

People, Programs and Points of Excellence (P³E) Report for July 31, 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

New "Shaping the Future" video features Lied Center's Bill Stephan

The University of Nebraska System's newest "Shaping the Future" episode features a conversation between President Gold and Bill Stephan, executive director and chief artistic officer for the Lied Center for Performing Arts. They discuss the Lied Center's roles in community engagement and education, the steps necessary to plan a successful season, the importance of providing all NU students access to the performing arts and more.

Related Media Item: https://youtu.be/jLJ_WgfnpvA

University of Nebraska at Kearney

1. More than memories: UNK counseling students help local seniors find connection

University of Nebraska at Kearney graduate students Kyle Harshbarger and Mason Morhain are helping older adults stay socially connected and mentally engaged by leading a weekly reminiscence therapy group at Kearney's Peterson Senior Activity Center. As part of their clinical mental health counseling practicum, the students encourage participants to share life stories, photographs and memories in a welcoming environment that promotes cognitive health, communication and social connection. The experience provides meaningful support for local seniors while giving future counselors valuable hands-on experience facilitating group therapy and building therapeutic relationships. The program also reinforces the importance of listening, empathy and preserving the personal stories that connect generations.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2026/07/21/more-than-memories-unk-counseling-students-help-local-seniors-find-connection/>

2. Hospital partnership gives UNK students an inside look at rural healthcare

University of Nebraska at Kearney students are gaining firsthand experience in rural healthcare through the Rural Immersion Program, which places participants inside partner hospitals across Nebraska to shadow professionals and explore a wide range of healthcare careers. Part of the UNK Hospital Partners Network, the program allows students to rotate through departments such as emergency medicine, surgery, radiology, laboratory services and administration while connecting with rural communities and healthcare leaders. More than 30 students participated this summer, with hospital partners providing valuable clinical exposure, professional networking and mentorship. The initiative, launched in 2024 by UNK Health Sciences, helps students make informed career decisions while strengthening Nebraska's pipeline of future healthcare professionals.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2026/06/18/hospital-partnership-gives-unk-students-an-inside-look-at-rural-healthcare/>

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

1. Husker team earns elite NSF award to drive next generation of materials research

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln has earned a six-year, \$18 million National Science Foundation grant to establish a Materials Research Science and Engineering Center, positioning Husker researchers to advance quantum materials that could power faster computing, more efficient AI and next-generation technologies.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/husker-team-earns-elite-nsf-award-to-drive-next-generation-of-materials-research>

2. Husker-led project receives Genesis Mission funding to advance AI, 6G

Nebraska Engineering's Mehmet Can Vuran is leading a team contributing to the U.S. Department of Energy's Genesis Mission, an ambitious effort to build the world's most powerful integrated science discovery platform.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/husker-led-project-receives-genesis-mission-funding-to-advance-ai-6g>

University of Nebraska Medical Center

1. Leaders cut ribbon on 'amazing' UNMC Residences

UNMC Chancellor H. Dele Davies, MD, on June 17 hosted the ribbon-cutting ceremony for UNMC Residences, which is now the largest student housing facility on the UNMC Omaha campus. In August, occupants will begin moving into the six-story, 305-bed building, which will house UNMC students with a secure entrance to living areas on the second through sixth floors.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2026/07/22/leaders-cut-ribbon-on-amazing-unmc-residences/>

2. Access offered to promising pancreatic cancer treatment

Patients at the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center now have access to a promising new therapy that has generated national attention for its potential to improve outcomes for people with advanced pancreatic cancer, one of the deadliest forms of cancer. Patients with previously treated metastatic pancreatic cancer can receive daraxonrasib through an Expanded Access Program (EAP), providing an opportunity to receive the investigational therapy while it awaits review by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2026/07/23/access-offered-to-promising-pancreatic-cancer-treatment/>

University of Nebraska at Omaha

1. Journey Beyond Sight Camp helps visually impaired kids play sports

The Journey Beyond Sight Camp gives children who are blind or visually impaired a traditional summer camp experience through adaptive activities such as beep kickball and archery. Hosted in partnership with Outlook Nebraska and UNO's School of Health and Kinesiology, the camp promotes independence and confidence by helping campers build new skills in a supportive environment.

