



# THE DISTINCTION

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SPRING 2025



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# Newsletter Staff

Editor-In-Chief.....	Olivia McArthur
Student Editor.....	Tanatswa Chivero
Copy Editor.....	Rory Vargas
Student Writer.....	Hana Miller
Student Writer.....	Summer Dingman
Graduate Assistant.....	Emily Fuller
Director.....	Lucy Morrison

## Emily Fuller wins Graduate Student Employee of the Year

Emily Fuller has been a huge part of building and maintaining the Honors Program at UNO in the past two years--but especially last fall. Down a fulltime staff member from the second week of the fall semester, there were many potential challenges, but Emily demonstrated her leadership and professionalism as a member of our honors team. She innovated procedures, demonstrated sensitivity to others, and resolved problems she shouldered through her own initiative. She undertook all such efforts to support Honors and its students and thus demonstrated a willingness to stretch herself to serve others.



# Celebrating 2025 Honors Graduates

**Ishani Adidam**

College of Business Administration  
Major: Business Administration  
“The Future of Work: Examining New Graduate Sentiment on Remote Work and Return to Office Mandates”  
Mentor: Erin Pleggenkuhle-Miles

**Autumn Alicea**

College of Public Affairs and Community Service  
Major: Criminology and Criminal Justice  
“Examining the Perceptions of Restorative Practices in a Non-Profit Organization: A Comparative Analysis of Staff and Youth Attitudes”  
Mentor: Anne Hobbs

**Keith Allen**

College of Arts and Sciences  
Majors: International Studies, Political Science  
“A Future For the U.S. Department of Education”  
Mentor: Amanda Von Goodrich

**Gabrielle Anzalone**

College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences  
Major: Library Science  
“The Value of an Academic Library as Told By Its Users”  
Mentor: Cathy Thorsen

**Jordan Bakar**

College of Information Science and Technology  
Major: Cybersecurity  
“Framing the Digital Scene: Applying Routine Activity Theory to IoT Smart Frames”  
Mentors: Greg Hoff & George Grispos

**Alexandra Barnes**

College of Arts and Sciences  
Major: Medical Humanities  
College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences  
Major: Public Health  
“I Am (Me)dicine: An Analysis on the Influence of Humanities Courses with the Construction of Internal and External Identities within Pre-Med Students at UNO”  
Mentor: Marcia Adler

**Alexander Becker**

College of Arts and Sciences  
Major: Biology  
“Understanding Age-Related Differences of Dentists’ Perceptions of Fluoride Use in the Midwest”  
Mentor: Karen Murch-Schafer

**Kyley Bishop**

College of Arts and Sciences  
Majors: English, World Languages and Literature  
“Building Language Learners; A Study on U.S. and German Curriculums”  
Mentor: Gwyneth Cliver

**Patrick Brady**

College of Public Affairs and Community Service  
Major: Criminology and Criminal Justice  
“Soft Substance Use and Productivity in the Patrol Officer Population”  
Mentor: Justin Nix

**Kathryn Chain**

College of Arts and Sciences  
Majors: Physics, Mathematics  
“‘Integrative’ vs. ‘Integration’: STEM Skills and Concept Development in 6th Grade Students”  
Mentor: Kelly Gomez Johnson

**Eva Burklund**

College of Arts and Sciences  
Major: Political Science  
College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media  
Major: Communication Studies  
“Parents, Patriots, and Joyful Warriors: The Rhetoric of Moms for Liberty”  
Mentor: Katherine Storck

**Nadia Castillo**

College of Public Affairs and Community Service  
Major: Criminology and Criminal Justice  
“Re-opening the Past: How Advancements in Forensic Technology Are Reshaping Investigation and Resolution of Cold Cases in the U.S.”  
Mentor: Kim Retzlaff

**Garrett Connely**

College of Arts and Sciences  
Majors: International Studies, Political Science  
“An Analysis of the Effectiveness of International Courts in Contributing to Rebuilding and Resolving Conflicts in Societies Post-Genocide”  
Mentor: Lana Obradovic

# Celebrating 2025 Honors Graduates

**Kamila Cortes**

College of Business Administration  
Major: Business Administration  
“The Impact of Social Media on Fan Engagement in Sports: A Focus on Student and College-Level Sports Fan Interaction”  
Mentor: Ashley Varilek

**Layhla Currier**

College of Arts and Sciences  
Major: Psychology  
“The Sun Shines Beyond the Mountains: An Examination of Risk Factors for Suicidality in Lesotho”  
Mentor: Richard Stacy

**Thomas Eilers**

College of Arts and Sciences  
Majors: Medical Humanities, Philosophy, Psychology  
“Diagnosis and Epistemic Injustice: How Diagnostic Categories change the Epistemic Relationship between Clinical Psychologist and Patient”  
Mentor: Allison Schlosser

**Zoe Fosbinder**

College of Arts and Sciences  
Major: English  
“Nature vs Nurture: Place in *Perceval*”  
Mentor: Lisabeth Buchelt

**Ethan Funke**

College of Arts and Sciences  
Major: Bioinformatics  
“Examining the Effects of Traditional Culturing Techniques on Filamentation Assays in the Fungus *Candida albicans*”  
Mentor: Jill Blankenship

**Jacqueline Gonzalez-Torres**

College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences  
Major: Elementary Education  
“Constructing Clear Sentences: Effective Strategies for Teaching Pronoun-Verb Agreement in 3rd Grade”  
Mentor: Justin Andersson

**Joshua Gryzen**

College of Information Science and Technology  
Majors: Computer Science, Math  
“Optimizing the Peter Kiewit Institute Course Schedule Using Answer Set Programming”  
Mentor: Harvey Siy & Jorge Fandinno

**Delaney Ham**

College of Public Affairs and Community Service  
Major: Social Work  
“Convenience or Connection: What Motivates Diversion Program Clients in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) Attendance?”  
Mentor: Konnie Kirchner

**Abby Heimann**

College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences  
Major: Secondary Education  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Major: Mathematics  
“Organizing Math for Success: Assessing the Effectiveness of Graphic Organizers in Math Education”  
Mentor: Justin Andersson

**Mila Herszbaum-Harding**

College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences  
Major: Early Childhood Inclusive Education  
“The Impact of Think-Alouds on Student Polling Performance”  
Mentor: Justin Andersson

**Matthew Heywood**

College of Engineering  
Majors: Computer Engineering, Electrical Engineering  
“Phoneme Recognition for Pronunciation Improvement”  
Mentor: Harvey Siy

**Theresa Isbilir**

College of Business Administration  
Major: Business Administration  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Major: World Languages and Literature  
“Deutschland verliert seinen Weltwettbewerbsvorteilen. Warum? [Germany is Losing its Global Competitive Advantage: why?]  
Mentor: Gwyneth Cliver

**Yexalen Jaramillo**

College of Arts and Sciences  
Majors: World Languages and Literature, International Studies  
College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences  
Major: Secondary Education  
“Effective Command Instruction in Spanish Level Two”  
Mentor: Sandra L. Shillingstad



# Celebrating 2025 Honors Graduates

**Tyson Kerr**

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Mathematics

“Optimization and Personalization of Fitness Routines Using Mathematical Models”

Mentor: Fabio Vitor

**Navya Khandavalli**

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Molecular and Biomedical Biology

“The Burden of Care: Understanding Burnout Among Pediatric Healthcare Workers”

