New Frontiers

RESEARCH AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA KARNEY

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As I prepared to welcome University of Nebraska at Kearney faculty and students this fall, the theme that dominated my thoughts and greetings was “Momentum” – momentum in terms of faculty research, scholarship, and creative activity; momentum in terms of brick and mortar building (literally) throughout the campus.

Our new Wellness Center, for example, will provide a state-of-the-art home base for UNK’s nationally recognized Department of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Leisure Studies (soon to be renamed the Department of Kinesiology and Sport Sciences). It is great news for students and faculty, and for the Kearney community as well. Kearney has been recognized on the national level in recent years for programs such as Building Healthy Families and UNKids. Watch for more great things as our researchers continue their work.

Momentum for health science education is also increasing as plans for a new $19 million Health Science Education Complex take shape.

This project is a collaborative effort with the University of Nebraska Medical Center that will provide facilities for expanded programs in nursing and allied health. We are excited about its tremendous potential for keeping our talented health career students here in central and western Nebraska, increasing opportunities for greater numbers of health science students, and contributing to both economic development and health care access to better meet the demands of rural Nebraska.

On behalf of the UNK community, I am proud to present this sixth issue of New Frontiers. The stories represent only a glimpse of the research and creative activity being conducted by our faculty, yet I hope it will convey our excitement, our productivity – and our momentum.

Through discovery, commitment, collaboration, and with progressive facilities, our scholar-teachers are crossing disciplines and producing work that benefits their students and all of us. As a university, we constantly endeavor to “look farthest into the future and prepare us for the challenges and opportunities ahead.”
Welcome to New Frontiers

While Chancellor Kristensen’s update focuses on changes across campus, our focus on excellence in teaching and scholarly activity remains the same.

UNK sets a high priority on recruiting faculty who have the potential to excel as teacher-scholars. The philosophy at UNK is that our students benefit most from working with excellent instructors who are also productive scholars. We know that professors who are active researchers, artists and scholars enrich their classroom teaching with current knowledge and debates in their academic areas. When professors are considered for promotion and tenure, they need to provide evidence that during their years at UNK they have substantial accomplishments in these interdependent areas.

Interestingly, many of our best teachers are also our best scholars. This sixth issue of New Frontiers highlights the work of eight faculty members who personify the teacher-scholar model. Their research and creative activity make original contributions to their disciplines and to the educational development of their students. To a person, their careers are energized by their passion for both teaching and scholarship.

KENYA S. TAYLOR, Ed.D.
Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs
Dean for Graduate Studies and Research

This passion is expressed around different themes. Many of Peter Longo’s topics reflect his interest in human rights and advocacy for the under-represented. Julie Shaffer’s research agenda involves analysis of lake water in Nebraska. Nathan Buckner has 204 professional piano concert appearances. Susan Honeyman’s fascination with how children are depicted in literature started with her interest in Henry James’ work. Dennis Potthoff’s scholarship indicates his recognition of the importance of educational reform. A specialization in the needs of high-risk youths is a focal point in David Hof’s research, which also reflects his belief that counselors should advocate for their clients. Heather Schulz is building on a psychological theory that likens the way people create their identities to an actor’s performance and then links that perspective to buying decisions. Kathryn Zuckweiler applies her knowledge about operations management to topics ranging from optimum class size in web courses to hospital project implementation.

These professors are part of a faculty of teacher-scholars who devote their careers to discovery and are leading us to a new frontier. Their students, colleagues, and the community are beneficiaries of their findings. I hope that you enjoy reading about their research and creative activity.
New Frontiers

Research and Creative Activity at the University of Nebraska Kearney

Volume VI

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Office of Graduate Studies and Research
Dr. Kenya Taylor, Dean

Director Honors Program
Dr. John Falconer

Managing Editor
Kelly Bartling

Director of Marketing & Creative Services
Creative Art Director
Randy Mattley

Contributing Writers
Jan Treffer Thompson
Carol Bryant

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klemmenm@unk.edu
unk.edu

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Every teacher knows a student like him. The one in the back row. The one who doesn’t talk much, and mumbles when he does. The one who slides down in his chair, trying to make himself invisible.

Sometimes it’s difficult to remember much about those kids. But as a new teacher for Lincoln Public Schools in the early 1980s, Dennis Potthoff met one he’ll never forget. This boy, a seventh-grader Potthoff calls “Tony,” posed a question that he has been answering ever since.

“I had been watching him for the first nine weeks or so. I knew he wasn’t doing much of anything. He was a loner, he didn’t talk to anybody, slumped down in his chair, but every once in a while he’d do an assignment pretty good and you’re thinking ‘this kid’s got some talent,’” Potthoff said. So Potthoff called him in after school one night. To his surprise, Tony showed up.
“We had this conversation where I was getting totally beat up. I was trying to build bridges with him, trying to make connections,” but Tony answered in monosyllables only. “Finally he looks at me and says ‘I don’t know why I have to go to school anyway.’”

None of the usual answers — his future, his career, to get into college — meant anything to this student. “I’m ashamed to admit it…this is how badly I got beat up. I finally said to him ‘well here’s the deal Tony. You have to go to school until you’re 16, it’s the law. So you just as well get over it.’”

Now associate dean of the University of Nebraska at Kearney’s College of Education, Potthoff has spent the last three decades searching for answers to Tony’s question. Along the way, he’s helped shape the approach teachers take to their profession, not only through his teaching but with dozens of published articles and work with national and international education organizations. His work argues to Tony and other American children that they need schools because democracies need engaged citizens.

THE PURPOSE OF SCHOOLS

“That was probably a first big moment in my interest in the purpose of schools, and that became much more refined over time because I also learned from international travels that schools are very different around the world,” Potthoff said.

Potthoff is director of the American Democracy Project at UNK, which promotes student engagement with current issues, and led his college through two major initiatives to assess and improve its programs.

Answering Tony’s long-ago question has taken Potthoff into the heart of the debate over national education standards, for which the federal No Child Left Behind legislation has become the “poster child.” Roughly, the debate breaks down into two camps — those who believe schools should prepare students for careers, and those who think schools should prepare students for citizenship. As Potthoff and colleague Ed Walker explained in a 2009 article for the National Network for Education Renewal, No Child Left Behind has led to more standardized curriculums and testing. It’s also shifted who controls schools, with local school districts making fewer and fewer decisions.

In the article “School Goals in an era of Accountability: Getting Back to the Basics of Educating in a Democracy,” Potthoff and Walker looked at the question of what goals should drive educational reform. They surveyed 900 parents, educators at all levels and students in UNK’s teacher education program on support for 12 educational goals, from teaching vocational skills to fostering creative and aesthetic appreciation.

Survey results showed strong support for all the goals, which argue against educational reforms that stress workplace skills over everything else.

“All groups believe schools are, among other things, to form democratic character, to form interpersonal skills, to form character,” he said, yet that’s not what government policies emphasize.

NETWORK FOR EDUCATION RENEWAL, AND ATTITUDE

Potthoff promotes a broader purpose for schools as executive director of the NNER, a network UNK joined in 1996. The network’s mission is to promote the same 12 goals Potthoff and Walker used in their survey, which were first proposed by educator John Goodlad.

