



# MASTERS DISTANCE MONITOR

May 2026

Issue 54

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## WELCOME

### New Online Masters Students for Summer 2026:

River Adams, NC; Adara Chilcoat, NE; Nicholas Gattuso, IL; Adam Glynn, IL; Suzy Hasenkamp, NE; Nichole Kern, NE; Hannah Labonar, NE; Melanie Letzring-Hansen, NE; Victoria Mahoney Cannon, MO; Daisy Mendoza, CA; Breanna Paul, MO; Edith Perrault, PA; Cynthe Slaybaugh, WA; Vienna Werner, HI

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## NEWSFEED:

Three Biology professors were highlighted this spring in the UNK News.

In February, Dr. Melissa Wuellner's, Professor, students took part in an angling competition; below is an excerpt from the article entitled, "UNK anglers land third place in collegiate fishing competition" (see [full article](#)).

### **UNK anglers land third place in collegiate fishing competition**

February 23, 2026 / [Tyler Ellyson](#)



Pictured at Archway Lake in Kearney, Robert Allison, left, and Connor Banzhaf led the UNK team in the Hardwater Havoc collegiate fishing competition. (Photo by Roberto Bautista, UNK Communications)

By MARY CHVATAL  
UNK Communications

KEARNEY – University of Nebraska at Kearney students reeled in a top-three finish during a North American collegiate fishing competition that wrapped up last week.

Graduate student Robert Allison of Middleton, Idaho, and junior Connor Banzhaf of Gothenburg led the UNK team during the six-week Hardwater Havoc, which blends ice and open water fishing with citizen science.

Competing against more than 30 colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada, the pair helped UNK accumulate 668 total points to secure third place in the North Central Division. Both anglers also finished near the top of individual leaderboards.

Allison led the region with 353 total fish and 18 different species. Banzhaf, the team captain, was right behind him with 278 fish and 17 species. He landed the largest panfish, a 16-inch black crappie.

“I fish a lot,” said Banzhaf, a [wildlife biology major](#). “I’m not much of a tournament person, but getting to represent UNK made me excited to get involved.”

Hardwater Havoc is a partnership between the American Fisheries Society and Angler’s Atlas, a Canadian company that provides tools and resources for anglers. Through its mobile app, MyCatch, anglers log catches that contribute to fisheries research and management across North America.

Participants were required to upload photos of each fish on a length board and record hook type and species information. In addition to competing for prizes, students could complete optional assignments to earn a micro-certification in applied citizen sciences for fisheries management.

