

People, Programs and Points of Excellence (P³E)

Report for May 9, 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. Brooke Envick Selected to Lead UNK College of Business and Technology

Following a national search, UNK has named Dr. Brooke Envick as the next dean of the College of Business and Technology, effective July 1, pending approval from the NU Board of Regents. A third-generation Loper and award-winning educator, Envick brings extensive experience in entrepreneurship, curriculum development, and student-centered leadership. A professor of management and current associate dean, Envick joined UNK in 2017 after nearly two decades at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas. She has received numerous accolades for teaching excellence and research, including UNK's highest faculty honor—the Leland Holdt/Security Mutual Life Distinguished Faculty Award. Known for her innovation and commitment to student success, Envick will succeed outgoing dean Tim Jares and continue advancing the college's mission.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2025/05/06/brooke-envick-selected-to-lead-unk-college-of-business-and-technology/>

2. Small-Town Students Get Big-World Experiences Through UNK's Political Science Program

UNK's Department of Political Science is giving students like Arielle Lawrence of Marsland and Bailey Tjaden of York life-changing opportunities to explore global politics and legal systems. Through the Kearney Law Opportunities Program (KLOP) and field study experiences, students have traveled to Cuba, Europe, and Washington, D.C., gaining firsthand insight into international law, civil rights, and federal government operations. These immersive experiences help rural Nebraska students broaden their worldviews and prepare for careers in law and public service. Both students are part of KLOP, a program that supports aspiring rural attorneys and provides extensive mentorship and experiential learning.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2025/04/28/small-town-students-get-big-world-experiences-through-unks-political-science-program/>

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

1. Fritz elected to National Academy of Sciences

Sherilyn Fritz, George Holmes Professor in Earth and atmospheric sciences and the School of Biological Sciences, has been elected to the National Academy of Sciences. Fritz is the fifth member from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln to be added to the National Academy of Sciences.

Membership is one of the highest distinctions for a scientist or engineer in the United States.

Related Media Item:

- **Nebraska Today:** <https://news.unl.edu/article/fritz-elected-to-national-academy-of-sciences>
- **Lincoln Journal Star:** https://journalstar.com/news/state-regional/education/article_9ed0ea85-8ecc-4d82-a510-ce48c9db67e4.html

2. University to award 3,700 degrees May 16-17

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln will confer about 3,700 degrees during commencement exercises May 16 and 17 at Pinnacle Bank Arena.

The University will host a ceremony for students earning graduate and professional degrees, 3 p.m. May 16, and two ceremonies for those earning bachelor's degrees, 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. May 17

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/university-to-award-about-3700-degrees-may-16-17>

University of Nebraska Medical Center

1. Dentistry researcher shows promise in repairing nerve damage

UNMC researchers have published new research highlighting the potential of synthetic materials and electrical stimulation to help heal traumatic nerve injuries. The latest published research was funded with support through a National Institutes of Health R01 grant and the U.S. Department of Defense.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2025/05/08/unmc-research-shows-healing-potential-of-engineered-scaffolds/>

2. UNMC unveiling new tick testing, surveillance program

In May, UNMC unveiled the Nebraska Tick Testing (NeTT) Program to allow members of the public to send ticks to the university for testing and surveillance. The goal is to test for any tick-borne pathogens to which someone might have been exposed. At the same time, NeTT will also build up a database of the types of ticks and the prevalence of particular tick-borne pathogens in various parts of the state.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2025/04/30/unmc-unveiling-new-tick-testing-surveillance-program/>

University of Nebraska at Omaha

1. UNO Service Learning: Helping Hands, Bright Futures

The Service Learning Academy (SLA) at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) connects academic learning with real-world community impact, allowing students to apply classroom concepts through hands-on projects with local organizations. These experiences build essential career skills like project management, communication, and data analysis while addressing community needs. Students across disciplines, from education to business, develop professionally and personally through meaningful partnerships. Ultimately, service learning empowers students and the Omaha community, creating lasting change and setting future generations up for success.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unomaha.edu/news/2025/04/uno-service-learning-helping-hands-bright-futures.php>

2. UNO Named AMA In-House Marketing Team of the Year

The University of Nebraska at Omaha's Office of Strategic Marketing and Communications was named In-House Marketing Team of the Year at the 2025 AMA Omaha Chapter Pinnacle Awards, recognizing its leadership, creativity, and impact. In addition to this top honor, UNO earned seven other awards across various categories, showcasing its excellence in communications and marketing strategy.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unomaha.edu/news/2025/04/uno-named-ama-in-house-marketing-team-of-the-year.php>

Agriculture and Natural Resources

1. NCTA leadership changes provide opportunity to strengthen CASNR partnership

The University of Nebraska has appointed Dr. Kelly Bruns as interim dean of the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture (NCTA) and Dr. Jennifer McConville as associate dean, marking a pivotal leadership transition aimed at strengthening alignment between NCTA and the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR). This new leadership presents a significant opportunity to deepen collaboration between the two colleges and more effectively address Nebraska's pressing agricultural workforce needs.

Bruns will guide NCTA through a period of innovation and closer integration with CASNR, expanding dual-enrollment and experiential learning opportunities while ensuring programs align with the evolving demands of the ag industry. McConville will focus on academic innovation and career pathways, working with CASNR to build educational bridges that help students across both institutions gain industry-ready skills.

The appointments follow Dean Larry Gossen's planned retirement in 2025 and support a broader strategic realignment announced in late 2024. With agriculture accounting for one in four Nebraska jobs, this leadership change reinforces the University's commitment to delivering relevant, hands-on education that prepares students to lead in Nebraska's vital ag economy. A national search for a permanent dean will begin in late 2025.

