruGRYsnkmPetyRaXW7rcussBgaw14co5Bf272WNzWjrbK2FCZl>

Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute

Global Conference marks 15 years since DWFI's official inauguration

The Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute (DWFI) recently celebrated its 15th anniversary at the 2025 Water for Food Global Conference, marking a significant milestone since its inauguration in May 2010, made possible by a \$50 million commitment from Bob Daugherty. For a decade and a half, DWFI has been at the forefront of sustainable water management for agriculture, driving innovative research, fostering strategic partnerships, and implementing impactful programs that have significantly improved water use efficiency, agricultural productivity, and environmental sustainability worldwide. The institute's dedication to supporting student research, promoting global collaboration, and its expertise in key areas of agricultural water management have solidified its position as a global leader in addressing water and food security challenges, with celebrations throughout the year commemorating this achievement.

Related Media Item: <https://youtu.be/2Ld---HpiCo>

National Strategic Research Institute

NSRI publishes "For NU" newsletter

The National Strategic Research Institute (NSRI) at the University of Nebraska published the final issue of Volume 6 of the "For NU" newsletter, which aims to educate NU faculty, administrations and communicators about the institute's mission space and highlight key stories and announcements. Nearly 80 percent of the 578 recipients opened the issue, which provided an update from the executive director; featured Dr. Benjamin Riggan of UNL, Dr. Krista Forrest of UNK and Dr. DJ Murry of UNMC; spotlighted the institute's annual conference, including a dialogue between the USSTRACOM commander and NU president; and showcased the first article in a series related to agricultural security, NSRI's \$35-to-\$1 ROI and videos from an NSRI training and facility.

Related Media Item: <https://bit.ly/4jN6IW7>