

People, Programs and Points of Excellence (P³E)

Report for November 21, 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

1. President Gold showcases university's workforce and economic impact on Huskers Radio Network

President Gold joined Jessica Coody on the Huskers Radio Network at halftime of the Nebraska-UCLA game to discuss university efforts around workforce development and economic growth. Topics included access and affordability initiatives, public-private partnerships, internship programs and technology transfer, among other areas.

Related Media Item: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jww4ys42pxY>

2. President Gold discusses diabetes prevention and management on "Rural Health Matters"

A recent study has shown that nearly 12% of the U.S. population had diabetes as of 2021 and it is annually one of the top 10 causes of death in our country. Diabetes also has a greater impact on rural areas than urban areas. According to 2023 data from the CDC, nearly 10% of adults in rural areas were diagnosed with diabetes, compared to 8% of adults in urban areas.

On a recent RFD-TV "Rural Health Matters" segment, President Gold joined RFD-TV's Suzanne Alexander to discuss how members of our rural and urban communities can prevent and manage diabetes.

Related Media Item: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tA8V4VR57qI>

University of Nebraska at Kearney

1. Shared Solutions: UNK program builds statewide partnerships to strengthen, expand early childhood education

Communities across Nebraska are tackling child care shortages through the Knowledge Network for Early Childhood Education Workforce (KNEW), a statewide initiative led by the University of Nebraska at Kearney in partnership with Communities for Kids and Nebraska Extension. Funded by a \$2 million U.S. Department of

Education grant, the program connects stakeholders from 17 rural communities to address recruitment and retention of early childhood educators.

In Valentine, Jill Austin and the Valentine Children and Families Coalition joined the network to expand access and support providers. In Holdrege, McKenna Fahrenbruch, director of the Holdrege Area Early Childhood Partnership, is focused on workforce development and elevating the profession. UNK faculty Philip Lai, Sharon Obasi, Paula Thompson and JP Rech lead the research team studying more than 200 participants statewide. “Our goal is to develop shared strategies and best practices that rural communities can use to improve early childhood education and increase access to child care across Nebraska,” Thompson said.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2025/11/17/shared-solutions-unk-program-builds-statewide-partnerships-to-strengthen-expand-early-childhood-education/>

2. Learning to Thrive: Revamped LOPER 101 course strengthens support for first-year UNK students

The University of Nebraska at Kearney has redesigned its LOPER 101 first-year seminar to better support students during their transition to college. More than 800 students are enrolled in the new format, which blends university skills development – study strategies, time management, notetaking, campus resource awareness, and financial and personal wellness – with hands-on academic content and meaningful conversations about college life.

For the first time, most sections are co-taught by a faculty member and professional staff instructor, intentionally pairing academic and student support roles inside the classroom. Faculty and staff across campus are using 25 different academic themes to help students practice essential skills in more interactive ways. The redesign mirrors national first-year seminar models proven to increase retention and graduation by helping students feel supported and connected early in their college experience.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2025/11/12/learning-to-thrive-revamped-loper-101-course-strengthens-support-for-first-year-unk-students/>

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

1. Quantum research at Nebraska boosted with \$2.5 million grant

A seven-member team led by Xia Hong, professor of physics and astronomy, aims to exploit ferroelectric oxides to control oxide and van der Waals materials in ways classical physicists only dreamed were possible. “The overarching goal is to use nanoscale control of ferroelectricity to induce a new state of matter,” Hong said, “and, in the process, foster the design of smaller and more energy-efficient devices.”

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/quantum-research-at-nebraska-boosted-with-25-million-grant>

2. Collaborative project brings 3D printed running shoe to life

Till Steinforth is a Husker track and field decathlete and Master of Architecture student with an interest in fashion. Over the summer, he partnered with a Kylin Flothe, assistant professor, to create the first fully 3D printed running shoe.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/collaborative-project-brings-3d-printed-running-shoe-to-life>

University of Nebraska Medical Center

1. Doctor of Nutrition and Dietetics program leads the way

The Doctor of Nutrition and Dietetics advanced-practice doctorate program in the UNMC College of Allied Health Professions has achieved candidacy for accreditation status by the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics. The program will be led by Jana Ponce, PhD, who explained that this groundbreaking recognition positions UNMC as a national leader in advancing the profession of dietetics.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2025/11/18/doctor-of-nutrition-and-dietetics-program-leads-the-way/>

