

People, Programs and Points of Excellence (P³E)

Report for January 16, 2026

The People, Programs and Points of Excellence (P3E) is a biweekly update from across all four campuses of the University of Nebraska System 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 discusses the new year and new opportunities on "Sports Nightly" broadcast

President Gold joined Jessica Coody on a recent Huskers Radio Network Sports Nightly broadcast to share more about university developments, vision heading into the legislative session, and reflecting on the university's participation in the "We Give Blood" drive competition.

Related Media Item: <https://youtu.be/ZS06cl6BVSg>

2. President Gold joins RFD-TV for first "Rural Health Matters" segment of 2026

On a recent "Rural Health Matters" segment, President Gold joined RFD-TV's Suzanne Alexander to discuss how viewers can build and maintain healthy habits in the new year.

Related Media Item: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lybEbavZga0>

University of Nebraska at Kearney

1. UNK Students Build Skills and Bonds Through America Reads Tutoring Program

Through the America Reads federal work-study program, UNK students are gaining hands-on classroom experience while supporting reading proficiency in Kearney Public Schools. Sophomore Akeyli Bush, an education major from Central City, tutors second-grade students at Central Elementary School, working in small groups on reading, spelling and pronunciation—particularly with English language learners. Bush plans to teach family and consumer sciences and credits the program with giving her meaningful, real-world experience.

UNK has participated in America Reads for more than 25 years. Currently, 16 students work up to 10 hours per week earning \$15 an hour. Financial Aid assistant director Joseph Campbell says the program benefits both schools and students by pairing academic support with experiential learning.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2025/11/25/unk-students-build-skills-and-bonds-through-america-reads-tutoring-program/>

2. Exploring the Quantum Frontier: UNK Professor Helps Advance Cutting-Edge Research Through EQUATE

UNK physics professor Jeremy Armstrong is contributing to advanced quantum research through the Emergent Quantum Materials and Technologies (EQUATE) initiative, a \$20 million National Science Foundation–funded project involving UNK, the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, University of Nebraska at Omaha and Creighton University. Armstrong is one of 20 faculty members studying quantum systems that could influence future technologies in computing, communication and sensing.

At UNK, Armstrong’s research focuses on theoretical work involving ultra-cold dipolar quantum gases, examining how impurities affect system behavior. He says EQUATE also creates valuable opportunities for student involvement and workforce development. In addition to research, EQUATE emphasizes outreach, supporting K–12 engagement and science education across Nebraska.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2025/11/25/exploring-the-quantum-frontier-unk-professor-helps-advance-cutting-edge-research-through-equate/>

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

1. Ankerson takes helm; pledges bold, forward-focused leadership

Katherine S. Ankerson began work Jan. 12 as interim chancellor of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, opening her tenure with a call for collaboration, dialogue and a shared focus on the university’s future. Her appointment was announced Jan. 5 after Chancellor Rodney D. Bennett announced his resignation.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/ankerson-takes-helm-pledges-bold-forward-focused-leadership>

2. Book club empowers young adults with intellectual disabilities

One evening each week, a book club at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln’s Barkley Center becomes a space for laughter, learning and belonging. Young adults with intellectual disabilities gather to read, share ideas and make the club their own — building confidence, independence and lasting connections through stories they choose together.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/book-club-empowers-young-adults-with-intellectual-disabilities>

University of Nebraska Medical Center

1. UNMC earns 2026 Carnegie Community Engagement Classification

UNMC has been awarded the 2026 Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, one of the highest national honors recognizing an institution's commitment to community engagement. Behind this milestone was a rigorous self-study that examined how deeply community engagement lives in UNMC's mission, classrooms, programs and partnerships.

