

People, Programs and Points of Excellence (P³E) Report for April 10, 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

U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon visits Nebraska, highlights progress toward historic joint accreditation

The University of Nebraska marked progress toward its major joint accreditation initiative with a visit from U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon, highlighting the university's continued efforts to strengthen student success, expand research collaboration and enhance its impact across the state.

Related Media Item: <https://nebraska.edu/news-and-events/news/2026/04/us-secretary-of-education-linda-mcmahon-visits-nebraska>

University of Nebraska at Kearney

1. Loper Spotlight: UNK freshman Avery Lowther is committed to rural health care

University of Nebraska at Kearney freshman Avery Lowther is pursuing a career in rural medicine, driven by personal experiences and a commitment to serving underserved communities. A pre-medical student studying chemistry with a health care management minor, she is part of the Kearney Health Opportunities Program, which supports students preparing for health careers in rural Nebraska.

Through KHOP, campus involvement and hands-on experiences, Lowther has participated in job shadowing, volunteer work and undergraduate research while building connections with health care professionals. She plans to pursue a career in medicine, with a goal of practicing in rural areas where access to care is limited.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2026/02/05/loper-spotlight-unk-freshman-avery-lowther-is-committed-to-rural-health-care/>

2. 'They give you life': UNK grad Reid Bednar finds his fit in a middle school classroom

UNK graduate Reid Bednar is teaching middle school science at Horizon Middle School in Kearney, using hands-on experiments and interactive lessons to engage students. A 2021 graduate in middle level education, he incorporates lab-based learning and discussion to help students connect scientific concepts to real-world applications.

Bednar completed his student teaching at Horizon and returned as a full-time teacher in 2022. He recently earned a master's degree in 7-12 school principalship from UNK and credits the university's teacher education program for preparing him in classroom management and relationship-building.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2026/01/05/they-give-you-life-unk-grad-reid-bednar-finds-his-fit-in-a-middle-school-classroom/>

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

1. Forum begins shaping university's Bold Path Forward

Faculty and staff provided their visions for future success in the University of Nebraska–Lincoln's first public forum on Our Bold Path Forward on April 3. The discussions will inform the university's strategic framework through 2028-29. Additional sessions and online feedback are available through early May.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/forum-begins-shaping-universitys-bold-path-forward>

2. Buan participates in national symposium, strengthens biotech sector

Nicole Buan, an expert in microbial physiology at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, was among specialists invited from all 50 states to participate in a March 25 national symposium identifying strategies to strengthen the country's biotech sector.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/buan-participates-in-national-symposium-strengthens-biotech-sector>

University of Nebraska Medical Center

1. Latest U.S. News rankings place UNMC among the best

UNMC was recognized in the 2026 U.S. News & World Report "Best Graduate Schools" rankings for the strength of its graduate and professional programs, with the College of Medicine moving up to Tier 1 in primary care training and retaining Tier 2 in research.

UNMC also ranked 17th nationally for graduates practicing in rural areas, improved to a tie for 53rd in graduates practicing in primary care (up from 67 last year), and earned strong rankings across physician assistant, pharmacy, physical therapy, public health, nursing practice, occupational therapy and biostatistics.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2026/04/08/latest-u-s-news-rankings-place-unmc-among-the-best/>

2. BHECN joins response to Nebraska wildfires

Wildfires have ravaged Nebraska in recent weeks, with the largest in the state's history, the Morrill Fire, and three other major fires having burned more than 700,000 acres. UNMC's Behavioral Health Education Center of Nebraska joined UNL's Nebraska Extension's disaster response to help meet the mental health needs of affected communities.

BHECN is providing statewide support through its regional site leaders, participation on the Wildfire Task Force, and a behavioral health resource guide offering free, accessible training and tools for communities and providers.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2026/04/06/bhecn-joins-response-to-nebraska-wildfires/>

University of Nebraska at Omaha

1. Snapshots: The 2026 Chuck Hagel Forum in Global Leadership

The annual Chuck Hagel Forum in Global Leadership at the Strauss Performing Arts Center brought global policy discussions to campus through a conversation between Chuck Hagel and national security leader Avril Haines, in partnership with the Atlantic Council.

The forum highlighted major global issues including conflict, U.S. leadership, public service, and international perceptions, while emphasizing the importance of mentorship and civic responsibility.

As part of a long-running series featuring prominent figures like Joe Biden and John Kerry, the event continues to give students and the public direct access to high-level insights on global leadership.

Related Media Items:

- UNO News Release: <https://www.unomaha.edu/news/2026/04/snapshots-the-2026-chuck-hagel-forum-in-global-leadership.php>
- KMTV: <https://www.3newsnow.com/videos/central-omaha/chuck-hagel-forum-in-global-leadership>

2. Inaugural Catalyst Conversation Sparks Bold Ideas for UNO's Future

The University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) launched its first Catalyst Conversation to step back and evaluate how it serves students amid rapid changes in higher education. Leaders and national experts focused on improving access, accelerating degree completion, and ensuring education delivers clear career value with an emphasis on skills-based learning, shorter credentials, and stronger alignment with workforce needs.

The discussion underscored UNO's opportunity to lead by adapting to student and employer expectations, with next steps including continued engagement and its upcoming Strategy Forum.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unomaha.edu/news/2026/04/inaugural-catalyst-conversation-sparks-bold-ideas-for-unos-future.php>

Agriculture and Natural Resources

1. Winning contest entry shows AI's agricultural potential

Nipuna Chamara, a University of Nebraska–Lincoln researcher, won a category in UNL's 2025 TAPS -- Testing Ag Performance Solutions -- competition by using AI to guide farming decisions. Chamara's success exemplifies the technology's potential in agriculture when paired with expertise and reliable data.

