

People, Programs and Points of Excellence (P³E)

Report for May 22, 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. NU announces UNMC chancellor priority candidate statewide engagement schedule

Dele Davies, M.D., priority candidate for the position of chancellor of the University of Nebraska Medical Center, will begin a series of visits with university leadership, faculty, staff, students, donors and community members later this month.

Related Media Item: <https://nebraska.edu/news-and-events/news/2026/05/nu-announces-unmc-chancellor-priority-candidate-statewide-engagement-schedule>

2. Nebraska Bioeconomy Competitiveness Conversation session videos now available

Hosted by the University of Nebraska System at the historic Durham Museum in Omaha, this two-day conversation brought together leaders from business, academia, government, labor and national laboratories to explore how breakthroughs in biotechnology, synthetic biology, and biomanufacturing are reshaping industries, strengthening supply chains, and driving U.S. competitiveness.

For more information: <https://compete.org/nebraska-competitiveness-conversation/>

Related Media Item: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLFkenmNzguFvvAi6lXyVFDODKyrF8dMfW>

University of Nebraska at Kearney

1. UNK grad Emme Brown teaches little minds big lessons

University of Nebraska at Kearney graduate Emme Brown is creating a welcoming and creative learning environment as a kindergarten teacher at Sumner-Eddyville-Miller Schools. Born with dwarfism, Brown uses her own experiences to teach lessons about kindness, acceptance and belonging while helping students appreciate differences.

After earning her bachelor's degree from UNK, she returned to complete a master's degree in special education and a special education endorsement to better support students with diverse learning needs. Brown also has gained a large social media following by sharing joyful classroom moments and creative teaching ideas that highlight her passion for education.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2026/05/11/unk-grad-emme-brown-teaches-little-minds-big-lessons/>

2. Rebranded UNK radio station provides a 'clear' path for student broadcasters

The University of Nebraska at Kearney's student-run radio station has rebranded as "91.1 The Clear Alternative," reflecting its unique music format and commitment to hands-on student learning. Operating for more than 40 years, the station broadcasts rock, indie and Americana music alongside student-produced news, sports and original programming from its studio inside the renovated Calvin T. Ryan Library.

The rebrand was led by students and faculty, providing real-world experience in marketing, branding and media production. Students involved with the station say the experience has opened professional opportunities in broadcasting, journalism and sports media while preparing them for careers in the industry.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2026/04/08/rebranded-unk-radio-station-provides-a-clear-path-for-student-broadcasters/>

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

1. Weaver earns \$4M grant to target future flu pandemics

Backed by a \$4 million, five-year grant from the National Institutes of Health, University of Nebraska–Lincoln virologist Eric Weaver will advance a vaccine to protect against future flu pandemics by providing strong, long-lasting immunity across multiple high-risk avian strains.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/weaver-earns-4m-grant-to-target-future-flu-pandemics>

2. Swearer co-authors United Nations' World Youth Report

Susan Swearer, department chair and Willa Cather Professor of educational psychology, was one of three contributing authors to the World Youth Report: Youth Mental Health and Well-being released in February by the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/swearer-co-authors-united-nations-world-youth-report>

University of Nebraska Medical Center

1. Rural health education complex opens in central Nebraska

UNMC and UNK formally celebrated the opening of the Douglas A. Kristensen Rural Health Education Complex in Kearney on May 14. The \$115 million complex expands UNMC's academic programs in Kearney and includes the new \$95 million, three-story, 110,000-square-foot Health Science Education Center II, which opened in January, along with the original Health Science Education Center I that opened in 2015.

The complex enables UNMC to offer medicine, pharmacy and public health programs in Kearney for the first time, while also expanding programs in allied health and nursing. Overall, it will host 14 academic programs: cardiovascular interventional technology, diagnostic medical sonography, magnetic resonance imaging, medical laboratory science, medical nutrition, medicine, nursing, occupational therapy, pharmacy, physical therapy, physician assistant, radiation therapy, radiography (all UNMC programs) and speech-language pathology (a UNK program).

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2026/05/15/unmc-unk-celebrate-opening-of-rural-health-education-complex/>

2. Nebraska expertise at the center of hantavirus response

UNMC and Nebraska Medicine played a central role in the federal response to a hantavirus outbreak associated with the MV Hondius cruise ship, safely receiving 16 U.S. citizens repatriated from the Canary Islands for assessment and monitoring. Fifteen passengers initially were monitored in the National Quarantine Unit, while one individual who had tested positive was cared for in the Nebraska Biocontainment Unit (he was later moved back into the NQU after testing negative); two additional passengers later transitioned from Emory University to the National Quarantine Unit, bringing the total number of guests being monitored at UNMC to 18. The response drew on UNMC and Nebraska Medicine's national expertise in special pathogens, their established federal, state and local partnerships, and the country's only National Quarantine Unit.