2. New blood test is a ‘game-changer’ for pregnant women

Nebraska Medicine and UNMC now are the first in Nebraska to implement a strategy to offer a new blood test that more accurately predicts whether a woman will develop severe preeclampsia during pregnancy. Preeclampsia is a condition that can cause serious complications and even death for a pregnant woman if left untreated.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2025/11/19/new-blood-test-is-a-game-changer-for-pregnant-women/>

University of Nebraska at Omaha

1. UNO Ranked No. 1 for Traditional and Online Education by Military Times

The University of Nebraska at Omaha has been ranked No. 1 in the nation for traditional and online education for veterans by Military Times. UNO stands out in multiple categories, including being the No. 1 university in Nebraska and the central region, and ranking No. 4 among all public universities. The recognition highlights UNO’s support for more than 1,600 military-connected students and its strong campus services dedicated to their success. University leaders credit the achievement to a campus-wide commitment to fostering a welcoming and supportive environment for veterans and service members.

Related Media Items: <https://www.unomaha.edu/news/2025/11/uno-ranked-no-1-for-traditional-and-online-education-by-military-times.php>

2. UNO Launches Nebraska Cyber Matrix: Students Work With Local Firms to Combat Cyber Threats

The University of Nebraska at Omaha has launched the Nebraska Cyber Matrix, a cutting-edge cybersecurity training facility designed to build Nebraska’s future cyber workforce. Supported by a Weitz Innovation Excellence Fund grant, the program offers hands-on experience in machine learning, AI, and threat response at a time when cybersecurity talent is in high demand.

Students and industry partners are already collaborating on real-world projects, giving learners job-ready skills that employers value immediately. The initiative reinforces UNO's mission of workforce development and strengthens the state's digital resilience through education, innovation, and collaboration.

Related Media Items: <https://www.unomaha.edu/college-of-information-science-and-technology/uno-launches-nebraska-cyber-matrix-students-work-with-local-firms-to-combat-cyber-threats.php>

Agriculture and Natural Resources

1. Master Gardener program celebrates 50 years of growing gardeners, communities

In 2026, the Nebraska Extension Master Gardener Volunteer program marks 50 years of empowering Nebraskans through horticultural education and community service. Over 4,000 trained volunteers have shared research-based knowledge statewide, enhancing landscapes and lives. Through University of Nebraska–Lincoln's expert-led training, participants gain practical skills in soil health, water conservation, pollinator support, and more—then give back through 40 hours of community service. From school gardens to tree-planting projects, volunteers help strengthen food security, environmental resilience, and community connections. The program continues to grow Nebraska's green spaces and spirit of service—no prior gardening experience required, only curiosity and commitment to community.

Related Media Items: <https://ianrnews.unl.edu/article/master-gardener-program-celebrates-50-years-of-growing-gardeners-communities>

2. Rural Prosperity Nebraska helps Verdigre envision a brighter future

Verdigre, Nebraska, recently completed the Entrepreneurial Communities Activation Process (ECAP), a program led by Rural Prosperity Nebraska and Nebraska Extension that helps towns identify strengths, set priorities and turn ideas into action. Through surveys and community discussions, residents built a shared vision centered on collaboration and growth. The process sparked projects such as forming an investment club, developing a wellness center and creating a historical walk. Beyond planning, ECAP renewed local pride and hope for Verdigre's future. Guided by the University of Nebraska–Lincoln's Rural Prosperity Nebraska, these programs empower communities to harness local talent, foster engagement and build lasting prosperity.

Related Media Items: <https://ianrnews.unl.edu/article/rural-prosperity-nebraska-helps-verdigre-envision-a-brighter-future>

University of Nebraska Foundation

2025 One Day for UNK raises a record \$389,737

Loper supporters came together to raise a record \$389,737 during the 2025 One Day for UNK. Over 24 hours, 2,170 gifts were received from 1,352 donors to support causes and priorities at the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

The goal for One Day for UNK was to receive 2,100 gifts. The number of gifts, as well as the amount raised, set new records. The giving day raised funds to support numerous priorities, including scholarships, Loper Athletics, UNK's

three colleges, the library, the Loper Pantry and emergency assistance for students facing unexpected financial difficulties.

