



THE DISTINCTION

Fall 2024

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Graduating Honors Students

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Early Childhood Inclusive Education, Bachelor of
Science
“Verbal Behavior: An Errorless Teaching
Intervention in Elementary Special Education”
Advisor: Justin Andersson

Micah Dunwoody

Religion, Bachelor of Arts
“Dao Gives Birth to Lots of Killing: Military
Force in the Daoist Tradition”
Advisor: Laura Alexander

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Psychology, Bachelor of Science
“Well-being and Pickleball at the Community
Center”
Advisor: Amy Hanson

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Molecular and Biomedical Biology, Bachelor of
Science
“Opioid Use Knowledge Among Nebraska
College Students”
Advisor: Allison Schlosser

Mackenzie McGuire

Elementary Special Education, Bachelor
of Science
“High Quality Vocabulary Instruction
for Elementary Special Education”
Advisor: Justin Andersson

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Early Childhood Inclusive Education,
Bachelor of Science
“Teaching Addition and Subtraction
Relationship with Instructional and
Assessment Strategies”
Advisor: Justin Andersson

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English, Bachelor of Arts
“Navigating the Anglo-Irish Postcolonial
Landscape: Imaginative Geographies
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Advisor: Lisabeth Buchelt

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Molecular and Biomedical Biology, Bachelor
of Science
“Longitudinal Kinetics of Surface CD16 on
Human Natural Killer Cells when Peripheral
Blood Mononuclear Cell Pools are Treated
with a Toll-like Receptor 9 Agonist”
Advisor: Paul Denton



Benefits of the Honors Program

OLIVIA MCARTHUR

The UNO Honors Program encourages students to do their best while also supporting them in numerous ways. Honors Alumni Allyson Havenridge stated, “I loved the Honors Program, and I appreciate all it has done for me during my time at UNO.”

For one, Honors students receive priority registration. This is a great advantage for students to make sure they can get registered for their preferred classes before seats fill up. Priority registration does not only extend to class enrollment but also housing for University and Maverick Village. The Honors Program also has a residence hall in Maverick Village that is specifically for only Honors students. This can be a great opportunity to meet fellow Honors students and establish a bonded community.

Honors students have the privilege of utilizing the Honors Program space in Kayser Hall, suite 208. This space includes a student lounge and a more private study room that are great for studying and relaxing. Students also have access to a small kitchen that has a microwave and a refrigerator, and there is a computer lab which includes free printing. These facilities are available to Honors Program students with 24-hour access, and they are a good tool for students to take advantage of.

Some lesser-known benefits of the Honors Program have to do with the National Collegiate Honors Council and the Wash-

ington Center. The National Collegiate Honors Council offers students the opportunity to spend a semester away. They offer Domestic and International Honors Semesters within the United States and Canada for Honors credit. The Washington Center offers students internship programs and academic seminars. This independent nonprofit organization is affiliated with around 850 colleges and universities and offers a unique network experience.

If taken advantage of, the Honors Program can offer many opportunities and resources to students. UNO Honors Alumni Jared Dingman stated, “Honors has helped me personally throughout my undergrad. The constant guidance and resources helped me immensely when navigating the tricky decisions that coincide with college and life.”



Honors students started the semester off on the right foot with free bucket hats!

Honoring Student Leaders: Inside UNO's Student Government Association Through HSA Members

HANA MILLER

At the heart of UNO's Student Government Association (SGA) are students driven to make a difference. Honors students Ishani Adidam, SGA President, Nate Ostdiek, SGA Chief of Staff, and Senator Aditi Rai are working to make UNO a better place, one initiative at a time.

For Adidam, SGA became her community when she started at UNO. "I joined at first because I wanted to find my community," she says, reflecting on those first weeks on campus. "I was nervous about making friends, but SGA's mission to represent, serve and empower students really resonated with me. I knew that joining through the first-year program would let me connect with people who shared that same passion." Now, as President, Adidam is focused on keeping SGA strong while pushing for student-centered change. "We're in a unique situation where we're focused on preserving the initiatives we've built," she explains, "but we're also making sure our advocacy reflects true student needs."

This year, Adidam and her team are prioritizing transparency and outreach. They're working to make sure students know where their tuition dollars go and how they can access campus resources. With monthly town halls, student surveys, registered student organization (RSO) council meetings and newsletters, Adidam hopes to build a resilient, connected network on campus. Emphasizing the importance of building relationships with other

student organizations, she says "I believe that we're only as strong as our network,".

