

People, Programs and Points of Excellence (P³E)

Report for October 24, 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. Shaping the Future: Empowering Student Voices with Libby Wilkins

The newest "Shaping the Future" episode features a conversation between President Gold and Libby Wilkins, ASUN Student Government president and student regent at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. In the video, Wilkins explores her journey to becoming a student leader, discusses the roles and responsibilities she holds as student body president and student regent and shares some of the accomplishments her team has achieved—and work yet to complete—during her current term.

Related Media Item: <https://youtu.be/M-XakiTHkhQ>

2. Rural Health Matters: Dental Health in Rural Communities

On his October 22 "Rural Health Matters" segment on RFD-TV, President Gold gave viewers an update on the state of dental health in rural America—and shared why keeping up with dental health is crucial to our overall health.

Related Media Item: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ae5AW_rVnrc

University of Nebraska at Kearney

1. Ask an Antelope: Jacob Rosdail brings filmmaker's vision to UNK Department of Communication

Jacob Rosdail, chair of the Department of Communication at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, shares his lifelong passion for storytelling and film with students through courses in video production and multimedia storytelling. Raised near Knoxville, Iowa, Rosdail earned a master's degree in documentary film from Wake Forest University. A filmmaker and professor, he joined UNK in 2014 and became department chair this semester.

Outside the classroom, Rosdail is active in Kearney’s creative community, serving on the World Theatre board and working a weekly shift at Buffalo Records. His recent projects include an award-winning documentary/music video hybrid for the local band WastedWitch and collaborative film work with students for a local nonprofit. “I love that UNK is a place for students in central and western Nebraska to earn a bachelor’s degree, something that still makes a real difference,” he said.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2025/10/08/ask-an-antelope-jacob-rosdail-brings-filmmakers-vision-to-unk-department-of-communication/>

2. Running toward opportunity: Nick Abdalla finds a home – and his stride – at UNK

Nagmeldin “Nick” Abdalla, a standout on UNK’s track and cross country teams, has turned perseverance into purpose – on the course and in the classroom. Originally from Sudan, Abdalla immigrated to the U.S. as a child, overcoming years of separation from his family amid civil conflict. A Thompson Scholar majoring in aviation systems management, he discovered his passion for flight during his first plane trip to America and is now pursuing his dream of becoming a commercial airline pilot. Abdalla credits UNK’s aviation program and the Thompson Scholars Learning Community for giving him both professional direction and personal support. An All-MIAA and All-Region honoree, he’s also active in the African Student Union, Omega Psi Phi fraternity and community mentoring. “UNK has given me a home and the chance to keep chasing my goals,” he said.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2025/10/16/running-toward-opportunity-nick-abdalla-finds-a-home-and-his-stride-at-unk/>

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

1. Abbott funds helping Huskers turn passion into community impacts

From an a cappella group to stargazing clubs, more than 40 Recognized Student Organizations are receiving a share of \$150,000 in Abbott-funded grants — the latest step in the university’s effort to boost campus well-being through the inaugural \$1 million Big Ten “We Give Blood” prize.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/abbott-funds-helping-huskers-turn-passion-into-community-impacts>

2. Clifton Strengths Institute celebrates a decade of impact

At the University of Nebraska–Lincoln — the birthplace of strengths-based psychology — the Clifton Strengths Institute in the College of Business is celebrating 10 years of helping Huskers unlock their potential. Through innovative courses, personalized coaching, and powerful partnerships, CSI has guided more than 10,000 students to discover and apply their natural talents—building confidence, purpose, and lifelong leadership skills.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/clifton-strengths-institute-celebrates-a-decade-of-impact>

University of Nebraska Medical Center

1. Dr. Sweasy to confront rural cancer as new AACI president

Joann Sweasy, PhD, director of the National Cancer Institute-designated Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center, will begin her two-year term as president of the Association of American Cancer Institutes (AACI) with a bold vision to confront one of the nation's most pressing health disparities: rural cancer care.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2025/10/22/joann-sweasy-phd-to-serve-as-president-of-aaci/>

2. UNMC nursing innovation launches nationally

A digital platform years in the making, created through a collaboration between the UNMC College of Nursing, UNeMed, UNeTech and Nebraska Medicine, will position UNMC at the forefront of health care innovation. Familyroom.health provides information to family members on what to expect, ask and do when faced with the ICU hospitalization of a loved one. It is the first platform of its kind to allow families to chart their contributions directly in the electronic health record, making family input a documented part of patient care.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2025/10/21/unmc-nursing-innovation-launches-nationally/>

University of Nebraska at Omaha

1. UNO Leads Nebraska in 2026 WSJ College Rankings for Value, Mobility, Experience

The University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) has been recognized as the top ranked Nebraska institution in the Wall Street Journal's 2026 College Pulse rankings for Best Value, Social Mobility, and Student Experience. UNO placed #183 nationally in Best Value and #367 in Student Experience, leading all Nebraska schools in both categories. These distinctions highlight UNO's statewide leadership in providing accessible, high-quality education that drives opportunity and student success.

