



Department of Biology Online Master of Science Program

MASTERS DISTANCE MONITOR

August 2026

Issue 55

WELCOME

New Online Masters Students for Fall 2026:

Reagan Ambrose, CA; Jesus Avalos, TX; Brandon Bates, CA; Timothy Bridges, TX; Michael Broussard, NE; Amberly Brtek, NE; Keisha Campbell, FL; Brad Cotton, IL; Joel Di Bernardo, NE; Marissa Dobson, PA; Vance Dorsey, NE; Katlynn Downey, NE; Jordan Fuglestad, NE; Ana Gonzales Albornoz, NE; Kati Houston, FL; Maryam Iqbal, NY; Niya LaRoda, NE; Trinity Lawrence, KS; Erik Martin, HI; Linda Salter, MD; John Shea, VA; Caitlyn Slowinski, MA; Jeremy Szerlip, NY; Ali Tassaddaq, NY; Melany Vargas Mejia, NE; Teaghan Vogelsong, PA; Madeleine Wocicki, NE; Mary Zavala, AZ

NEWSFEED:

Dr. Joe Dolence, Associate Professor, was featured in the UNK News in June. Below is an excerpt from the article entitled, "UNK professor Joe Dolence receives \$500,000 grant for peanut allergy research" (see [full article](#))

UNK professor Joe Dolence receives \$500,000 grant for peanut allergy research

June 8, 2026

Tyler Ellyson



UNK associate biology professor Joe Dolence received a four-year, \$500,000 National Institutes of Health grant to support peanut allergy research. The award is the first NIH Support for Research Excellence grant received by a UNK faculty member. (UNK Communications)

By TODD GOTTULA
UNK Communications

KEARNEY – University of Nebraska at Kearney associate biology professor Joe Dolence has received a National Institutes of Health grant, becoming the first UNK faculty member to earn a Support for Research Excellence (SuRE) award.

The four-year grant provides approximately \$500,000 to support research examining why males and females respond differently to peanut allergens and how those differences may influence the development of peanut allergies.

Dolence received the grant from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, part of the National Institutes of Health, for his project, “Androgens Protect Against Development of Immune Responses to Peanut.”

The SuRE program supports high-quality biomedical research at institutions that play an important role in training undergraduate students. The award supports scientific discovery and hands-on student research opportunities.

Funding will support student researchers, laboratory supplies and experiments examining how sex hormones influence the development of peanut allergy.

Peanut allergy is among the most common and severe food allergies. Researchers have observed that females are more likely than males to develop peanut allergies, but the reasons remain unclear.

Dolence's research will examine how male sex hormones, known as androgens, influence immune responses to peanut allergens. By identifying biological factors that may protect against peanut allergy, the project could help inform future prevention and treatment strategies.

"The award is exciting not only because of the scientific questions it will help answer, but also because of the opportunities it creates for students," Dolence said.

CONGRATULATIONS

July 2026 Graduates:

Lauren Allex (THESIS), Carter Black, Nicole Dale, Kimberly Evans, Erin Foxx, Chelsea Gelling, Jacob Gomez, Laurie Kermmoade, Lucretia Krause, Erin Miranda, Destiny Moore, Ashley Moss, Sarah Neuville, Laura Prochaska, Kaitlyn Roe, Derek Thompson, Valerie Vogel-Scheidt

Four graduates were able to attend the commencement ceremony on July 31st at 10:00 am in the Health and Sports Center. Below are some pictures from graduation.



Pictured below: Lucretia Krause, Erin Miranda and Laura Prochaska lining up prior to ceremony



Pictured above (left to right): Erin Miranda, Jacob Gomez, Lucretia Krause, Laura Prochaska

Grants, Meetings, Publications

Grants

- Dolence, J.** June 2026-May 2030. Title: Androgens protect against development of immune responses to peanut. Agency: NIH-National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. Amount: \$509,604.
- Nuxoll, A.** August 2026-July 2030. Title: Host Immune and Metabolic Determinants of *Staphylococcus aureus* Persister Survival. Agency: NIH-National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. Amount: \$548,020.
- Sui, Y.** July 2026-May 2030. Title: The Potential Effects of a Universal Plasticizer Alkylsulfonic Phenyl Ester on Dyslipidemia and Atherosclerosis. Agency: NIH-Support for Research Excellence (SuRE) Program (R16). Amount: \$530,940.

Meetings

- Green, P.** and G. Pec. July 2026. Phosphorus availability, not sulfate concentration, predicts Northern wild rice occurrence in Iron Range Lakes. Ecological Society of America Annual Meeting. Salt Lake City, Utah. Poster Presentation.
- Greene, K., Nordby, R., Campbell, L., Harens, K., Guoliang, Y. and **Lu, H.** June 2026. CRISPR-mediated Upregulation of Salicinoid Production in *Populus*. In Vitro Biology Meeting. Reno, Nevada. Poster Presentation and Lightning Talk.

