

People, Programs and Points of Excellence (P³E) Report for February 27, 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. University of Nebraska recognizes Auburn students as Presidential Scholars

Two Auburn High School seniors who earned a perfect score of 36 on the ACT were recognized Tuesday as Presidential Scholars by the University of Nebraska, receiving the university's most prestigious undergraduate scholarship.

Related Media Item: <https://nebraska.edu/news-and-events/news/2026/02/university-of-nebraska-recognizes-auburn-students-as-presidential-scholars>

2. President Gold discusses value of outreach on News Channel Nebraska

On a new "Your University Minute" segment on News Channel Nebraska, President Gold joined Brandon Aksamit to talk about outreach and engagement efforts across the university and state, including Nebraska Extension, professional education and more.

Related Media Item: <https://youtu.be/Yfa0RQPuGow>

University of Nebraska at Kearney

1. UNK junior Zach Arner serves the community while earning criminal justice degree

University of Nebraska at Kearney junior Zach Arner is balancing his criminal justice studies with hands-on experience as a part-time community service officer for the Kearney Police Department. Working about 30 hours a week, he handles duties such as parking enforcement, traffic control and accident reports while training alongside full-time officers.

A Kearney native, Arner began the role in late January and expects to work independently by mid-March. He plans to pursue a full-time position with KPD after graduation. His experience reflects a strong partnership between UNK and the department, where many officers are UNK graduates and students gain early exposure to careers in law enforcement.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2026/02/25/unk-junior-zach-arner-serves-the-community-while-earning-criminal-justice-degree/>

2. High Demand, High Impact: UNK program meets growing need for speech therapists

The University of Nebraska at Kearney’s communication disorders and speech-language pathology programs are preparing graduates to meet growing workforce demand. Graduate enrollment has increased from fewer than 40 students five years ago to more than 110, supported by an online speech-language pathology option launched in 2020.

Students complete extensive clinical experiences through the on-campus Speech, Language and Hearing Clinic, telepractice services and community-based internships. With employment of speech-language pathologists projected to grow 15% from 2024 to 2034, UNK graduates are serving schools, hospitals and rural health care facilities across Nebraska and beyond.

Related Media Item: <https://unknews.unk.edu/2026/02/24/high-demand-high-impact-unk-program-meets-growing-need-for-speech-therapists/>

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

1. Record five Husker researchers named NAI Senior Members

Five University of Nebraska–Lincoln innovators — Shubhendu Bhardwaj, Nicole Buan, Forrest Kievit, Rebecca Lai and James Schnable — have been named senior members of the National Academy of Inventors, an honor that recognizes excellence in translating research into tangible impact.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/record-five-husker-researchers-named-nai-senior-members>

2. Nebraska Law exchange broadens students’ global perspective

A faculty exchange between the University of Nebraska College of Law and Palacký University gives students a global perspective on legal systems. Visiting professors like Ondrej Filipec and UNL faculty expose students to alternative approaches, helping future lawyers think creatively, compare systems, and prepare for complex challenges at local, national, and international levels.

Related Media Item: <https://news.unl.edu/article/nebraska-law-exchange-broadens-students-global-perspective>

University of Nebraska Medical Center

1. Med students hold 'Mini-Med School'

Fourth-grade students from Holy Name Elementary School participated in a “Mini Med School,” which combined two classroom lessons taught at Holy Name by UNMC medical students and hands-on activities on the UNMC campus, including practicing stethoscope placement/heartbeat sounds, exploring ultrasound imaging of joints, and viewing tissue samples under microscopes. The event was sponsored by the UNMC College of Medicine, Office of Strategic Initiatives and Division of Medical Pathway Initiatives with the goal of engaging students at a young age and helping them see health and science careers as achievable.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2026/02/23/elementary-students-explore-mini-med-school-at-unmc/>