Meanwhile, Senator Aditi Rai has brought her own passion for connection to her role. "One of the things I enjoy most about SGA is the chance to directly impact campus," Rai shares. "I'm truly passionate about advocating for meaningful and lasting changes. As a senator, I get to voice concerns before decisions are finalized, and I've developed my leadership skills while making sure students are at the heart of every decision."

This year, Rai worked with other senators to improve the student experience, starting with her "Messages of Love" event during the first week of school. "It was a way for students to send messages of encouragement to each other. We wanted to help reduce the isolation that a lot of students feel at the beginning of the year," she says.

Rai also recently collaborated on a "letter of unity and support" for UNL's student government following the closure of their Office of Diversity and Inclusion. "With DEIA facing new challenges, it's more important than ever that we stand together as NU campuses to advocate for the resources students need."

Thanks to Adidam, Rai and other dedicated members of SGA, UNO students have a passionate team fighting for their voices to be heard, making campus a more welcoming and empowering place for everyone.

Answering the Call: Psychology Student Gains Real-Life Experience as Crisis Counselor

TANATSWA CHIVERO

As mental health awareness continues to grow, senior Layhla Currier is gaining real-life experience in the field through her role as a crisis counselor. Currently pursuing a degree in psychology, Currier is able to use her role working for the Boys Town National Hotline and the Your Life Your Voice text line to learn more about the field.

Currier has worked at the organization for about a year and a half, and also involves herself in various mental health related events on campus and in town through volunteering. She has participated in activities like the Omaha Out of Darkness Community Walk, an event that works to raise awareness and reduce stigma about mental health and suicide prevention.

Interested in the mental health field, Currier began looking for job opportunities in the area. She submitted an application to be a crisis counselor at Boys Town, not expecting to be accepted for the position. Much to her surprise, they reached out with an invitation to join the organization, recognizing her enthusiasm for helping others.

Currier always knew she wanted to go into mental health, but not exactly crisis management. Regardless, she says she enjoys the work. On a regular shift, she takes phone calls for the phone hotline, and has been trained to answer texts for the Your Life Your Voice text line. The rigidity of her schedule is helpful, as she works the same days of the week at the same time. With such a clear-cut schedule, she's better able to balance her job, school-

work, and other extracurriculars. Nevertheless, Currier says that the job is definitely difficult at times, partially due to the nature of the position. In the beginning, she was worried about being able to mentally 'handle' the position, but is grateful for the community at Boys Town that she can talk to in order to work through these hurdles.

Currier enjoys being able to interact with callers and coworkers, and values having a space where she can continue to learn new skills that can't be acquired in the classroom. She has learned how to tackle new issues and has gained a more nuanced perspective of mental health prioritization across the state. At times, Currier answers rural callers, and has to figure out how to navigate their situations since they likely don't have the appropriate resources conveniently nearby.

Having experience in crisis management has encouraged Currier to step out of her comfort zone, and she encourages those interested in being involved with crisis management to do the same. Currier believes that such a job does take mental preparation and getting used to, but values taking care of oneself and being open to help the process flow more smoothly.

Boys Town is actively recruiting and looking for those interested in crisis management. Currier believes the opportunity is an enriching experience, and that crisis management positions are a great opportunity for those looking to make a difference.

A Semester Abroad

MICAH DUNWOODY

My journeys started in Fall 2023 on the island of O’ahu. I wanted to spend a semester at the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa (UHM), so I could meet graduate faculty whose interests align with my own. I was amazed at the university’s respect for Asia. Its departments and centers are dedicated to it. The next stage in my journey was in Hualien, Taiwan.

Although my time was extremely lonely, my two trips to Taipei made it all worth it. I would love to live in Taipei someday, to improve my Chinese and more. I was able to spend five days in Bangkok before returning to America.

My time abroad changed my views and presented me with opportunities I never had prior. To take vacations for their own sake. To sightsee temples and offer incense to the gods. To meet new friends and reunite with old ones. To see sides of them I had never been exposed to prior. To realize just how human we all are. People often comment that I have been exposed to different cultures and ways of thinking. At this point, I do not think of that. I think people are more alike than they may think, regardless of the cultures and environments we were raised in. At this point, I am back in America. I am currently preparing an application to return to UHM in Fall 2025 to earn a Master’s degree in Religious Traditions of Asia and the Pacific.

Photos courtesy of Micah Dunwoody



Dunwoody during his time in Southeast Asia. From “A Semester Abroad”.



