

People, Programs and Points of Excellence (P³E)

Report for August 29, 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. UNK faculty members honored for their excellence in teaching, service and scholarship

Four UNK professors were recognized during the Aug. 20 Faculty/Staff Convocation in the Fine Arts Recital Hall. Anthony Donofrio, chair of Music, Theatre and Dance, received the Pratt-Heins Award for Scholarship and Research for his extensive record of commissioned works, recordings and performances, along with leadership of the UNK New Music Series. Amy Nebesniak, professor of Math and Statistics, earned the Pratt-Heins Award for Service for directing the Loper Launch Enrichment Camp and advancing teacher education initiatives. David Vail, professor of History, was presented the Pratt-Heins Award for Teaching for excellence in classroom instruction and student mentorship. In addition, Whitney Schneider-Cline, chair of Communication Disorders, received the R.I.S.E. Award for Institutional Engagement for her leadership in creating accessible online programs and fostering collaboration with UNMC.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2025/08/26/learning-beyond-borders-unk-students-broaden-horizons-through-summer-study-abroad-programs/>

2. Learning Beyond Borders: UNK students broaden horizons through summer study abroad programs

This summer, 32 UNK students participated in study abroad programs in Argentina, France, Spain and Costa Rica. Abby Trantham of Beatrice, an English education major with minors in Spanish and creative writing, studied literature and language at the Universidad de Granada while living with a host family. Dylan Seitz of Kearney, a history and modern languages major, joined assistant professor Chris Jacobs and classmates for a five-week program in France, with coursework in Lyon and excursions across the country and into Switzerland and Spain. Students described the experience as transformative, strengthening their language skills, confidence and cultural understanding.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2025/08/20/unk-faculty-members-honored-for-their-excellence-in-teaching-service-and-scholarship/>

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

1. Mom's thankful voicemail inspires new national TV spot

A portion of a voicemail from the parent of University of Nebraska-Lincoln students is now being broadcast nationally in the new TV spot “No Place Like It,” which shows the students engaging in the many facets of campus life while their mom’s voice is heard in the background. The new commercial complements “Home Again,” the TV spot that premiered in 2024, featuring the eloquent narration of Johnny Carson over footage saluting all Nebraskans who call the state home. “No Place Like It” and “Home Again” will air across broadcast, streaming and digital platforms.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/moms-thankful-voicemail-inspires-new-national-tv-spot>

2. Nebraska tradition returns as Runza opens in Selleck Hall

Runza has officially returned to the University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

The university community and Runza representatives celebrated the new franchise in the Selleck Hall food court with a ribbon cutting on Aug. 18. Along with university leaders, the event included Runza’s Renee Sjulín, vice president, and Dawn Amend, purchasing director.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/nebraska-tradition-returns-as-runza-opens-in-selleck-hall>

University of Nebraska Medical Center

1. New office aimed at health workforce announced

To better align strategic initiatives that attract, develop, place and retain health professionals for Nebraska and beyond, a new office has been created at UNMC. The new Office of Health Workforce Initiatives will align and integrate current workforce efforts and serve as a resource for external agencies and communities as they partner with UNMC to maintain and grow their health care workforce.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2025/08/27/unmc-announces-new-office-aimed-at-health-workforce/>

2. UNMC’s first PharmD class in Kearney embark

The inaugural cohort of UNMC pharmacy students to conduct their education on UNMC’s Kearney campus started classes this August. The expansion of several UNMC programs to Kearney, including medicine in 2026, is in large part to help address the state’s rural health care workforce shortages.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2025/08/25/unmcs-first-pharmd-class-in-kearney-embarks-on-program/>

University of Nebraska at Omaha

1. Real Madrid Graduate School Universidad Europea and UNO Launch Dual Degree in Sports Management

The University of Nebraska Omaha (UNO) has partnered with the Real Madrid Graduate School Universidad Europea (RMGS-UE) to expand international opportunities in sports management education. Through this collaboration, UNO MBA students can earn a Certificate in Sports Management from RMGS-UE or pursue a dual degree by completing additional coursework in RMGS-UE's Executive MBA in Sport Management program.