2. Omaha Mayor declares Feb. 23 'UNMC Community Engagement Day'

Omaha Mayor John W. Ewing Jr. visited the med center to help celebrate UNMC receiving the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement. Mayor Ewing delivered a proclamation that declared Feb. 23, 2026, “UNMC Community Engagement Day.” The Carnegie designation is one of the highest national recognitions for community engagement, and UNMC first earned it in 2015 and is among 1 of 7 comparable institutions that currently hold the classification.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2026/02/25/mayor-ewing-visits-unmc-to-celebrate-community-engagement/>

University of Nebraska at Omaha

1. Guentzel, USA Hockey capture gold in Milan

Former Omaha Maverick Jake Guentzel added an Olympic gold medal to his impressive resume, helping Team USA defeat Canada 2–1 in overtime to capture gold in Italy. Guentzel now returns to the NHL’s Tampa Bay Lightning, where he ranks second on the team in goals and points, and former Omaha staff member David Quinn also served as a Team USA assistant coach.

Related Media Items:

- Omaha Mavericks News Release: <https://omavs.com/news/2026/2/22/guentzel-usa-hockey-capture-gold-in-milan.aspx>
- Omaha World-Herald: https://omaha.com/sports/other/olympics/article_7d846a12-3cab-4946-9c44-7b0862cb3fd6.html

2. Omaha women's basketball players help driver trapped in sinkhole on Pacific Street

Two University of Nebraska Omaha women’s basketball players stepped in to help after a road collapsed into a sinkhole near 67th and Pacific streets. Assistant Athletic Director Jordan Sarnoff praised Olivia Borsutzki and Esra Kurban for acting quickly, with Borsutzki helping driver Jonathan Inman climb out of his vehicle. No injuries were reported, and Inman expressed gratitude for the bystanders who rushed to assist.

Related Media Items:

- KETV: <https://www.ketv.com/article/omaha-womens-basketball-players-rescue-driver-sinkhole/70517485>
 - Fox News: <https://www.foxnews.com/sports/womens-college-basketball-players-recount-rescuing-victims-after-sinkhole-swallows-2-vehicles>
 - The Athletic: <https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7076586/2026/02/27/nebraska-omaha-sinkhole-womens-basketball-rescue/>
 - CBS Sports: <https://www.cbssports.com/womens-college-basketball/news/nebraska-omaha-womens-basketball-players-sinkhole/>
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Agriculture and Natural Resources

1. Heng-Moss named permanent vice chancellor for agriculture and natural resources

Tiffany Heng-Moss has been named Harlan Vice Chancellor for the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR) at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and vice president for agriculture and natural resources for the NU system, pending Board of Regents approval. She has served in the dual role on an interim basis since June 2025.

A Nebraska native and UNL alumna, Heng-Moss brings more than 20 years of experience in teaching, research and extension. A former dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, she has led major academic initiatives, secured significant research funding and advanced Nebraska’s land-grant mission through innovation, partnerships and statewide engagement.

Related Media Items:

- IANR News Release: <https://ianrnews.unl.edu/article/heng-moss-named-permanent-vice-chancellor-for-agriculture-and-natural-resources>
- Lincoln Journal Star: https://journalstar.com/news/state-regional/education/article_070f2b12-62bf-4fc4-8024-3fde5fac36d4.html

2. Student documents new homeowners on campus — flying squirrels

Josh Palik, a fisheries and wildlife senior at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, was photographing plants for a journalism class when he made a rare discovery: two threatened southern flying squirrels on East Campus. Previously believed to live mainly along the Missouri River, the species drew major attention after a 2021 sighting prompted the university’s School of Natural Resources to intensify research and outreach.

The school launched a Flying Squirrel Squad, secured a Nebraska Watchable Wildlife Grant, and installed nesting boxes to support study efforts. Palik’s photos provided the first confirmed evidence of squirrels using the campus boxes, underscoring the university’s key role in researching and monitoring the species.

Related Media Item: <https://ianrnews.unl.edu/article/student-documents-new-homeowners-on-campus-flying-squirrels>

University of Nebraska Foundation

First UNMC Kearney medical class to be awarded scholarships

UNMC will offer scholarships to the first class of medical students to study and train in Kearney, a key initiative aimed at strengthening access to health care in rural Nebraska. The Health Science Education Center II will open to the inaugural class of medical students in fall 2026.