Publications

- Bai, R.-Z., Yu, J.-X., Zhao, F., Asafaw, F., **Drew, B.T.**, Chen, Y.-P., Seregin, A.P., Cai, J., Menemen, Y., Celep, F., He, Z.-S., Ertaş, Ş., Xu, G. and Xiang, C.-L. 2026. Phylogenetic insights into *Hypericum* (Hypericaceae) from China based on genome-skimming data. *Taxon*. 75(3): e70166. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tax.70166>
- Cordeiro, N.J., **Cooper, J.C.**, Mkongewa, V.J., Joho, M., John, J.R.M., and Ndang'ang'a, P.K. 2026. Ecological niche models result in an extreme overestimation of area of occurrence in an Endangered East African songbird. *Bird Conservation International*. 36:e26. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0959270926100574>
- Halcyon, J.A.**, **Jonas, J.L.**, Plumb, G.E. and Ranglack, D.H. 2026. Fencing disrupts spatiotemporal scaling of North American bison ecology: implications for conservation as wildlife. *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution*. 14:1800225. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fevo.2026.1800225>
- Hernandez, C., **Hobbs, A. M.**, **Dolence, J. J.**, Xiao, P., and **Carlson, K. A.** .2026. An Exploratory Analysis of Transcriptional Responses to Peanut Exposure in *Drosophila melanogaster*. *International Journal of Molecular Sciences*. 27(10): 4545. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijms27104545>
- Ji, Y., Wu, L., Li, D., Feng, S., Fang, Q., Xiong, Y., Chang, Y., **Cooper, J.C.**, et al. 2026. Flight style and metabolism shape the tempo of genome evolution in birds. *PLoS Biology*. 24(7): e3003884. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.3003884>
- Jiang, L.-Q., **Drew, B.T.**, Arthan, W., Yu, J.-J., Li, C.-C., and Xiang, C.-L. 2026. Micro-morphological features of

Arundinelleae (Poaceae, Panicoideae) and their taxonomic significance. *Flora*. 342, art. no. 153026.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.flora.2026.153026>

Peterson, B.C. August/September 2026. Antler Analytics: The Science and Symmetry of Deer Antlers. *Nebraskaland Magazine*. 104 (7): 52-55.

White, J.A., Woods, T.A., Stastny, L.A., and **Geluso, K.** 2026. First Documented Occurrence of a Gray Bat (*Myotis grisescens*) in Nebraska. *Western North American Naturalist*. 86(1): 135-139.

<https://doi.org/10.3398/064.086.0113>

Zebro, L.R., M.P. Ranta, J.L. Jonas, J.A. DeBoer, M.R. Wuellner, and K.D. Koupal. 2026. Do Abiotic or Biotic Factors Influence Walleye Recruitment From Stocking in a Large Great Plains Reservoir? *Aquaculture, Fish and Fisheries*. 6(3): e70267. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aff2.70267>

Zhao, F., Celep, F., Özcan, T., Wilson, T.C., Li, S.-H., Chen, Y.-P., Arabaci, T., Turginov, O.T., **Drew, B.T.,** Dirmenci, T. and Xiang, C.-L. 2026. A first global phylogeny of *Ajuga* (Lamiaceae, Ajugoideae): Implications for taxonomy and evolutionary insights. *Taxon*. 75(3): e70164.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/tax.70164>

Ziegler, A., Walcott-George, K., **Sullivan, A.,** Gailor, M., Kayler, L., and Tumiel Berhalter, L. 2026. Educating, Contextualizing, and Deferring: Qualitative Investigation of Physician Communication About Chronic Kidney Disease. *Healthcare*. 14(10): 1403. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare14101403>

Continue to send us updates on any meetings, publications, grants, or awards that you have been involved with. Please email details to msbiology@unk.edu.

Director's Desk from Dr. Austin Nuxoll

Greetings!

Welcome to the start of another academic year! I hope you had an enjoyable summer and were able to find some time to recharge before the fall semester. As classes get underway, I wanted to welcome both our new and returning MS Biology students and share a few updates and reminders for the semester ahead.

One important change this fall is the transition to a new Canvas site for the University of Nebraska system. Courses from across the NU system will now be housed in one location. To access your fall courses, please make sure you are logging into canvas.nebraska.edu rather than the previous UNK Canvas site.

I am also pleased to welcome two new faculty members to the Department of Biology, Dr. Bailey Didriksen and Dr. Caitlin Golden. Dr. Didriksen earned her BS in Chemistry from Salisbury University and her PhD in Immunology from the University of Cincinnati. This fall, she is teaching Cell and Molecular Biology lecture and laboratory courses as well as Immunology laboratories. Dr. Golden earned her BS in Exercise Science from UNK and her PhD in Health Promotion and Disease Prevention from UNMC. She will primarily teach within our undergraduate Public Health program and is teaching Introduction to Public Health, Current Issues in Public

Health, and Global Health this fall. Although both will primarily be teaching undergraduate courses this semester, we hope to see graduate course offerings from them in the future. Please join me in welcoming Dr. Didriksen and Dr. Golden to UNK!

As a reminder, Friday, August 28 is the final day to register for fall courses through MyBlue, and there are still openings in several courses. I also want to remind students that BIOL 881: Current Issues in Biology is planned to be offered for the final time this fall as we complete the transition to the new MS Biology catalog. If BIOL 881 is part of your current plan of study or degree requirements, please make sure you are registered for the course this semester. If you are unsure whether you still need BIOL 881, please contact us at msbiology@unk.edu before the registration deadline.

