

## People, Programs and Points of Excellence (P<sup>3</sup>E) Report for March 14, 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**

#### **University of Nebraska President Advocates for Veterans' Healthcare Before Congress**

University of Nebraska President Jeffrey P. Gold, M.D., recently testified before the U.S. House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health, emphasizing the power of public-private partnerships in enhancing healthcare access for veterans. Dr. Gold voiced support for H.R. 217, a bipartisan bill co-sponsored by Nebraska Congressman Don Bacon that would make the CHIP-IN for Veterans Act permanent. He highlighted Nebraska's successful CHIP-IN pilot project—the Omaha VA Ambulatory Care Center—as a national model of efficiency and innovation. Looking ahead, Dr. Gold underscored the potential for a new VA hospital integrated with Project Health, a \$2.19 billion medical complex under development at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. His testimony reinforced the university's commitment to ensuring high-quality healthcare for those who have served our country.

**Related Media Item:** <https://nebraska.edu/news-and-events/news/2025/03/university-of-nebraska-president-testifies-before-congress-on-improving-veterans-healthcare>

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### **University of Nebraska at Kearney**

#### **1. UNK's Research Impact Earns National Recognition from Carnegie Foundation**

The University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK) has been classified as a Research College and University (RCU) by the American Council on Education and the Carnegie Foundation, placing it among an elite group of institutions recognized for significant research activity. UNK is one of just 216 colleges and universities nationwide – and one of only 127 public institutions – to receive this classification, which highlights research-intensive institutions outside the traditional R1 or R2 research university model. UNK exceeded the Carnegie Foundation's threshold for classification, securing 31 federal research grants totaling \$8.7 million over the past four years. These grants support research across multiple disciplines, including health sciences, agriculture, education, and business.

**Related Media Item:**

- **UNK News:** <https://unknews.unk.edu/2025/03/05/unks-research-impact-earns-national-recognition-from-carnegie-foundation/>
- **News Channel Nebraska:** <https://www.newschannelnebraska.com/story/52512377/unks-research-impact-earns-national-recognition-from-carnegie-foundation>
- **North Platte Post:** <https://northplattepost.com/posts/fb5478cc-6b7b-41ae-af48-3eb9b060486e>

## **2. Nebraska Communities Collaborate to Expand Early Childhood Education Workforce**

The Knowledge Network for Early Childhood Education Workforce (KNEW), led by the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK), Nebraska Extension, and Communities for Kids, is working to strengthen early childhood education across Nebraska, particularly in rural areas. With \$2 million in funding from the U.S. Department of Education, this first-of-its-kind initiative brings together stakeholders from 17 counties to develop solutions for increasing the recruitment and retention of early childhood educators.

Recognizing the critical need for accessible, high-quality early childhood education, KNEW focuses on workforce development, professional advancement, and local capacity-building. The program includes funding for recruitment initiatives and aims to create a “teaching toolkit” that enhances training and resources for educators.

**Related Media Item:**

- **UNK News:** <https://unknews.unk.edu/2025/03/07/nebraska-communities-come-together-to-expand-early-childhood-education-in-state/>
- **Central Nebraska Today:** <https://www.centralnebraskatoday.com/2025/03/07/247389/>

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## **University of Nebraska–Lincoln**

### **1. Khalimonchuk named to prestigious national society**

Oleh Khalimonchuk, Willa Cather Professor of biochemistry at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, has been named a fellow of the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology—one of just 24 scientists nationwide to receive the prestigious recognition. His lab studies the role of mitochondria in biological processes and human disease.

**Related Media Item:** <https://news.unl.edu/article/khalimonchuk-named-to-prestigious-national-society>

### **2. Nebraska U gears up to host National Science Olympiad**

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln will host the 2025 Science Olympiad National Tournament on May 23-24, bringing some of the nation’s top middle and high school students to campus for one of the country’s premier STEM competitions. The tournament at UNL is expected to draw about 5,000 students, educators and parents, offering hands-on STEM experiences and exposure to diverse career paths.

**Related Media Item:** <https://news.unl.edu/article/nebraska-u-gears-up-to-host-national-science-olympiad>

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## **University of Nebraska Medical Center**

### **1. New clinical trial for patients undergoing LASIK surgery**

Ronald Krueger, MD, and Brian Armstrong, MD, launched a clinical trial intended for patients undergoing LASIK surgery to correct hyperopia (farsightedness) and hyperopic astigmatism. The trial is designed to see if the Teneo™ 317 model 2 laser is as safe and effective as currently approved devices. This is advanced laser technology that puts UNMC on the cutting edge of treatments to improve our patients' eyesight and their experience in the clinic. Dr. Krueger performed the first research procedure correcting farsightedness in Nebraska using the new laser.