Mentor: Kristen Johnson

**Joseph Lamb**

College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences

Major: Early Childhood Inclusive Education

“How Metacognition Can Improve Reading Comprehension”

Mentor: Justin Andersson

**Emily Langford**

College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media

Major: Studio Art

“Cavedivers: A Multi-media Visual and Musical Release”

Mentor: Jeremy Baguyos

**Abigail Logeman**

College of Arts and Sciences

Majors: General Science, Biology

“A Comparative Study Investigating the Patient Experience at Corporate and Private Dental Practices”

Mentor: Sachin Nedungadi

**Rolando Martinez-Rico**

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Molecular and Biomedical Biology

“An Examination of the Impact of a Six-Week Summer Enrichment Program on Anxiety Among Underrepresented Health Profession Students”

Mentor: Sonja Tutsch-Bryant

**Allison Munderloh**

College of Public Affairs and Community Service

Major: Criminology and Criminal Justice

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Psychology

“Human Trafficking Prevention Methods in Nebraska”

Mentor: Kim Retzlaff

**Rachel Napier**

College of Public Affairs and Community Service

Major: Criminology and Criminal Justice

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Psychology

“A Comparative Analysis of the Intersection Between Sex Trafficking and Domestic Violence: A Cross-Cultural Study of the United States and India”

Mentor: Kim Retzlaff

**Melisa Ontiveros**

College of Arts and Sciences

Majors: Medical Humanities, Biology

“Capturing Care: A Visual Narrative on Caregivers at J. P. Lord School”

Mentor: Mark Gilbert

**Nathan Ostdiek**

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Political Science

“Quantum International Relations: An Emerging Political Framework and Understanding of Us”

Mentor: Michelle Black

**Tai Prauner**

College of Arts and Sciences

Majors: Molecular and Biomedical Biology, World Languages and Literature

“Investigating the Effects of SOD1 Knockout on Oxidative Stress and Stress Coping Styles in Zebrafish Using CRISPR Technology”

Mentor: Ryan Wong

**Lydia Rose**

College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences

Major: Kinesiology

“Outlook: A Different Look on Life”

Mentor: Jessica Baldwin

# Celebrating 2025 Honors Graduates

**Htoo Say**

College of Arts and Sciences

Majors: Chemistry, Biology

“Computationally Driven Receptor Tyrosine Kinase Inhibitor Design: Bridging Data Analysis with Drug Discovery”

Mentor: Joe Yao

**Grace Schmidt**

College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences

Major: Kinesiology

“The Role of Occupational Therapy in Multidisciplinary Teams”

Mentor: Sandra L. Shillingstad

**Keegan Sims**

College of Information Science and Technology

Major: Computer Science

“Wind Simulation on Weighted Physics Objects”

Mentors: Harvey Siy & Brian Ricks

**Moo Law Eh Soe**

College of Arts and Sciences

Majors: Molecular and Biomedical Biology, English

“Chronic Health and Refugee Observations on Norms, Insights and Cultural Language of Menstruation”

Mentor: Melanie Menning

**Sanjay Srinivasan**

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Molecular and Biomedical Biology

“Assessment of Dose-Dependent Cytotoxicity of Caffeine on Human Colorectal Adenocarcinoma and Fibroblast Cell Lines”

Mentor: Kristen Johnson

**Hannah Stenger**

College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences

Major: Secondary Special Education

“A glance at Guided Notes in the Special Education Classroom”

Mentor: Justin Andersson

**Rayna Summerfield**

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Political Science

“Despair Against Boredom: Hyperstitional Narrativization in the International Relations of Populist States”

Mentor: Sally Bonsall

**Hafsa Tasneem**

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Biology

“Impact of Public Health Policies on Access to Dental Care in Underserved Communities”

Mentor: Richard Stacy

**Madison Vater**

College of Engineering

Major: Architectural Engineering

“Structural Design of a Multi-Story Steel Building”

Mentors: Marc Maguire & Todd Feldman

**Isabelle Weber**

College of Arts and Sciences

Majors: Neuroscience, Molecular and Biomedical Biology

“Optimization of Natural Killer Cell Simultaneous ADCC and Direct Killing Assay to Increase Data Output for Each Human Donor”

Mentor: Paul Denton

**Sophie Whitehill**

College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media

Major: Music Education

“Composing New Ideas Utilizing Graphic Organizers in the General Music Classroom”

Mentor: Justin Andersson

**Allison Whitmire**

College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences

Major: Public Health

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Psychology

“Listen to my Story: An Autoethnographic Account of a Manic Episode”

Mentor: Marcia Adler

**Jay Winfield**

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Biology

“Comparing Non-Invasive Survey Techniques on Southern Flying Squirrels in Nebraska”

Mentor: Jeremy White

# Honors Student Association (HSA)



## **Members**

Navya Khandavalli  
Jiya Chaudhari  
Juliana Scheopner  
Sydney Ryan  
Chloe Hansel  
Garrett Connely  
Austin Shiner  
Drew Leisy  
Aditi Rai  
Jia Acharya  
Nour Alomari  
Maria Butler  
Julia Holt

## **Elected Position**

President  
Vice President  
Secretary  
Treasurer  
Public Relations/Social Media Manager  
Fourth Year Representative  
Third Year Representative  
Second Year Representative  
Second Year Representative  
First Year Representative  
First Year Representative  
First Year Representative  
First Year Representative



# Student Honors Convocations Awards

## Undergraduate Major Honorees

Alexander Becker—Biology

Kyley Bishop—English

Thomas Eilers—Medical Humanities

Tai Prauner—World Languages and Literature, Molecular and Biomedical Biology

Ishani Adidam—Business Administration

Gabrielle Anzalone—Library Science

Jacqueline Gonzales-Torres—Elementary Education

MacKenzie McGuire—Special Education

Allison Whitmire—Public Health

Kaitlyn Wusk—Kinesiology

Jordan Bakar—Cybersecurity

Patrick Brady—Criminology and Criminal Justice

## Dean's Awards

Tai Prauner

Ishani Adidam

## Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Research or Creative Activity

Tai Prauner

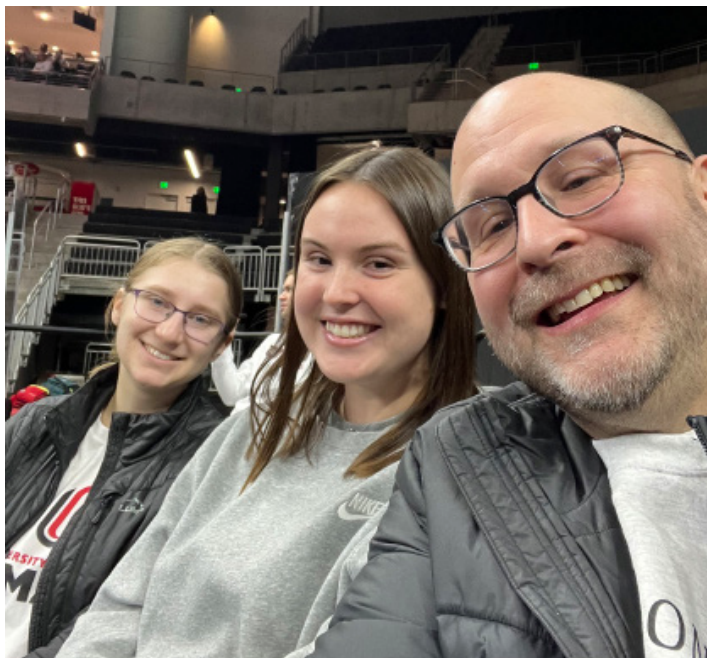
## National Scholarships and Fellowships

Gio Gomez—Voyager Scholarship

Mila Herszbaum-Harding—Fulbright Semi-Finalist

Abby Tarr—Goldwater Scholarship

## Honors Goes Courtside



From left to right, students Allison Drozd and Claire Coulter attended the honors Maverick basketball game night with assistant honors Director Andrew Faltin, enjoying courtside fun and community spirit.