A proponent of Goodlad’s ideas for decades, Potthoff said he was happy to learn, when he was hired, that UNK was part of NNER. “I thought ‘Gee whiz, this is Tony all over again.’ I’ve been bothered by this Tony story for 15 years, now I’m in a place where they’re really thinking about this stuff.”
“We don’t want to sort kids any more. We want to raise all kids up…”
Potthoff regularly writes articles for the network’s journal, blogs and gives presentations at NNER conferences. His message is not that schools should fight nationalized testing and standards, but instead should look at the trend as a challenge, and make the national goals work for them.

“We don’t want to sort kids any more. We want to raise all kids up… so it’s in the schools’ best interest to take steps to help kids learn more so they’ll do better on the tests. That doesn’t thrill me, but (it does thrill me) if you just stop and say ‘we’ve got to do some things to make these kids learn better.”

While Potthoff has always seen schools as offering more than job training, he said his philosophy began to evolve in the mid-1980s, during the year he taught at a middle school in Ontario, Canada, through a teaching exchange program.

Potthoff said there were many similarities between the school systems in Canada and the United States, but there was a key difference in attitude. For example, Canadian students were taught French from kindergarten on even then, while bilingual education is still relatively rare in America.

Those differences came into focus for Potthoff when he was again asked a difficult question – this time, by a German social studies teacher named Thomas.

“We were at a function one night and we were talking about international politics and he said to me something like ‘surely, you don’t think the Cold War was only the Soviet Union’s fault,’ and I was sitting there thinking that every textbook in the United States told that story. We were just trying to protect the world from the Communists.”

That and other international travel, including a trip to Taiwan as a keynote speaker, has broadened Potthoff’s perspective on education and showed him what’s truly important to a democracy.

“We’ve got a culture where kids are used to freedom, choices, their voice being accepted in most families, in the schools,” he said. “So it came to this notion that our schools are schools in a democratic society. We need people to use their voice. We need people to think critically. We need people that will collaborate with each other. This is how a democracy works.”

Collaboration is Key

A second emphasis of Potthoff’s research has been to look at just how teachers can accomplish that purpose. One key, he’s found, is collaboration.

In the late 1990s, as chair of UNK’s teacher education department, Potthoff oversaw the Professional Renewal Program for Educators. An “overhaul” of UNK’s teacher education program, the program created faculty cohorts who addressed three identified themes – diversity, technology and democratic education.

Many teaching methods changed because of that program, but Potthoff said a bigger impact might have been the collaboration among faculty.

Potthoff detailed the process in a number of refereed articles, including 2004’s “A Bucket of Eels: A Tri-partite Approach to Renewing a Teacher Education Program” in the Journal of Teacher Education.

“We helped establish the culture, that it is OK for a college on the university campus to do this kind of work across departments, to learn from each other,” he said.

That initiative also identified technology as key to reaching a diverse student population, and since then the college has embraced tools such as SmartBoards and online classrooms.

Online classes were a key part of a second initiative, which Potthoff also coordinated, that looked at ways to differentiate teaching within the university. In 2012, he and other coordinators received a $25,000 grant from UNK’s Kelly Fund to assess those efforts.

Along with Potthoff’s other work, he’s active in the classroom. A key part of his teaching methods class is the day he tells his freshmen about Tony, and asks how they would respond.

“I go ahead and tell them how badly I botched it,” he said, but his real goal is to start his students on their own quest for an answer. In America, he said, we can’t settle for anything less.

“My scholarship is driven by my love of teaching. I want to study how to get better at teaching. My scholarship is driven by my love of democracy. I do believe democracy is worth it. It’s really hard work, but it’s an awfully good model for living, and for setting up a society.”
Honeyman’s fascination with how children are depicted in literature started with James’ works. But they have diverged to topics such as studying how Halloween has changed from a trick-focused holiday to a treat-dominated holiday that the candy industry controls, to examining how children are depicted in the comic strip “Sugar and Spike.”

Early in her academic career, the English professor at the University of Nebraska at Kearney focused on Henry James and 19th- and 20th-century American fiction. She became fascinated with the representation of children in Henry James’ works, which led to her focus on the representation of children in literature.

James’ novel, “What Maisie Knew,” describes the life of Maisie Farange beginning with her childhood, when her parents are divorced. Maisie spends six months of the year with each parent. Because of the instability in her parents’ homes, Maisie eventually chooses as a teen to live with Mrs. Wix, a more reliable adult guardian.

“The point of the novel is that we can’t know what Maisie knows,” Honeyman said. A film based on “What Maisie Knew” was released in 2012.

Honeyman’s research focusing on traditional literature shifted to more contemporary topics such as Halloween and comic strips.

CANDY INDUSTRY CONTROLS HALLOWEEN WITH SWEET TREATS

In the article “Trick or Treat? Halloween Lore, Passive Consumerism, and the Candy Industry,” Honeyman describes Halloween as a holiday once led by children who threatened to play tricks – but now controlled by the candy industry that peddles sweet treats.

“Sweetness has always been used as a way of making both the physical and ideological palatable – a process that seems especially relevant in child rearing and commercial child culture,” according to Honeyman. “I investigate representations of children’s initiations into consumer society at the subtle level of appetite, especially through tempting sweets.

“To my mind a most interesting background for exploring this issue can be found in the commercialization, urban legends, childlore and rituals surrounding Halloween, a holiday that ranks second (after Easter) in the United States for candy consumption and no doubt as such plays an important role in socializing young children as future consumers.”

Honeyman notes that tricks were once widely tolerated as part of a permissive holiday ritualizing an aggressive outlet for the young, and have been preserved longer in rural areas where the “treat” part seemed like begging. In fact, some people call Halloween “Beggar’s Night.”

“The perception of trick-or-treating as begging exposes the problem with the ‘treat’ – it encourages passive
consumerism rather than the empowering play of tricking or potential, active, enlightened consumerism,” she wrote.

Honeyman uses examples from sources such as Grimms’ fairy tales, “The Wizard of Oz,” “Meet Me in St. Louis” and the TV shows “It’s the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown” and “Malcolm in the Middle” to illustrate her points.

“The candy industry’s hold on Halloween guarantees much commercial control” of the holiday. “It should be no surprise that the vehicle of control is sweetness.”

SUGAR AND SPIKE

Honeyman wrote about Sheldon Mayer’s comic strip “Sugar and Spike” for an article scheduled to be published in “Children’s Literature Association Quarterly” in January 2014. Sugar and Spike was a syndicated DC Comics series from 1956 to 1971. The comic series features two toddlers, Sugar Plumm and Spike Wilson, who communicate with each other and baby animals through baby talk that adults cannot understand.

Honeyman said comics have been called “the folklore of the times.”

Mayer includes baby talk dictionaries within the comic series, defining the vocabulary such as “big doggie” (horse), “meow doggie” (cat) and “little doggie” (mouse).

“Sugar and Spike” directly followed heated censorship debates that peaked with 1950’s hysteria concerning juvenile delinquency, according to Honeyman.

“Sugar and Spike” was created at a time when the Comics Code Authority (formed in 1954) determined what could and could not be printed in comics, putting complex pressures upon all comics producers, but especially on those addressing young readers,” she said.

Imprisonment is a constant theme in “Sugar and Spike.” The toddlers are often trapped in playpens, halters, animal cages and anything with bars.

“Ultimately, we don’t want ‘Sugar and Spike’ to unlearn baby talk, speak to their parents, or learn to read. Instead, we can fantasize that they exist in an endless but visually imaginable liminal social space that language and word-literacy cannot contain,” according to Honeyman.