Ten foundational indicators — including reciprocity with community partners and sustained institutional support — were reviewed through two rounds of national peer and expert evaluation, confirming that UNMC's commitment to community is not symbolic, but measurable, embedded and enduring.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2026/01/13/unmc-earns-2026-carnegie-community-engagement-classification/>

2. UNMC student leaders get inside look at new residence hall

UNMC student leaders got an early look inside UNMC's first residence hall as construction progresses toward an opening next school year. UNMC broke ground in fall 2024 on the residence hall on the campus' east side that will offer housing for some 300 UNMC students. The construction has advanced to the point where the building is fully enclosed for work to continue through winter, and the project is on track for an August 2026 date for the first residents to move in.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2025/12/12/unmc-student-leaders-get-inside-look-at-new-residence-hall/>

University of Nebraska at Omaha

1. UNO Earns Prestigious Carnegie Community Engagement Designation

The University of Nebraska at Omaha has earned its third consecutive Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement, a national distinction recognizing its sustained commitment to public service and partnership. UNO is one of just 277 institutions nationwide to receive the designation, reflecting nearly two decades of embedding community engagement into teaching, research, and outreach. The classification, valid through 2032, underscores UNO's measurable impact through thousands of community-engaged courses, students, and partnerships.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unomaha.edu/news/2026/01/uno-earns-prestigious-carnegie-community-engagement-designation.php>

2. UNO-Led Team Pioneers First Catheter-Based Treatment to Eliminate Arterial Calcium

Peripheral artery disease affects more than 200 million people worldwide, and severe arterial calcification dramatically increases treatment failure and amputation risk, yet no therapy can currently remove this hardened calcium.

A multidisciplinary team led by the University of Nebraska at Omaha has received a \$2.7 million NIH R01 grant to develop a first-of-its-kind, localized EDTA therapy that directly targets and removes arterial calcium using a microneedle catheter. If successful, the approach could restore vessel flexibility and transform outcomes for patients.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unomaha.edu/news/2025/12/uno-led-team-pioneers-first-catheter-based-treatment-to-eliminate-arterial-calcium.php>

Agriculture and Natural Resources

1. Uden takes lead at university's resilience center

Daniel Uden has been named the interim director of the Center for Resilience in Agricultural Working Landscapes at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln in January 2026, succeeding founder Craig Allen. CRAWL focuses on collaborative, interdisciplinary research that helps Nebraska farmers, ranchers and land managers build resilient agricultural landscapes.

The small but far-reaching team works with multiple UNL centers, departments and external partners on projects spanning rangeland management, climate-smart beef, water conservation, wildlife habitat and digital agriculture. Grounded in ecological resilience theory and close partnerships with people working the land, the center's work delivers practical tools and benefits for Nebraskans statewide.

Related Media Items: <https://ianrnews.unl.edu/article/uden-takes-lead-at-universitys-resilience-center>

2. Nebraska Extension Opens Applications for Next Small Meat Processor Management Training Program

Nebraska Extension's upcoming Small Meat Processing Management Training Program offers a timely and important opportunity to strengthen the state's meat processing sector. The intensive, weeklong, in-person training will equip small plant owners and managers with practical skills in operations, regulatory compliance, workforce leadership, and financial decision-making.

Through expert instruction, plant tours, and peer learning, participants will gain tools to address labor shortages, evolving markets, and increasing regulatory demands. With the next session scheduled for March 2026, this program is a near-term investment in building management capacity, helping Nebraska's small meat processors remain competitive, compliant, and resilient in serving local producers and communities.

Related Media Items: <https://ianrnews.unl.edu/article/nebraska-extension-opens-applications-for-next-small-meat-processor-management-training>

University of Nebraska Foundation

Musician J. E. Van Horne Jr. creates Husker scholarship for South Dakota students

Musician, sound engineer and University of Nebraska–Lincoln alumnus J. E. Van Horne Jr. has made a \$500,000 gift to create a scholarship for students who want to attend UNL. The J. E. Van Horne Jr. South Dakota Scholarship will be awarded to graduates of South Dakota high schools who are in good academic standing and enroll in the Nebraska College of Business. The fund will be a permanent endowment, providing support for College of Business students in perpetuity.

Related Media Items: <https://nufoundation.org/musician-j-e-van-horne-jr-creates-scholarship-for-south-dakota-students/>

Buffett Early Childhood Institute

Buffett Early Childhood Institute Shares the Legacy of Head Start and Ed Zigler

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute produced a video featuring Executive Director Walter Gilliam’s reflections on the 60th anniversary of Head Start and the contributions of one of its key architects, Ed Zigler, who was Gilliam’s longtime mentor.