**Related Media Item:** <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2025/03/06/seeing-the-benefits-of-laser-vision-correction-procedures/>

### **2. UNMC to offer new dental/public health degree**

UNMC will begin offering a dual Doctor of Dental Surgery/Master of Public Health degree, with the first official cohort of DDS students expected to enroll in the MPH program beginning summer 2026. The dual degree is being offered through the UNMC Colleges of Dentistry and Public Health at a time when dentists and health professionals are becoming increasingly aware of the impact of oral health on the overall health of a community. The degree has been designed so UNMC dental students can get an MPH more affordably and quickly, timing the public health courses so both degrees can be completed in four years.

**Related Media Item:** <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2025/02/25/unmc-to-offer-new-dental-public-health-degree/>

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## **University of Nebraska at Omaha**

### **1. National spotlight on Maverick Hoops**

The Omaha Mavericks have secured their first-ever NCAA Division I tournament berth after winning the Summit League Championship with an 85-75 victory over St. Thomas. Led by JJ White's 29-point performance and Marquel Sutton's double-double, Omaha set a new program record with 22 Division I wins. The Mavericks now await their NCAA tournament matchup, which will be revealed during the Selection Show on March 16.

**Related Media Item:**

- **KETV:** <https://www.ketv.com/article/uno-using-national-spotlight-to-grow-its-brand/64168729>
- **KFAB:** <https://kfab.iheart.com/featured/emery-songer/content/2025-03-06-1248-emery-songer-uno-chancellor-joanne-li/>

## 2. Civic Mobility in the Heartland Research

The Heartland Research Project at the University of Nebraska Omaha is studying civic engagement among young adults, finding that while many want to be involved, they need guidance on how to do so. The Heartland Civic Summit, which drew around 200 attendees, exemplified this interest, prompting researchers to suggest that young people connect with organizations and attend events with others. Funded by a \$325,000 AmeriCorps grant, the project aims to track engagement trends over time through ongoing interviews.

**Related Media Item:** <https://www.ketv.com/article/uno-research-finds-young-people-want-to-be-involved-but-want-to-know-how/64078305>

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## Agriculture and Natural Resources

### 1. UNL plays key role in monitoring, combatting avian influenza

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln is a key partner in combatting high-path avian influenza in Nebraska. Avian influenza, which causes illness and death in birds, including poultry, has also been detected in dairy cattle, cats, humans and other species. Understanding spread and risk of this disease is important for the health of livestock, wildlife, humans and pets.

The Nebraska Veterinary Diagnostic Center tests about 250,000 samples from both wild and domestic birds and other animals annually to understand where the disease is present. The Center works closely with the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, Nebraska Game and Parks, and other state and federal agencies to coordinate disease response.

Additionally, the University has partnered with a private company to develop a vaccine against high-path avian influenza for cattle. University researchers are testing the vaccine and evaluating how cattle respond to it. News outlets have run stories about both testing and vaccine development efforts this spring.

**Related Media Item:**

- **KETV:** <https://www.ketv.com/article/nebraska-university-lab-on-high-alert-for-bird-flu/64167804>
- **Lincoln Journal Star:** [https://journalstar.com/news/state-regional/education/article\\_b0f928d4-fa03-11ef-8638-17cdfa6c977f.html](https://journalstar.com/news/state-regional/education/article_b0f928d4-fa03-11ef-8638-17cdfa6c977f.html)

### 2. UNL works with NRD, other partners, to understand groundwater quantity and how use could impact future levels

To figure out what was going on underground, the Middle Republic Natural Resources District took to the air. Working with Aqua Geo Frameworks and the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, the district carried out helicopter-based airborne electromagnetic surveys to fill out its understanding of local groundwater resources.

UNL associate professor Jesse Korus had a key role in this work, which has helped the NRD understand groundwater levels in areas that were previously impossible to measure, such as between wells. In some cases, the aquifer was thicker than expected, and in other areas, there was less water.

The work speaks to the forward-thinking nature of the NRD and the area it serves and has inspired other states to use similar methods to evaluate their own groundwater levels.

**Related Media Item:** The research inspired the cover story in Irrigation Leader magazine:  
<https://irrigationleadermagazine.com/volume-16-issue-3-march-3/>

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## **University of Nebraska Foundation**

### **1. Only in Nebraska campaign reaches donor goal**

Only in Nebraska: A Campaign for Our University's Future has achieved an important milestone, eclipsing the campaign's goal of 150,000 unique donors.

While this is an incredible accomplishment, the Only in Nebraska campaign is far from over. The campaign has two goals: a donor goal and a fundraising goal. As of Feb. 28, 2025, \$2.58 billion has been raised toward the \$3 billion fundraising goal.

The campaign's three primary objectives are:

- To ensure that the University of Nebraska is accessible to all students and can help all students achieve their goals.
- To invest in faculty — the university's lifeblood and a source of intellectual capital for Nebraska — and in academic and clinical programs.
- To help save lives and change lives by increasing the university's reach as a hub of research and innovation.

**Related Media Item:** <https://onlyinnebraska.org/>

### **2. Come Together March 26-27 For the Greater Good**

For the Greater Good will be celebrated from noon to noon March 26-27, 2025. The giving day will support the University of Nebraska Medical Center and Nebraska Medicine.