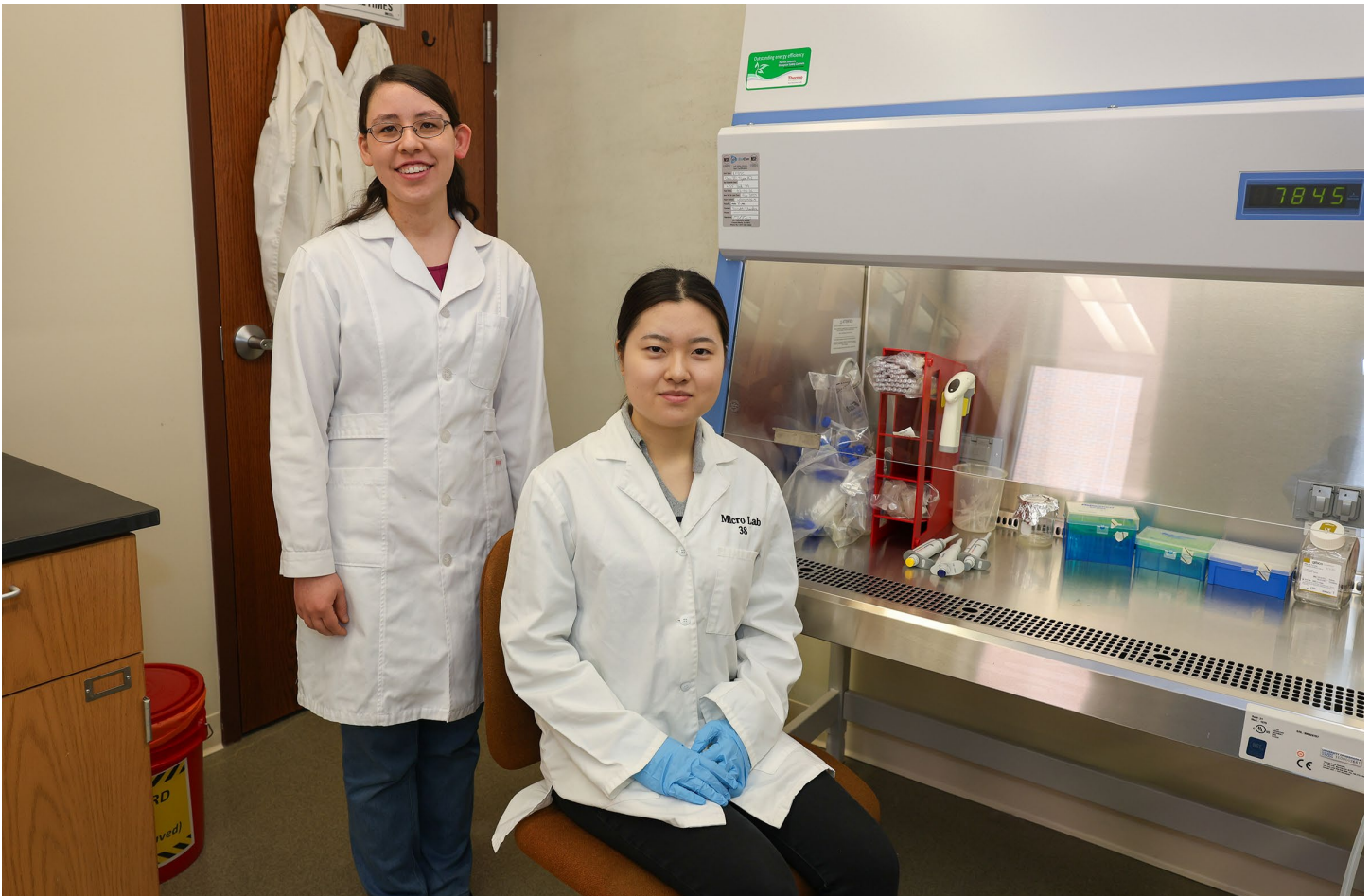
UNK had eight students participate in the inaugural event.

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Dr. Catherine Johnson's, Assistant Professor, cancer research was highlighted in March. Below is an excerpt from the article entitled, "UNK biology professor, undergraduate students collaborate on cancer research" (see [full article](#)).

## UNK biology professor, undergraduate students collaborate on cancer research

March 3, 2026 / [Tyler Ellyson](#)



UNK assistant biology professor Catherine Johnson, left, and junior Eri Watanabe pose for a photo in Johnson's lab. Their research team studies metastatic prostate cancer. (Photos by Erika Pritchard, UNK Communications)

By MARY CHVATAL  
UNK Communications

KEARNEY – Prostate cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer deaths in American men. Roughly 1 in 8 men will be diagnosed with the disease during their lifetime, according to the American Cancer Society, which estimates more than 330,000 new cases in 2026 alone.

The disease, known to spread to bones and lymph nodes, is a research focus for University of Nebraska at Kearney assistant professor Catherine Johnson, who specializes in [molecular biology](#).

Johnson completed her doctorate in biomedical science at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha, where she was part of the cancer research program. She studies the interactions between bone cells and tumor cells, specifically, how some proteins produced by bone cells promote the growth of bone-metastatic prostate cancer.

Her current research is supported by a grant from Nebraska INBRE, a statewide initiative funded by the National Institutes of Health and administered by UNMC. Since its inception in 2001, the program has awarded more than \$7 million in funding to UNK to support faculty research, enhance undergraduate education and strengthen the pipeline to graduate programs in the biomedical sciences.

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In April, UNK News highlighted Dr. Joseph Dolence, Associate Professor, for being chosen as a Public Policy Fellow by American Association of Immunologist (below is the [full article](#)). You can also read about Dr. Dolence's fellowship on the [AAI Public Policy Fellows Program](#) website.

## UNK professor Joe Dolence first Nebraskan selected for AAI Policy Fellowship

April 6, 2026 / [Tyler Ellyson](#)



KEARNEY – University of Nebraska at Kearney associate biology professor Joe Dolence has been selected for the 2026-27 American Association of Immunologists Public Policy Fellows Program.

Dolence is one of 10 individuals selected from across the United States for the 16th class of AAI Public Policy Fellows. The one-year fellowship begins May 1. He is the first individual from Nebraska selected for the program.