Related Media Items:

- KETV: <https://www.ketv.com/article/omaha-camp-helps-visually-impaired-kids-play-sports/73250521>
- KMTV: <https://www.3newsnow.com/central-omaha/legally-blind-campers-find-level-playing-field-at-uno-goalball-camp>

2. National Honors Recognize CEHHS Faculty Leadership in Human Movement and Health

Three faculty leaders from the University of Nebraska Omaha's College of Education, Health and Human Sciences were recognized as fellows by leading national professional organizations, honoring their contributions to research, education, and leadership in athletic training, behavioral medicine, and biomechanics. These prestigious recognitions underscore UNO's growing national reputation for excellence in health, kinesiology and biomechanics while highlighting the college's commitment to advancing research, student success, and professional impact.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unomaha.edu/college-of-education-health-and-human-sciences/news/2026/07/cehhs-national-fellows.php>

Agriculture and Natural Resources

1. Driving Innovation: Partnership Brings Autonomous Truck “Smart Feeding” to University of Nebraska

A partnership between the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and Nebraska-based ALA Engineering is bringing autonomous "smart feeding" technology to the Klostermann Feedlot Innovation Center at ENREEC near Mead. The

collaboration integrates autonomous feed trucks to improve feeding consistency, increase efficiency and help address workforce shortages while supporting research and student education.

Demonstrated during the AgTech Connect conference, the technology serves as a real-world testbed for evaluating autonomous systems before broader industry adoption. University leaders say the partnership advances innovation by providing unbiased research, preparing students for emerging technologies and helping producers assess new tools that could improve feedlot operations.

Related Media Items:

- News Release: <https://ianrnews.unl.edu/article/driving-innovation-partnership-brings-autonomous-truck-smart-feeding-to-university-of>
- Lincoln Journal Star: https://journalstar.com/news/state-regional/education/article_c98c55d5-01be-499c-a84a-960871b96f87.html

2. National awards honor Cahoon, Ciftci for outstanding achievement

Husker researchers Edgar Cahoon and Ozan Ciftci have earned national honors from agInnovation for their contributions to agricultural research. Cahoon, director of the Center for Plant Science Innovation, received the 2026 Lifetime Agricultural Research Innovation Award of Excellence for his pioneering work in plant lipid biotechnology and sustainable agriculture. Ciftci, associate professor of food science and biological systems engineering, earned the 2026 Mid-Career Agricultural Research Innovation Award of Excellence for advancing sustainable food systems, green processing technologies and alternative protein research. Both were selected for national honors after first receiving regional awards.

Related Media Item: <https://ianrnews.unl.edu/article/national-awards-honor-cahoon-ciftci-for-outstanding-achievement>

University of Nebraska Foundation

UNMC pharmacy student aims to bring meaningful connections to small town Nebraska

University of Nebraska at Kearney graduate Carter Schultz of Doniphan, Nebraska, is part of the inaugural cohort of students enrolled in the University of Nebraska Medical Center pharmacy program at the recently opened, privately supported Health Science Education Center II in Kearney. After graduating from pharmacy school, Schultz wants to begin his career at a smaller community pharmacy where he can build meaningful connections with patients.

“I truly believe health care is the best way to make a positive impact on people’s lives,” Schultz said. “It’s important for people to not only have access to these services but to have access to professionals who sincerely care about them.”