Related Media Item: <https://ianrnews.unl.edu/article/kelly-bruns-named-interim-dean-jennifer-mcconville-reappointed-associate-dean-at-ncta>

2. UNL launches new water use app for growers

The University of Nebraska's Panhandle Research and Extension and Education Center has developed and expanded a valuable digital tool for growers through its Irrigation and Digital Agriculture Lab. Since 2020, the lab has operated the Peer Learning Agricultural Network (PLAN), a web-based dashboard providing real-time soil moisture data, disease risk alerts, and weekly crop water use reports across more than 100 commercial fields and 10,000 acres in the Nebraska Panhandle. Developed in partnership with over 30 growers and industry collaborators, this platform supports informed agricultural decision-making.

To enhance field accessibility, PHREEC has now launched the PLAN mobile app, integrating key dashboard features and adding mobile-friendly improvements. The app offers real-time sensor data visualization, a user-friendly irrigation scheduler, weekly water use summaries, and the potential for AI-driven insights. A notable feature is the irrigation scheduler, designed for growers without commercial probes, which uses local weather data and a checkbook method to recommend watering needs.

The PLAN app is currently available for iOS via TestFlight, with an Android version in development. This effort reflects the university's commitment to advancing digital agriculture and supporting growers through accessible, data-driven tools.

Related Media Item: <https://cropwatch.unl.edu/introducing-plan-mobile-irrigation-management-app/>

University of Nebraska Foundation

1. Gift will expand Schmoker Reading Center's impact across Nebraska

Philanthropist and alumna Catherine "Kit" Schmoker has made a leadership gift to support the Kit and Dick Schmoker Reading Center in the University of Nebraska–Lincoln's College of Education and Human Sciences. The gift will help the reading center expand its services to communities, schools and children throughout the state.

Established in 2008 as a one-of-a-kind program in Nebraska, the Kit and Dick Schmoker Reading Center provides one-on-one reading and writing tutoring for K-12 children.

Related Media Item: <https://nufoundation.org/gift-will-expand-schmoker-reading-centers-impact-across-nebraska/>

2. UNMC faculty member leaves gift to support microbiology research

Roberta White-Miller, Ph.D., a former faculty member in the University of Nebraska Medical Center Department of Pathology, Microbiology and Immunology, is remembered as a trailblazer in her field. The late professor loved science and education, and as a devoted teacher, she shared her expertise with many students.

Her legacy will live on because of an estate gift of more than \$738,000 to support fellowships for graduate students at UNMC and the University of Nebraska–Lincoln conducting research focused on microbiology.

Related Media Item: <https://nufoundation.org/unmc-faculty-member-leaves-gift-to-support-microbiology-research/>

Buffett Early Childhood Institute

Local Leaders Celebrate Superintendents' Plan Impact at Institute Convening

The Buffett Institute hosted the third annual Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan convening in Omaha on March 27 to highlight the importance of early learning and the plan's impact on schools, families, and young children.

The event was attended by 100 people, including several Omaha-area superintendents, leaders from the 11 school districts in the metro area, principals, school staff, community partners, and members of the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties Coordinating Council.

The event's keynote speaker was Edward Manuszak, a national early childhood expert and executive director of early childhood at Washtenaw Intermediate School District in Michigan. He told the audience that Omaha was leading the nation with its emphasis on early learning.

Educators from three participating school districts—Millard, Omaha, and Douglas County West— participated in a panel and shared how their schools have embraced early learning through the School as Hub approach, a main component of the Superintendents' Plan.

The Superintendents' Plan is an innovative partnership created in 2014 between the 11 school districts in the Omaha metro. It serves more than 2,800 children at the more intensive School as Hub sites. That number climbs to 15,000 students impacted when counting school administrators and staff who receive professional development, coaching, and other services.

The Learning Community funds and supports the Superintendents' Plan; the Buffett Institute helps implement it.

Related Media Item:

- **News Release:** <https://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/blog/2025/04/leaders-celebrate-early-childhood-efforts-cross-district-collaboration-at-superintendents-plan>
- **Superintendents' Plan:** <https://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/schools>

Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute

Experts stress importance of irrigation to nutrition, health outcomes

Claudia Ringler of the International Food Policy Research Institute delivered the Heuermann Lecture at the 2025 Water for Food Global Conference, focusing on the link between irrigation and nutrition. She emphasized that water security often leads to food security and better nutrition, highlighting how irrigation can extend growing seasons, improve crop yields, and encourage a variety food production. Ringler also noted the importance of domestic water access and suggested pathways to maximize nutrition benefits from irrigation, such as promoting crop biodiversity and supporting women in agriculture.

A panel discussion following the lecture included insights from Abbie Raikes on food insecurity in Nebraska and globally, and Brandon Hunnicutt on farmers working with the University of Nebraska to improve water efficiency. Ringler challenged attendees to apply the insights from her talk to their work, emphasizing that anyone involved in irrigation can impact nutrition. The lecture, sponsored by the University of Nebraska's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, can be viewed online.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/experts-stress-importance-of-irrigation-to-nutrition-health-outcomes>

National Strategic Research Institute

AI for national defense: Engineer applies layered expertise for force protection

AI and other forms of automation are sweeping the world and changing the face of almost every industry, including defense. It's hard to say exactly what the future will hold for these technologies, but hard-working, talented researchers like Dr. Benjamin Riggan, assistant professor of electrical and computer engineering at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln, are on the forefront to make sure the U.S. stays on the cutting edge.

Related Media Item: <https://nsri.nebraska.edu/news/news-releases/2025/04/ai-for-national-defense-engineer-applies-layered-expertise-for-force-protection>