# Honors' New Scott Campus Study Space

**By Summer Dingman**



Above pictures showcase the new Honors study space in MavLanding.

With big, bright windows, ample room to study, and easy access to caffeine, the new Honors space offers a refuge for students visiting Scott Campus to work.

As of Fall 2024, HSA has gained a block of four study rooms in MavLanding. Situated on the westernmost side of the building, they are sandwiched between public booths to study and Scott Crossing housing; they are directly across from The Campus Grind- a coffee bar and grab-and-go counter.

Apart from the bustle of the rest of the common area, the rooms are quiet workplaces. Each space has one large desk, four chairs, one screen, and numerous outlets, mimicking the group study rooms in Criss Library. For Scott Campus dwellers and frequenters, though, one does not have to trek to Dodge Campus for a quiet study space.

This addition to Honors was added with the intention of convenience. With common difficulties such as shuttles and limited Dodge parking, the space eases students regularly on Scott Campus.

An Honors staff member must be present to unlock these rooms for students. They frequent the space on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and Wednesdays from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Advisory meetings are even offered here. On MavCONNECT, when scheduling advising appointments, the MavLanding space is a potential location option.

Honors faculty and student board also host occasional Honors events here, such as Donuts with the Director and a pre-law event hosted by Assistant Director Andrew Faltin. Announcements surrounding events can be found in the weekly Hump Day emails.

This Scott Campus sanctuary is a great place to utilize if you want to work or simply decompress. If you're interested in more information about this Honors space or the events held there, please contact GA Emily Fuller.

# An inside look into the Honors newsletter

**By: Rory Vargas**

When I joined the Honors Program, I didn't know they had a newsletter until my first advising meeting with Emily Fuller. She noticed I was a journalism major and suggested I join the newsletter in the spring, advising me to notify her if I was interested. I found myself sending her an email a few weeks later, and before I knew it, I was sitting in my first newsletter meeting.

I was excited to join. Being part of a group that works together to find, edit, and publish stories was an experience I've always enjoyed. "The Distinction" covers anything from events going on in the Honors Program to specific students' achievements. This semester, working on the newsletter carries Honors credit.

Students participating have to fill out a regular Honors contract and they will work on the newsletter throughout the semester. Although much of the work is self-motivated, there are routine meetings every few weeks to brainstorm and work on different aspects of the newsletter.

The responsibilities were originally in the hands of the Graduate Assistant, Emily Fuller, under the Honors Director's supervision. In the fall of 2023, Honors student Olivia McArthur helped Fuller with editing. McArthur officially joined the newsletter during the spring 2024 semester. "Then, it was just Emily and I," she said. Now, a small group of Honors students work to bring the newsletter to life. It is open to students of all majors, but those studying journalism are highly encouraged to participate.

Working on this newsletter helped McArthur secure her current internship at Nebraska Journalism Trust. She said, "Working on the newsletter is one important aspect that has helped make me more desirable in the career pool."



Newsletter team members Summer Dingman, Emily Fuller, Olivia McArthur, Tanatswa Chivero, and Rory Vargas celebrate winning 2nd place in the National Collegiate Honors Council's annual publications contest.

With "The Distinction" counting for credit, the future of the newsletter seems brighter. Students will want to participate more as they will be recognized and will receive more credit for their work. Students can redeem credit hours from participating for up to two semesters, and are encouraged to continue participating after. McArthur said she will continue to work on the newsletter regardless. She finds the process of the newsletter incredibly rewarding. "I take comfort in continuing to pursue what I want and knowing that I can do it with confidence," McArthur said.

Students who join will get to experience all aspects of the process. From writing stories to formatting pages, "The Distinction" gives students the chance to gain a broad experience in journalism.

McArthur urges Honors Students to read the newsletter. She believes it to be an important tool to foster a connected community within the program. "The Distinction is our opportunity to reward and recognize one another for the hard work we accomplish every semester," she said.



# Honors Welcomes Assistant Director Andrew Faltin

By Olivia McArthur

Andrew Faltin is excited to build the role of Assistant Director of the Honors Program this year. He's a Nebraska native with extensive schooling experience specifically from the University of Nebraska System. He obtained his MA in higher administration and student affairs, his BA in philosophy with minors in Portuguese and political science, and his Juris Doctor all from UNL. Andrew is from Howells, Neb., about an hour northwest of Omaha, and he graduated high school from Millard North.

The responsibilities of this position include three primary parts: teaching, advising students, aiding in administrative functions. Andrew will teach law and education classes, and administrative functions include anything from sending mail, helping with events, and ordering cookies.

With this position, Andrew brings in a strong determination to create positive change. He is looking for innovative ways for students to be able to earn credits and recognition throughout their time in the Honors Program, whether that be through research, a badge program, or relevant opportunities for students to get together. He wants to "tap into students' ability to solve big and unique problems" and "put our minds together across disciplines" to create appropriate solutions. Amazed by Honors' students, Andrew admires their capacity to operate at the level they do, through school, work, and involvement.

As a former Honors student, Andrew offers advice for current scholars. "All learning comes from articulation; write it out, talk it out, or act it out." He says, "That means, you need to be doing things. Turn notes into something that can be processed. Better than reading, do something with the information you're given." He wants students to know, "Don't let perfect be the enemy of good."

In his free time, Andrew loves listening to podcasts, watching sports, spending time with friends and family, and traveling, especially to Colorado. He wants the Honors community to know he is very pragmatic and "optimistic about what we can do, together and as individuals." If Andrew were to be a food, he would be bananas foster, a dessert originated in New Orleans made with cooked bananas and served in a caramelized butter, rum, and brown sugar sauce. Andrew describes himself in these three words: happy to help.

**"Don't let perfect be the enemy of good."**



Assistant Director Andrew Faltin stands beside Director Dr. Lucy Morrison.

**"Happy to help."**



Honors students welcome the new Assistant Director at a "Cookies with Andrew" event.

**"Bananas foster."**



# Honors Contract Bolsters Research Confidence

By: Tanatswa Chivero

When sophomore neuroscience student Jenna Kramer couldn't fit an Honors course into her spring schedule, she turned to an alternative option: an Honors contract.

"Last year, second semester, there wasn't an honors-designated class that worked with my schedule, so I decided to contract a class I was already taking," Kramer said. "I chose to contract Neuroscience II."

Honors contracts allow students to collaborate with professors to create a plan for work within a non-honors class, earning honors credit without disrupting progress in their degree. For Kramer, the contract took the form of a semester-long research and writing project.

"Over 10 weeks, I would choose a research article that was related to the content," Kramer said. "I'd write a summary on paper, and the second thing I would do is analyze it and discuss what I liked, what [the researchers] did, or something I wanted to learn more about."