“I was encouraged to fall in love with the arts.”
L O V E  F O R  L A N G U A G E

Honeyman’s path to becoming an English professor was non-traditional, just like her choice of topics for journal articles. She describes herself as a remedial reader when she was a child growing up in Wichita, Kan.

“I didn’t understand why reading was relaxing for some people to do. I did love language, such as lyrics to songs. I wrote poems as a child,” Honeyman said.

Although she loved language, her struggles with reading and migraine headaches led her mother to enroll her in an alternative school in Wichita for fourth- through sixth-grade students that promoted the arts. Students did not receive grades, and her migraines became less severe.

“I was encouraged to fall in love with the arts,” Honeyman said.

She knew when she set foot on a college campus that she wanted to be an English major. Honeyman received bachelor’s and master’s degrees in English from the University of Kansas, studied film and comparative literature at the University of Hull in England and earned a doctoral degree in English from Wayne State University in Detroit, Mich.

Honeyman noted that identity politics commonly shape the content of English courses, such as courses that focus on women’s literature. When Honeyman regularly taught an African American literature course at Wayne State University in Detroit, students often wondered “what a white girl from Kansas would know about African American literature” because she had not experienced life as an African-American.

However, even though she is not a child, students do not probe her legitimacy in teaching children’s literature.

“No one has questioned why I am teaching a children’s literature course,” Honeyman said. “Adult authority is rarely questioned when it comes to representing children. It should be.”

Honeyman has written two books: Consuming Agency in Fairy Tales, Childlore, and Folkliterature and Elusive Childhood: Impossible Representation in Modern Fiction. Routledge published Consuming Agency in 2010, and Ohio State University published Elusive Childhood in 2005.

Her articles have been published in The Henry James Review; Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature; Children’s Literature in Education; Marvels and Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies; The International Journal of Comic Art; The International Journal of Children’s Rights; the Modern Language Association’s Children’s Literature; and International Research in Children’s Literature.

She presented papers at three international conferences and five national conferences and has also delivered presentations and invited lectures at nine events.

She was elected for a four-year term for the Children’s Literature Association’s Committee for Article Award and serves as a reviewer for Children’s Literature, An Annual Publication of the MLA; International Research in Children’s Literature; The Henry James Review; Children’s Literature Association Quarterly; The Lion and the Unicorn; and Marvels and Tales.
ACT I, SCENE 1
A young professor of marketing sits center stage at a desktop that’s full, but organized. She’s dressed simply, in a white shirt and black pants with classic lines. The office has the stark feel of a place someone is still moving into, with few personal mementos. She may be at the beginning of her career, but this woman’s a professional who’s all business.

At least, Heather Schulz’s research suggests, that’s the role she’s writing for herself.

Schulz, an associate professor of marketing at the University of Nebraska at Kearney since 2011, has begun publishing research that uses theatrical concepts to study consumer behavior.

Building on a psychological theory that likens the way people create their identities to an actor’s performance, she applies the theories to buying decisions. When people buy clothes or shoes or jewelry, she writes, they’re really choosing “props” to develop the roles they’ll play when they go before a public audience.

While the idea that “all the world’s a stage” may not be new, applying dramaturgy the way Schulz has is a ground-breaking concept in her field of consumer research.

“I’m not the first one to look at consumer social interactions, but I am the first one who’s trying to apply this certain type of social interaction theory to consumer behavior. It’s a big, bold idea,” she said.

Words flow quickly when Schulz talks about her work, punctuated by a broad smile that hints at how exciting it is for someone just two years from her doctorate to have made such an impact. She laid out the concept in a 2012 article for
the Journal of Research for Consumers and has delivered related presentations at a number of national conferences.

She has at least three manuscripts under review that build on her concept. Drawing from data she collected for her dissertation, Schulz at first found it difficult to get her ideas accepted by her peers.

A NEW CONCEPT

“It was such a new concept, I was having a lot of issues my first year here trying to publish. I was putting out a lot of manuscripts, I was getting a lot of pushback at first,” she said, especially from the top journals in her discipline. “It was too big a leap, even the idea, for tier one journals.”

Not only is Schulz’s theatrical metaphor a new take on consumer research, her findings rely heavily on qualitative research from interviews, and many researchers aren’t comfortable with that.

“I was starting to get some doubts about my research, or did I collect the right kind of data,” she said, but that all changed once she was able to lay the foundation for her research in the 2012 article. “Now I’m getting some approval, so I’m going to plow ahead.”

Schulz’s ideas started coming together from her first year in the University of Texas at Austin’s doctoral program. Articles from her advertising theories class became her building blocks – the first, Grant McCracken’s “The Movement and Meaning Model,” explained how advertising creates social meaning for products, and consumers take on those meanings when purchase the goods.

The second, by Russell Belk, borrowed an idea from social psychology to argue that consumers’ purchases are an extension of their identities.

“He’s the one who introduced self-extension theory in consumer research,” Schulz said. “I was kind of like,
that’s what I want to take to social psychology theory and apply it to something more specific, not social interaction but consumer interactions, and consumer identities.”

The theory Schulz reapplied, impression management theory, was forwarded in 1959 by Erving Goffman. He used the theatrical metaphor, and the terms of dramaturgy, to describe how people create identity through social interaction.

**RESEARCH INTO BRAND CHOICES**

Schulz applied Goffman’s theory to consumers by looking at their brand choices. She surveyed 300 people and interviewed 20, asking questions about what clothing brands they would choose for different social situations, such as a night out on the town. Each interview was at a subject’s home, where Schulz would ask her subject to put together outfits. She took photos of the outfits and notes on the brands chosen, including how prominently the brand name or logo was displayed.

The private space of their homes, Schulz said, seemed to help people open up. Many became reflective about their choices, gaining insight into the images they’d been projecting “on stage.” Schulz said she was most surprised by how many people became defensive about their decisions. “About a quarter of the people, when we got to the second half of the session, they did not like answering those questions. You could see they got physically uncomfortable (discussing) their clothes, because it’s a reflection of their sense of self,” Schulz said. Often, she had to reassure subjects that she wasn’t judging them as vain or materialistic. Schulz’s research found a very complex relationship exists involving consumers, their identities, their audience and their brand preferences. People are influenced not only by the characteristics they want to project, she found, but by the reactions they receive and the cultural meanings they apply to certain brands. For example, in one interview, a man named Ryan explained he usually wore Diesel jeans because he felt they had a masculine, low-key image, and that’s the image he wanted to project.

“There’s a lot of moving parts, and I think that’s again why qualitative research is so helpful when you’re trying to understand a new social phenomenon, or a new topic,” Schulz said.

Quantitative research generates numbers, while qualitative research yields other forms of data, including interview narratives. While qualitative findings are more subjective, Schulz said her work centers on that kind of data because it allows her to tell more of the story.
“You’re going into their world, and I actually did that. I went to their individual homes to do the interviews, and I like that. I’m trying to understand their reality, instead of trying to make them see where they fit into my reality of my research . . . I like the messy details of qualitative research, and then finding some organization within that. Finding some themes from the chaos,” she said.

Articles Schulz has under review at various journals explore the themes she found in her initial research. One focuses on how consumers use brand-name products as props on their “stages,” while another uses role theory to look more closely at how groups influence the consumer/actor.