Climbing the Rankings

KATIE RUGE

Last spring, the UNO Women's golf team ended their year at a ranking of #217. In just one fall season, the girls have improved by 74 positions under head coach Victoria Grasso, climbing to #143 among D1 Women's Golf schools. Coach Grasso secured her first win as a head coach during the opening tournament of the year, with the team winning the Payne Stewart Memorial and Katie Ruge the individual title.

Two tournaments later, at the Big O Classic hosted at Oak Hills Country Club in Omaha, the Mavericks clinched their second crown of the season, dominating with a 31-stroke victory. Four Mavericks placed in the top 10: Ruge, Emily Karmazin, Sydney Taake and Macarena Garcia Terrón.

The fall season wrapped up with yet another highlight, as Ruge earned her second individual title at the Loyola Parkinson Family Invitational. Her performance secured her second Summit League Peak Performer/Golfer of the Week award, capping off an impressive fall campaign. The team competed in four tournaments, consistently showing improvement and building momentum.

The Mavericks' rapid rise and strong fall performances set a promising tone as they look ahead to an exciting spring schedule. Upcoming tournaments will take the team to Florida, Las Vegas, Missouri and their home event at Indian Creek in Omaha, all culminating in the conference championship in Arizona. With their sights set on continued success, the Mavericks are poised to make a strong impact this spring.



Photos courtesy of Katie Ruge

Introduction to Sustainability: Pocket Prairies

OLIVIA MCARTHUR

This semester, Professor Farrah Grant taught Honors Introduction to Sustainability (SUST 1000). Students got the opportunity to participate in a Service Learning project in relation to the new pocket prairie initiative on campus. Currently, there is one pocket prairie on campus: near University Village, between University Drive South and Lot J. However, students in Honors Introduction to Sustainability have made their case on where they believe a second pocket prairie should go.

Pocket prairies are small, artificially created areas of land that are full of self-sustaining native plants. These areas of land offer plenty of benefits to the local environment. For example, they provide a habitat for pollinators and other regional animals, and nature areas have been proven to reduce stress levels in people. This makes a happier experience for all types of life. While initially the pocket prairies require watering maintenance for roughly two weeks, afterwards, the area becomes self-sufficient. This is not only positive for the ecosystem, but it saves time and costs

of maintaining other landscapes, such as grass lawns, which require fertilization, watering and mowing nearly year-round.

The current pocket prairie originally began seeding in Fall of 2023 and Spring of 2024. Then, the addition of plant plugs began in June of this year with the help of student volunteers, and the process continued thanks to Professor Grant's two sections of SUST 1000 this semester. The ability of the pocket prairie growth is thanks to Sustainability Faculty Award money Professor Grant received last fall. Students also held group presentations to fellow students, faculty, and members of the community to discuss where they believe the addition of a second pocket prairie should be carried out.

Overall, students got to learn about pocket prairies inside and outside the classroom in Honors SUST 100. One student, first-year Maria Butler, stated, "My experience with this class has really helped me think about nature in a different way, and I really have enjoyed the experience planting pocket prairies has given me."



Photos courtesy of Farrah Grant

NCPTW Conference Summary

ANNA MILLER

I attended the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW) in Tacoma, Washington, October 17 through 21. This was the culmination of a project that began with creating a proposal for a panel with three of my coworkers in the UNO Writing Center, focused on support in the workplace. Once accepted, we each developed our individual topics with mine being emotionally intelligent leadership and mutual support among coworkers. This was the first time I had developed a project like this, and I really appreciated the opportunity to stretch my writing, collaborating, and presenting skills through our panel.

My panel's presentation was on the third day of the conference, and despite a couple minor technical difficulties, it went smoothly. Each of us had done our research and worked together to solidify our best work on the topics we were passionate about. Our audience was small and mainly [consisted of] administrators and directors who were curious to hear from a fully undergraduate panel, discussing our perspectives on our workplaces and what we could do to improve them. Afterward, there was a question-and-answer session that led to some insightful conversations, including how to adapt what we had shared to a virtual writing center context.

Beyond my group's presentation, I

attended several other people's panels, roundtables, workshops, etc. Some resonated more with me than others, but regardless of whether they did or not, observing other people's work and presentations was informative in demonstrating the different ways the various topics could be explored and what methods of presenting were most engaging and educational. There were a couple presentations that stood out to me mainly because of their psychological basis since that is my field of study. These included research and practices that I could easily see informing how I do my work in the Writing Center at UNO.

One panelist, named Lesly Cervantes from the University of North Texas, overlapped writing center work with gestalt counseling theory, emphasizing the emotional work that goes into writing and supporting students through that process. They explained some steps to help guide those of us working with writing center clients, particularly defining the importance of genuine connection, working through the steps of an experience according to gestalt theory, the acknowledgement of emotions, and what happens when this process stalls or is interrupted. Generally, these were things I had felt and intuitively experienced, but it was helpful to have the names and details identified to more easily put into intentional practice.