For the Greater Good brings together alumni, students, faculty, staff and grateful patients to raise money for scholarships, programs, student groups, research, patient care and other critical resources. Gifts may be made online at [greatergoodgivingday.org](https://greatergoodgivingday.org). The 2025 goal is to receive 2,100 gifts.

**Related Media Item:** <https://nufoundation.org/come-together-march-26-27-for-the-greater-good/>

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## **Buffett Early Childhood Institute**

### **The Buffett Institute's Linda Smith shares expertise in national panel on for-profit child care**

Linda Smith was featured on a March 4 virtual panel hosted by the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading on for-profit child care and the role of private equity investment in the early learning sector. She was joined by other national child care experts from KinderCare, Capita, Child Care Aware of America, Bainum Family Foundation, and more.

During the panel discussion, she highlighted her ongoing work calculating the child care gap in states, including Nebraska. The gap quantifies the difference between how many children and families need care and the number of available spots. A Nebraska child care gap policy brief will be released later this month.

While some have called for greater scrutiny of for-profit child care, Smith said there are bigger issues at play in the child care field, including too few spots for children, high costs for parents, and low pay for early educators. Singling out for-profit providers doesn't address the need for more high-quality care.

#### **Related Media Item:**

- **Early Years Matter Blog:** <https://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/blog/2025/03/balancing-profit-and-public-good-buffett-institutes-linda-smith-weighs-in-on-for-profit-child-care>
- **Webinar:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i4H3rIClIWs>

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## **Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute**

### **Researchers prepare Colorado River Basin project for winter, plan to further expand this spring**

The Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute (DWFI) team recently completed winter maintenance on their Parallel 41 Expansion Project's eddy covariance flux tower network in the Upper Colorado River Basin, a \$3.4 million initiative funded by the Upper Colorado River Basin Commission.

This project, which includes nine operational solar-powered towers and one upcoming installation, aims to improve irrigation water management by collecting real-time data on environmental variables like CO2 levels and evapotranspiration.

The collected data is used to validate and calibrate DWFI's GloDET model, compare other remote sensing evapotranspiration models, understand climate change impacts on water resources, and ultimately develop a tool for informed water governance and sustainable crop water management.

**Related Media Item:** <https://waterforfood.nebraska.edu/news-and-events/news/2025/03/researchers-prepare-colorado-river-basin-project-for-winter-plan-to-further-expand-this-spring>

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## **National Strategic Research Institute**

### **NSRI Features 3 NU Research Contributors**

The National Strategic Research Institute (NSRI) at the University of Nebraska recently featured three NU research contributors to demonstrate NU's expertise and capabilities to support the U.S. Department of Defense.

Shilu Dahal, a doctoral student in plant pathology at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, led an NSRI-funded project to investigate the effectiveness of the *P. protegens* PBL3 secretome as a seed coating or foliar spray, aiming to advance the secretome's development as an affordable and sustainable biopesticide-based solution for controlling Bacterial Panicle Blight (BPB).

"This project demonstrates our lab's ability to bridge from fundamental science to applied solutions, addressing critical challenges such as antimicrobial resistance, crop protection and environmental resilience," Dahal said. "With expertise in microbial genetics and synthetic biology, we are well-positioned to contribute to national biosecurity and agricultural priorities."

"Projects like these are also a stepping stone to cultivating the next generation of research leaders. As a student beginning my career in scientific research, this project has taught me to embrace science as a journey."

NSRI Fellow Dr. DJ Murry, professor of pharmacy practice and science at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, is actively contributing to a project through NSRI to develop prophylactics for acute radiation syndrome. The project leverages Dr. Murry's deep expertise in pharmacokinetics, pharmacodynamics, bioanalytical method development, metabolite identification and drug development.

"NSRI really helps with connecting people to collaborate and address specific questions," Dr. Murry said. "They've been helpful in identifying projects that fit with our expertise and making sure our expertise is being applied to address critical concerns."

In a #NSRIFellow Q&A feature, Dr. Steven Yeh, director of retina and uveitis at the Truhlsen Eye Institute at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, explained how his area of research can contribute across the CBRNE threat spectrum.

"Within the areas of national security, understanding the range of threats including biological, chemical, radiological, nuclear and explosive threats and how they can affect organ systems such as the eye is a unique and important area," Dr. Yeh said. "Within the biological threat space, our group has learned that setup of vision health infrastructure can translate into further opportunities for care, education and research in areas that previously did not have access. This has been particularly true in Sierra Leone where we setup the first Vitreoretinal Surgery system for 8+ million people who previously did not have access to these services."

#### **Related Media Item:**

- **DAHAL:** <https://nsri.nebraska.edu/news/news-releases/2025/02/unl-student-advances-rd-in-global-health-ag-security-for-the-dod>
- **MURRY:** <https://nsri.nebraska.edu/news/news-releases/2025/03/improving-drug-treatment-researcher-takes-on-complex-medical-challenges>
- **YEH:** <https://nsri.nebraska.edu/news/news-releases/2025/02/nsrifellow-feature-dr-steven-yeh>