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By: Dr. Kristy Kounovsky-Shafer

2025

Letter from the Department

Welcome back to the Chemistry Department newsletter! Dr. Christopher Exstrom became the General Studies Director this fall and is working to revamp the freshman seminar class. In 2024, Dr. Kristy Kounovsky-Shafer (pictured below) received a National Institutes of Health (NIH) R15 Award for developing methods to concentrate and protect large DNA molecules. Congratulations Drs. Exstrom and Kounovsky-Shafer!!! We have hired a new faculty member, Dr. Aaron Johnson, in a new position (Professor of Practice) in the Chemistry department. It is the first of its kind in the College of Arts

and Sciences. Welcome! You will hear more about Dr. Johnson next year. We have had some outstanding students graduate, just like every year that I have been here, and we will be sad to see them go, but we are excited for their next steps.

Our next Don Fox seminar will be on October 10, 2025, and Grace Wei will be honored. The banquet will be on October 9 at the Alley Rose (please note the new location). If you want to watch the Don Fox seminar online, please email moserac@unk.edu for the link.



Don Fox Memorial Lecturer, Fall 2024

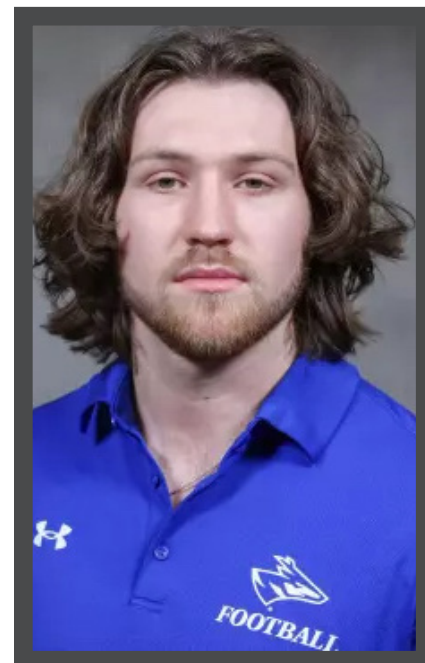
Abby Sekle

Abby Sekle of Omaha, Nebraska, has been a high school science teacher for 20 years, educating students in chemistry, physics, and physical science. She is currently a science teacher at Elkhorn North High School and previously taught at Arlington High School and Benson High School. The Kearney, Nebraska, native and a Kearney High School graduate received her Bachelor of Science in Chemistry 7-12 and Physical Education 7-12 in 2004, as well as a Master of Science in Science/Math Education in 2015, both from the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Sekle's hands-on and encouraging approach to learning earned her the University of Nebraska-Lincoln impactful teacher recognition and the Benson High School Star Teacher of the Year award, both student-nominated recognitions. She is currently the co-coach of the Elkhorn North High School Academic Decathlon team. Abby is a mother of 3 (2 sons and a daughter) and enjoys watching them play soccer, basketball, and volleyball. They all enjoy hanging out with their dog and going to the gym.





Meet four of our Graduating Seniors



From left to right: Nicole Wandrey, Seth Yarnell, and Jake Boley. Kolten Cada is in the second picture.

Nicole Wandrey

Where are you from? I am from Omaha, NE.

What are you going to do after UNK? I am going to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to pursue a PhD in chemical biology.

What is one of your favorite moments at UNK? I really enjoyed the opportunity to go to Denver for the 2024 National ACS meeting. I learned a lot about research in different areas of chemistry. We were also able to tour an industrial lab, so it was very exciting to learn more about what a future career in chemistry could look like.

What is your favorite part about doing research? I loved it when we were having trouble trying to synthesize a molecule, and we tried something that finally worked, and we got to the final product. I have also been able to learn a lot of different techniques and see different steps of the drug development process, which has helped me define my research interests going into graduate school.

What is your favorite class? My favorite class is organic chemistry.

Seth Yarnell

Where are you from? I am from Scottsbluff, NE.

What are you going to do after UNK? I am going to the University of Kansas in Lawrence for their Chemistry Ph.D. program.