Another pair of panelists, Josh Schultz and Jackie Quiroga from Texas A&M University, ran a study exploring the anxieties that led to students avoiding using resources like writing centers. They found that social anxiety and writing anxiety each had effects on avoidance and lower writing center engagement, but they also, more surprisingly, found that a fear of positive evaluation could also be contributing to students' avoidance. They then discussed strategies to address this fear and discomfort during in-person appointments and in asynchronous contexts. The positive evaluation connection to anxiety surprised me, but once they explained what this might look like in a writing center context, I un-

derstood the importance of giving concrete feedback compared to surface-level praise.

Overall, through this experience I gained confidence in navigating the process of proposing, researching, drafting, and presenting. I had the opportunity to put my skills, such as networking, managing travel, and dressing and conducting myself as a professional, into practice on a different level than I have often had the chance to do. I see this conference as one of the stepping stones to becoming the academic professional I aspire to be, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to attend and present with my coworkers at NCPTW.



Above: Anna Miller, Natalie Pearson, Marcus Pennell and Kat Manning smile in front of their panel's presentation.

Photos courtesy of Anna Miller

Campaigning for Osborn

WILL RAMSEY

Dan Osborn ran for U.S. Senate as an Independent against incumbent Senator Deb Fischer. After serving our country in the Navy aboard the USS Constellation CV-64 and in the Nebraska Army National Guard, Dan got a job at Kellogg's as an industrial mechanic. As president of his union, BCTGM 50G, he led a successful strike at Kellogg's in 2021, defeating efforts to slash benefits and guaranteeing the factory remain open through 2026.

My introduction to the Dan Osborn for U.S. Senate campaign began on the day Dan announced his candidacy – September 23rd, 2023. I was invited by a family member of Dan's to attend a private, intimate kickoff party at Dan's home. From that day forward, I knew this movement was going to be special.

We raised over \$3 million with an average donation of \$35. Near the end of October 2024, an external poll showed us just one point behind Senator Fischer – both monumental achievements for an Independent candidate with no political party backing and infrastructure.



Most of my work on the campaign has been behind the scenes creating event flyers, social media graphics and managing the campaign's back-end data systems. More interestingly however, I've gotten the chance to spend a lot of time with Dan out in the field both in and out of Omaha. In Omaha, I've worked numerous meet and greets, town halls and other events. Outside of Omaha, I've, among other things, spent a week-end in Wayne at the Dixon County Fair, spent my 4th of July photographing parades in Ralston and Scribner, enjoyed some great wings at a local bar in Beatrice after an event, took a day trip to Tekamah to talk to local small business owners and spent a day in Humboldt talking to community members.

I've learned a lot about our state, about politics and about myself during my time on this campaign. Most importantly, I've learned that there is far more that unites us – everyday, working-class Nebraskans – than divides us.



Research Work as an Undergraduate Research Assistant

DELANEY HAM



As a social work student interested in connecting with those around me, working on a research project has not been at the top of my bucket list. I chose to pursue a degree in social work with the intention of helping others in a very direct way, such as by working as a therapist or interacting face-to-face with those in need of resources. With this said, I have been fully invested in learning about case management, different cultures and active listening in my classes thus far—all topics that I believe will make me a better therapist in the future. I would admittedly become less interested when learning about macro work, such as in research or policy analysis. To me, work in the research field seemed very distant and unrealistic; I had no personal experience with it, leading my idea of research to consist of a person sitting in a lab alone. When I was approached with an offer to work as an undergraduate research assistant for the National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology and Education Center (NCITE), I was not sure what to expect. However, the goal of NCITE's project seemed interesting, and I decided that it would be a great opportunity to learn about what research actually is. I learned so much about the field of research from this experience, and I have a newfound appreciation for those who dedicate their lives to making developments in the various fields in which the broader population works.

As a research assistant, I was responsible for coding responses from research participants for accuracy and legitimacy so that the data could be better utilized by those at the head of the project. Even as a student research assistant, I could clearly see the importance of the work I was doing and how it contributed to the research being conducted. Working closely with an expansive spreadsheet of data taught me about attention to detail in a new way, as well as being extremely thorough in my work efforts. In this research position, I also had the opportunity to collaborate with a team-

mate. Each week, we would meet to cross-examine our work and ensure that we were coding the research accurately. These meetings required strong, honest communication and would become tedious at times, but they were necessary to guarantee that the data being used by the research team would be as precise as possible.