Dolence's research and teaching areas include immunology, allergic disease, peanut allergy and stem cells.

Since 2011, the AAI Public Policy Fellows Program has enabled early career AAI members to learn how to effectively advocate for increased federal science funding and science policies relevant to the immunology community. Fellows meet virtually once each month and participate in advocacy and educational activities throughout the year, culminating in Capitol Hill Day, when participants visit congressional representatives to discuss the importance of biomedical research and encourage increased National Institutes of Health funding.

At a time when science funding, higher education and public trust in biomedical research face significant challenges, Dolence said it is essential for scientists to engage directly in policy conversations.

"As an immunologist who is a faculty leader at a primarily undergraduate institution in rural Nebraska, I see firsthand how federal and state decisions shape research programs, student opportunities and the strength of our communities," he said.

"Through this fellowship, I look forward to strengthening my ability to advocate effectively for sustained investment in biomedical research, science literacy and higher education," Dolence added. "I am especially eager to apply what I learn not only at the federal level, but also within Nebraska, where thoughtful advocacy can make a meaningful difference."

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## CONGRATULATIONS

### May 2026 Graduates:

Robert Allison (THESIS), Chloe Becker, Alicia Castaneda, Teara Florek, Alycia Hatfield, Eugene Huryn (THESIS), Kay Kelly, Elizabeth Lovings, Brian Maronde, Jordany Martinez Rosario, Christopher Pagano, Jenna Peterson, Charlet Reebenaker, Brittney Richardson, Kyle Soriano, Hannah Leighlynn Towne, Sarah Westman

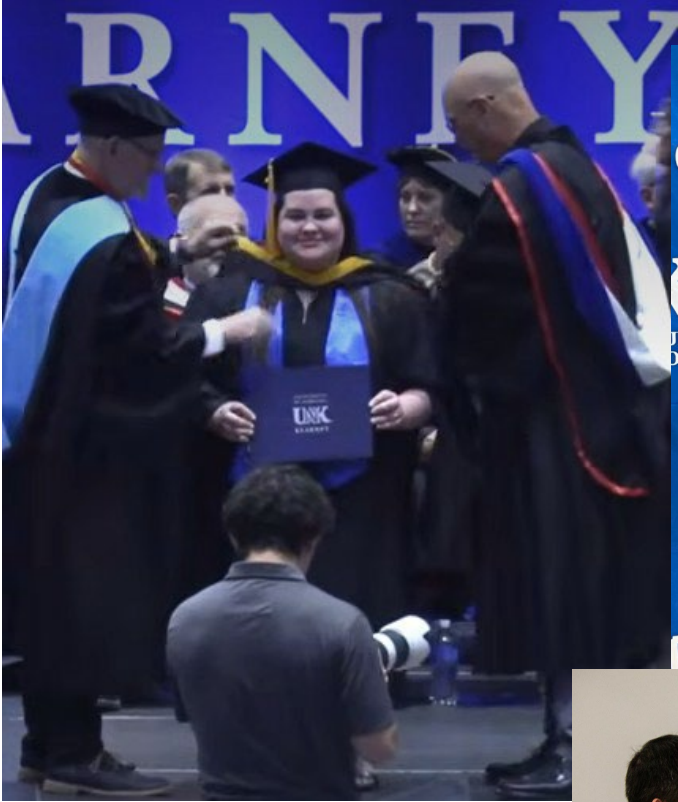
Five graduates were able to attend the commencement ceremony on May 8<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 am in the Health and Sports Center. UNK Online hosted a meet + greet after the ceremony. Below are some pictures from the events.



Pictured left (left to right):  
Dr. Surabhi Chandra, Dr. Jacob Cooper, Dr. Austin Nuxoll, Christopher Pagano, Jordany Martinez Rosario, Dr. Letty Reichart, Dr. Yipeng Sui



Pictured left: Hannah Leighlynn Towne  
Pictured below: Brittney Richardson



Pictured above (left): Charlet Reebenaker

Pictured above (right): Christopher Pagano and Jordany Martinez Rosario

Pictured right: (left to right): Dr. Yipeng Sui, Dr. Austin Nuxoll, Dr. Jacob Cooper, and Christopher Pagano



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# Grants, Meetings, Publications