Beyond fulfilling a requirement, Kramer said the contract boosted her confidence in reading and analyzing academic papers. These skills paid off during her summer research internship at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

"My mentor gave me this huge stack of papers at the beginning of the internship, and I thought I was reading them so slowly," Kramer said. "He kept coming over every ten minutes to check in, and I was like, 'Oh no, he thinks I'm failing.'"

But, at the end of the summer, she overheard him speaking to a fellow lab member and her mom.

"He was like, 'It's really impressive that Jenna reads so fast! I'm actually practicing being able to read as fast as she can,'" Kramer said.

Kramer credits her ability to quickly analyze information to her weekly contract work. She's able to quickly pick out the hypothesis, methods, controls and key takeaways of scientific articles, which she finds helpful in her learning experience.

"Being able to read more than just the abstract and quickly look through a paper and get those main ideas was super helpful," Kramer said. "A big part of my job will be reading research papers, and that will take up a lot of my time. The more efficient I can get at reading research papers, the better. I think that there'll be lifetime benefits of just starting that skill early."

Choosing a project tied to her major also helped her stay engaged.

"I went with whatever I was most interested in," Kramer said. "[One week] we talked about the senses... what really stood out to me was music and emotion. I read a scientific article on how music could influence emotion and increase study habits. I think [projects like this] really increased my passion for neuroscience, for my major, and just enhanced my learning overall because I was getting real life examples and applications."

To keep herself on track, Kramer treated the contract like a weekly assignment.

"That's the hard part with contracts, making sure you're doing them all throughout the semester," Kramer said. "I had that relationship with my professor that was like, 'I'm going to turn this in every week'. Since there was that expectation, I treated it like an assignment that was due every week to make sure I got it completed."

Now the process of reading and analyzing scientific literature isn't new to Kramer. Her contract professor Dr. Ernest Chivero integrates article analysis into a course Kramer is currently taking.

"Dr. Chivero requires the students [in my current class] every week to read research articles and to do a summary on them and answer similar questions," Kramer said. "I had already been doing that for an entire semester before with my contract with him, so that's helped my undergrad career."

Her professor's involvement made the experience even more meaningful.

"I felt like he knew even more how much the neuroscience field means to me and how passionate I am about the subject," Kramer said. "[During class] he would ask me to talk about the article that I read. Sometimes, I didn't know that I was going to share that with the class, but it was also a good opportunity to be like, 'okay, I'm actually reading this stuff to understand it.'"

Kramer advises students doing Honors contracts to be diligent about their work, and to begin working sooner rather than later.

"It never felt like too much," Kramer said. "I did it every week and worked on it a little bit every week, and it felt like something interesting that I was doing on top of my coursework."

# SHADOW DAY

On Tuesday, March 25, current honors students volunteered to host accepted prospect honors students at “Shadow Day.” The day was kicked off with breakfast and introductions. Then, students toured campus to provide the opportunity for new students to ask questions and get more familiarized with UNO.



Honors students Summer Dingman, Nour Alomari and Abby Tarr wait in excitement to greet incoming students.



Honors student Sydney Ryan speaks to a group of incoming students in the Honors computer lab.

# Mariah Rivera: Inside the County Clerk's Office

By Hana Miller

## **What is your major, and what is your internship?**

"I'm majoring in political science and hope one day to go to law school to become a lawyer. I am interning at the Douglas County Clerk's Office with a few other interns. I started around January 20th and will be continuing until the end of the semester."

## **How did you find or secure this internship?**

"I found this internship through my advisor, Blake Langmack. He sends out emails occasionally sharing opportunities, and I saw this one in one of those. It sounded interesting, so I applied—and it all worked out. The maximum was 20 hours per week, and I typically worked 16 to 18 hours. Sometimes I made it to 20. The internship took place mainly at the office, and the schedule was really flexible. Plus, it's paid, which is super helpful."

## **What were your main responsibilities during the internship?**

"I've rotated through six departments, in groups of two. For example, Jury and Juvenile are grouped together, Protection Orders and the Board of Mental Health are another pair, and right now, I'm in Files and Exhibits."

In each department, the responsibilities differ. In Protection Orders and the Board of Mental Health, I shadowed various people. In Protection Orders, I observed how they interact with people coming in to file paperwork and guided them through the process. In the Board of Mental Health, they handle all criminal cases involving individuals with mental illness. Everything there is confidential, so we were very careful. I also attended meetings where they discussed health plans with individuals. It was inspiring to see how much they care.

In the Jury and Juvenile departments, I mostly filed documents—since they keep both physical and digital copies—and helped organize paperwork. On Wednesdays, I processed court fees by barcoding them for the online database. I also observed a few jury cases, mainly preliminary trials involving police and prosecutors.

In Files and Exhibits, I've been shadowing the supervisor and helping where needed. I've gone into storage areas with really old files—even from the 1800s—to help downsize. If a file is old enough, they scan it to microfilm and destroy the physical copy. I also toured the Exhibit Room, where they store evidence like contraband, weapons, and substances until they're ready to be destroyed. I even saw the destruction area, which was really cool."

## **What new skills did you develop or strengthen through this experience?**

"The most valuable skill I've developed is learning to use the Justice database, which is the main system for court files

and documents. A lot of people have moved to digital-only records, so knowing how to use that system is really important. As someone who wants to be a lawyer, this gives me a head start with that technology."

I also learned how to speak professionally. In departments like Protection Orders, I had to interact with people under high stress, and I learned how to help and reassure them. I even had opportunities to talk with judges and attorneys. Those experiences helped me build confidence and improve my communication skills."

## **How has this internship shaped your future plans or perspective on your field?**

"It's really increased my interest in becoming a lawyer. Speaking with attorneys and seeing how grateful and fulfilled they are in their careers made me realize that this is what I want to do. I want to help people, and I've seen firsthand how much of a difference a lawyer can make in someone's life."

I was also impressed by how the entire office works together—each person doing their part for the common goal of serving the community. Seeing all the behind-the-scenes effort that goes into the legal system has been eye-opening and inspiring. It's really affirmed that I want to be a lawyer."

## **Would you recommend this internship or field to other honors students? Why?**

"This has been the best experience of my college career so far. Getting to work in different departments was amazing. If any of it interests you, I think it's worth applying. I know several current employees started as interns."

Everyone at the office is so welcoming and genuinely wants you to succeed. They're interested in your goals and experiences. I think it's a great first step if you're considering government or legal work. Even if you're not sure yet, this kind of internship helps you figure that out by exposing you to a variety of roles."

## **Do you have anything else to say to honors students about this experience?**

"If you're thinking about doing this internship, go for it. This was my first internship as a junior, and it's been the most helpful experience I've had in college."

Even if this specific internship isn't right for you, I think any internship is worthwhile. Being in a professional setting helps you figure out what you want—and don't want—in a career. It also helps you understand how local government works, which is so important."

I used to think internships were just something people talked about, but now I truly see the value. I'd absolutely recommend it to others."



# Scott Tarry's new colloquium course engages students

**By: Rory Vargas**

In the Fall 2024 semester, Dr. Scott Tarry introduced a new Honors course, "Mobility and Transportation."

This course covered trains, buses, cars, and more.

The class started with discussing transportation as a whole before going more into detail. The students were assigned several readings from a couple of books to further their knowledge on transportation.

Jenna Hellbusch, a first year Honors student, took the class in the fall. She thought it to be a very flexible course.

"He built the material based on how we would interact with it and what we liked to talk about," she said.