One of my most valued experiences in this position was attending a conference on counterterrorism, in which I learned from experts in the field about developments in our country's counterterrorism efforts and the importance of research in these endeavors. At this conference, several speakers explained that without research, advancements in how to best protect our country from danger would be impossible. Through learning about citizens' experience with crime, the psychology of terrorism and the impact of artificial intelligence in extremism, those in leadership positions in counterterrorism are able to make informed choices and decisions for the country. Aside from the emphasis on research itself, I found learning in-depth about what counterterrorism is and how it impacts the United States to be fascinating. Counterterrorism is not widely talked about outside of the news, so there was a lot to be learned! I also discovered that there is a serious lack of mental health resources for those previously involved in extremism, which I had not previously heard about in my social work and mental health classes.

Looking back at the hours I spent working for NCITE this summer, I am extremely grateful that I was given the opportunity to try something new and out of my comfort zone. Although I am not currently pursuing research work as my long-term career goal, I believe that I have gained significant skills and knowledge that will be relevant to any field that I will find myself working in. I am very happy with my decision to take a risk and say "yes" to learning about something that I likely would not have sought out myself, and I would encourage every student to do the same.

Building Bridges: Hands-On Lessons from The Baby Bob

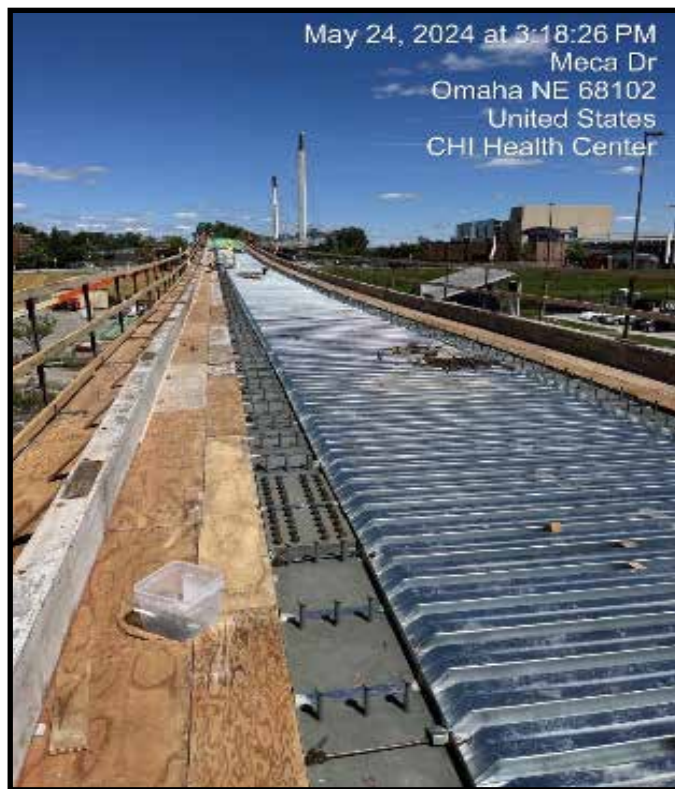
Madison Vater

Over the past three summers, I have had the honor of interning for a company called Benesch. It's a civil engineering firm that works on projects that help connect all modes of transportation across the United States. From foot traffic to trains, cars, and buses, even to some up-and-coming modes of transportation in downtown Omaha, Benesch has had a hand in creating connections throughout Nebraska and beyond. In my time with them, I have had the opportunity to help design culverts and rights-of-way and inspect ADA (accessibility) projects and road repairs, which were all amazing, hands-on learning experiences. However, nothing quite compares to the project I was able to work on this summer—The Baby Bob.

My role at the pedestrian bridge is to be an inspector—this means that I must document the work done in a day with time stamps and adequate details. I also help the contractors uphold standards and guidelines from the city and aid in communication with different professionals to ensure that the bridge comes out according to plan. With this position comes occasional troubleshooting as problems arise to find solutions that every party is content with. Additionally, I help find solutions to complex issues regarding the design and construction of the pedestrian bridge.

Currently, I am pursuing a bachelor's, and, more long-term, a master's degree in architectural engineering. One may ask why I chose to work at a civil firm instead of an architectural one, and while buildings and roads are very different, they have one bridging aspect—struc-

tural engineering. Although my job may not perfectly align with all the lessons I have been learning in school, it does help me visualize all the structural classes I have taken so far. The bridge, in particular, has sparked excitement for my future career. As for the artistic answer to why I chose a civil internship instead of an architectural engineering one, I see the beauty in buildings but love the discreet complexity of bridges. On the less expressive side of things, I highly value the in-the-field experience that Benesch has offered me.



