



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA AVIATION INSTITUTE

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University of Nebraska at Omaha Aviation Institute Honors Student Excellence and Industry Leadership at 2025 Honors Convocation

OMAHA, NE—The University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) Aviation Institute celebrated its annual Honors Convocation on April 23, 2025, at the Thompson Alumni Center. The event recognized outstanding student achievement and honored key figures who have made lasting contributions to aviation education and industry advancement.

The evening featured the presentation of the **Otto F. Bauer Distinguished Service Award to Captain Brad Monda**, Managing Director of Southwest Airlines' Destination 225° program. Captain Monda's visionary leadership in creating career pathways for aspiring pilots and his instrumental role in Southwest's partnership with UNO have transformed the journey from student to professional aviator.

Also highlighted was the **Frank E. Sorenson Award for Pioneering Aviation Education**, awarded to **Dr. John Bartle**, former Dean of the College of Public Affairs and Community Service. Dr. Bartle's leadership from 2012 to 2024 supported the dramatic growth of the Aviation Institute, helping it become one of the nation's premier collegiate aviation programs.

For the second year, the Institute was invited to submit a grant application to Southwest Airlines as a University Partner in the Destination 225° program. The Southwest Airlines Destination 225° grant aims to support Destination 225° partner universities by reducing the financial burden on students. Universities can enhance affordability, improve educational outcomes, and foster a conducive learning environment through this program. The Institute submitted a request for student scholarships. Six students received the **Southwest Airlines Student Scholarships**. These scholarships mark a significant investment in future pilots and aviation leaders:

- **Tyler Thieman**
- **Adeline Peetz**
- **Caden McDermott**
- **Samuel Kennedy**
- **Trevor Denker**
- **Alex Duman**

The Convocation recognized 19 additional recipients in addition to the Southwest Airlines Scholarship. These awards help support students in their academic and professional aviation pursuits.

2025 Scholarship Recipients

- **Aviation Student of the Year** – *Kyndall Vargas*
- **Durham Undergraduate Scholarship** – *Ella Stamp*
- **Chris A. Hawks Memorial Scholarship** – *Jacob Ginn*
- **David L. LaMar Memorial Scholarship** – *Cullen Leitner, Nicholas Hinkel*
- **Chambers Family Aviation Scholarship** – *Nicholas Hinkel*

- **Robert E. and Rosita C. Wolsmann Scholarship** – *Samantha Stojanvo*
- **Don Smithey Scholarship** – *Natalia Meyer*
- **Densel K. and Melba J. Acheson Scholarship** – *Kymberli Rodriguez*
- **Russell C. Ross Memorial Aviation Scholarship** – *Landon Scott*
- **Robert Azer Memorial Scholarship** – *Lana Huetson*
- **Jamie Barrett Memorial Scholarship** – *Fatuma Abdullahi, Shay Sinnard*
- **Larry M. Smith Memorial Scholarship** – *Cullen Leitner*
- **Nebraska Aviation Council Scholarship** – *Chloe Schrick*
- **Arlene V. Steier Memorial Scholarship** – *Maria Juan*
- **Bruce Tuttle Memorial Scholarship** – *John Arthur*
- **Jet Linx Aviation Institute Golf Classic Scholarship** – *Mercedes Silva*

The 2025 Honors Convocation reflects the University's mission to foster academic excellence and meaningful industry engagement, empowering students to soar as the next generation of aviation leaders.

As Director Scott Vlasek remarked in closing, "Tonight we celebrate not only our students' accomplishments but the spirit of innovation and mentorship that powers our Institute. May the sky never be their limit, but only their starting point."

For more information about the UNO Aviation Institute, visit aviation.unomaha.edu or contact Scott Vlasek at svlasek@unomaha.edu.