Related Media Items:

- <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2026/05/11/cruise-ship-passengers-arrive-at-national-quarantine-unit/>
- <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2026/05/11/16-u-s-citizens-safely-repatriated-to-unmc-nebraska-medicine/>
- <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2026/05/15/two-additional-mv-hondius-passengers-arrive-at-national-quarantine-unit/>

University of Nebraska at Omaha

1. 2,000+ Mavericks Celebrated at 2026 May Commencement

More than 2,000 students graduated from the University of Nebraska at Omaha during the 2026 commencement ceremonies held May 7–8 at Baxter Arena. The graduating class included undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students representing 33 states and 32 countries, with 638 first-generation graduates and 81% of students coming from Nebraska.

Speakers, including Chancellor Joanne Li and keynote presenters Allison Garrett and Eric Maldonado, encouraged graduates to lead with resilience, curiosity, kindness, and strong communication skills as they begin their next chapter. The ceremonies also highlighted UNO's commitment to student success, social mobility, and developing future leaders who will positively impact their communities.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unomaha.edu/news/2026/05/more-than-2000-mavericks-celebrated-at-2026-may-commencement.php>

2. In the UNO Animal Behavior Research Lab, Students Study Dog Cortisol Connections While Unlocking Critical Skills

University of Nebraska at Omaha students Maya Bergstrom and Izzy Apel gained valuable hands-on research experience through Dr. Rose Strasser's animal behavior lab, where they are studying how parenting and training styles may affect stress levels in dogs. Their research focuses on cortisol levels found in dog hair and explores how early life experiences and human interactions can influence canine behavior and health. Through the project, both students developed critical thinking, confidence, and problem-solving skills that they say will benefit their future careers in healthcare and medical research. Dr. Strasser emphasized that experiential research opportunities help students learn how to analyze information creatively and apply those skills far beyond the laboratory.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unomaha.edu/news/2026/05/in-the-uno-animal-behavior-research-lab-students-study-dog-cortisol-connections-while-unlocking-critical-skills.php>

Agriculture and Natural Resources

1. Nebraska's small-grains program produces award-winning wheat for baking

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln is demonstrating national leadership through interdisciplinary research that connects plant genetics, agronomy, food science, and industry collaboration to advance agricultural innovation. The university's small-grains breeding program recently earned national recognition when its hard red winter wheat line, NE20620, received the Wheat Quality Council's 2026 Miller's Choice Award for exceptional milling and baking performance. The achievement reflects a highly collaborative effort among researchers, grain quality specialists, and industry partners working to improve yield, disease resistance, and end-use quality.

Supported by the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, the Nebraska Wheat Board, and Nu Horizon Genetics, the program strengthens the state's research capacity and agricultural competitiveness while fostering workforce development and public-private partnerships. By combining scientific discovery with real-world industry needs, the University of Nebraska is positioning Nebraska as a national leader in agricultural research and innovation.

Related Media Items:

- IANR News Release: <https://ianrnews.unl.edu/article/nebraskas-small-grains-program-produces-award-winning-wheat-for-baking>
- Grain Journal: <https://www.grainjournal.com/article/1141883/nebraska-wheat-line-earns-national-milling-and-baking-quality-honor>
- The Daily Nonpareil: https://nonpareilonline.com/article_bc67df0d-3e0c-5b2a-bd2c-02dad06e7991.html

2. Grassini named 2025 American Society of Agronomy fellow

Patricio Grassini, Sunkist Professor of Agronomy and Horticulture at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, was named an American Society of Agronomy Fellow, an honor awarded to only 0.3% of members. Grassini credits his success to curiosity, hard work and passion for agronomy, a field he chose for its ability to combine scientific discovery with practical impact for farmers. His research focuses on improving crop productivity, sustainability and input efficiency worldwide through projects like the Global Yield Gap Atlas and on-farm experiments with Nebraska producers. Despite international recognition, Grassini remains committed to research grounded in farmers' real-world challenges, aiming to balance global food demands with environmental sustainability.

