

People, Programs and Points of Excellence (P³E) Report for September 27, 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. Former Kearney radiologist William Northwall creates full scholarship for UNMC medical student at UNK

Dr. William Northwall, a former radiologist from Kearney, has established the William H. Northwall MD Scholarship through the University of Nebraska Foundation. This scholarship will cover the full cost of attendance for a medical student from greater Nebraska who studies at the Douglas A. Kristensen Rural Health Education Complex at the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK). The scholarship aims to support future physicians and reduce the financial burden of medical education, while promoting rural health care training.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2024/09/24/former-kearney-radiologist-creates-scholarship-for-unmc-medical-student-at-unk/>

2. UNK saves significant money by using in-house construction team for renovation projects

The University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK) has implemented a new cost-saving approach by forming an in-house construction team to complete renovation and maintenance projects. This DIY strategy, led by UNK Facilities Management and Planning Director Michael Cremers, saved over \$300,000 during the Randall Hall renovation. With rising costs in construction, this initiative is expected to reduce future project costs by utilizing in-house staff for projects, including the Nebraskan Student Union remodel and other campus renovations.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2024/09/19/diy-approach-saves-unk-significant-money-on-campus-renovation-projects/>

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

1. UNL's positive momentum reflected in U.S. News rankings

Announced Sept. 24, the ranking elevates Nebraska's flagship, land-grant university to No. 152 nationally, up seven spots from No. 159 one year ago. Among all public institutions in the United States, UNL advanced its place in the top 100, moving up three places to No. 81. The College of Engineering jumped 11 spots to No. 71 nationally among programs where the highest degree offered is a doctorate. And, the College of Business showed a considerable gain in undergraduate business programs (up nine spots to No. 53) and rose in undergraduate economics instruction (up two places to No. 143).

Related Media Item: <https://go.unl.edu/2024usnwr>

2. Homecoming festivities include Battle of the Bands, festival, parade

Homecoming runs Sept. 28 to Oct. 5 and will carry the theme "Cornchella." Events include a Battle of the Bands, a new University Libraries exhibition, a drive-through tailgate, the Cornstock Festival and the homecoming parade.

Related Media Item: <https://go.unl.edu/2024hoco>

University of Nebraska Medical Center

1. MMI opened Autism Care for Toddlers Clinic (ACT) in Fremont

ACT Clinics are a community outreach program, providing one-on-one early intervention services to toddlers with autism spectrum disorders. The Fremont metro and surrounding rural communities are currently without clinic-based applied behavior analytic services for children with autism spectrum disorder. ACT clinics serve children up to kindergarten eligibility. Funding for the clinic comes, in part, from an ARPA grant through the Behavioral Health Education Center of Nebraska designed to provide behavioral health training to rural areas and establish providers there.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2024/09/04/act-clinic-to-open-in-fremont-this-month/>

2. College of Dentistry distributes early dental health starter kits

The UNMC College of Dentistry, Nebraska Community Foundation and Nebraska DHHS Office of Oral Health and Dentistry partnered with the Nebraska Hospital Association to distribute early dental health starter kits to new parents in hospitals across Nebraska. The kits are packed with unique oral hygiene items for children from birth to six years old and give parents access to an instructional video. The kits also emphasize the need for parents to establish a dental home for their children so they can receive continual dental disease prevention and education.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2024/09/25/college-partners-with-nebraska-hospital-association-to-distribute-childrens-oral-health-kits/>

University of Nebraska at Omaha

1. UNO, Kiewit Luminarium Enter Agreement to Develop STEAM Educators in Omaha

The University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) and Kiewit Luminarium have partnered to recruit, develop, and retain STEAM educators in Omaha, aiming to strengthen Nebraska's STEAM workforce. This collaboration will provide immersive learning experiences, including hands-on programs like the Luminator Program for youth and daytime courses for UNO students at the Luminarium. The partnership will also support research, public engagement, and educator preparation, led by UNO's College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unomaha.edu/news/2024/09/uno-kiewit-luminarium-enter-agreement-to-develop-steam-educators-in-omaha.php>

2. NCITE Secures First-Ever Patent for Chatbot Technology

The National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education (NCITE) Center at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) has secured its first-ever patent for a chatbot designed to streamline suspicious activity reporting. This tool, developed by a team led by Joel Elson, Ph.D., and Erin Kearns, Ph.D., provides a more user-friendly, conversational way to report potential threats, offering law enforcement more accurate, real-time data. The chatbot, now available for licensing, marks a major achievement for NCITE and opens doors for further technological innovations in public safety and beyond. NCITE's success highlights the power of interdisciplinary collaboration and its commitment to transforming research into practical, real-world solutions.

Related Media Item: <https://www.ketv.com/article/omaha-ncite-receives-patent-for-chat-bot-technology/62268580>

Agricultural and Natural Resources

1. Schnable receives funding to develop cornfield digital twin

Digital twins are revolutionizing a range of industries, from manufacturing to health care to ride-hail services like Uber. Virtual replicas of supply chains, vehicle parts, traffic routes and beyond enable companies to rapidly innovate and adapt. UNL professor James Schnable has received \$1 million in NSF funding to help develop the first digital twin of a corn field, enabling researchers to quickly test countless what-if scenarios related to corn performance. The digital twins will allow for use of high-performance computing to simulate and explore how whole fields of corn with different properties would behave. For example, researchers can easily study topics like how resilient they are to wind and how efficiently they use water and capture light, without having to actually grow the corn field. The project will help researchers overcome overcome real-world constraints on the number of field tests researchers can run and more quickly identify the planting arrangements and hybrids with the most potential.