TAPS allows participants to manage real crop plots, making decisions on irrigation, fertilization, and marketing. After modest results in 2024 due to limited AI capabilities, Chamara capitalized on improved tools in 2025 that incorporated real-time data and past insights. By combining AI recommendations with trusted reports, his team achieved top corn yield, demonstrating how farmers can amplify their knowledge and decision-making through effective AI use.

Related Media Items:

- IANR News Release: <https://ianrnews.unl.edu/article/winning-contest-entry-shows-ais-agricultural-potential>
- Ag Farm News: <https://agfarmnews.com/news/modern-farming-benefits-from-ai>

2. Agricultural economics students help shape Fairbury's future

In spring 2025, University of Nebraska–Lincoln students in an agricultural economics course partnered with Fairbury, Nebraska, to support community development. Through research, site visits, and conversations with residents, they identified key challenges like housing shortages, limited childcare, and infrastructure needs.

The students produced an 80-page report with practical recommendations and resources, emphasizing community-driven solutions. Their work provided fresh perspectives, validated local ideas, and encouraged collaboration among stakeholders. A year later, Fairbury has made progress on projects such as housing and infrastructure, showing lasting impact. The experience also helped students build confidence and understand the complexities of rural development.

Related Media Items:

- IANR News Release: <https://ianrnews.unl.edu/article/agricultural-economics-students-help-shape-fairburys-future>
 - Nebraska Ag Connection: <https://nebraskaagconnection.com/news/nebraska-students-support-fairbury-growth>
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University of Nebraska Foundation

Carey and Brian Hamilton recognized in Health Science Education Center II at UNK

The atrium of the new Health Science Education Center II will be named in honor of Carey and Brian Hamilton in recognition of their generous support of the University of Nebraska at Kearney's rural health initiatives.

The Carey and Brian Hamilton Atrium will serve as a tribute to the couple's commitment to strengthening UNK and rural Nebraska communities. The Hamiltons committed \$5 million through the University of Nebraska Foundation through a combination of an outright gift and a future estate gift. The couple, who maintain residences in Omaha and Grand Island, serve as co-chairs of the UNK Campaign Committee for Only in Nebraska: A Campaign for Our University's Future.

Related Media Item: <https://nufoundation.org/health-science-education-center-ii-atrium-named-for-hamiltons/>

Buffett Early Childhood Institute

Buffett Early Childhood Institute Releases New Workforce Well-being Research Brief with Yale

A new research brief from the Buffett Early Childhood Institute recaps the conclusions and recommendations from the 2023 Early Childhood Education Workforce Well-being Research-to-Policy Convening hosted by Yale University School of Medicine and the Buffett Institute.

The brief was authored by Walter Gilliam, the Buffett Institute's executive director, and Ayse Cobanoglu from the Tobin Center for Economic Policy at Yale.

Research shows that early educators face high levels of food insecurity; frequently lack health care, paid leave, and other benefits; and have a high prevalence of depression and chronic diseases.

Convening participants included 24 leading researchers from universities across the nation, including Holly Hatton from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Department of Child, Youth, and Family Studies, and faculty from Rutgers, Yale, Harvard, University of Virginia, and more. Additional stakeholders represented leaders in early childhood education policy and systems supports, and practicing professionals.

They made recommendations for researchers, funders, and policymakers to support and improve workforce well-being, including:

- Investing in workforce recruitment and retention
- Dedicating funds to rapid-cycle research to focus on the most pressing problems identified by early childhood educators
- Explore what's working—and what's not—to inform policy improvements over time

The brief has garnered several thousand views on the Institute's website and LinkedIn.

Related Media Items:

- BECI Brief: <https://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/policy-research/workforce-well-being-brief>
 - LinkedIn Post: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7440411776988639232>
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Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute

DWFI internship paves the way for future water law career

Lexi Bodlak's path from a Nebraska farm led her to the intersection of water law, land governance and global food security, an interest sharpened by a DWFI-led experiential learning opportunity in Ghana as a Yeutter Student Fellow at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. As a DWFI intern, Lexi then completed two major research projects: a comparative study of U.S. water permitting for agricultural irrigation and an in-depth case study on Arkansas's unique, voluntary water management approach. Through her research and interviews, Lexi gained valuable insights into the practical application of state statutes, honing her interest in natural resource policy and water. Lexi recently received the Water for Food – International Arid Lands Consortium (IALC) Student Impact Award and is now focused on pursuing a law degree to work in natural resources and water in Nebraska. Her story demonstrates DWFI's commitment to supporting and developing the next generation of water and food leaders.

Related Media Item: <https://waterforfood.nebraska.edu/news-and-events/news/2026/03/dwfi-internship-paves-the-way-for-future-water-law-career>

National Strategic Research Institute

NSRI provides national security perspective, facilitation at Nebraska Department of Agriculture functional exercise

The National Strategic Research Institute (NSRI) at the University of Nebraska recently provided subject matter expertise while serving as a lead facilitator for the "Fire Break" Modified Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) Emergency Vaccination Response Exercise hosted by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA).

Through a combination of workshops and a functional exercise, NDA staff and mutual aid partners stress-tested Nebraska's vaccination methods and resources against FMD. Meghan Jackson, NSRI director for food, agriculture and environment security, facilitated vaccination request and distribution workshops with state mutual aid partners and evaluated the state's in-field vaccination procedures at cattle operations, guiding participants through high-pressure decision points to generate actionable recommendations.

Related Media Item: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7447682162381815809>