The first book they read was about trains, and then it got into how trains progressed into buses and cars.

Hellbusch took the class because it stood out from the other Honors courses.

"I was kind of interested on what all it could entail," she said.

Over the semester, the class went on two field trips. One was to Eppley Airfield, and the other was to the Union Pacific headquarters downtown.

At Eppley Airfield, the students were taken to a conference room where they met with some airport employees. They talked about how the airport works and the new construction they're doing.

"It was really cool to just hear the story behind it. And they just took us on a little tour," Hellbusch said.

At the Union Pacific headquarters, they went to the back room and saw all the people behind the scenes. They were on computers routing the trains and watching the train's routes.

Hellbusch described it as one person per desk, and each desk with six huge monitors. It was a large, quiet room. The students had to be quiet, as many of the employees were working 12-hour shifts.

"It was crazy," she said.

Towards the end of the semester, they started branching off into more specialized topics to prepare for a project. The project had full flexibility as long

as it was related to transportation.

Hellbusch did her project on I-80's traffic. She was inspired by a speaker who came and talked to the students about traffic on the interstate. The project helped her gain a new perspective on traffic.

Another speaker came in and spoke on the ORBT System in Omaha. The students got to hear about the new transportation downtown: the street-car.



Students stand in front of a screen on one of their field trips.

Hellbusch enjoyed the class largely because of Dr. Tarry's teaching style. She found herself learning a lot while also not feeling stressed about the class.

"He's great. I loved him as a professor," Hellbusch said.

"It was definitely one of my most fun classes," she said, "it was fun to go there and learn something in a hands on way."



# First-Year Takes the Lead in Summer Research

By: **Tanatswa Chivero**

For many students, summer offers a break from academic demands. However, freshman neuroscience student Nour Alomari used his summer to contribute to a published medical research project, significantly expanding his practical understanding of medicine beyond the classroom.

Alomari was simply “looking for a project to do over the summer” during a tour at Harvard University in Boston, MA.

“I saw a flyer about a possible research opportunity, so I emailed the professor, and we started working on a paper,” Alomari explained.

The project developed over the following month. Living with his uncle in Boston, Alomari worked in the lab numerous times throughout the week to learn introductory material.

“The professor spent [those weeks] teaching me the procedure and everything,” Alomari said. “The next two weeks involved in-depth work, including analyzing research papers, reviewing graphs and surgical images, and building the foundation for the report.”

The final project documented a rate complication in a 16-month-old patient.

“It was a rare complication that happened after a heart procedure in the baby,” Alomari said. “Normally, this kind of problem—a connection between an artery and a vein—is fixed with surgery, but we used a less invasive method. Instead of cutting the patient open, we used a needle and ultrasound to close the connection from the outside using a piece of surgical thread.”

Although Alomari doesn’t plan to work in pediatrics, he expressed appreciation for the procedure’s success and the knowledge gained while completing the project.

“I learned a lot about working with real clinical cases,” Alomari said. “I got an understanding of imaging and how there are other solutions for problems that are innovative and less invasive than the original ones. Those less invasive solutions can make procedures safer and simpler, especially when you’re treating kids.”

Beyond the medical insights, the project encouraged Alomari to collaborate with his peers.

“I felt like I’ve grown personally, and I’ve learned

more about working with others,” Alomari said. “I’m not usually a social type of person, but I pushed myself to meet new people.”

Academically, the experience honed Alomari’s approach to reading and analyzing existing research.

“I learned how to properly read research papers and how to extract the proper information from them,” he explained.

This deep dive into literature, clinical work and the subsequent responsibility for the project’s findings provided a unique perspective, particularly as Alomari took on a leading role in the publication.

“In terms of the work you get, you feel the responsibility of the research advancing and how you need to perfect everything regarding the abstract of the paper and the results,” Alomari said. “It’s about accurately communicating the correct information in order to help other people progress with their own research, and to help other people understand how this is relevant.”

Alomari’s experience with clinical research has provided a great advantage in his current work in an extra-curricular lab and future coursework in the neuroscience program.

“I didn’t know it at the time, but I’d be doing the same thing for my current neuropharmacology research lab at UNO... and next fall in my advanced behavioral neuroscience class,” Alomari said.

The hands-on experience with research and clinical work provided insight into potential medical careers, offering Alomari early exposure to different types of medical practices being tested.

“It gave me early exposure to clinical problem-solving and innovation in a medical setting,” Alomari said. “It’s also helped me develop a deeper understanding of anatomy, imaging, and minimally invasive techniques, all skills directly relevant in the medical field.”

Alomari also highlighted the crucial skill of clearly explaining complex medical ideas, stating that he’s learned how to communicate complex medical information through writing and collaborating with people, and making this information easy to access and understand.

# The Explore Biology Club plants roots

**By Hana Miller**

Biology can be a tough subject to crack. Between memorizing terms and wrapping your head around complex concepts, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Aditi Rai, president of the new Explore Biology Club at UNO, knows that feeling all too well.

"I've always been a little scared of biology," Aditi shared. "I wasn't sure if it was the memorization or just how complicated everything seemed. That's actually what motivated me to take on this role—I wanted to help make biology feel less intimidating for other students, too."

That mission is at the heart of the club. Explore Biology is all about giving students a chance to learn how biology connects to the real world, and to explore the many ways it touches our everyday lives—from the environment to health care and beyond.

Since launching, the club has already hosted a mix of fun and thoughtful events, including a trivia night and a de-stress session. Now, they're planning a litter clean-up at Elmwood Park to celebrate Earth Day.

"We're still figuring things out, especially with limited funding," Aditi said. "We've been reaching out to different people and looking into hands-on opportunities like volunteering and even prescribed burning. We want our members to be able to learn by doing."

Aditi credits the Honors Program for shaping the way she leads the club.

"Honors really helped me learn to think differently," Aditi said. "When we're planning events or having discussions, I try to think about what perspectives might be missing and how we can make the club more inclusive and supportive."

The club also wants to help students take their interest in science further by connecting them with faculty, research labs and different biology-related paths they might not have considered before.

For Aditi, the most rewarding part so far has been watching the other club officers grow.

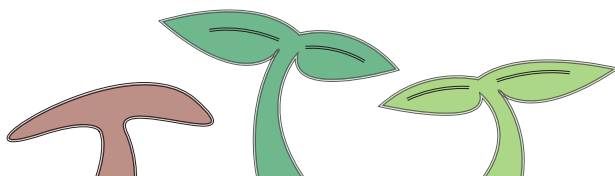
"They've brought so many great ideas and supported each other every step of the way. I'm honestly just really proud of them."

Looking to the future, Aditi hopes Explore Biology becomes a place where students feel welcomed and encouraged—whether they're passionate about biology or just a little curious.

"We want this to be a space where people feel seen and supported, a place that helps students grow—not just academically, but personally too."



Biology club members hold a tabling event to spread awareness about the impact the field of biology has on the real world.



# More than Machines

**By: Tanatswa Chivero**

In his first year at UNO, Lore Reick is already making an impact in the robotics community— an accomplishment built on over a decade of experience.

“I’ve been doing robotics for about 11 years,” Reick said. “I was going to stop after high school, but why stop now? I’ve been doing this for so long, and there’s so much mentoring to do.”

Reick is the president of the UNO Robotics Club and has helped shape the group’s presence in the metro-area robotics community. His mission expands past competing in competitions. The club regularly meets with high schoolers and provides mentoring experiences for VEX Robotics students.