Related Media Items: <https://www.unomaha.edu/news/2025/10/uno-leads-nebraska-in-2026-wsj-college-rankings-for-value-mobility-experience.php>

2. UNO Chancellor Charts Bold Future at State of the University

University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) Chancellor Joanne Li, Ph.D., CFA, delivered her 2025 State of the University Address on Oct. 17, centered on the theme "Powered by Purpose." Li highlighted UNO's growing impact

as a driver of economic mobility, workforce development, and innovation, supported by nearly 15,000 students and a rising number of first-generation learners.

She shared milestones such as launching Nebraska's first Bachelor of Science in Artificial Intelligence, record-breaking philanthropy, and strong workforce retention among graduates. The Chancellor urged the UNO community to share the university's story and advance its mission reminding all that when Mavericks thrive, Nebraska thrives.

Related Media Items: <https://www.unomaha.edu/news/2025/10/uno-chancellor-charts-bold-future-at-state-of-the-university.php>

Agriculture and Natural Resources

1. Preliminary report shows IANR delivers \$849M annual economic and public value, strongly supporting Nebraska's #1 industry

A new economic impact analysis by consulting firm Tripp Umbach finds that the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR) at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln generated an estimated \$849.3 million in statewide economic and public value in 2024.

The report highlights IANR's essential role in supporting Nebraska's No. 1 industry — agriculture and natural resources — through its teaching, research, and Extension programs that reach all 93 counties. For every \$1 of state investment, IANR contributes \$8.49 to Nebraska's economy, supporting nearly 4,500 jobs and generating over \$23 million in tax revenue, demonstrating the power of the land-grant mission in action.

Related Media Items: <https://ianrnews.unl.edu/article/preliminary-report-shows-ianr-delivers-849m-annual-economic-and-public-value-strongly>

2. Nebraska Extension's Small Business Program helps 1,000th business open its doors

Nebraska Extension's Small Business Program, launched in 2015 by Rural Prosperity Nebraska extension educator Sandra Barrera, has now helped 1,000 entrepreneurs start or expand businesses across the state. Through one-on-one coaching, Barrera and her team guide Nebraskans through every step of business development—from writing plans and securing permits to finding locations and funding.

Recent success stories include Joel Yera, who launched Yera Transportation in Grand Island, and others who have opened studios and shops that strengthen local economies. Rooted in Nebraska Extension's mission, the program helps turn passion into opportunity and keeps rural communities thriving.

Related Media Items: <https://ianrnews.unl.edu/article/small-business-program-helps-1000th-business-open-its-doors>

University of Nebraska Foundation

1. UNL celebrates Johnny Carson's 100th birthday, legacy on campus

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln is celebrating the 100th birthday of Johnny Carson, one of the university's most iconic and generous alumni. The “King of Late Night,” who made America laugh for decades, would have turned 100 on Oct. 23.

Carson's legacy as a Husker alum is one of unwavering support. At age 44, Carson made his first gift to the university — \$5,000. Gifts from Carson, his estate and the Johnny Carson Foundation have exceeded \$50 million and have supported renovations of the Lied Center for Performing Arts and Temple Building; supported academic programs in theatre and film and broadcasting; created the Johnny Carson Center for Emerging Media Arts; and notably, his endowed scholarship funds have directly supported hundreds of students who will continue to be his enduring legacy.

Related Media Items: <https://news.unl.edu/article/university-celebrating-johnny-carsons-100th-birthday-legacy-on-campus>

2. One Day for UNK set for Nov. 12-13 with goal of 2,100 gifts

The University of Nebraska at Kearney will host its fifth annual giving day, One Day for UNK, in November. The 24-hour online event provides an opportunity for Loper supporters everywhere to contribute to the university's continued success and growth. Donations can be made at givingday.unk.edu, where participants can choose from a variety of areas to support. One Day for UNK runs from noon Nov. 12 to noon Nov. 13, with a goal of 2,100 gifts.

