

People, Programs and Points of Excellence (P³E)

Report for November 22, 2024

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 Construction Management Program: Building careers with 100% job placement

The University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK) Construction Management Program equips students with practical skills and industry connections, leading to a 100% job placement rate. Offering hands-on training and a curriculum aligned with industry demands, the program prepares graduates for high-demand positions in fields such as residential, commercial, and infrastructure construction. With faculty experienced in the industry and strong partnerships with employers like JE Dunn Construction and Sampson Construction, UNK students gain valuable internships and career opportunities before graduation, averaging \$70,000 in starting salaries.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2024/11/18/unk-construction-management-program-is-a-pipeline-for-high-demand-positions/>

2. UNK Professor Nathan Tye Preserves Local History Through Community Engagement and Research

Dr. Nathan Tye, assistant professor of history at the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK), combines research, teaching, and public engagement to highlight the rich history of Kearney and central Nebraska. Through his work on overlooked and marginalized communities, labor history, and local stories, Tye has published extensively, given over 50 public lectures, and collaborated with museums and historical societies. Known for making history accessible, Tye's dedication extends to collecting and preserving historical artifacts, consulting on local exhibits, and teaching courses that inspire the next generation of historians.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2024/11/18/preserving-the-past-nathan-tye-keeps-local-history-alive/>

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

1. Nebraska U entrepreneurship programs counted among world's best

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln debuted at No. 42 in the world and No. 12 in the Midwest in The Princeton Review and Entrepreneur Top 50 Undergraduate Entrepreneurship Programs rankings.

The Princeton Review conducted a survey of administrators at nearly 300 schools, the ranking tallies took into account more than 25 data points about the schools' entrepreneurship programs, faculties, students and alumni.

Related Media Item:

- **Nebraska Today:** <https://news.unl.edu/article/nebraska-u-entrepreneurship-programs-counted-among-worlds-best>
- **Lincoln Journal Star:** https://journalstar.com/news/local/business/unl-makes-top-50-list-for-best-entrepreneurship-programs/article_5fba84c4-a13c-11ef-a89d-13d3f31626ea.html
- **KFAB:** <https://kfab.iheart.com/featured/kfab-local-news/content/2024-11-13-nebraska-gets-high-marks-for-undergraduate-entrepreneurship/>
- **Entrepreneur:** <https://www.entrepreneur.com/entrepreneurs/top-50-undergraduate-programs-for-entrepreneurs-in-2025/482099>

2. Nebraska Innovation Studio launching robotics fellowship program

Nebraska Innovation Studio — the makerspace at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln — is launching a groundbreaking program that aims to advance Nebraska's next robotics builders and inventors.

The NIS Robotics Fellowship Program will select an inaugural class of fellows to launch their idea or project and gain valuable training and guidance through studio staff and a panel of experts who will serve as coaches and mentors.

The program is accepting applications through Dec. 8.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/nebraska-innovation-studio-launching-robotics-fellowship-program>

University of Nebraska Medical Center

1. College of Public Health receives Department of Homeland Security grant

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security recently awarded the UNMC College of Public Health's Center for Preparedness and Emergency Response Solutions part of its \$18 million dollar Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention grant. CPERS, under the direction of the DHS Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships, will develop Behavioral Threat Assessment Management training for health care organizations nationwide.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2024/11/07/unmc-cpers-receives-grant-to-develop-threat-training-for-hospitals/>

2. Two labs certified as "green"

The laboratories of Dr. Karoly Mirnics and Dr. Zeljka Korade participated in UNMC's initial pilot of a "Green Labs" program. They achieved the highest certification level – green – by completing more than 80% of available credits in the program.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2024/11/14/as-green-lab-pilot-winds-up-drs-mirnics-korade-led-the-way/>

University of Nebraska at Omaha

1. Yano and Cindy Mangiameli Establish Scholarship for Maverick Hockey Goalie

Longtime supporters Yano and Cindy Mangiameli have established the Yano and Cindy Mangiameli Goalie Scholarship to support the starting goalie of the Omaha Hockey program. The scholarship, part of the UNO Hockey Excellence Fund, underscores the couple's commitment to Maverick Athletics, building on their legacy of support for various UNO sports programs. This gift, made through the Only in Nebraska campaign, aims to inspire student-athletes and strengthen Omaha Hockey's future.