## Grants

- Cooper, J.C.** Nebraska Natural Legacy Grant Award, 2026. Title: Surveys for Black-billed and Yellow-billed cuckoos in Nebraska. Agency: Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Amount: \$4880.
- Geluso, K.** 2026. Title: Frog call survey in Nebraska. Agency: EPSCoR Nebraska Undergrad Research. Amount: \$5,000.
- Geluso, K.** Nebraska Natural Legacy Grant Award, 2026. Title: Anuran call surveys for species of conservation need. Agency: Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Amount: \$5,000.
- Geluso, K.** Nebraska Natural Legacy Grant Award, 2026. Title: Effect of litter on American Burying Beetles. Agency: Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Amount: \$3,500.
- Geluso, K.** 2026. Title: Development and mentoring of young biologist through field experience. Agency: Turner Institute of Ecoagriculture, Inc. Amount: \$20,000.
- Johnson, C.** 2026. Title: Role of Therapy-Altered Osteoblasts in Bone-Metastatic Prostate Cancer Therapy Resistance. Agency: EPSCoR Nebraska Undergrad Research. Amount: \$5,000.
- Lu, H.** 2026. Title: Enhancing salicinoid production in Populus using CRISPR activation. Agency: EPSCoR Nebraska Undergrad Research. Amount: \$5,000.

## Meetings

- Cooper, J.C.** March 2026. From the Pine Ridge to the Albertine Rift: Case studies on biogeographic dynamics in birds. Louisiana State University Museum of Natural Science. Invited seminar.
- Paysen, J.W., C. Kruse, and **K. Geluso**. April 2026. Lizard abundance and habitat affinities in upland grasslands in the Nebraska Sandhills. Annual Meeting of the Southwestern Association of Naturalists. Tyler, Texas. Poster Presentation.
- Paysen, J.W., C. Kruse, and **K. Geluso**. April 2026. Threats to the stronghold population of Blanding's Turtles (*Emydoidea blandingii*): An overwinter mass mortality event in the Nebraska Sandhills. Annual Meeting of the Southwestern Association of Naturalists. Tyler, Texas. Poster Presentation.

## Publications

- Birathi, P., Pattabiraman, M., Ramaswamy, A., Kumar, M., Agrawal, A. Dua, A., Nalamachu, S.R., and **Chandra, S.** 2026. Multi-Patient Analysis of Steroid-Induced Hyperglycemia in Diabetic Patients Using Continuous Glucose Monitoring. *Journal of Pain Research*. <https://doi.org/10.2147/JPR.S569171>
- Cooper, J. C.**, R. Juárez, D. F. Barragán, and P.F.D. Boesman. 2026. South American Leaf-tosser (*Sclerurus obscurior*), version 2.0. In Birds of the World (T. S. Schulenberg and B. K. Keeney, Editors). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.soalea1.02>
- Deivasigamani, P., Basu, S., **Rikhi, R.** et al. 2025. Screening for Wiskott-Aldrich Syndrome in Chronic Idiopathic

Thrombocytopenic Purpura. *Indian Journal of Pediatrics*. 92, 1104–1106.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12098-025-05712-6>