What is one of your favorite moments at UNK? I used to get coffee after every Gen Chem lecture with a girl in my class named Maiah. We've been dating for three years now.

What is your favorite part about doing research? I think the best thing about research is how much you have to stretch your thinking to be successful. There's no manual like in a lab course, so all the problem-solving falls on you. There are times when it seems like nothing is working how you want it to, but that's kind of the fun part. It forces you to come up with solutions to problems nobody else has run into before.

What is your favorite class? My favorite class is probably Senior Chem Lab. I feel like we all just learned more in that class than in any other.



Jake Boley

Where are you from? I was born and raised in Colorado Springs, CO.

What are you going to do after UNK? After UNK, I plan to become a veterinarian and eventually own an animal hospital.

What is one of your favorite moments at UNK? One of my favorite moments at UNK was presenting at the ACS conferences in St. Louis, Denver, and Omaha. It was really fun to travel with my classmates, get to know our professors better, and present on all the hard work we had done with our research.

What is your favorite part about doing research? My two favorite aspects of research are seeing chemistry concepts applied to real-life situations and collaborating with my classmates and Dr. Thomas. It has been really fun working with these people while discovering new things through our research.

What is your favorite class? One of my favorite classes was Advanced Biochemistry. I really enjoyed going into depth on the chemistry that promotes life, and I feel like my understanding of biochemistry was really solidified by this class.

Kolten Cada

Where are you from? I'm from Wahoo, NE

What are you going to do after UNK? I will be going to medical school to get my M.D.

What is one of your favorite moments at UNK? I am on the UNK Football team.

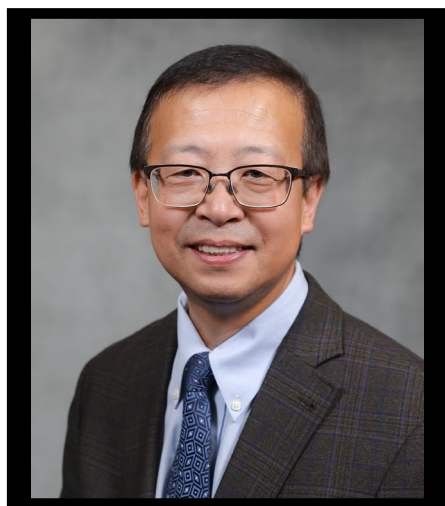
My favorite moment at UNK was beating Northwest Missouri's football team at home this past season. It was a huge win for our team and an awesome environment to be a part of!

What is your favorite part about doing research? My favorite part about doing research was that it allowed me to learn more about something I enjoyed while making a meaningful contribution to that field of science.

What is your favorite class? My favorite course was Biochemistry.

Three faculty win prestigious awards

The Pratt-Heins award is a university-wide award that is handed out to one faculty member across the university for each area: teaching, research and service. New Frontiers is a magazine focused on faculty doing cutting edge research. Congratulations to all three!!!



Dr. Haishi Cao
Organic Chemistry
Pratt-Heins Research, 2023



Dr. Annette Moser
Analytical Chemistry
Pratt-Heins Teaching, 2024



Dr. Michael Moxley
Biochemistry
New Frontiers, 2024



Recognition of Our Graduates

Students listed have a Chemistry major or minor.

Fall 2024

| | |
|------------------------|---------------|
| Logan Stevens | Kearney, NE |
| Esmeralda Mendez Ortiz | Lexington, NE |

Spring 2025

| | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| Jake Boley | Colorado Springs, CO |
| Kolten Cada | Wahoo, NE |
| Samantha Crockett | Omaha, NE |
| Mackinzi Hill | Hastings, NE |
| Kathryn Lytle | Omaha, NE |
| Breyer Menke | Hastings, NE |
| Jason Tovar Batres | Lexington, NE |
| Nicole Wandrey | Omaha, NE |
| Jacob Witter | Omaha, NE |

Spring 2025 continued

| | |
|--------------|-----------------|
| Seth Yarnell | Scottsbluff, NE |
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Students Graduating with a Chemistry Minor

Kyle Dittmer
 Alexis Haynes
 Marissa Hoover
 Makenna Redinger
 Noah Shackelford

Congratulations graduates!!!