Related Media Item: https://omaha.com/sports/college/uno/longtime-omaha-hockey-supporters-create-scholarship-for-mavericks-starting-goalie/article_3ffd68c0-a1e8-11ef-8d5c-3f58b0415005.html

2. School of Public Administration Awarded AmeriCorps Grant to Study Youth Civic Engagement in the Heartland

Researchers from UNO's School of Public Administration received a \$346,080 AmeriCorps grant to continue studying youth civic engagement in the Midwest through the "Civic Mobility in the Heartland" project. Led by Dr. Jodi Benenson, the study explores how young adults ages 18-25 observe and participate in civic life, utilizing a team of student researchers to interview over 100 participants across seven states.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unomaha.edu/college-of-public-affairs-and-community-service/news/2024/11/school-of-public-administration-awarded-ameri-corps-grant-to-study-youth-civic-engagement-in-the-heartland.php>

Agriculture and Natural Resources

1. Yeutter Institute to partner with Washington International Trade Association for tariff seminar

The Yeutter Institute of International Trade and Finance will partner with the Washington International Trade Association (WITA), to hold a virtual seminar on tariffs on Wednesday, Dec. 11 from 8:00-11:15am Central Time via Zoom.

The seminar will address the president-elect's promise to impose a 60% tariff on goods from China and a minimum 20% tariff on everything else the United States imports. This event is a special edition of WITA's Virtual Intensive Trade Seminar series to discuss legal avenues for such an action and the possible impact on farmers, consumers, and firms.

WITA is the world's largest non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to providing a neutral forum for trade policy discussions and is a longtime partner of the Yeutter Institute.

Two Yeutter team members will serve as presenters – Dr. Ed Balistreri, the Yeutter Institute Acklie Chair in the College of Business, and Dr. Christine McDaniel, the institute's non-resident fellow.

UNL colleagues can register for the seminar at the WITA Member rate by using the promo code "UNL." Students can register for free. Nebraska state government officials can also register for free as long as they use a .gov email address to register.

2. \$3.2 million grant to help Husker researcher fight childhood obesity in rural areas

Dipti Dev, an associate professor at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, is leading a pioneering \$3.2 million NIH-funded project to improve eating habits among rural children. The initiative addresses the unique challenges of rural child care settings, where children are 26% more likely to experience obesity, a risk factor for serious illnesses. Central to the project is the EAT (Ecological Approach To) for Prevention program, which trains rural child care providers in responsive feeding practices. These methods encourage children to self-regulate food intake, enhancing their diet and promoting healthier choices.

The program's benefits include increased consumption of fruits and vegetables, lower provider stress, and better child engagement. The team will conduct randomized trials involving 200 children to assess dietary changes and other health metrics. By collaborating with local communities, Extension professionals, and researchers, the project aims to create sustainable, impactful strategies for combating childhood obesity in rural areas nationwide.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/husker-led-project-aims-to-reduce-rural-childhood-obesity>

University of Nebraska Foundation

1. One-year return on foundation's endowment is 14.5%

The University of Nebraska Foundation recently posted its FY24 Foundation Endowment Report. The foundation's endowment, with a market value of nearly \$2 billion as of June 30, 2024, had a one-year return of 14.5%. The report received positive coverage in a Pensions & Investments news article.

The article stated: "For the most recent fiscal year, the endowment's return was the second highest among the 46 college and university endowments whose most recent fiscal-year returns have been tracked by Pensions & Investments as of Nov. 13. The median return is 10%."

Related Media Item: <https://nufoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/7820-2024-UNF-Endowment-Report-241017a-msc.pdf>

2. Loper Nation takes One Day for UNK to new heights

The fourth annual One Day for UNK set new records for the number of gifts, donors and the amount raised. The 24-hour giving day, held Nov. 13-14, raised \$289,568 from 2,029 gifts to support the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

“One Day for UNK powerfully demonstrates the generosity of our UNK community,” said Interim Chancellor Charlie Bicak. “Every gift makes a lasting impact, directly supporting our students and enhancing UNK. We are grateful for this tremendous support from alumni, friends, faculty, staff and students.”

Related Media Item: <https://nufoundation.org/loper-nation-takes-one-day-for-unk-to-new-heights/>

Buffett Early Childhood Institute

Buffett Early Childhood Institute leaders receive national awards for their early childhood work

The Buffett Institute’s Walter Gilliam and Linda Smith received separate awards in October recognizing their leadership in the early childhood field.

On Oct. 14, Gilliam accepted the Research Trailblazer Award from the international Parents as Teachers organization at its annual conference in San Diego. He received the award alongside Dr. Joshua Sparrow, the executive director of Brazelton Touchpoints Center at Boston Children’s Hospital. The two are the first-ever recipients of this award, which recognizes their significant contributions to the field of early childhood education and research. Both serve on the Parents as Teachers Research Council.