The partnership also offers access to The Real Madrid Experience in Madrid, where students network with top sports professionals and explore global industry trends. This initiative enhances UNO's MBA program by providing students with a global perspective, hands-on learning, and valuable professional connections in the sports industry.

Related Media Item: <https://www.ketv.com/article/uno-partners-with-real-madrid-through-mba-program/65904100>

2. UNO School of Criminology presents labor trafficking in Nebraska report

The University of Nebraska Omaha's School of Criminology and Criminal Justice released a first-of-its-kind two-year statewide report on labor trafficking in Nebraska. Based on more than 580 surveys, researchers identified key themes around the nature of trafficking, investigative challenges, and gaps in survivor services, particularly in rural areas. The report recommends public awareness campaigns, stronger cross-agency collaboration, and expanded resources to better support survivors and address the hidden scope of the crime.

Related Media Items:

- KETV: <https://www.ketv.com/article/uno-presents-labor-trafficking-in-nebraska-report/65926117>
- WOWT: <https://www.wowt.com/2025/08/28/university-nebraska-omaha-seeking-help-labor-trafficking-victims/>
- Omaha World-Herald: https://omaha.com/news/local/crime-courts/article_6710c35f-5534-41a9-af74-f42d355afb1a.html

Agriculture and Natural Resources

1. University launches online course to boost state's meat processing industry

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln and the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture have launched “Prime Education: Introduction to Butchery and Meat Processing,” an online course designed to strengthen Nebraska's meat processing workforce—a vital sector of the state's agricultural economy.

Developed with USDA support and in partnership with industry, the eight-part curriculum provides foundational training in areas such as safety, sanitation, humane harvest, fabrication, and product labeling.

By offering flexible, self-paced learning, the program aims to accelerate onboarding, improve worker retention, and introduce participants to the wide range of career opportunities in meat processing and related fields.

Related Media Items:

- IANR News: <https://ianrnews.unl.edu/article/university-launches-online-course-to-boost-states-meat-processing-industry>
- 1011: <https://www.1011now.com/2025/08/20/unl-ncta-partner-online-course-hopes-boosting-meat-processing-industry/>
- AG Update: https://agupdate.com/midwestmessenger/news/livestock/article_ac60d1a2-8c17-4204-a39d-3cc1bbfb8bab.html

2. Nebraska LEAD Program Announces Class 44 Fellows

The Nebraska Leadership Education/Action Development (LEAD) Program has selected 27 individuals as Fellows of Nebraska LEAD Class 44. Representing diverse agricultural backgrounds, the Fellows were chosen for their leadership potential, commitment to agriculture, and dedication to their communities.

Beginning in September, they will participate in a two-year curriculum that includes in-state seminars, a national study experience, and an international seminar, all designed to strengthen leadership skills and broaden understanding of agricultural issues.

Established in 1981, the Nebraska LEAD Program has prepared nearly 1,200 graduates to serve as leaders in agriculture at local, state, national, and global levels.

Related Media Items:

- IANR News: <https://ianrnews.unl.edu/article/nebraska-lead-program-announces-class-44-fellows>
- Nebraska TV: <https://nebraska.tv/news/local/nebraska-lead-program-welcomes-27-new-fellows-to-class-44>
- Nebraska Ag Connection: <https://nebraskaagconnection.com/news/nebraska-agriculture-leaders-chosen-for-lead-program>

University of Nebraska Foundation

University of Nebraska Receives Record Philanthropic Support

The University of Nebraska Foundation announced record-setting private support for the University of Nebraska, with \$416.6 million in new funds committed in the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025. This is the first time that fundraising has exceeded \$400 million in a single year. In addition, 60,602 donors gave a gift to support the University of Nebraska, the best year ever for the number of individual supporters.

Gifts were made to support all campuses: the University of Nebraska at Kearney, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, University of Nebraska Medical Center and its clinical partner, Nebraska Medicine, University of Nebraska at Omaha and Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture in Curtis, Nebraska.