Related Media Item: <https://stories.nufoundation.org/i-can-be-myself-in-a-small-town/>

Buffett Early Childhood Institute

Buffett Institute, National Military Family Association Share Research, Expertise at Congressional Briefings on Military Child Care

The Buffett Institute and the National Military Family Association (NMFA) convened a congressional briefing on July 20 in Washington, D.C., to spotlight urgent child care gaps affecting military families nationwide and outline policy solutions. More than 100 congressional staffers and representatives from military and early childhood organizations attended the “Closing the Military Child Care Gap: Data, Workforce, and Federal Action” briefings for the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate. The offices of U.S. Sen. Deb Fischer and Congressman Don Bacon sponsored the briefings. Fischer also provided video remarks.

Buffett Institute Executive Director Walter Gilliam shared new data on child care gaps around military installations nationwide, as well as research on child care provider retention, military family well-being, and the effects of military life on young children’s behavior and mental health. An expert panel offered policy solutions.

Panelists included:

- Stephen Simmons, Deputy Assistant Secretary of War for Military Community and Family Policy, U.S. Department of War
- William French, Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy, Retired, and president and CEO, Armed Services YMCA
- Alexandra Daro, Buffett Institute director of applied research
- Eileen Huck, director of government relations, NMFA The briefings garnered media coverage in the Military Times.

The story was picked up and syndicated by several military wire services and Yahoo! News. On July 21, Gilliam, Chris Kratochvil, vice president for external relations at the University of Nebraska System, and Patty Baron, military consultant, met at the Pentagon with the Honorable Keith Bass, Assistant Secretary of War for Health Affairs, and Stephen Simmons, Deputy Assistant Secretary of War for Military Community and Family Policy.

Related Media Items:

- Blog post: <https://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/blog/2026/07/congressional-briefing-highlights-military-child-care-gapsand-the-impact-on-families-workforce-and-readiness>
- Military Times: <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2026/07/23/even-500-could-make-a-difference-for-military-childcare-workers-researchers-find/>

Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute

Twenty-five years of U.S. irrigation data shows shifting trends at the county-level

A recent DWFI analysis of 25 years of U.S. irrigation data reveals significant county-level shifts in agricultural water use. The study highlights regional changes in irrigation practices, driven by climate variability and groundwater depletion, providing crucial insights for future water management and policy.

Related Media Item: <https://waterforfood.nebraska.edu/news-and-events/news/2026/07/twenty-five-years-of-u.s-irrigation-data-shows-shifting-trends-at-the-county-level>

National Strategic Research Institute

UNO workshop expands NSRI's mission focus into social science

The National Security Social Science Seminar (NS4), recently held at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) and hosted by the campus's Office of Research and Creative Activity, was designed to ask for assistance in tackling social science aspects for strategic deterrence and CWMD — the two Department of War missions NSRI addresses through research, development and training. “The minds in this room hold vast knowledge related to this critical need — maybe in ways we don’t realize,” said Dr. Neal Woollen, NSRI associate executive director, to open the event. “Cascading effects and distractions surrounding national security, including social frameworks and economic issues, are just as important to resilience as the physical science of defense.” In the past, the nation’s linear deterrence and defense model focused solely on intentional, physical threats. In 2018, U.S. security leaders shifted the mission, allowing more attention on accidental and natural events, as well cascading and distracting causes, vulnerabilities and effects. The potential for social sciences to help build resilience and strengthen national security is great, and the possibilities are far reaching, encompassing disciplines such as cybersecurity and technology, rural studies, counterterrorism, compliance, conflict resolution, international studies, supply chains, leadership and more. The workshop only scratched the surface. The potential for social sciences to help build resilience and strengthen national security is great, and the possibilities are far reaching, encompassing disciplines such as cybersecurity and technology, rural studies, counterterrorism, compliance, conflict resolution, international studies, supply chains, leadership and more. The workshop only scratched the surface. Dr. Woollen encouraged attendees to reach out to him with more ideas and consider joining the NSRI academic network to share expertise, take on challenges and make a difference in defense of the nation. NU faculty are welcome to connect with NSRI for these opportunities.

Related Media Item: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7488260308298473472>