One Day for UNK, which is celebrating its fifth year, was held Nov. 12-13.

Related Media Items: <https://nufoundation.org/one-day-for-unk-raises-a-record-389737-over-24-hours/>

Buffett Early Childhood Institute

Native Children's Research Exchange Scholars Program Continues to Invest in the Next Generation of Native American Researchers

The Native Children's Research Exchange (NCRE) Scholars Program, a federally funded initiative co-led by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute's Michelle Sarche, is launching its 14th cohort of early-career Native American researchers. Four new Scholars will partner with Native communities to study substance use, its impact on child development, and strategies for intervention and prevention.

Since 2012, NCRE Scholars has provided career development and mentorship to 41 emerging Scholars, building an essential pipeline of researchers who can respond to the health priorities of Native communities. Native American researchers have long been underrepresented in the field, yet their cultural knowledge and understanding of community context are vital for moving the field forward.

The program is funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse and is led by Sarche, a professor at the Buffett Institute and the Munroe-Meyer Institute, Jerreed Ivanich, and Nancy Whitesell, assistant professor and professor, respectively, at the Centers for American Indian and Alaska Native Health at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus.

Ivanich, who co-leads the program and was a member of its sixth cohort in 2017-18, completed his Ph.D. in sociology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

A cohort kick-off meeting will take place Nov. 17–21 in Tulsa. Over the course of 18 months, Scholars will work with program leaders to create career development plans that include developing a research paper or grant application. They also participate in training opportunities, conduct data collection and/or analyses, and present research at national conferences.

Scholars from past cohorts include Tribal leaders, psychologists, scientists, university faculty, a Tribal epidemiologist, and more.

Related Media Items: <https://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/news-and-events/news/2025/11/native-childrens-research-exchange-continues-to-invest-in-the-next-generation-of-researchers>

Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute

DWFI featured in 2025 Global Agricultural Productivity Report

The Global Agricultural Productivity (GAP) Initiative at Virginia Tech mobilizes and advocates for action and investment to accelerate agricultural productivity growth at all scales of production to create returns to farmers,

society, the economy, and the environment. The GAP Report is the heart of the GAP Initiative. This annually produced report is the premier source for productivity data, analysis, and policy recommendations that inspire action.

DWFI provided a Partner Story for the 2025 report, sharing its collaboration on the Dashboard for Agricultural Water and Nutrient Management (DAWN) project. DAWN is a free, web-based decision-support tool developed to help Corn Belt producers optimize water and nutrient inputs for efficiency gains. Supported by USDA NIFA and developed by a team of researchers, including those at DWFI, the tool translates complex climate data into six-month forecasts that can be applied for realtime, region-specific, actionable insights. With over 400 users, DAWN is gaining traction and attracting private-sector interest. By bridging science and practice, DAWN supports more efficient, resilient farming and highlights the importance of collaborative, farmer-informed innovation in digital agriculture.

The 2025 GAP report was launched at an event in Chicago on October 1.

Related Media Item: <https://globalagriculturalproductivity.org/2025-gap-report/empowering-us-producers-the-dawn-project/>

National Strategic Research Institute

NSRI supports NU Collaboration Initiative with priorities, insights

Directors from the National Strategic Research Institute hosted a session at the recent University of Nebraska Collaboration Initiative retreat to provide insights into the institute's FY27 priorities, available at nsri.nebraska.edu/priorities.

Presenters included:

- David Blanchard, NSRI research director for biological defense programs
- Adam Carlstrom, NSRI associate executive director for strategic deterrence and nuclear programs
- Katelyn Ideus, NSRI director for strategic communications and engagement
- Meghan Jackson, NSRI director for food, agriculture and environment security
- Neal Woollen, NSRI associate executive director for CWMD allied programs

Each director provided a short brief that touched on active research, but focused on timely needs from the federal government. They went on to facilitate small group discussions and 1:1 brainstorming sessions with faculty.

Since 2021, the NU Collaboration Initiative has funded 24 projects within NSRI's mission space, totaling \$1,550,851. NSRI directors aim to help faculty develop projects that can go on to meet federal government research and development needs for national security.

NU faculty who plan to submit within NSRI's mission space can connect with NSRI at nsri.nebraska.edu/nuci/nuci-plan-review-form to collaborate.

Related Media Item: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7395190033588318208>