Vater's first day on the field

All of the ADAs and design work I had done up to this summer were based solely on the original section of the office that I applied for, Construction Management. After speaking with my supervisors about my future at Benesch, I expressed my interest in structural engineering. Since then, they have assisted me with more experiences catered towards my future goals. Last fall, I was able to shadow one of the field engineers at the 42nd street bridge as it was under construction, and this summer, I got to spend most of my time shadowing another field engineer at the new addition to the Bob Kerrey Bridge!

The Baby Bob has been under construction since last winter while I was still in school, so I haven't been able to watch the bridge come up from the ground, but the journey I have been on with the addition has been eye-opening. The first picture is the bridge the first day I came out to the field, and the pictures to follow are a picture timeline to how the bridge came to look more and more like its predecessor while I worked on it.

Since working on site, I have watched a slab of empty metal girders and decking turn into a beautiful, walkable bridge with drains, electrical conduit, thousands of pounds of metal and concrete, and an amazing overlook area. I have watched the contractors and subcontractors add

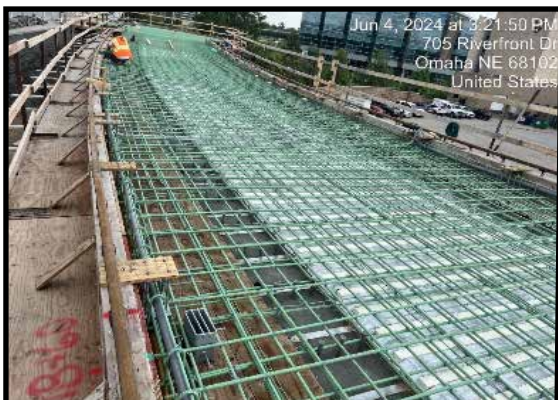
thousands of bars of rebar across the metal deck and tie each one, stack hundreds of blocks on top of one another to form a ramp, string plastic conduit along thousands of feet, tediously chip away at excess concrete around the curbs, put up and take down a quarter mile of safety railing, and so much more. It is difficult to truly grasp how much hard work and effort goes into ensuring that it is safe, aesthetic, and usable for such a large flow of foot traffic, but one can certainly appreciate and marvel at the result.

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It is difficult to truly grasp how much hard work and effort goes into ensuring that [the bridge] is safe, aesthetic, and usable

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Not everything with this bridge has been sunshine and rainbows. I had to take some online classes over the summer to get certified to walk over the bridge during construction since it is over a railroad. Equipment was stolen from the site, and some of our measurements had to measure out to the $\frac{1}{164}$ th of an inch. Regardless, the journey to getting to a structure that resembles a complete bridge has been indescribable. continued on the next page



My favorite part about the construction of the Baby Bob was pouring the deck. It was a two-day process that consisted of being on-site before 5 a.m., but the experience was worth the lack of sleep. The contractors in charge of the concrete pour used two gigantic pumps to pump concrete up to the bridge deck as well as something called a screed, which was a large metal machine that rolled along railings that ran parallel along either side of the bridge deck and was used to help smooth out the concrete. It was such a turning point for Baby Bob because the concrete gave the bridge its form and allowed me to picture all the people who will utilize this great space after it opens. Another experience that made these two days so notable was that I was able to help with concrete testing to ensure that the concrete met code requirements (this was a bit tricky and had to be done multiple times, because in some instances, the pump forced so much air through the concrete that sometimes it would fail its air test). Cooler yet, I was in the background of a few news stories as news stations came out to document the momentous occasion!

Although it was part of my job to be out there, it truly felt like a privilege to watch such a monumental addition to Omaha come to life. Simply being able to throw on my PPE and walk across a bridge that so few can right now but so many are excited about was almost surreal. Knowing that within a few months, the bridge will be open and frequently used by people from all over is exciting and very gratifying. Though I was not there from the beginning, I have seen the bridge become something extraordinary that will be, in my opinion, one of Omaha's greatest assets. While I am beyond grateful for all the experiences, I have gained from working with Benesch throughout the years, the Baby Bob was by far the most eye-opening opportunity I have had thus far.

From the early mornings to the late nights, all the achievements and challenges of the bridge have helped to rejuvenate me as I pursue the last few years of my academic journey to my master's degree!