**BRAND PROMINENCE**

The third explores how brand prominence, or how conspicuous a brand is on a product, also plays a role in creating consumer identity. She said that idea has been written about mostly as it relates to high-income consumers, but her research suggests the effect exists for other demographic groups too. She’s also identified some age and gender differences in the role brand prominence plays.

Future projects could include more work with the quantitative survey results, and a look at how Jungian archetypes are used in creating social identities.

Last summer, Schulz interviewed staff at an Omaha advertising agency to generate data about a different part of the branding process.

“The second narrative I’m going to try to start is how the advertiser could create the meanings that the consumer sees” Schulz said, which would make her research applicable. Not only could the findings help companies with brand messaging, they would help consumers better understand buying choices and make them more aware of the signals they send.

Ultimately, all of Schulz’s efforts can be seen as part of the role she plays. As an academic and researcher, she said, in many ways she’s a storyteller. And there’s no way she can walk away from this story until it’s finished.

“I’m telling the story kind of piece by piece, keeping the stream of research going.”
Peter Longo has put in 25 years of scholarship at UNK. He hopes he has 25 more to go. This professor’s blood is Loper blue. And he doesn’t want to stop learning, researching, collaborating, being inspired by others. He doubts that he’ll run out of research topics even in 25 more years.

Students and fellow faculty inspire him every day – it doesn’t matter the discipline. He can be intrigued by a discussion with a biologist, an accountant, a musician or artist. And want to collaborate with them on research projects to learn something new. “I’m a big fan of teamwork. And that’s the beauty of the place. When you stay 25 years you learn so much from students, from your colleagues,” Longo said.

**HIS VITA READS LIKE A CATALOG**

Here’s some of his and collaborative publications, and presentation topics: “Workplace Religious Accommodation for Muslims and the Promise of State Constitutionalism,” “Ethics Of Tax Law Compliance: An Interdisciplinary Perspective,” “School Consolidation in Nebraska: Economic Efficiency vs. Rural Community Life,” citizenship and higher education, diversity opportunities in higher education, water on the North American Plains, water on the borders, the constitution, environmental racism, water recreation, water quality, religion and religious rights, ethics in criminal investigations, stalking on campus, Nebraska constitution, Nebraska legal history, the Human Genome project, city codes for chicken coops…

Meandering. That’s his research path. Curving, bending, looping…as along the course of a stream or river. That metaphor pleases him.

Longo is a professor of political science at University of Nebraska at Kearney. He wrote the book, literally, on the Nebraska constitution.

How does Longo decide what he’s going to research next? Better yet, where does he get the energy to pursue so many topics? “The ideas come from a variety of sources,” he said. “I benefit from community, I collaborate. I like to work with students – I learn from them, they give me more than I do them. Of course, I learn much from my colleagues.”

Indeed, he is intrigued by conversations with colleagues. He doesn’t care what discipline. Sometimes the further removed from political science, the more intrigued he is.

“To take what I do from my discipline overly serious would be a mistake… because it doesn’t reveal the dimensions provided by other disciplines. That’s the strength of UNK. We know biologists, we know chemists. That creates one of the best research environments for faculty and for students.”
“Research should be related to our classroom teaching, our students, our own classroom development, and more thoughtful, more reflective.”

Longo grew up in Bellevue and earned his bachelor’s degree in history at Creighton University. He went to UNL for his law degree and followed that up with a doctoral degree in political science. His first faculty position (1986) was at Benedictine College. That’s where he met one of his first research collaborators as a tenure-track faculty member. That collaborator remains a close personal friend, as are his other collaborators.
His mentor, the late Robert D. Miewald, urged Longo and his fellow doctoral candidates to not take themselves too seriously.

“He said, ‘just do your work.’ I never want to hold my research out as the definitive word. Research is an enjoyable side of doing the work. Being part of a community, exchanging ideas, and being purposeful and getting work accomplished, not taking ourselves too seriously is part of the research role,” Longo said. “We don’t know the answers, that’s why we do the research.”

Every step in Longo’s education led him to what he was really interested in: Learning more. He started as a history major.

“Liberal arts provide insights into the human condition. Ideally everyone should have at least an opportunity to minor in history, or disciplines such as political science, philosophy, English. I have a long-held interest in history but I also appreciate biology…That’s the strength of our research endeavors on our campus, the interdisciplinary research, summer research programs, and undergraduate student research programs.”

“That’s why I feel fortunate to have landed and stayed at UNK. You experience the rich diversity of students and colleagues; you see the kind and bright students who will be great citizens in their community.”

This May Longo took a handful of students on an honors seminar trip to research water policy in western and northern Nebraska.

“I just finished that honors course on environmental policy. We traveled to the Niobrara, Fort Halsey, (Lake) McConaughy, to the Platte River. It was driven by a grant, and I am hopeful the course will be continued to be taught with or without a grant.”

Again, that research experience was more about sharing with the students and learning from others. There were profound campfire conversations.

“It’s easy to teach environmental policy in the classroom, you don’t get ticks. I picked up a nice tick in Halsey…The students knew more about living outdoors than me. They picked up lizards and snakes. They also had a keen understanding of environmental stewardship. I learned much from them.”

ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS AND ‘THE PERSON NEXT TO YOU’

Many of his research topics reflect his interest in civil and human rights and advocacy for the under-represented.

“It’s all about how you take care of the person next to you,” he said. “I came from a large family (the last of nine), and you take care of everyone in your family.”

He examines religious rights, educational policy, environmental policy and many more topics. He and Professor Joan Blauwkamp won the Center for Great Plains 2012 Leslie Hewes Award for their article, “Workplace Religious Accommodation for Muslims and the Promise of State Constitutionalism,” published in the spring issue of Great Plains Research.
Longo said: “That’s what drives my research… I’m concerned when people get left out. I don’t like being left out. If there’s a good conversation I want to be included. I like to look at what happens when citizens are left out of governing decisions. Things like school consolidation, religion, comparative water policy. When you displace people, how did they get left out of that decision? Those aren’t distant entities, they could be the person next to you.”

Disagreements are inevitable, he said, but politics suggests that you do your best to say you involved everyone in the discussion.

On May 22, following the honors seminar excursion, he was in Rome presenting a paper to the United Nations’ Food and Ag Organization and the Global Awareness Society International Conference. He presented “Dam Water Policy in the U.S. and Italy” with Rick Cummings, the professor of accounting, his long-time friend and former colleague at Benedictine, now at University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. He calls that conference one of the highlights of his career. He also found new contacts for his next project, collaborating with his colleague Professor Satoshi Machida.

This spring he also co-chaired with Rick Edwards the annual Center for Great Plains Studies Symposium on “Gains and Losses from School Consolidation in the Great Plains,” in Kearney. The subject of school consolidation fascinates him because rural schools are a vital part of “the good life” and students bring their experiences to UNK and ultimately well beyond UNK. He said it was an excellent opportunity to learn from Edwards, director of the Center for Great Plains Studies and former UNL Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs.

WHAT’S UP NEXT?

Obviously, Longo already has lots of ideas and things going on. He’s working on a project with Machida looking at food and hunger from a global perspective. Another upcoming conference research project involves Blauwkamp on the “chicken coop policies and resulting controversies.”

“When I stop doing research it’s time for me to go. You’ve got to be part of the learning process and research is a key component of staying relevant.”