Students looking for an additional course later in the semester may also want to consider BIOL 826P: Human Dimensions, taught by Dr. Wuellner. The course begins October 21, making it a useful option for students who still need or would like to add another course this fall. As we begin the semester, I also encourage you to take a few minutes to review your plan of study and make sure you are on track with your degree requirements. If you have questions about course selection, your plan of study, or progress toward graduation, please reach out to msbiology@unk.edu. We are always happy to help you think through your options.

We are excited to have you back and look forward to another great year for the MS Biology program!

Best,
Dr. Nuxoll

Faculty News

Dr. Nicholas Hobbs, Associate Professor, and Alexis Hobbs, Lecturer, welcomed their second child on May 15th, Elena Marie. (pictures below)



Student News

Nikki Abshire Blumenfeld (May 2019 graduate) recently graduated from PharmD school and is currently working as a pharmacist. She is also an Adjunct Professor of Biology at Northwestern State University and Corning Community College.

Carla Bobier (December 2022 graduate) is moving from teaching middle school science at Logan Fontenelle Middle School to teaching physics and physical science at Bellevue West High School.

Micah Bowman (December 2013 graduate) defended his dissertation entitled “Optical Imaging and Machine Learning Techniques for the Advancement of Biomonitoring in Freshwater Systems” at Baylor University in May.



Leslie (Kuiper) Drenth (May 2018 graduate) got married on February 1st and accepted a job at Elanco Animal Health as a Principal Research Scientist which began in May. This position is responsible for building their Large Molecule Bioanalytical Team at the Indianapolis headquarters location. She and her husband, John, are currently in the process of relocating from Kalamazoo, Michigan area to the Indianapolis area. (pictured left)

Alexia Edwards (December 2024 graduate) has been accepted into a Licensed Vocational Nursing program that begins this December. After completing the program, she plans to bridge into an RN program and pursue a career in either wound care or the NICU. She set a personal goal to run 1000 miles in 2026. So far, she has completed more than 830 miles and participated in six races this year.

Josh Goff (current thesis student) was one of six recipients of the Bass Fishing Hall of Fame Scholarship for 2026.

Kevin Hintz (August 2022 graduate) begins teaching this fall as an Adjunct Professor of Biology at the University of Cincinnati, Blue Ash.

Hannah Lenning (December 2025 thesis graduate) was awarded 2026 Best Student Paper, entitled: Beyond the Backwaters: Response of Pool-Wide Fish Communities to Restoration, at the 2026 Iowa and Nebraska Chapters Joint AFS Meeting.

Candace Leuthold (July 2018 graduate) began a full-time tenure-track position as Instructor of Biological Sciences at Chaffey College in August, teaching general biology, environmental science, and evolutionary ecology. She has taught majors and non-majors general biology as an adjunct professor at Mt. San Antonio College since 2022, where she also served as Dual Enrollment Faculty Liaison. Outside the classroom, she works in ecological restoration with California native plants and serves as vice president of the San Dimas Canyon Nature Center Associates, a group of docent naturalists who lead volunteer educational programming.

Adam Sullivan (May 2023 graduate) released the first volume of a [paranormal science fiction series](#), under the pseudonym Finn D. Thorne. The second volume is scheduled to be released this fall and the third volume this fall or winter.

Please let us know what is going on in your lives; email us your news at msbiology@unk.edu.

Office Space

Fall 2026 Deadlines:

August 24th—Fall classes begin
August 28th—Last day to add/drop class on MyBlue with no penalty
September 3rd—E-bill notifications sent to Lopermail account
September 7th—Labor Day break, all classes dismissed and UNK offices closed
September 15th—Last day to apply for December graduation
September 24th—Tuition and fees due in full
October 6th—Early Term grading closes
October 19th–20th—Fall break, all classes dismissed
October 26th—Early Registration for Spring 2027 classes begins for all currently enrolled students
November 3rd—General Registration for Spring 2027 classes begins for all admitted graduate students
November 8th—Comprehensive Exams (for graduating students) are due to the Biology Dept
November 13th—Last day to drop a full semester course on MyBlue (no refund at this time)
November 25th–27th—Thanksgiving break, all classes dismissed
December 1st—Spring 2027 graduation application opens on MyBlue
December 14th–17th—Finals Week
December 18th—Commencement ceremony at 10:00 am in the Health and Sports Center
December 22nd—Deadline for faculty to submit final grades for fall classes
December 24th–January 3rd—University offices closed for the holidays
January 4th—UNK offices open
January 11th—Spring 2027 classes begin

Students planning to graduate this December 2026 must apply for graduation on MyBlue.

Even if you do not plan to attend ceremony you must apply to receive your degree. The deadline to apply for fall graduation is September 15th. There is a \$25 application fee which can be paid on-line during the application process. Commencement ceremony will take place at 10:00 am on December 18th in the Health and Sports Center. Please consider making the trip to Kearney to walk in graduation and if you do, please let the Biology Department know.