2024 Outstanding Honors Faculty Award



Above: Dr. Lucy Morrison, Dr. William Cooney, and Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Dr. Ni (Phil) He

Honors faculty member, William Cooney, received the 2024 Outstanding Honors Faculty Award, which recognizes an Honors faculty member whose teaching has both challenged and inspired students. Honors students nominate and select the recipient of this award. Faculty are recognized at a ceremony each fall.

Senior Reflects on Growing Rugby Community

TANATSWA CHIVERO

Balancing a rigorous academic life with the demands of rugby might seem intense, but for senior Allen McCumbers, it's all part of the thrill. He started playing as a Mav his first year, and has since been able to take part in a steadily growing sport.

McCumbers didn't initially look into rugby as his sport of choice, but became part of the team through recruitment.

"My first semester here, I was going to get books at Milo Bail, and they had a recruitment fair outside the building," McCumbers said. "I got dragged to the table and said, 'ok, sign me up.'"

As a molecular biology student, McCumbers has a lot on his plate.

"It's a lot of work, but I like to stay busy," McCumbers said. "After a while, rugby just becomes more of a hobby. It's fun to play, and it keeps me in shape."

Competition and physicality is critical to the game, but the team also has a focus on building community.

"We're more on the social side of the game now," McCumbers said. "We used to be really competitive though; [in 2021] we had a bid to go to nationals and play in the national tournament."

Though rugby isn't as popular as football or soccer in the metro area, the team has worked hard to spark interest at the high school level as a way to recruit college level players.

"We have some guys that have been in rugby for a while, and we've had some of our alumni trying to restart the high-

school league in Omaha," McCumbers said. "Some of the guys that are playing on the team this year were actually kids that were playing last year in high school."

Wider initiatives have also been put in place to create traction for a growing rugby community in the metro area.

"Nebraska now has Big Red Rugby, which is youth rugby for kids within their grades," McCumbers said. "It's difficult to teach guys who have only ever played football or soccer [at the college level]. We do use aspects of those sports, but it's something completely on its own. Big Red Rugby will give kids some knowledge at the youth level."

The men's team is the only official rugby club on campus, but McCumbers highly encourages women wanting to play to join the Omaha Goats Women's Rugby Club.

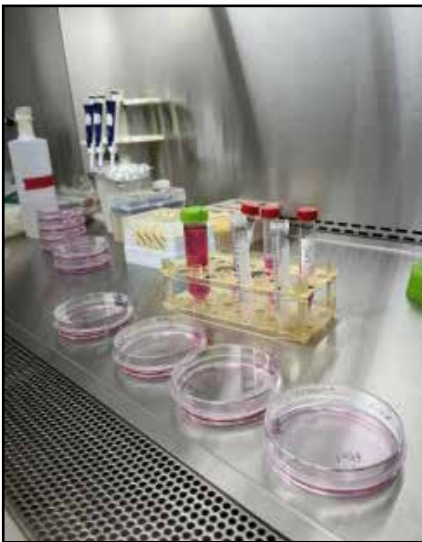
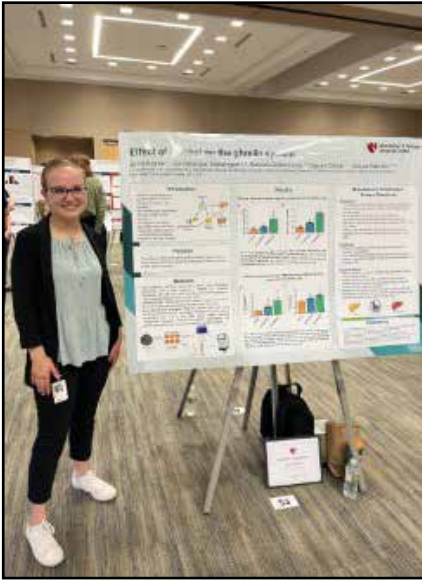
"It's a lot of fun, and we're always open to new members," McCumbers said. "If anybody wants to join, they're very welcome."



Pictured above is the team during their 2024 fall metro area tournament. (Photo/@unomaharugby on [Instagram](#))

UNMC's SUARP Experience

JENNA KRAMER



This past summer I participated in UNMC's Summer Undergraduate Alcohol Research Program (SUARP). Through SUARP, I was placed in Dr. Karuna Rasineni's hepatology lab where I trained under her researchers who primarily study alcohol-associated fatty liver disease. I learned cell passing techniques and ran an experiment with stomach and pancreatic cells. My project's goal was to determine if ethanol induces greater ghrelin, the hunger peptide hormone, secretion. Ghrelin levels are especially important to monitor in alcohol use disorder because increased ghrelin levels increase alcohol craving and intake. By passaging cells, treating them with ethanol and running a variety of tests, our initial findings show that ethanol does increase ghrelin secretion. This demonstrates the cyclical nature of addiction and, specifically, how alcohol-associated fatty liver disease develops.