Related Media Items: <https://nufoundation.org/university-of-nebraska-receives-record-philanthropic-support/>

Buffett Early Childhood Institute

Buffett Early Childhood Institute Invests Another \$75,000 in Research Projects from UNMC, UNL Ph.D. Students

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute has selected three doctoral students representing the University of Nebraska Medical Center and University of Nebraska-Lincoln for the 2025-26 Graduate Scholars program.

Since 2016, the Buffett Institute has invested more than \$700,000 through its Graduate Scholars program to support the research of doctoral students from University of Nebraska campuses related to early childhood education and development.

The program awards one-year fellowships worth up to \$25,000 to a maximum of four NU doctoral students every year. 2025-2026 Buffett Early Childhood Institute Graduate Scholars:

Colman Freel, University of Nebraska Medical Center

- Project Title: Cardiovascular Wellness from the Womb: Evaluating the Role of the Endothelial-to-Mesenchymal Transition and Therapeutic Potential of Maresin-1 in Vascular Remodeling in Infants of Diabetic Mothers
- Mentors: Dr. Ann Anderson Berry, Paras Kumar Mishra

Rebekah Rapoza, University of Nebraska Medical Center

- Project Title: Perinatal Health Disparities: Investigating the Influence of Maternal Socioeconomic Status on Placental Gene Regulation and Expression
- Mentor: Dr. Ann Anderson Berry

Ali Shull, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

- Project Title: Parents Under Pressure: Social Media's Impact on Parent's Mental Well Being
- Mentor: Carrie Clark

These students further the university's research priorities by engaging in in-depth explorations of vital early childhood issues. The Graduate Scholars program fosters the growth of ambitious researchers by offering opportunities to communicate, network, and collaborate across campuses, breaking down silos and promoting cross-disciplinary work.

Related Media Items: <https://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/news-and-events/news/2025/08/buffett-institute-202526-graduate-scholars-to-explore-infant-cardiovascular-health>

Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute

New reports explore costs and scalability of Irrigation as a Service business models

Two recent DWFI reports provide insights into scalable and sustainable irrigation solutions for smallholder farmers.

Unit economics refers to the revenues and costs of delivering a single unit of a good or service. "The Unit Economics of Irrigation as a Service" report provides insight into the unit economics of irrigation as a service (IaaS), in which farmers can access irrigation equipment and services without owning it outright. The report analyzes diverse IaaS approaches, including those adopted by entrepreneurial farmers, multisided market makers, and dealer subsidiaries. It offers a framework for understanding how these services can achieve both financial viability and broader reach.

An additional DWFI report, the “Pay-N-Pump Business Model Canvas,” offers an in-depth look at one of these approaches. Pay-N-Pump is an innovative irrigation service provider that offers long-term rentals of solar pumps and mobile irrigation kits, overcoming capital limitations. By combining reliable solar tech, local community engagement, and efficient logistics, Pay-N-Pump makes irrigation—and its benefits—more accessible and affordable for smallholder farmers.

This research informs future investments and strategic collaborations by analyzing various irrigation solutions and complements DWFI’s other IaaS-focused work.

Related Media Item: <https://waterforfood.nebraska.edu/our-work/research-and-policy/entrepreneurship>

National Strategic Research Institute

Strategic deterrence interns brief JEMSO projects at STRATCOM HQ

This summer, the National Strategic Research Institute (NSRI) at the University of Nebraska hosted 10 students for a deep dive into national security research through its annual strategic deterrence internship.

With a focus on joint electromagnetic spectrum operations (JEMSO), the experience featured two cohorts of students. Mentored by Dr. Andrew Harms, assistant professor of electrical and computer engineering at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL), one cohort provided a foundational prototype to explore the feasibility of basic frequency capture and retransmission functionalities. Mentored by Dr. M. Can Vuran, Dale M. Jensen Professor of Computing at UNL, the second cohort developed a system for accurately geo-locating emitters in a congested environment using Software Defined Radio receivers.

Both cohorts recently briefed leaders at U.S. Strategic Command with the results of their work. The Command is responsible for JEMSO and sponsors NSRI as a University Affiliated Research Center — a designation from the U.S. Department of Defense.

Related Media Item: <https://nsri.nebraska.edu/news/news-releases/2025/08/strategic-deterrence-interns-brief-jemso-projects-at-stratcom-hq>