A GUIDE TO NEBRASKA’S CONSTITUTION

Nebraska’s constitution is one of the oldest state constitutions in the U.S., but it has been amended 227 times at last count. Longo, with Robert D. Miewald and Anthony Schutz, wrote the book on the topic.

The Nebraska State Constitution: A Reference Guide, (2009, University of Nebraska Press, second edition) is the only modern, comprehensive reference on the state constitution, including up-to-date information on case law and the latest constitutional amendments.

His co-authors are the late Robert Miewald – his mentor and dissertation adviser – and UNL law professor Anthony Schutz. The first edition was published in 1993, guided by Miewald; and Schutz did the majority of the work on the second edition, Longo said. “Anthony is a tremendous scholar,” he said. “I managed to sandwich myself between two of the smartest and kindest people I have ever known.”

The significance of the book is its subject, Longo said. “The Nebraska Constitution is the social contract between Nebraska citizens and Nebraska government. The 1875 Constitution continues to shape the political life of the state.” Through continual amending: from the creation of the unicameral legislature to the changing role of education, “the story is told.” The reference guide isn’t just for lawmakers, it’s for all concerned citizens., he said.
Nathan Buckner’s repertoire list numbers 276. That’s the number of pieces he’s mastered for piano solos, piano duets, piano and strings and woodwinds, orchestra and contemporary music.

His number of professional concert appearances: 204. That’s a lot of practicing and performing for this child-violinist-turned-pianist who has become one of Kearney and Nebraska’s premier musicians in series and solo performances such as Concerts on the Platte, piano concertos and chamber performances – and a featured performer with the Hastings and Kearney symphony orchestras.

He’s performed throughout the world, notably at the Blue Lake Summer Arts Festival, Delmarva Piano Festival, for the College Music Society International in Seoul, and at recitals in Hong Kong and Weihai, in Ljubljana, Slovenia, Mexico, Taiwan and Belarus.

When Buckner plays his audience is transported to a world apart from today. Maybe to the Baroque or Renaissance eras. To a Romantic age. Or to a time of old aristocracy in Russia.

His piano is played in concerto as a solo instrument where he can bare his soul amid the notes and crescendos as designed and written by masters of all the world’s best piano concerto literature. Or it’s part of a string or piano trio of piano-cello-violin, piano-violin-horn, or piano-violin-viola. Or of a chamber quartet: piano, two violins, cello.

When he’s not in concerto, most often his playing companion is his wife Ting-Lan Chen, or with Nathan Rogoff as part of the UNK Faculty Piano Trio.

In July, he and Chen performed at the Oregon Bach Festival – a massive event spanning Eugene, Portland, Ashland, Bend, Corvallis and Florence, over three weeks. Its focus was to celebrate Helmuth Rilling’s 80th birthday and 44th and final season as artistic director with the festival.

His return to the Oregon festival makes him nostalgic and reflective. For family and for his musical roots.

TO THE JUILLIARD

Buckner was 17 when he left Eugene, Ore., and moved to the Bronx, N.Y., to attend the Juilliard School preparatory program – a child-turned-teen prodigy of piano, who before fate intervened, began his world in music as a violinist.
His father Paul Buckner still lives in Eugene – a noted sculptor, scholar and creative pioneer in figure studies – and is turning 80. His mother Kay Lamoreaux Buckner (1936-2012) was also a formative influence in his creative endeavors, and passed away last December. Buckner is cataloguing her letters, discovering new things about her as an adult son of a famous artist.

Family and fate and love of art and music are themes that dominate a discussion with Nathan Buckner.

“My father was responsible for the figure studies program at the University of Oregon, with classical traditions of figurative artwork – the human form,” Buckner said. “He taught the anatomy classes and figures studies classes. Which was not popular in the 1960s when he started, when everything was not abstract or expressionist ‘enough.’ My parents during their early careers experienced quite a bit of derision for that.”

When Buckner was 4 his father earned a Fulbright to study at the Slade School of Fine Art in London, and Nathan and the family went with him, exploring for a year, “being dragged from gallery to gallery” in places like the Victoria and Albert Museum, through Florence and Madrid. Even at such a young age, he remembers.

“I’m from a family of sculptors and painters basically. I went into a different field, music, to avoid the competition. I can’t draw like they can. My family is quite an interesting group.”

Dad and brother are noted sculptors, mother a noted painter, an uncle who taught ballet, a cousin architect.

“I’m a musician, my wife is a musician, both of us are performing musicians.”

At age 11 Buckner studied violin, playing for six years.

“I stopped when I was 16. … Why? It’s hard to say. There are a number of things that happened. Some of these tend to be fate,” he said. “That’s what my wife would say – when she grew up in a such a system that she was in, piano was her first instrument – and at some point she was pointed to violin. And she got a great teacher and she was pushed on the violin and then became a violinist.

“In my case, when I was 14, I suddenly stumbled into a situation with a very fine piano teacher who made it very inspiring for me to pursue piano and then at that point it was almost all piano.”

Shoshana Cohen, herself a student of Juilliard in the 1960s, happened to be in Eugene, Ore., and was a fascinating and inspiring influence to Buckner. He describes her as flamboyant.

Fate brought him Cohen, and he became highly skilled and motivated. Enough to travel across a continent to a city of 8 million people that may as well have been a different planet, as much unlike it was to Eugene.

PHILIP ANTONY CORRI?

Buckner earned his bachelor of music at the Juilliard School, later his master of music in piano performance at Indiana University, then his doctor of musical arts in piano performance and literature at University of Maryland. He came to UNK upon completion of his Ph.D. and has been here ever since, rising from assistant professor to associate, awarded tenure in 2003 and full professor in 2009.

Buckner’s trip to England as a 4-year-old, in addition to developing some childhood memories and bridging his legacy backward to his earlier ancestors, provided some inspiration for his dissertation and scholarly research topic: composer Philip Antony Corri.

Corri is someone you’ve probably never heard of. Buckner finds him fascinating, after spending hundreds of hours studying him, reading his music, performing it.

COLONIAL AMERICA AND ITS PLACE IN MUSIC HISTORY INSPIRED HIM AS WELL

“Initially I was exploring a lot of what was going on in music in colonial America and classical period… often referred to as the federal period in this country. It being a historically neglected subject, it interested me in what was going on,” he said. He found a connection to Corri’s story as a composer and pedagogy.

“My mother’s family were Huguenots who in the 1680s-1700s came to America, so I had maybe more of an interest in colonial periods of time, than in many families,” he said. “Not that any of my ancestors were musicians, but I’m very interested to know what the climate was, especially in the cities and in the countryside as well. That (subject) fit the bill in many ways.”

Now his creative exploration centers around chamber music, exploring classical literature: Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Chopin, Haydn, Liszt, Schubert, Mozart, Ravel, Rachmaninoff, Grieg, Mendelssohn. He also enjoys some modern and contemporary works such as Gershwin’s “Rhapsody in Blue,” Darleen Cowles Mitchell’s “Illuminata,” “Julius,” “Passages,” and “Variants,” among others; Frederick Fennell’s works.
As any musician would, he enjoys playing solo as much as playing with his musician-colleagues: Piano four-hands is one of his favorite collaborations. Playing with Chen and Rogoff as the faculty trio — really anything with chamber music for piano and stringed music combinations.