Along with my work in the lab, SUARP also included weekly journal clubs, seminars on alcohol use and scientific skills lectures. These meetings fostered my interest in research and improved my comprehension of scientific literature. Additionally, the UNMC Student Life Diversity and Inclusion Office provided opportunities throughout the summer for all undergraduate participants in a Summer Undergraduate Research Program to socialize and meet other scholars. My summer of research at UNMC culminated in a research poster symposium in which I got to share my work with faculty, family and peers. My experience as a SUARP scholar grew my passion for research and confirmed I'm on the right career path. I am grateful I had the opportunity to connect with people in the research field and learn new skills.



Photos courtesy of Jenna Kramer

Working at OPL: Love of Libraries, OPL, Miniature Pigs

SUMMER DINGMAN

Within the Douglas County city ordinance, you are allowed to own two miniature pigs. While this isn't the most known fun fact about the Omaha area, this unusual rule has become one of senior Gabbi Anzalone's favorites to share. As a Library Specialist at the Omaha Public Libraries, she has been able to foster her love of helping others and her love of public libraries while learning about her community and its members.

Before becoming a student at UNO, Anzalone lived in the small town of Arlington, NE, where her local library became a personal refuge. At the mature age of eight, she convinced her librarian to show her how to use the card catalog; at age 11 or 12, she helped with her library's digitization process. At age 15 or 16, she began to officially volunteer.

"I didn't figure out I wanted to do library science stuff until I was a senior [in high school], and at that point, I had already done an internship for my local library... But I always have had a lot of library involvement, my mom had been on the library board for my whole life, but there wasn't one thing [that made me de-

cide this path,] it was just kind of like 'Oh wow, why is this something that I've been overlooking?'"

Anzalone began her official position with OPL on June 10th, 2024, and has flourished within the role since. A part of her duties entails assisting patrons with finding proper (online and in-person) resources and assisting with programs and children story times. With many of her roles being based on patron-interactions, this has allowed her to become better acquainted with visitors.

"There's an old man who comes in every morning and takes a copy of the crossword in the newspaper and then fills it out. And when I first started, I couldn't get him to acknowledge me, and now every time, he goes out of his way to say good morning to me."

The unique facts and heart-warming interactions are only a small portion of gratifications present in her experiences working here. Anzalone's passion for libraries is palpable through her extensive love for the physical space, the patrons, and her unique experiences (regardless of the miniature pigs' involvement).

Simulation Making in Computers and Complexity

CALEB THIEMAN

Traffic is one of the most important and often overlooked parts of daily life that we all have to deal with. I have always been interested in the way traffic works, from the engineering of road design to the psychology of driving. This incredibly complex system has developed from the relatively simple action of individuals trying to reach their destination as efficiently as possible. The Honors Computers and Complexity class I took in the Spring of 2024 dove deep into what makes complex systems and how their applications can improve our lives today.

Throughout the course, we used many simulations in order to model complex systems, such as population fluctuations in animals, genetic algorithms to adapt to a task, and other famous simulations, such as Conway's Game of Life. Our final project at the end of the course was to create our own simulation to model a complex system and show our findings from it. From my interest in traffic theory, I chose to create a model-based simulation of traffic on a single-lane road. The high level idea was to have several cars all driving down a road; each car has a desired speed they wish to go and a desired distance they would like to keep from the car in front of them. From these simple rules I was able to see more complex actions come from the car models and give insight into how real-world traffic operates.

Along with desired speed and distance, I pro-

grammed the simulation to give each vehicle a current speed and distance. If the speed of the car does not match its desired speed, it will speed up or down correspondingly. Along with this, it would also slow down for cars if they became too close together, creating a pushing and pulling force for the vehicles. When a car ends up much too close to the car in front of it, it would have to brake much harder to stop in time, causing the car behind to have to do the same. In the simulation, this caused collisions just like we would see in real life.



The traffic simulation helped me to see the patterns that exist in real everyday life from a higher perspective



The traffic simulation helped me to see the patterns that exist in real everyday traffic from a higher perspective and the project itself was a lot of fun. Computers and Complexity was really good at taking these abstract complex ideas and making them applicable to real situations. Hopefully, I can keep making cool projects like this in future classes and keep learning about some of the more overlooked topics in day-to-day life.

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