Related Media Item:

- **Nebraska Today** - <https://news.unl.edu/article/schnable-to-help-launch-first-digital-twin-of-corn-field>
- **KETV** - <https://www.ketv.com/article/unl-researcher-develops-first-digital-twin-of-corn-crop/62396745>

2. Statewide soil health schools attended by 200 producers, others across Nebraska

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln team led by Dr. Bijesh Maharjan, associate professor and extension specialist at UNL's Panhandle Research, Extension and Education Center (PREEC), held its third annual series of Nebraska Soil Health Schools hosted by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and UNL. The purpose of Soil Health School is to connect and educate growers, crop consultants and other ag professionals about soil health needs, best practices and concerns. The schools were conducted at three locations from west to east in Nebraska in 2024 and attended by over 200 growers and others. Healthy soil is critical for productive, sustainable agriculture. Healthy soils better hold moisture, require fewer nutrient inputs, prevent erosion and contribute to resilient agriculture.

Related Media Item:

- **CropWatch** - <https://cropwatch.unl.edu/2024/nebraska-soil-health-school-accomplishment-goals-through-collaboration>
 - **Chadron Radio** - <https://chadronradio.com/nebraska-soil-health-school-an-accomplishment-of-goals-through-collaboration/>
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University of Nebraska Foundation

University of Nebraska Foundation announces new board members

University of Nebraska Foundation adds two new directors: Sue Wilkinson and Doug Waggoner. Wilkinson is president and chief operating officer of Ameritas. She has been a trustee since 2015 and has served on the foundation's Finance Committee since 2021. Prior to her current service on the foundation's Finance Committee, she served six years (2015-2021) on the foundation's Audit Committee. Waggoner served as managing director of BlackRock and founded Castle International Asset Management, among other positions during his career. Waggoner has been a trustee since 2019 and has served on the foundation's Investment Committee since 2020. Board members Julie Jacobson of North Platte, Nebraska, and William Lester of Lincoln were reelected to second terms.

Related Media Item: <https://nufoundation.org/university-of-nebraska-foundation-announces-new-board-members/>

Buffett Early Childhood Institute

Seventh annual Thriving Children, Families, and Communities Conference attracts more than 550 attendees from Nebraska and beyond

More than 550 civic, business, education, health care, and government leaders from over 145 Nebraska communities gathered in Kearney, Neb. for the Thriving Children, Families, and Communities Conference on Sept. 17. This conference is the only event of its kind in Nebraska and frequently receives interest from community leaders in other states interested in holding a similar meeting.

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute serves as the administrative agency for the conference while partnering this year with 10 Nebraska-based early childhood and education organizations. The Buffett Early Childhood Fund supports the conference through a grant, but the Buffett Institute contributes a large amount of in-kind support by planning, promoting, and staffing the event.

The event focuses on the connection between quality early childhood care and education in Nebraska and local economic development and community vitality. Attendance for the 2024 conference was more than double that of the inaugural 2018 conference and has attracted national attention. This year saw the largest in-person attendance ever, an increase of 20% over 2022, the year with the next-highest in-person attendance rate.

Linda Smith, director of policy at the Buffett Early Childhood Institute, delivered the keynote address and moderated a panel with state and regional leaders from the business, early childhood advocacy, and rural research fields.

Related Media Item:

- NTV – <https://nebraska.tv/news/local/childcare-crisis-in-nebraska>
- KSNB Local 4 – <https://www.ksnblocal4.com/2024/09/18/buffett-early-childhood-institute-hosts-annual-childcare-conference/>
- Early Years Matter Blog - <https://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/blog/2024/09/thriving-children-panel-lets-find-innovative-solutions>

Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute

DWFI's Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Irrigation and Mechanization Systems takes a role in shaping Africa's next steps in agricultural policy

The USAID-funded Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Irrigation and Mechanization Systems (ILIMS), led by the Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute, is collaborating with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) to initiate regional meetings and engage partners in the post-Malabo dialogue process. The Malabo Declaration, a guiding document for agricultural policy drawn up by the African Union, is expiring in 2025, and many of its goals remain unmet. USAID is supporting a dialogue process through regional meetings to shape new agricultural policy in Africa, and ILIMS is actively involved, especially on aspects related to agricultural water management and mechanization. As part of this effort, ILIMS Director Nicole Lefore co-hosted a session at the Africa Food Systems Forum 2024 Annual Summit in Kigali, Rwanda, focusing on African food security beyond the Malabo Declaration. ILIMS Deputy Director Jude Cobbing will also attend African Water Week in Cairo to collaborate on the post-Malabo process and connect with partners from the African Union and USAID.

Related Media Item:

[https://www.resakss.org/sites/default/files/Malabo%20Declaration%20on%20Agriculture 2014 11%2026-.pdf](https://www.resakss.org/sites/default/files/Malabo%20Declaration%20on%20Agriculture%202014-2026-.pdf)

National Strategic Research Institute

NSRI brings DOD needs to UNO, UNK

NSRI hosted a DARPAConnect Regional Pop Up event on September 18 at UNO, bringing 13 DARPA directors, program managers and staff to Nebraska in person to share their perspectives, insights and advice for submitting project ideas to the agency. Nearly 150 attendees gathered in person and 500 attended online; 15 NSRI Fellows came in person. On September 19, Dr. Terry Thiem, NSRI director for medical countermeasures, presented “Developing Medical Countermeasures for the Warfighter” to more than 100 UNK faculty and students at UNK.

Related Media Item:

- **DARPA Event** – <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7242278822316810241/>
- **UNK event** - <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7244014417200168962/>