The new scholarships will cover at least half the cost of medical school tuition for all four years. The scholarships have been made possible by generous benefactors and the UNMC College of Medicine. No state money has been used to create the scholarships.

With additional private support, the UNMC College of Medicine would like to extend the scholarships to subsequent classes of UNMC medical students in Kearney. Matching funds are available.

Related Media Item: <https://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2026/02/23/first-unmc-kearney-medical-class-to-be-awarded-scholarships/>

Buffett Early Childhood Institute

Buffett Early Childhood Institute Releases Annual Report Celebrating Achievements and Next Steps

The Buffett Institute's first-ever annual report captures success stories from Fiscal Year 2024-25, including the Institute's growth in policy and research work, and previews upcoming projects that support families, young children, and those who care for them.

Some highlights:

- More than 4,600 PreK through Grade 3 Nebraska students directly impacted through the Institute's School as Hub programming under the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan
- \$75,000 invested to support the early childhood research of three doctoral students from University of Nebraska campuses
- Two Community Chairs at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL) and the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) who collaborate with the Institute
- 36 publications, including 14 peer-reviewed articles and other academic works, and 16 policy and research reports and briefs
- Three national awards honoring research, Tribal, and policy work
- \$25.2 million awarded in new grants and contracts

Related Media Items:

- Annual Report: <https://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/about-us/annual-report>
 - News Release: <https://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/blog/2026/02/buffett-institute-expands-impact-across-research-policy-and-practice-in-2024-25>
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Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute

Nebraska Master Irrigator invites farmers to 'Shop Talk' on irrigation and nitrogen challenges

The 2026 Nebraska Master Irrigator "Shop Talk" series, co-led by DWFI invites farmers, agricultural professionals, and conservation partners to participate in interactive, two-day programs focused on irrigation and nitrogen management challenges in Nebraska. These sessions, held across the state in Grand Island, Beatrice, Norfolk, and North Platte, aim to foster producer-to-producer learning for increasing yields, reducing pumping costs, and improving long-term soil health. Participants will connect with experts, explore emerging technologies, learn about cost-share opportunities, and can earn select NRD Nitrogen Certification credits.

Related Media Item: <https://water.unl.edu/2026-nebraska-master-irrigator-invites-you-shop-talk/>

National Strategic Research Institute

Capabilities Spotlight: Biological Process Development Facility

With scientific breakthroughs, there is often a "eureka" moment when a researcher first realizes a process or technology can solve a problem. It's no different with breakthroughs supporting the safety and well-being of warfighters. These are moments that make headlines — big discoveries that tell us a better world or a smarter, stronger, safer soldier is possible.

"We often forget the hard work doesn't end with 'eureka,'" said Marty Sikes, associate executive director of chemical and biological defense programs at the National Strategic Research Institute (NSRI) at the University of Nebraska. "There is an important space between revolutionary discoveries and fielding innovative and timely solutions. This critical space is one that NSRI and its partners are uniquely positioned to fill."

An essential collaborator in helping NSRI close that gap in biological processes contributing to national security is the Biological Process Development Facility (BPDF) at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL). In addition to a wide range of other biological development work, the facility develops, tests and documents processes that turn raw, one-time laboratory products into practical, large-scale manufacturable defense-related products.

Staffed by experts with decades of academic and commercial experience, and equipped with cutting-edge technology, the BPDF is perfectly situated to provide the missing link that transforms brilliant ideas into real-world solutions.

"Time and again, the BPDF has served a critical role in our national security work with federal government agencies," Sikes said. "With recent investments from NSRI and UNL, it is going to continue to be a partner in executing and innovating for the Department of War (DOW)."

Read the full feature at <https://nsri.nebraska.edu/facilities/biological-process-development-facility>.

Related Media Item: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7422337734410657792>