“It’s not possible to talk about my work without talking about my wife’s work, too. She is first and foremost the person I collaborate most with as a musician,” he said. “Even today, we have at this point performed together almost all of the standard literature for the violin and piano combination. This is something that does interest me very much at this point.”

Ensembles bring opportunities to negotiate and navigate through collaboration, he said.

“If you want to do collaborative work involving a chamber ensemble, then you can be more selective with the musicians you’re working with. If it’s an important piece of chamber music to you you’re not going to have too many opportunities to play the same piece, when it comes to solo piano literature you can do that any time because that involves only you.”

How does a musician with such a depth of experience and variety of collaborations decide what to attempt and master next? He laughs.

“This is very funny because we’ve had many conversations about that, that in part go ‘what haven’t we done?’ We (he means he and Chen) are so both of this sort of mentality that we’re sort of hungry to find out what else is there. And that’s maybe why we’re so good together. There’s that element of it.”

Most often the selection of work follows the requirement for the type of performance or festival. For instance the July recital in Oregon.

“We actually had a very interesting process for determining which of the 10 Beethoven sonatas we were going to do: We took a vote. We (he and Chen) each ranked 10 sonatas 1-10 in the order in which we thought we would like to do them and which we thought would be suitable and then we averaged the 2 numbers to come up with the piece that would surface to the top, and so we’re doing the 8th Sonata, the G major. I think she ranked that slightly higher than I did but on average it was the highest one. But none of the Beethovens leave anything to be complained about really!”

But mostly, those conversations are about what they enjoy, and sometimes the two are just drawn to the same pieces of music — “and then other times we then have to negotiate a little bit in that process.”

“The more musicians you add to the equation the more complicated it becomes.”

Kearney is a rich oasis for anyone who is pleased to hear beautiful music, experience beautiful art, and who revels in creative expression. If it’s due in any part to him, he refuses credit. The faculty in the school of music, are, however, stage-setters for music in central Nebraska.

Whether there has been an increasing interest and audience for chamber music – a revival of sorts – is difficult to tell.

“The music faculty here set the tone. But I tend to think that in general there has been more of a direction, that you can trace through progress of the 20th century, and more of an interest specifically in chamber music. I have seen in my time there has been more interest and there have been many more chamber concerts performed in places like Kearney, and more of a migration to an interest in the great works for chamber ensembles.”

He remembers several stand-out performances in Kearney as highlights.

“One in particular, a performance of my wife and I… a Brahms horn trio, with piano, violin and horn, in March of 2007 that was particularly well-received. We’ve performed together all kinds of chamber work, all 10 of the Beethoven sonatas for piano and violin, all of the Brahms, most all of the important works in piano and violin we’ve done.”

“I think, and Ting-Lan would second this, that the favorite performance that I’ve given here was probably the performance in April of 2006 when we performed the
Brahms A Major piano quartet. I suspect very few people were familiar with it but it is one of those monumental chamber works: piano, violin, viola, cello combination. Brahms wrote three and this is the second. But the A Major piano quartet is one of those monumental pieces. It requires more than 50 minutes to perform and it’s one of those pieces that one can die happy after one has performed…and, which I think at the performance, it did go very well.

“That, for me, is one of the moments I remember most fondly.”

Buckner traveled to China in 2008 for a unique experience teaching at Shandong University at Weihei, China, where he again realized that music is indeed a universal language. During a five-week teaching and performance schedule, he taught accompanying and improvisational accompanying, a master class in Schubert’s sonatas, and numerous private lessons.

He doesn’t speak Chinese. His 3-year-old son will, he said. (“It’s too late for me.”)

“I had a translator there but he didn’t say a lot,” Buckner said. “Usually you can teach things on piano through demonstration. That’s the best way to teach. You demonstrate. You can explain what it is you’re doing.

“Was it Stravinsky who said ‘Writing about music is like dancing about architecture?’ On some level or another there’s that truth. It’s better to just demonstrate. But you can’t demonstrate everything and you do have to do some explaining. And I could. I had enough Chinese vocabulary to get through some things myself but then I would get stuck, and so the translator would start speaking.”

Writing about Nathan Buckner’s music is indeed like trying to dance about architecture. ■
The girl was 11, maybe 12 years old. But she braved the pain as a medicine man cut the skin of her chest and placed pegs through the openings. She would dance, tied by those pegs to a cottonwood tree, until her skin tore free.

Though he’s attended many sun dances on the Pine Ridge reservation since that day, David Hof said that girl’s story has stuck with him. It’s a powerful reminder that true understanding comes in the real world, not in offices or books. “She was piercing…because her younger brother was 7 and he had leukemia and was going to die,” Hof said. By taking part in the sun dance, the girl was sacrificing part of herself for her brother.

“If you had just walked in and saw that you’d think ‘oh, how inhumane, how awful,’ I can’t believe this culture still embraces this. Spend a week with them and you’ll say ‘I got it. I got it. It might be different, but I got it.’”

Leading professors and graduate counseling students from the University of Nebraska at Kearney to Pine Ridge each summer is just one of the ways Hof promotes a hands-on approach to his profession. A professor in UNK’s school psychology and counseling program since 2000, Hof has published extensively and maintains a private counseling practice.

“I specialize in high-risk kids. I work with the naughtiest kids this state produces,” he said. Counseling children exclusively, Hof specializes in treating kids with sexually deviant behaviors. After 16 years, he remains confident that people can change for the better, especially if he can “catch them while they’re young.”

“The more I work in it, the more I feel that way,” he said.
WEARING MANY HATS, INCLUDING ADVOCACY

A specialization in the needs of high-risk youth links Hof’s many projects, which also reflect his belief that counselors should advocate for their clients. And to be effective advocates, he said, counselors have to understand and accept cultures that may be quite different from their own.

That’s why, though Hof and his group may wear many hats while on the reservation, none of them ever say “tourist.”

The Pine Ridge Intercultural Service-Learning Immersion focuses on making participants part of the community. They live with Dallas Chief Eagle, a school counselor at Pine Ridge and one of the architects of the program.

“One of the things Dallas Chief Eagle told us was that ‘you don’t get to be tourists. We’re not going sightseeing, we’re not seeing the Native Americans in their native areas, what you’re going to do is participate.’ And so what we set up, then, is students actually do a ‘sweat,’” Hof said. They watch a sun dance, visit schools and do whatever the rest of the community is doing.

Instead of planned service projects, they simply do what’s needed – construction, giving someone a ride or leaning up. One year, Hof and a few students even fixed Chief Eagle’s plumbing when it broke during their stay.

Real-world experiences are important to Hof’s counseling philosophy, which stresses the need for advocacy. Advocacy is a counselor’s work on behalf of his or her clients – not just individual clients, but the social groups to which they belong. Counselors who are social advocates argue for policies and try to enact changes that benefit those groups.

Pine Ridge is plagued by high rates of alcoholism, drug use, poverty and school dropouts. It’s also a place rich in history. Any counselor who wants to help that group of people, Hof said, must first understand the culture and the situation first-hand.
Hof explained his ideas on advocacy in a 2009 article, “Advocacy: The T.R.A.I.N.E.R Model,” published by the Journal of Social Action in Counseling and Psychology. Hof worked four years to develop the model it outlines. It gives seven steps counselors can take to make advocacy part of their practices — target needs of a client group, respond to those needs, articulate a plan, implement the plan, network while training, evaluate and redirect efforts. TRAINER, Hof said, gives counselors a step-by-step guide for advocacy that hadn’t existed before. The model has led to several other articles and refereed national presentations on advocacy.