Parents as Teachers cited Gilliam’s research on improving the quality of PreK and child care services, methods for reducing classroom behavior problems and preschool expulsion, the impact of COVID-19 on the physical and mental health of early educators, and more. Parents as Teachers oversees a network of early childhood professionals that support families and healthy development in children birth through Kindergarten.

Smith received the CDA Advocate Award for Early Childhood Education from the Council for Professional Recognition. The Council helps early educators further their educational and career goals through different pathways and credentials, including the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential.

Smith accepted the award Oct. 18 at the 2024 Early Educators Leadership Conference in Washington, D.C. It recognizes her “tireless advocacy” for quality early childhood education.

Related Media Item:

- **Omaha World-Herald:** https://omaha.com/life-entertainment/local/omahans-movie-star-looks-helped-bring-them-together-65-years-later-theyre-still-a-couple/article_b9bdf6b6-9213-11ef-ac86-f30565ebd175.html
 - **Parents as Teachers:** <https://parentsasteachers.org/drs-walter-gilliam-joshua-sparrow-honored-with-parents-as-teachers-research-trailblazer-awards/>
 - **BECI Facebook post:** <https://www.facebook.com/BufettECI/posts/pfbid0mceez9EeJWBGm7wKTKbSmTuzqfbSatoP5weSWr149Jk5cFJBjGR3BKBVNb6afBHil>
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Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute

Annual Report celebrates 15 years of progress toward global water and food security

In its recent annual report, the Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute shares its impact throughout the past year toward its mission of ensuring a sustainable future in which everyone has access to nutritious food and clean water, including:

1. Launch of its new USAID-funded Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Irrigation and Mechanization Systems (ILIMS);
2. Expansion of its suite of water management tools, including a multi-state network of flux towers which accurately measure crop-water use and carbon-equivalent emissions;
3. Along with its partners, provision of a free and secure decision-support tool for farmers to assist with improvement of agricultural water use and enhance crop productivity in the U.S. Corn Belt;
4. Analysis and catalyzation of the agtech startup ecosystems in Nebraska, India and beyond to identify functional gaps in the ecosystem, facilitate and expedite commercialization, and aid startup founders and investors in leveraging existing resources;
5. Exploration of how irrigation equipment reaches farmers through entrepreneurial pathways in Sub-Saharan Africa, which can increase smallholder incomes and climate resilience;
6. Contribution to several high-profile publications through its Water, Climate and Health Program, including the federally-mandated Fifth National Climate Assessment; the first comprehensive assessment of drought and health in the US; and the Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change Policy Brief for the U.S.;
7. Participation in and co-convening of strategic regional and international events which further DWFI's reputation, foster collaboration, enhance recognition of our work and generate impact;
8. Exploration of solutions and enhanced understanding of water challenges in Nebraska, including supporting the successful Know Your Well, a collaborative citizen science program training high school students how to sample and test well water quality.

Related Media Item: <https://waterforfood.nebraska.edu/resources/annual-report-2024>

National Strategic Research Institute

NSRI, UNL developing AI for USSTRATCOM to maximize electromagnetic spectrum

As digital communication grows, the electromagnetic spectrum (EMS) is becoming increasingly crowded. Novel solutions for how the U.S. can effectively share the spectrum are critical to national objectives, several of which were outlined in the November 2023 Presidential Memorandum on Modernizing United States Spectrum Policy and Establishing a National Spectrum Strategy.

Researchers from the National Strategic Research Institute (NSRI) at the University of Nebraska and the University of Nebraska–Lincoln School of Computing are developing novel artificial intelligence (AI) deep learning techniques to model EMS environments and adapt them to use dynamic sharing techniques.

U.S. Strategic Command, which sponsors NSRI as a DOD-designated University Affiliated Research Center, awarded the institute nearly \$1.7 million for the effort, "AI Enabled Transceivers for Dynamic Spectrum Sharing Applications."

NSRI Fellow Dr. Mehmet Can Vuran, UNL Dale M. Jensen Chair Professor in Computing, is the principal investigator for the project with Allen Geist, NSRI director, and Dr. Witawas Srisa-an, professor and director of the UNL School of Computing, contributing. Undergraduate and graduate students from UNL will also contribute, providing a tremendous opportunity to train the next generation of spectrum experts who will maintain U.S. leadership in EMS operations going forward.

Related Media Item:

- **NSRI:** <https://nsri.nebraska.edu/news/news-releases/2024/11/nsri-unl-developing-ai-for-usstratcom-to-maximize-electromagnetic-spectrum>
- **LinkedIn:** <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7265071648830025729>