- Geluso, K.**, K.N. Geluso, C.A. Lemen, and P.W. Freeman. 2026. Distribution and reproduction of bats from the Neotropical island of Tobago. Special Publications of the Museum of Texas Tech University Number 84.
- Gilbert, N.A., Queally, N., **Cooper, J.C.**, Eyster, H.N. and Williams, P.J. 2026. Heterogeneity, productivity, and migration drive continental evenness patterns of bird assemblages. *Global Ecology and Biogeography*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/geb.70205>
- Gilmore, T.E., Chapman, K.W., **Harner, M.J.**, Bajelan, J., Terry, C., Stranzl, J.E., Jr., Mittelstet, A.R., Chapman, C.D. and Mehrubeoglu, M. 2026. A new GRIME2: Using an Octagon Calibration Target and Trail Camera to Measure Stream Water Level Over a 2-Year Period. *Water Resources Research*. 62: e2025WR042244. <https://doi.org/10.1029/2025WR042244>
- Huryn, E.A. and J.C. Cooper**. 2026. First confirmed Nebraska breeding record of the Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) since the 19th century. *Nebraska Bird Review*. 93(3):118-123.
- Kosmicki, D.V., C. Kruse, and **K. Geluso**. 2025. Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*) predation on Brazilian Free-tailed Bats (*Tadarida brasiliensis*) and insects in northern Oklahoma. *Western North American Naturalist*. 84:677-682.
- Payson, J.W., P.M. Huss, **J.C. Cooper**, L.J. Bernal, C. Kruse, and **K. Geluso**. 2025. Terrestrial Gartersnake (*Thamnophis elegans*) consuming a Western Meadow Vole (*Microtus drummondii*) in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of New Mexico. *Transactions of the Nebraska Academy of Sciences*. 45:139-131.
- Peterson, B.C.** 2026. More than Bone: Behaviors Behind Wildlife Antler Recycling. *Nebraskaland*. 104(2):38-41. Print and Digital Issue: <https://magazine.outdoornebraska.gov/about/archive/> and Online formatted: <https://brnw.ch/21x0EyZ>
- Rokusek, B.**, Sklenar, S., **Hamilton, L. J.**, Cheku, S., **Carlson, D. J.**, and **Carlson, K. A.** 2026. Detection of Nora virus in infected *Drosophila melanogaster* heads without evidence of ubiquitous brain infection by smRNA FISH. *Fly*. 20(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/19336934.2026.2620887>
- Rue, J.W.**, Adams, J.R., Beckmann, J.P., et al. 2026. Genetic diversity and genetic structure near the range periphery of a reintroduced endemic grassland ungulate. *Conservation Genetics*. 27(29). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10592-026-01763-0>
- Sudhakar, M., Kumrah, R., Anjani, G., **Rikhi, R.**, et al. 2026. Deficiency of adenosine deaminase 2: Myriad faces in a single family. *Pediatric Allergy and Immunology*. 37(2): e70309. [doi:10.1111/pai.70309](https://doi.org/10.1111/pai.70309)
- Turdiboev, O.A. and **Drew, B.T.** 2026. New combinations and a typification in Lamiaceae from Central Asia and adjacent regions. *Phytotaxa*. 741(3): 298–300. <https://doi.org/10.11646/phytotaxa.741.3.5>
- Zaborsky, J.G., Rose, J.P., Kriebel, R., **Drew, B.T.**, Moriarty Lemmon, E., Lemmon, A.R., and K.J. Sytsma. 2026. Evaluating the African arid corridor hypothesis: A meta-analysis including the phylogenetic and biogeographical history of *Sesamothamnus*. *American Journal of Botany*. 113: e70192. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajb2.70192>

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](mailto:msbiology@unk.edu).

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# Director's Desk from Dr. Austin Nuxoll

Greetings!

I hope you had a great spring semester and are looking forward to the summer months ahead. As we transition into summer and begin planning for fall, I wanted to share a few important updates and reminders for our MS Biology program.

For students who were admitted prior to Fall 2025 and may still be on an older catalog, I encourage you to reach out to discuss whether moving to the Fall 2025 catalog would be beneficial for your plan of study. With this change in the program, I also want to remind students that BIOL 881: Current Issues in Biology is being phased out and will likely be offered for the final time this fall. If this course is part of your plan of study, it is important to register for it this fall. Please contact us if you have questions about how this change may affect your course planning.

Fall registration is now open, and we encourage you to register as soon as possible to secure the courses you need or prefer. As always, if a class you are interested in is full, whether for summer or fall, please reach out to [msbiology@unk.edu](mailto:msbiology@unk.edu) to be added to a waitlist, as spots often open as schedules adjust.

I would like to highlight an opportunity related to stackable degrees. Graduates of the MS Biology program may be able to apply up to one-third of their completed credits toward a second graduate degree, such as the MS in Health Sciences or MS in STEM Education. This provides a pathway to broaden your expertise and earn a second degree without starting from scratch. If you are interested in pursuing an additional degree or would like to learn more about how this option could fit your goals, please reach out to [msbiology@unk.edu](mailto:msbiology@unk.edu) for more information.

Finally, I want to thank our students and alumni for continuing to share information about our program. Word of mouth remains one of the most valuable ways we grow, and we appreciate your role in helping connect others to our program.

As always, we are here to support you. Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions about your plan of study, registration, or upcoming courses. I hope you have a productive and enjoyable summer. I look forward to working with many of you in the coming months.

Best regards,  
Dr. Nuxoll

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# Faculty News



**Dr. Joseph Dolence, Associate Professor,** was awarded Graduate Mentor of the Year at the University of Nebraska Kearney Student Research Day held on April 16<sup>th</sup>. (pictured left)

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# Student News

**Robert Allison (May 2026 thesis graduate)** recently accepted a position as a Fisheries Research Technician 2-Field and Lab Coordinator with the Pacific States Marine and Fisheries Commission in Idaho.