VICTIMIZATION AND BEHAVIORS

Another major publication that’s led to a series of presentations was Hof’s “Deviant Sexuality in Children and Adolescents: A Protocol for the Concurrent Treatment of Sexual Victimization and Sex Offending Behaviors.” Published by the American Counseling Association in 2009, the protocol was yet another way for Hof to advocate for his clients.

“If I had a claim to fame, that would be it,” Hof said of the article, which lays out a method for treating both a child’s behavior, and the victimization that may have caused that behavior, at the same time.

About 60-80 percent of children who are sex offenders were first the victims of sexual abuse, Hof said.

But while counselors have long known about that connection, the traditional approach has been to treat them as offenders first, gearing sessions toward stopping them from re-offending. In concurrent treatment, sessions deal from the beginning not only with children’s behavior, but the reasons for it.

“It’s all tossed in together. So you might talk about how this person was sexually abused when they were 8, they get talking about how angry they are, their anger connects to the relapse prevention plan where they’re saying ‘it’s my anger that’s one of my biggest triggers that causes me to offend’ and so that’s the importance of linking those together because otherwise you miss that. It’s getting to the core,” Hof said.

He has presented on concurrent treatment at national conferences, including the 2011 Association for Counselor Education and Supervision Conference and 2010’s American Counseling Association Conference.

Hof’s method of concurrent treatment developed early in his career, while a clinical supervisor in Minnesota.

“We worked with the worst kids this country produces. We worked with baby rapists, murderers, everything,” Hof said. In that real-world crucible, he and the other counselors found they could be more effective, more quickly, if they addressed the root causes of the children’s problems along with their behavior. But they didn’t have empirical research to prove the method worked. That’s what his protocol offered.

“We worked with the worst kids in the world and we took a look at the two years and seven years’ recidivism rate, and we were 82 percent successful at not having re-offense, so it can be done,” he said.

Each time Hof presents his curriculum, he said, he “tweaks” it based on previous feedback. His goal is to write a workbook on concurrent treatment. Like all his efforts, he wants it to be a hands-on tool for practitioners.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST-AID

Recently trained in psychological first aid and disaster mental health, Hof said he also wants to start taking students into disaster areas, continuing to give future counselors real-world experience.

“I think what we’re finding is that the more students have the opportunity to experience these things, the more likely they are to do them in their own careers,” Hof said, adding that his experiences at Pine Ridge have not only changed the way he teaches, but the way he thinks.

“I learn so much first probably about myself, second about the culture, and third about our students,” he said. The experience isn’t for everyone. While many students signed up for the first trip in 2007, numbers plummeted the next year when students heard stories about the activities and the conditions.

Changes in the orientation helped, Hof said, and this year’s group was bigger than ever with two people from the community and three members of UNK’s Native American student group added to the mix.

“What we continue to hear is it is one of the most meaningful experiences they’ve participated in, in helping them really contextualize culture. So if they have an openness to accepting native culture, then that easily parleys into middle eastern culture, or (any other culture),” Hof said. “So the translatableness of the experience seems to be one of the blessings. It’s that ‘OK I risked to do that, I put myself out there. I survived. I can survive this too. I can be open to this one too.’"

And from the beginning of the project, Hof said, Dallas Chief Eagle made it clear that openness is what the people of Pine Ridge want from the UNK group: “He said ‘Come here, learn our ways, just understand our people, and take that back. That’s advocacy.’”
Unlocking Lakes

The Old Wives’ Tale is that if you leave a fencepost in a Sandhills soda lake it will be gone by next year.

Many of these small, shallow, alkaline-saline lakes in Garden and Sheridan counties seem something like from a science fiction movie – not molten and bubbling, but nevertheless extreme.

These environments – where no vertebrate species survive – have the attention of microbiologist Julie Shaffer, whose research over the last half-dozen years has worked to solve a mystery that has captivated few other researchers’ full attention.

What is in these lakes – animal, plant, bacteria, nutrient, or a combination of some unknown matter or processes – that yields potassium to such an extreme?

And more, are there clues to climate change that can be discovered in these extreme lake environments?

“Some microorganisms break down wood very quickly,” Shaffer said. “It is known that alkaline-saline, another name is soda lakes, are very productive, so the carbon turns over very fast in those environments. But people don’t know an awful lot about what’s in the lake, what the microbial community is doing.”

Shaffer’s research takes her to these unusual lakes to draw water samples, and using next-generation sequencing, analyzing and identifying tens of thousands of bacteria from a single water sample, to eventually provide important clues about what’s going on.

“Those lakes are unusual around the world. We were going to begin to study the microbial community in those lakes: what’s there, try to understand what makes them so special or so unique.”

Potash Lakes and Their Role in History

Known as soda lakes or potash lakes, during World War I potash was harvested from them to use in products such as fertilizer, glass and soap. Most of the potash needed in the U.S. came from Germany prior to the war. Large plants were built for harvesting the potash, and remains from the old plants still stand.

The lakes Shaffer studies are primarily in the Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Garden County: Crane, Crescent, Blue, Hackberry, Roundup, Island, Goose, Wolf and Black Steer lakes, all southeast of Alliance or northwest of Ogallala.

“They’re very unusual because there are a few places in the U.S. that have alkaline-saline lakes but with high potassium carbonates. They’re sodium or magnesium chlorides.”

The Sandhills, the largest vegetative desert in North America, is basically one big desert but it’s covered in plant material,
Shaffer said. It’s a very fragile ecosystem because of the lack of rainfall and the lack of solid material on which plants can grow – easily disturbed.

The potash lakes themselves are very shallow and small, “that’s how the salts can accumulate in them so significantly,” Shaffer said. “They don’t interact with the aquifer, the water doesn’t circulate down. There’s clay at the bottom that kind of seals them off, and so water comes in from the dunes, the runoff from the surface, then it just evaporates once it gets there. Those nutrients or those salts just accumulate more and more every year.”

Shaffer has been researching the potash lakes since about 2006, when she turned her studies in a new direction. “I guess the research I’m doing now is more cutting edge than anything I’ve done before.” With a small collaborative grant from the university, she and professor Bradley Plantz from UNL began the project that she is now finishing solo, drafting and submitting papers.

She believes the process in these lakes is not caused by any one thing, “It’s the whole community and how they’re working together.”

“So solving a mystery, yes, that’s what the whole goal of the project is.”

CLIMATE CHANGE?

“One of the things we’d written a grant about was to use those lakes as a way to monitor climate change, discovering eventually ‘is it really getting warmer,’ (and) ‘are we really getting less rain out here?’ Because they’re so sensitive to change, we would think that the Sandhills would respond to changes in temperature very quickly.”

The project also gives her an opportunity to involve students – that’s a primary focus for her, and more broadly, for UNK, Shaffer said.

“There are lots of things for students to do (in this research). There are lots of ways to keep students involved, that’s the focus of what I do here,” she said.

Analyzing data points, running data analyses on computers, even going with her to the field, she mentors student researchers to show them real science.

UNK’s Mobile Environment Lab is a helpful tool. New in 1997–98, the “MEL” allows a laboratory in the field – a drawing point for students.

“We filter our samples there. To prepare them for the DNA sequencing and chemical analysis,” Shaffer said. The surfacewater samples from individual lakes are examined for what ions are present, pH, temperature and turbidity, among other things.