VEX Robotics is a program that provides students with the opportunity to design, build, and compete with robots. Teams of students work together to create robots that can complete specific tasks in a competitive setting. VEX Robotics is known for its highly competitive tournaments, where students can showcase their skills and problem-solving abilities.

“Nebraska is about the fourth most competitive area for VEX in the world, so we have a tournament almost every weekend,” Reick said. “It’s all about giving back. We used to have high school teams mentoring middle schools, and I thought, why not continue that tradition?”

In the club’s first year, the team’s leadership has volunteered at more than seven tournaments, including ones at Glenwood, South, Omaha North, Concordia, Gross Catholic, and DC West High Schools. They co-hosted Programming Palooza, a VEX-specific challenge that brought together some of the best programmers in the state.

The team’s outreach doesn’t stop at tournaments. High schools and middle schools regularly reach out to request mentorship or collaboration on camps and events. With strong relationships across the robotics community, the club has become a hub for growth.

“There’s been a push for UNO to host high school, middle school, and elementary tournaments,” Reick said. “We’ve had schools reach out asking us to mentor students and run summer camps.”

Internally, the team is small but ambitious. With about 13 members, the club balances running community outreach and mentoring while also preparing their own team for the VEX U World Championship.

“It’s been a lot,” Reick said. “But we’ve been pretty ambitious. It’s been amazing just giving back to the community and seeing how much people have grown.”

Next year, the club plans to recruit more members, expand across colleges, and build a broader robotics community that spans more than VEX competitions.

“Our goal is to turn into more of a robotics club,” he said. “We want to do VEX AI, FIRST Robotics Competition, maybe even drone challenges.”

The team also aims to be an interdisciplinary space. Reick sees future involvement from other majors, like journalism students helping with documentation or interviews, and education majors mentoring at camps.

“We don’t look at how much skill you have,” Reick said. “We look at your desire to learn, and we can teach you all day.”

As he actively works to shape the local community, Reick is inspired by the positive reception the club has received.

“We’ve seen the growth of so many people over the years,” Reick said. “It’s been incredible to give back and see how much people improve. There’s also been a lot of excitement as well from staff as to how we can use this as an outreach tool.”

Reick handles many of the logistical aspects of the group. He works on funding, event coordination, and tournament registration all while balancing competitions and school work. Despite not majoring in robotics, Reick’s dedication has made a lasting impact on his personal growth.

“Probably my biggest takeaway from running this club would be being understanding,” Reick said. “Deadlines do need to be met, but you also have to realize people are people. There’s a whole life behind a person.”

Reick applies this knowledge to his relationship with his advisors, choosing collaboration over formal distance.

“I don’t talk to my advisors like they’re higher ups,” Reick said. “I ask them about their day and I try to be friendly.”

As the team continues to grow, Reick’s vision is clear. “Right now, we’re centered around VEX, but we want to broaden it to what people want to do,” Reick said. “There’s room for everyone in robotics.”

# Student Weaves Business into Academic Life

By: Tanatswa Chivero

Ella Lucey, a sophomore molecular and biomedical biology major, balances complex coursework with a creative side hustle. Lucey crochets and sells handmade items through her Etsy shop, ChubbiiYarn.

“It’s mostly stuffed animals,” Lucey said. “My most popular items... I have duckies that I’ve been selling a ton of for Easter, Scrump from Lilo and Stitch, and I also make some hats.”

Lucey began learning to crochet when she was 16 and officially turned her hobby into a business at 17 with help from her parents, since she was underage to start an online business. After a while, she launched a new shop under her own name.

Launching the shop required learning product photography, crafting SEO-friendly descriptions, and rebuilding her customer base.

“It was a lot of learning to take photos that were in good lighting,” Lucey said. “I had to provide descriptions, which involves its own research: How do people describe similar items? What do people recommend using for tags?”

Lucey said the key to customer service has been transparency.

“Learning to work with people [demands] just being open and honest,” Lucey said. “Most people are going to be understanding about stuff. If they like it and [are] happy with the product, they’ll come back, or they won’t,”

Compared to her past jobs, Lucey enjoys being an entrepreneur because of the flexibility it provides. This opportunity has helped her manage her time during demanding semesters.

“If I have a big assignment and I can’t do something that night, I can send all my shipping out a week ahead of time, or I can work on my Etsy the next night,” Lucey said. “That freedom is really nice.”

Although her major doesn’t tie directly to business, she says college has helped her manage time.

In addition, Lucey believes that skills she uses to create her products overlap with her long-term goal of attending dental school.

“When you’re making something with your hands, you’re working on that hand dexterity, your attention

to detail, and then your ability to communicate with people online,” Lucey said. “Those hand skills I think are going to be really important in my career,”

Lucey emphasizes the benefits of being a business owner in regard to having a creative outlet.

“It’s important to have that break,” Lucey said. “I’m so busy with academics that having my own hobby is super beneficial. It’s important for me to be doing stuff academically, but also be doing creative things. [Having a business] forces me to have a balance between the two,”

Although she may continue crafting into dental school, Lucey plans to wind down the shop after her first degree.

“Once I get towards the end, I am going to try and shut down my Etsy slowly,” Lucey said. “If I have a bunch of product left over, I’ll try and sell it at craft shows,”

Lucey’s advice to students wanting to start creative projects is simple.

“You just have to get at it,” Lucey said. “If you really want to do it, you just have to start it,”.





# Junior Gains PR Insights at National Conference

**By: Tanatswa Chivero**

Junior Makena Colson is no stranger to public relations. From her role as a social media manager at Lukas Partners to her involvement with campus organizations like Zeta Tau Alpha (ZTA) and the Women and Gender Equity Center (WGEC), Colson has given herself a head start in the field.

“I worked with Lukas Partners, which is a local PR firm in midtown,” Colson said. “I was there as a social media manager, responding to customer messages for brands like Scooter’s Coffee. We were essentially the bridge between customers and corporate.”

Her experience in campus organizations further shaped her PR background. As a board member for the WGEC, she works on digital communications, including managing social media and creating flyers. During her time with ZTA, she previously served as Alumni Outreach Chair and remains an active member.

It was her attendance at the national Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) conference, however, that offered a broader perspective. The event gathered PR students from across the country to hear from professionals, including the PR head of Taco Bell.

“It was a really interesting experience,” Colson said. “They talked about work-life flexibility, the ever-changing nature of PR, and the importance of networking and mentorship in advancing your career.”

Colson had heard about the conference from previous board members, who returned each year with new insights.

“They always came back stronger, with so many notes and great experiences,” she said. “A lot of them made lifelong connections, and now I have too. I met some girls from California, and we still keep in contact. We even went to Disneyland together.”

The conference provided more than just networking opportunities. Colson found herself drawn to

crisis communication after participating in a speed networking session with professionals.

“I took notes on everything,” she said. “There were sessions on sports PR, corporate communication, and crisis communication. That’s where I realized that’s what I want to do... crisis communication.”

One of the biggest takeaways from the conference was the emphasis on ambition and adaptability.

“They told us to be aggressive about what we want,” Colson said. “You don’t have to settle. If you have [various] experiences, you’re invaluable... and that message really stuck with me.”

According to Colson, the conference was not just about professional growth but about surrounding herself with like-minded peers.

“It reminded me a lot of the Honors community here,” Colson said. “Everyone was there to push themselves and learn. It’s intimidating, but in a good way.”