Head Start, the landmark federal early childhood education and family engagement program, celebrated 60 years of impact in 2025. It has served 40 million children living in poverty across the United States.

Ed Zigler, a developmental psychologist at Yale University, was often called the “Father of Head Start” for his work developing the program. Zigler was the mentor, frequent research partner, and close friend of Gilliam, who led the Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy at Yale University from 2005 until 2023, when he came to the Buffett Institute.

To cap off Head Start’s milestone year, Buffett Institute staff created a video and accompanying blog post of Gilliam detailing what he learned from Zigler, the lasting impact of Head Start, and how the Buffett Institute complements the wraparound approach of serving families, children, and early educators. As of mid-January, the video had roughly 930 views on YouTube and LinkedIn.

Related Media Items:

- BECI news release: <https://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/blog/2025/12/walter-gilliam-reflects-on-60-years-of-head-start-and-ed-ziglers-legacy>
 - YouTube video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MoExGf_ODC8&t=5s
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Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute

Joe Sanders named executive director of the Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute

The Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute (DWFI) at the University of Nebraska has appointed Joe Sanders as its new executive director, effective February 1, 2026, succeeding Peter McCornick. Sanders brings over 27 years of experience as an international development leader, having managed large-scale programs focusing on agricultural

market systems, food security, climate resilience and water management across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. University of Nebraska President Jeffrey P. Gold, M.D., and Interim Harlan Vice Chancellor Tiffany Heng-Moss both praised Sanders' extensive experience and collaborative approach to guide the institute's mission of research, education and policy to achieve global food and water security.

Related Media Item: <https://waterforfood.nebraska.edu/news-and-events/news/2026/01/joe-sanders-named-executive-director-of-the-daugherty-water-for-food-global-institute>

National Strategic Research Institute

NSRI optimizes biological defense team to meet federal biosecurity challenges

In an era when biological threats are evolving as rapidly as the technology to counter them, the National Strategic Research Institute (NSRI) at the University of Nebraska stands ready with seasoned leadership and proven capabilities to meet the Nation's most pressing defense challenges.

The recent congressional testimony of Dr. Robert Kadlec, who was confirmed as Assistant Secretary of War for Nuclear Deterrence, Chemical and Biological Defense Policy and Programs on December 18, underscored what NSRI and its defense clients have long recognized: Biological defense must be a cornerstone of U.S. national security strategy. Kadlec's declaration that he considers "deploy credible capabilities to deter adversary biological weapons use" as one of his four key priorities makes it clear that NSRI's strategic approach in this critical domain is prudent.

This alignment is no coincidence. Two years ago, Kadlec addressed NSRI staff and University of Nebraska System (NU) faculty and students at an NSRI conference, where he experienced firsthand the commitment of NSRI and the University of Nebraska System (NU) to advancing biological defense capabilities. That commitment crystallized into a comprehensive program that today is optimized and poised to meet the federal government's requirements.

"Effective deterrence requires staying three steps ahead of any threat our adversaries might conceive," said Marty Sikes, NSRI associate executive director for chemical and biological defense programs. "Through our partnerships across the national security enterprise, NSRI is helping ensure our warfighters and first responders never face a biological threat we as a Nation haven't already anticipated — and are prepared to defeat."

At the helm of NSRI's biological defense program stands Dr. David Blanchard, recently appointed to the new position of research director for biological defense. With more than 20 years of highly specialized experience at the intersection of science, operations and national security, Dr. Blanchard is a nationally recognized expert in chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive threats. He has led multi-agency research and development programs and fielded operational capabilities for U.S. Special Operations Command, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency and the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority, among others.

"I came to NSRI to not just innovate, but to deploy innovations," Dr. Blanchard said. "When we leverage the institute's deep national security experience across the biological disciplines with the expertise of four university campuses, we accelerate the transition of technology from research to readiness."

"Our capabilities in rapid prototyping, sensor integration and field-relevant validation mean we can ensure solutions move beyond academic discussion to the theater. We're not only developing tomorrow's tools — we're enabling them to defend the Nation today."

Related Media Item: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7417234435407925248>