When Shaffer goes on a research trip to the Sandhills, it’s like coming home, she said.

A natural scientist and naturalist – she loved the outdoors, camping, hiking and fishing – and intended to study zoology, but then discovered she like microbiology better. After earning her bachelor’s degree in biology and English at Sioux Falls Col-
lege, she began her Ph.D. in microbiology at UNL. She was drawn to UNK immediately on earning her doctorate because of her interest in teaching and mentoring students.

“I applied, they called me right away and here I am,” she said.

‘TEACHING IS WHY WE’RE HERE’

“If you’re here just to do research you’re at the wrong place. You’re here to share your love of your discipline and help students develop those skills as well, she said.”

“The mentoring we do is just another type of teaching. Part of our job is getting students excited about science’ and to do that you have to get your hands dirty and you have to show them what science is really about,” she said. “That’s been a fun part of the research, taking students with you, spending time with them and helping them to develop those skills that they’re going to need to be good scientists.”

When not working on the Sandhills lakes research, she’s overseeing various undergraduate research projects.

“I do a lot of projects with students interested in dental careers,” such as one student analyzing coliform on toothbrushes. Another student analyzed the contamination of her surgical scrubs.

“I let students have some flexibility with what they’re interested in.”

“Teaching and research is all so closely related on this campus. Collaborative writing with undergrads and grad students: that’s my primary role. I love my students. They’re fun it’s very rewarding to see them become successful and know they’re prepared for the next part of their lives.”

New Frontiers
Kathryn Zuckweiler knows operations management, whether she’s teaching graduate students about the topic or writing journal articles.

She applies her knowledge about operations management to topics ranging from optimum class size in web courses to hospital project implementation.

“The principles that underlie everything I do are processes. I’ve looked at process improvement. I view most things as a process,” she said. Each process is broken down into steps, and the steps are analyzed to see if improvements can be made.

For example, quality is a process, because there is a process to follow to improve quality.

FAIR STAFF WORKLOADS FOR TEACHING WEB CLASSES

Zuckweiler, associate professor of management at University of Nebraska at Kearney, has taught a number of classes online and blended her teaching pedagogy and operations management knowledge to write “Methodologies to Determine Class Sizes for Fair Faculty Work Load in Web Courses,” published in the International Journal of Distance Education Technologies.

In the paper, two approaches to determine fair class sizes for instructors who teach Web-based courses are presented. Some instructors are concerned that the additional time needed for teaching an online course not detract from their other obligations as professors to participate in research and service activities. The paper was intended not only to help professors but to also assist department chairs in creating equitable instructors’ schedules.

The first approach is called the simple index adjustment method. The assumption is that the time it takes for the “3 Ps” of teaching (preparation, presentation and processing) should
be equal between a traditional lecture course and a Web course. An Index Adjustment Statistic is calculated by dividing the total instructional time for a Web course by the total instructional time for a traditional course and multiplying the result by 100. The allowable Web class size is then determined by dividing a representative traditional class size by the Index Adjustment Statistic.

The second approach uses a multiple regression model that incorporates the dependent variable of class size and the independent variables, which are tasks involved in teaching Web courses that are more time-consuming than instructional tasks for traditional courses.

Examples of tasks that may be more time-consuming for Web-based instruction are responding to students’ emails and dealing with technology problems. Although the article notes that “any multiple regression model is limited and can have unique technical problems that can render its application questionable,” the model is useful in determining “fairness” of class size.

Data was collected from nine semesters of an introductory management information systems course that was taught in a traditional setting and a Web-based setting. Using the first approach, results suggested that the maximum “fair” size for a web-based course was 152 students — compared to 212 students in a traditional lecture-based course. Using the multiple regression model, the maximum “fair” size for a web-based course was 205 to 213 students, compared to almost 209 students in a traditional lecture course.

“The substantial difference in the estimation of a ‘fair’ class size between these two models is, in the judgment of the authors, quite appropriate,” according to Zuckweiler. Instructors with less experience in teaching Web courses “should be allowed some form of instructing time adjustment to be ‘fair,’” including proposed reduction in class size as that form of adjustment.

As instructors gain experience teaching Web courses, the amount of time that they spend responding to students’ emails can decrease. Instructors who teach Web courses may also have time savings because they may not have to drive to a university to teach the course or for office hours, Zuckweiler said.

DO JUST-IN-TIME MANAGEMENT AND LEAN MANAGEMENT DIFFER?

Zuckweiler co-authored “Just-In-Time Management Or Lean Management: Is There Really A Difference” that was presented at the Mountain Plains Management Conference. The paper compares principles that define “lean management” and “just-in-time (JIT) management” through a survey of 172 operations managers and a review of journal articles published during an 11-year period. The term “just-in-time management” originated in Japan in the early 1970s, whereas the first book devoted to lean management was published in the early 1990s.

“Lean management appears to be the current term for the principles of JIT management,” the article said. Lean management may involve a more “inclusive” approach to operations management, where “inclusive” suggests incorporation of the customer, supply-chain, and newer information technology into lean management, but “JIT management’s origin lends itself to a more narrow production shop-floor environment.”

“Based on our results, we feel there is virtually no difference between the principles of JIT management and lean management,” according to Zuckweiler. “Further, we feel this makes a reasonable case that ‘lean management’ is a superfluous term that should not supplant the JIT management term in books and article.”

The article “was a little controversial,” Zuckweiler said. When it was presented at a conference, some people in the audience were upset that the article saw few differences between the two concepts.

OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT IN HOSPITALS

Because operations management is most often developed for manufacturing, a study about project planning for hospitals was completed, in part, to shift from a manufacturing environment to a service environment. Zuckweiler’s research, “An Empirical Evaluation of Hospital Project Implementation Success,” was published in the Academy of Health Care Management Journal in 2010.
Operations management literature contains a number of studies about project critical success factors, but the studies have not focused on hospitals. Zuckweiler’s article focuses on whether critical success factors identified in previous research apply to hospital implementation projects and what factors are perceived to be most important during each phase of a hospital implementation project. Project managers were surveyed from hospitals throughout the country.

Typically, a project implementation is considered successful if the project is completed on time, within budget, and according to specifications. Critical success factors are key areas that must be successful for an organization to do well.

Ten critical success factors were identified that are important for project implementation success: project mission, top management support, client consultation, project schedule, personnel, technical tasks, client acceptance, monitoring and feedback, communication, and troubleshooting. The article concludes that project mission, project schedule, monitoring and troubleshooting are significant predictors for project success. Although critical success factors studied in prior research are similar for hospital implementation projects, they are not identical.

“There were some areas where hospitals diverged from best practices for project implementation” in manufacturing environments, she said.

Because the surveys were anonymous, she doesn’t know whether any of the staff members surveyed implemented changes as a result of the article.

However, “the article is being cited in other articles,” Zuckweiler said.
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The new Wellness Center, a $6.5 million, 19,000-square-foot facility east of Cushing Coliseum, will open in 2014. When complete, it will include space for the nationally recognized exercise science education and research program, the Physical Activity and Wellness Lab, and a large fitness center for students and the entire campus community. This new facility will offer nearly 10,000 additional square feet for exercise and recreation classes, machines and weights, and personal fitness. The project also includes renovating 4,000 square feet of student recreation and classroom space.