One of her favorite memories remains the friendships she built.

I met girls from Wisconsin, Ohio, and California, and we’re still in contact,” she said. “If you stay in your shell, how do you meet different people and perspectives? That’s also the key to PR.”

Colson didn’t hesitate when asked about the most impactful session.

“The Taco Bell guy,” she said with a laugh. “He had so much experience. He talked about the brand’s great moments, and its PR nightmares, and how to handle both. It was fascinating.”

Colson is ready for her next big steps in PR and has come out of the conference with a new perspective.

“I’m excited to see where this takes me,” she said. “PR is all about staying on your feet and keeping your options open, and that’s exactly what I plan to do.”

# Honors Student's Campaign for Change

By Summer Dingman

"The biggest thing that I try to tell people is how important local politics are," shared senior Garrett Connely. Majoring in Political Science and in International Studies and minoring in both History and Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Connely has honed in his passion for politics and his community.

In 2022, he became involved with his first political campaign when working for a District 4 independent candidate running for senate. With this experience, he was able to create wide connections in the political sphere and drive himself to continue his work for campaigns.

"2024 was a big year for a lot of reasons, and I just really wanted to help in whatever way I could," Connely said. He joined the campaign teams of senator Tony Vargas' run for senate as well as for 501c(4) group, Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana--a tax-exempt, social welfare organization with the purpose of educating and advocating for medical cannabis.

"We (the Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana) were a little scrappy campaign; we didn't have a whole lot of money," Connely said. "So we were pretty much all hands-on deck."

Serving as their Statewide Grassroots Campaign Coordinator, Connely worked directly under the campaign manager. In this position, he primarily helped run volunteers during petition season, but was also accustomed to helping out where needed, allowing these skills to transfer to the Vargas campaign.

As the Digital Organizer, he helped with digital media content but often found himself doing anything and everything. Among other things, he helped with canvassing by going door-to-door and calling individuals, organizing and setting up events and anything else that was asked of him.

"[Working on campaigns] has really opened my mind to seeing how much we can influence locally," Connely said. This sentiment was not built through effortless civic engagement, but rather through a continuous passion for the welfare of his community.

"When I started getting involved, you realize that it's a lot easier when you see something that you're mad about or you're upset about, that you can change things for the better."

# Claire Coulter: Millard Public Schools internship Q&A



## What is your major/minor, and what interests you in this field?

I am a junior majoring in Communication Disorders. This major covers both speech-language pathology and audiology; both require separate graduate degrees. I am pursuing the audiology route. Audiology interests me because I never realized how prevalent hearing loss is until I started studying it. I also like how I will be able to work with all kinds of people from different backgrounds, different age ranges, and different hearing/balance disorders.

## What does your position look like with Millard Public Schools?

I am a Speech-Language Pathology Paraprofessional and an Audiology Paraprofessional at Millard Public Schools. I started these positions in the fall of 2024. I work three full 8-hour days a week as I only have college classes two days a week or during nights. Two days a week I am at Kiewit Middle School working as an SLP para. I work either one-on-one or in small groups with students working on articulation of speech sounds. I also work one-on-one with students on a variety of language-based concepts (i.e. context clues, main idea/details, paraphrasing information). However, my favorite part of the job is pushing-in to classrooms. When I do this, I work with students in the classroom as they are learning concepts in real-time.

One day a week, I am at the Millard Public Schools Audiology Clinic based in Hitchcock Elementary School. As an audiology para, my primary role is to sit in the sound booth with young children (ages 0-5) during their hearing screening to help keep them focused and stay on-task. I also enter the screening results into the student's file. My role focuses on younger students, but every so often we see older students or staff. The audiologist I work with is amazing and will let me conduct the hearing screening under her supervision! I am very lucky to be experiencing both roles because I have hands-on experience with both sides of the field. These two positions were ultimately how I decided between speech-language pathology and audiology.

## How do you see this experience benefiting your future career?

This experience has benefitted my future career because I have gained hands-on experience with both sides of the field. Before the year started, I was 50/50 between speech-language pathology and audiology. I have been able to see both sides and decide based on my own real-world experience instead of just the information I learn in class.

## How do you balance time between work, school, and extra activities?

My class schedule this semester and last semester has allowed me to work three full days. I dedicate those days just to work and relax in the evenings, and the two days I am in class, I do as much studying and homework as I can. I also am free on the weekends to finish schoolwork if needed. I am also part of the UNO National Student Speech, Language, and Hearing Association (the organization for Communication Disorders majors). I attend those events whenever I can. It typically works out that I can attend at least five events a month, which is our organization's goal! Overall, what has been most helpful for me to maintain a good work-school balance was dedicating workdays to work only and school days to school only.

## What is the most rewarding/your favorite part of your internship?

My favorite part of my internship is being able to make a positive impact on the students I work with. Many of them have told me that I am one of their favorite "teachers" or get excited when we get to work together. I have seen such great progress with all the students I have seen over the course of this year so far, so I know that the work I am doing is paying off.

## If you had to take away one thing you learned from this internship, what would it be?

My biggest takeaway from this internship is that I now confidently know what I want to pursue in the future. In high school, I was never completely sure what I wanted to study in college. I started off as a Journalism major but shortly realized that wasn't the right path for me. I was worried that I would never find my true calling, something that I was passionate about. Communication Disorders was my next choice because I saw a speech-language pathologist as a child, and she had a great impact on my confidence. I wanted to make that kind of difference in someone else's life as well. Over time, I realized audiology is what I want to do. I'll still be able to make an impact in my clients' lives, just in a different way! After this experience, I know for sure that this is the right path for me.

# Honors student testifies in front of Nebraska Legislature

**By: Rory Vargas**

Most people wouldn't think to find a music education major in the middle of Nebraska's political scene, but Christian Vihstadt knows the importance of getting involved in local politics.

"I will say, two and a half years ago when I started at UNO, I couldn't even tell you who my state senator was," Vihstadt said.

But now, he has testified in front of the Nebraska Legislature countless times.

On Thursday, Feb. 6, Vihstadt testified in front of the Nebraska Legislature opposing the Opportunity Scholarship Act, also known as LB509.

This bill was introduced by Senator Tony Serentino. Its aim is to give tax credits to those who donate to private and faith-based scholarship funds.

Vihstadt is largely against the idea of vouchers and believes they divert money from public schools.

He said the bill was identical to a school choice bill that was vetoed by Nebraska voters in the 2024 election. The bill was introduced less than two months after.

"It's plain anti-democratic to introduce an almost identical bill to one that people voted on," he said.

Vihstadt first found interest in testifying with the introduction of LB575 by Senator Kathleen Kauth.

When the bill was introduced, Vihstadt wanted to do anything he could to ensure it wouldn't pass. Although that didn't happen, he started making connections and testifying.

Vihstadt crafts his testimonies with his audience in mind. If a certain lawmaker has personal interest in something, he will appeal to that.

"I've learned a lot about how each senator operates and what motivates them when they're doing their law-making," he said.

Vihstadt advises those with interest in testifying to always be watching, as many of these hearings are scheduled only a week in advance.

"You have to be kind of willing to just drop everything and go," he said.

Testifying usually has consistent rules for every hearing. Everyone shows up at the same time, and they

are commonly at 1:30 on a weekday. There is a list of bills that are testified on in the order that is posted on the door.