Related Media Items: <https://nufoundation.org/fifth-annual-one-day-for-unk-set-for-nov-12-13-with-goal-of-2100-gifts/>

Buffett Early Childhood Institute

More than 100 Scholars, Researchers Gather at National Native Children's Research Exchange Conference Led by the Buffett Institute's Michelle Sarche

Attendees included researchers, practitioners, federal staff, and funders engaged in work that supports the well-being of American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and other Indigenous children and families.

This year marked the 15th anniversary of the conference, which is led by Sarche, an expert in Native American child development who serves as a professor at the Buffett Institute and the Munroe-Meyer Institute, and Nancy Whitesell, a professor in the Centers for American Indian and Alaska Native Health at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus.

The conference serves as a gathering place for members of the Native Children's Research Exchange (NCRE), a national initiative that brings together researchers studying child and adolescent development in American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and other Indigenous communities.

Presenters shared research approaches, methods, and findings on a variety of topics, including cultural connection, land-based healing interventions, parenting and home visiting programs, substance abuse prevention, youth resilience, suicide, and autism.

The conference also serves as a touchstone for early-career child development and substance use researchers who are part of the National Institute on Drug Abuse-funded Native Children's Research Exchange Scholars program.

Conference support was provided by the Tribal Early Childhood Research Center, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the Bezos Family Foundation, the Indigenous Early Learning Initiative, Clyfford Still Museum, and Lakeshore Learning.

Related Media Items: <https://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/news-and-events/news/2025/10/more-than-100-scholars-researchers-gather-at-native-childrens-research-exchange-conference>

Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute

New series highlights eight entrepreneurs and their innovative solutions to water access

DWFI's new "Irrigation as a Service" (IaaS) Entrepreneur Series" chronicles the journey of eight entrepreneurs from seven countries dedicated to solving the challenge of unreliable water access for smallholder farmers. While physical water scarcity is not always the problem, the high upfront cost of purchasing and maintaining irrigation equipment creates a significant barrier; IaaS addresses this by offering equipment access and services without requiring farmer ownership. The series follows the founders after a January 2025 workshop in Uganda, where they collaborated on key business challenges like unit economics and financial strategies, and will detail their real-world obstacles and unique solutions to help guide future research and investment in scaling IaaS adoption in the Global South.

Related Media Item: <https://waterforfood.nebraska.edu/news-and-events/news/2025/10/introducing-the-irrigation-as-a-service-founder-series>

National Strategic Research Institute

NSRI director confirmed as Under Secretary of State

The National Strategic Research Institute (NSRI) at the University of Nebraska is proud to announce that Thomas DiNanno was confirmed by the United States Senate on October 7, 2025, to serve as Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security.

In this critical role, DiNanno will report directly to the Secretary of State to lead the interagency policy process on nonproliferation and manages global U.S. security policy, principally in the areas of nonproliferation, arms control, regional security and defense relations, and arms transfers and security assistance. DiNanno has resigned from NSRI to serve in this position.

"We congratulate Tom on his confirmation to this important position," said Maj. Gen., USAF (Ret.) Rick Evans, NSRI executive director. "His deep knowledge and long-time experience across strategic deterrence and intelligence will serve the Department of State and the Nation well."

During his tenure at NSRI, DiNanno led the NSRI team in designing, developing and executing world-class wargames, specifically focusing on the areas of strategic deterrence and escalation control should potential adversaries choose to cross the nuclear threshold. He also led the strategic resiliency portfolio in which NSRI explores how best to respond to strategic escalation and manage the consequences of strategic attacks against the U.S. homeland.

Among many leadership roles within the federal government, DiNanno served as a professional staff member on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and as deputy assistant secretary of state of the Arms Control, Verification and Compliance Bureau from 2018 to 2021. In his roles focusing on deterrence and disarmament, he led or managed several dialogues and treaty negotiations on behalf of the U.S. on pressing foreign policy matters, such as:

- New Start Treaty extension negotiations in Vienna
- Implementation and oversight of missile defense and space policy
- U.S. delegation to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague and the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva
- DiNanno is one of two NSRI leaders nominated this year to serve in a senior national security position. Dr. Christopher Yeaw, former associate executive director, was nominated on September 3, 2025, to serve as Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Stability.

Learn more about NSRI's research for strategic deterrence at nsri.nebraska.edu/nuclear.

Related Media Item: <https://nsri.nebraska.edu/news/news-releases/2025/10/nsri-director-confirmed-as-under-secretary-of-state>