Related Media Items:

- IANR News Release: <https://ianrnews.unl.edu/article/grassini-named-2025-american-society-of-agronomy-fellow>
- Nebraska Ag Connection: <https://nebraskaagconnection.com/news/top-agronomy-award-for-grassin>

University of Nebraska Foundation

UNMC, UNK celebrate opening of rural health education complex

On May 14, the University of Nebraska Medical Center and University of Nebraska at Kearney celebrated the opening of the Douglas A. Kristensen Rural Health Education Complex in Kearney, the largest rural healthcare teaching facility in the country. The \$115 million complex expands UNMC's academic programs in Kearney and includes the new \$95 million, three-story, 110,000-square-foot Health Science Education Center II, which opened in January, along with the original Health Science Education Center I that opened in 2015. The project's lead donor, the William and Ruth Scott Family Foundation, requested that the Kristensen Complex be named in honor of UNK Chancellor Emeritus Doug Kristensen. The complex enables UNMC to offer medicine, pharmacy and public health programs in Kearney for the first time, while also expanding programs in allied health and nursing.

Related Media Item: <https://nufoundation.org/unmc-unk-celebrate-opening-of-rural-health-education-complex/>

Buffett Early Childhood Institute

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute Hosts Graduate Scholars Spring Showcase to Highlight Emerging Research

The 2025-26 Buffett Institute Graduate Scholars from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and University of Nebraska Medical Center presented the preliminary findings of their Institute-funded research projects at a showcase event. Held at the UNMC Davis Global Center on April 29, the event drew attendees including Buffett Institute staff members, University of Nebraska faculty and students, and Scholars' friends and family.

The 2025-26 Scholars are:

- Colman Freil, an M.D./Ph.D. student in the Department of Cellular and Integrative Physiology at UNMC. His mentors are Dr. Ann Anderson Berry and Paras Kumar Mishra.
 - He studies how diabetes during pregnancy impacts the long-term risk for cardiovascular diseases in offspring.

- Rebekah Rapoza, an M.D./Ph.D. student in the Department of Pediatrics at UNMC. Her mentor is also Anderson Berry.
 - Her project examines how maternal stressors—such as low food security or an income below the federal poverty level—can affect pregnancy and long-term maternal and infant health.
- Ali Shull, a Ph.D. student in the Department of Educational Psychology at UNL. Her mentor is Carrie Clark.
 - Shull researched how parenting content on social media influences parents' stress levels and their sense of parenting self-efficacy.

Since 2016, the Buffett Institute has invested \$750,000 through its Graduate Scholars program to support the early childhood-related research of Ph.D. 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. Fifteen Ph.D. students—a new record—applied for the 2026-27 Graduate Scholars cohort. Applicants will be notified in June.

Related Media Item: <https://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/blog/2026/03/meet-the-phd-students-advancing-early-childhood-research-through-the-graduate-scholars-program>

Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute

The state of U.S. irrigated agriculture: Trends, pressures and the path forward

A new DWFI study, published in *Agricultural Water Management*, takes a sweeping look at the state of U.S. irrigated agriculture and found that the systems that feed the nation are under growing stress. Five states—California, Nebraska, Arkansas, Texas, and Idaho—account for roughly half of all irrigated land in the country and accelerating groundwater depletion, heightened climate variability and rising operational costs are converging to strain water resources across major irrigated regions.

The research also identifies an emerging geographic shift of irrigation toward the eastern U.S. as depletion of critical aquifers like the Ogallala pushes agricultural expansion into regions with historically more abundant water. While adoption of low-flow irrigation methods and soil moisture monitoring has increased, the gap between what is technologically possible and what is widely practiced remains a persistent challenge, especially for smaller producers. The authors call for stronger groundwater governance, expanded access to precision irrigation technologies and smarter policy frameworks to safeguard both domestic food production and global food security.

Related Media Item: <https://waterforfood.nebraska.edu/news-and-events/news/2026/04/thestate-of-u-s-irrigated-agriculture-trends-pressures-and-the-path-forward>

National Strategic Research Institute

NSRI engages the next generation of national security researchers

Through the spring semester, the National Strategic Research Institute (NSRI) engaged with student across the University of Nebraska System through a series of campus events and classroom collaborations.

At the University of Nebraska at Kearney's 2026 Student Research Day, NSRI connected with undergraduate researchers presenting work in the social and behavioral sciences, including studies on U.S.-China alliance perceptions and military decision-making. At the University of Nebraska at Omaha, NSRI Executive Director Rick

Evans joined UNO Professor Dr. Dusty White to brief students in a History of Strategy course, offering an inside look at NSRI's role as one of only 15 University Affiliated Research Centers designated by the Department of War and its partnership with U.S. Strategic Command. Meanwhile, University of Nebraska—Lincoln students from a biosecurity and bioterrorism course visited the NSRI Engagement Hub on Nebraska Innovation Campus for a direct dialogue with General Evans on evolving national security threats and biodefense challenges.

Related Media Items:

- <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7449873081688559616>
- <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7455605672588730369>
- <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7460044883425222657>