**Alexia Edwards (December 2024 graduate)** is enjoying her work at a doctor's office that specializes in Wound Care and has recently picked up a new hobby of distance running. She made a goal this year to run 1000 miles and run in 12 races. So far, she has run a 5k, two 10k's and a half marathon, totaling 407.9 miles. (pictured left)

**William Frisch (May 2025 thesis graduate)** won 2024-25 Best Thesis Award in the Natural Sciences at University of Nebraska Kearney Student Research Day held on April 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Katie Hamilton (May 2021 graduate)** was promoted to Chief of Staff at Joyce University of Nursing and Health Sciences in October 2025. She also welcomed her 3<sup>rd</sup> child, Bennett, last July. (pictured right)



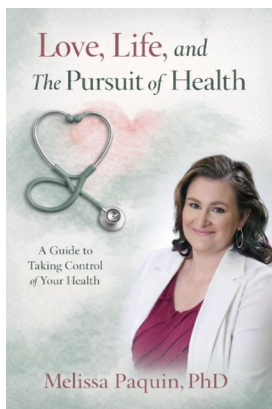


**Bailey Johnson (current student)** was recently elected President-Elect of the Nebraska Association of Teachers of Science (NATS). She had the opportunity to attend the National Science Teaching Association (NSTA) conference in Anaheim, CA in April. In addition to connecting with vendors interested in participating in upcoming NATS conference, she engaged in a wide range of professional learning sessions focused on current science education practices, instructional strategies, and emerging trends in STEM education. The conference also provided valuable opportunities to collaborate and network with science educators from across the country, exchanging ideas and resources that will help strengthen science teaching and learning in Nebraska.

The NATS conference will be held October 8–10 at the Omaha Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium. All science

educators from K–12 through higher education are welcome to attend; the conference will offer a wide range of professional learning opportunities. (pictured above, on the right)

**Andrew Marshall (December 2016 graduate)** is currently pursuing a Doctor of Public Health with a concentration in Preventative Care. He is also a lead scientist at a biotechnology company where he oversees the development and execution of Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) compliant assays. In this role, he is responsible for managing a diverse portfolio of assays critical to therapeutic and vaccine development. His work includes viral vector characterization, TCID50 assays for viral quantification, and research supporting vaccine development, viral oncolytics, and HIV treatment strategies. Through this combination of academic and professional experience, he aims to contribute to the advancement of translational science and the development of innovative public health solutions.



**Nnamdi Okore (current thesis student)** won Best Poster Presentation in Natural and Physical Sciences at the University of Nebraska Kearney Student Research Day held on April 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Melissa Paquin (May 2016 graduate)** wrote a book: *Love, Life and The Pursuit of Health*. (pictured left)

**Sunanda Rajput (May 2024 thesis graduate)** won the 2026 Midwestern Association of Graduate

Schools/ProQuest Distinguished Master's Thesis Award. She is the first student in Nebraska to win. Her story was highlighted in a [UNK News](#) article in April. (pictured right)



Please let us know what is going on in your lives; email us your news at [msbiology@unk.edu](mailto:msbiology@unk.edu).

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# Office Space

**Still looking to register for a class this summer?** The following courses have a few spots left:

May 26 – July 3:

CHEM 855 – Principles of Biochemistry (3 credits)

May 26 – July 17:

BIOL 858 – Physiology of Stress (3 hrs)

June 8 – July 31:

BIOL 823 – Environmental Biology (3 hrs)

BIOL 842P – Wildlife and Fisheries Laws and Policies (3 hrs)

BIOL 846 – Cancer Biology (3 hrs)

BIOL 863 – Biological Perspectives (3 hrs)

Students can register for open classes on MyBlue up until the first day of the class.

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**Reminder: If you haven't registered yet for Fall 2026 classes, we encourage you to do so ASAP.** Classes fill up quickly so if there is a course you really want/need to take, you should register now. Fall 2026 classes begin August 24<sup>th</sup>.

Remember, if a class you are interested in taking is full, contact Brian and Robyn at [msbiology@unk.edu](mailto:msbiology@unk.edu) to be put on a waitlist. Should a spot become available you would then be contacted via your loper email account.

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**Students planning to graduate this July 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 summer graduation is June 15<sup>th</sup>. 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 July 31<sup>st</sup> 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.