They have an hour for proponents and hour for opponents. If anyone wants to testify in a neutral capacity they are given an hour as well.

There is no sign up beforehand, the person testifying just shows up to the room posted with the hearings.



Vihstadt testifies in front of the Nebraska Legislature.

They then sign in on a sheet. If the testimony was already written, they will print out 12 copies and give

them out to the legislators at the time of the testimony.

"I think the barrier to entry in local politics is really short but really hard to overcome at the same time," Vihstadt said.

Vihstadt is now on the Stonewall Caucus for Nebraska, which is the queer wing of the Democratic Party. He sits on the board and represents the Omaha Sarpy County Area.

Vihstadt emphasizes the importance of local politics.

"There is so much happening in the world that you can feel paralyzed. But especially on the local level, it is so easy to get in there and start," he said.



# Does Anyone Need the Writing Center?

**By Summer Dingman**

I used to write the perfect essay. I would never make grammatical errors, all of my points were well thought-out, and I always had a healthy balance between both academic and topical information. There was no reason to not turn in my papers immediately after I finished them--which was always around 11:58 p.m.

When I started to work at the Writing Center (WC), my ignorance became glaringly apparent. My writing was nothing near perfect, and my misplaced confidence could not beat the helpfulness of this campus resource.

I am not an outlier to this experience as fellow Honors students and WC undergraduate consultants, junior Jack Hartz and senior Kyley Bishop, understand this same misplaced pride. With both Hartz and Bishop working at the WC for a little over six months, they can both recount their early preconceptions and later realizations.

"I think the reason why [I didn't use the WC's resources] was because I was pretty confident in my skills as a writer and didn't think I needed the extra help," Hartz shared.

The WC primarily has two negative narratives surrounding its services: people believe that only "bad writers" visit the WC, or that it's a means to provide quick fixes for students' writing.

"What I didn't realize [prior to working here] was that the Writing Center helps people of all skill levels and that there is still so much to be gained and improved just from having a conversation with another writer," Hartz said.

At any of the three locations on both Scott and Dodge campuses--in Arts and Sciences 150, on the second floor of Criss library, and in room 131 in Mammel Hall-- consultants

ultimately want to help individuals grow as writers.

"We--consultants at the WC--are excited to work with writers," Bishop said. "We want to collaborate with you on your writing, no matter if it's a speech, essay, assignment, application, resume, or another kind of writing."

Although our website lists four primary services that we help with-- "writing assignments, application essays, business letters, or other projects"-- we encourage people to visit, even if there's nothing on the page yet.

"There is no pressure to be perfect or to have a clear idea of where you want to go with your writing," Bishop said. "The consultants at the WC are here to help you work through your ideas and help you achieve your writing goals--no matter how big or small they may be."

When I personally struggle to find footing on an assignment, I make multiple appointments to help sort out my thoughts and stay accountable with my writing progress; this is something I have found especially helpful when collaborating with my coworkers.

With stigmas surrounding the WC, we try to encourage any and all people that this is a free resource meant to be supportive, not discouraging.

"My advice to people nervous to visit the WC is [that] we're very open and non-judgmental," Hartz noted. "We want you to feel good about your writing and to have the confidence you need to share your research and ideas with others."

Since working at the WC and utilizing its resources, I have felt more confident in my writing than ever before, which is the goal of the WC authentically manifested.

# The Maverick Machine Hits a High Note

By Hana Miller

If you have ever been to a Mavs hockey or basketball game, you have definitely heard of the Maverick Machine. They are the ones bringing the energy with brass, drums, and chants that get the whole crowd fired up. What you might not know is that several of those musicians are Honors students, balancing their academics with pep band life—and having a blast doing it.

## Why Join? It's More Than Just Music

For many, pep band started out as something familiar. “I was in pep band all through high school,” said Bailey Kuehl, a music major. “So when I got to UNO, it just felt right to keep playing.”

Others were encouraged to join by friends. “I knew a few people who were in it and kept telling me I’d love it,” said Carly Bishop. “They were totally right. The atmosphere is amazing, especially when the arena starts filling up before a game.”

And yes—there are a few perks: priority seating at games, some travel opportunities, and even a little extra money through a \$500 stipend that is distributed at the end of the season to full pep band members. For most of these students, it is about the people and the energy. “It’s just a really fun group to be part of,” Bishop said. “And we’re loud in the best way.”

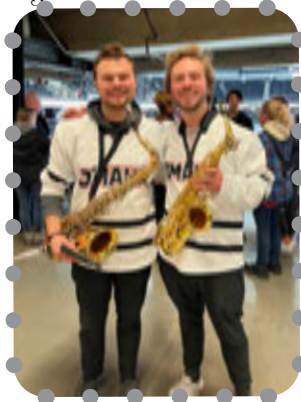
## Making It Work With an Honors Schedule

Being in the Honors Program and keeping up with a full course load doesn’t leave a ton of free time—but the students talked to all agreed that pep band fits in surprisingly well.

“We get the season schedule ahead of time,” said Elizabeth Ward, “so it’s easy to plan around big assignments or exams.”

For Reid Chapman, it has actually helped with time management. “Most games are in the evenings or on weekends, so I’ll use that as a deadline—like, okay, I have to finish this paper before the game tonight.”

Even during busy travel times like tournaments, the band’s structure helps. “We have a system for letting the directors know if we need to miss something,” said Callum Ward (pictured above, right). “It’s flexible, and people are super understanding.”



## The Best Seats in the House

The students shared a bunch of stories about their favorite moments—like buzzer-beaters, intense overtime hockey games, and packed home crowds.

“Hockey games are wild,” said Chapman. “If you’re going to check out one sport this year, go to hockey. The atmosphere is unreal.”

And beyond the games, there are a bunch of fun traditions, from pre-game chants to quote books filled with jokes and memorable moments. “We always yell ‘Go Mavs!’ together after tuning,” Kuehl said. “It’s goofy, but it makes us feel like a team.”

## Why It Matters

Most students said pep band gives them a space to breathe outside of classes. “It’s fun, it’s social, and it’s not tied to a grade,” said Kuehl. “I get to play music just for the joy of it.”

Maria Butler (pictured right) added, “Some of my favorite college memories are with pep band. It’s helped me stay connected, especially in the middle of a busy semester.”

It is not just for music majors—students from all kinds of majors are involved. Whether you are looking for a way to keep music in your life or just want a front-row seat to Mavs games, pep band is open to anyone who auditions.

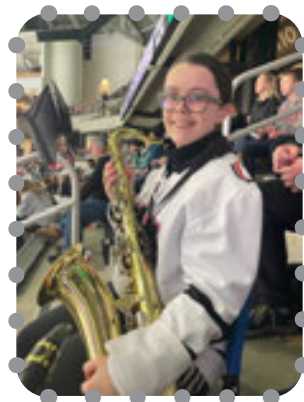
## Thinking About Joining? Here’s What They Say:

“Don’t talk yourself out of it because you’re ‘too busy,’” said Ward. “It’s super doable, and it’s so worth it.”

“It’s a great way to be part of campus life,” said Chapman. “Plus... you get paid. Can’t argue with that.” Chapman appreciates both benefits.

“If you like music and love supporting the Mavs, go for it,” Bishop said. “It’s fun, it’s welcoming, and it’s a great way to meet people.”

So, if you’re an Honors student who’s been missing music—or just looking for something different—consider this your sign. The Maverick Machine is always ready to welcome new members who want to make some noise.



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