Are We Alone?
ADAM JENSEN
From the Chancellor

This fall as we prepared for the 110th year at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, and as we welcomed some 7,000 students to campus from all over the world, I was equally humbled and thrilled to think of the impact we have on the lives of students, and by the changes that have occurred at our university.

Our brand is We are Difference Makers. As you page through this newest issue of New Frontiers and read the stories of seven of our talented faculty, you will be reminded of the differences we make. Collectively, as an academy of scholars, our work makes an even greater impact – on students, the people of Nebraska, collaborating faculty, and on the advancement of knowledge and understanding – than what any of us can attain on our own. Together, we are even greater Difference Makers.

On August 20, Senior Vice Chancellor Charles Bicak and I presided over the opening ceremony for our new Health Science Education Complex. Some 24 years after UNK joined the University of Nebraska system, we realized the full potential of our stake and demonstrated the power of the University of Nebraska. Our alignment with the University of Nebraska Medical Center will improve access to education and training opportunities for students in health careers, and to health care delivery for citizens in central and western Nebraska. Our vision for the Health Science Education Complex and the generosity and shared vision of the Nebraska Legislature will make a profound difference at UNK and across Nebraska for generations to come.

Our involvement with UNMC in training, research and outreach with students in nursing and allied health professions will further enhance our academic reputation and our perceived collective impact on Nebraska, the region and nation. It is evident that new opportunities to collaborate with our colleagues at UNMC and at the Omaha and Lincoln campuses will increase because of this successful collaboration. I’m eager to study opportunities to work together on our next education and research complex.

I hope you will join me in celebrating the accomplishments of our faculty and the continued success of the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

Douglas A. Kristensen, J.D.
Chancellor
New Frontiers Through The Years

2009

KATHRYN N. BENZEL
Professor, English
KURT BORCHARD
Professor, Sociology
GREGORY BROWN
Assistant Professor, HPERLS
KIM CARLSON
Assistant Professor, Biology

VICTORIA GORD-RAPOPORT
Associate Professor, Art
SUSAN JENSEN
Associate Professor, Political Science
JOSEPH CARLSON
Professor, Criminal Justice and Social Work
JEANNE STOLZER
Assistant Professor, Family Studies

WILLIAM AVILÉS
Associate Professor, Political Science

2010

KYLE LUTHANS
Chair/Professor, Management
DAWN MOLLENKOPF
Associate Professor, Teacher Education
MARGUERITE TASSI
Professor, English
FRANK TENKURANG
Chair/Assistant Professor, Economics

TEARA ARCHWAMETY
Education Research Consultant
SYLVIA ASAY
Chair/Professor, Modern Languages
HERBERT CRAIG
Chair/Associate Professor, Modern Languages

MARK ELLIS
Chair/Professor, Biology
CHAD FONFARA
Associate Professor, Art and Art History
KEITH GELOSO
Associate Professor, Political Science

2011

TING-LAN CHEN
Associate Professor, Music and Performing Arts
BRENDA ESCHENBRENNER
Assistant Professor, Accounting/Finance
SATOSHI MACHIDA
Associate Professor, Art and Art History
JANE STRAWECKER
Professor, Political Science

NATHAN BUCKNER
Professor, Music and Performing Arts
DAVID HOC
Professor, Counseling and School Psychology
SUSAN HONEYMAN
Professor, English
PETER LONGO
Professor, Political Science

DENNIS POTTHOFF
Professor, Teacher Education
HEATHER SCHULZ
Assistant Professor, Marketing
JULIE SHAFER
Professor, Biology
KATHRYN ZUCKWEILER
Associate Professor, Management

SHERRY CROW
Associate Professor, School Library Science
TONI HILL
Assistant Professor, Family Studies
CAROL LILLY
Professor, History
MIECHELLE MCKELVEY
Associate Professor, Communication Disorders

PAUL TWIGG
Professor, Biology
SAM UMLAND
Professor, English
DOUG WATERFIELD
Professor, Art
Welcome to New Frontiers 2015

I am delighted to welcome you to this issue of New Frontiers. At the University of Nebraska at Kearney, we are proud of the remarkable research of our faculty and their drive to enrich the educational experiences of our students. Our strength lies in combining teaching with research and creative activity to create innovative classroom experiences. Researchers at UNK learn in order to teach, and to prepare new generations of reflective, resourceful students who are ready to make their mark on the world in which we live.

UNK places a high priority on recruiting faculty who have the potential to excel as teacher-scholars. In this issue, you will meet seven young faculty members at very early stages of their careers. They came to UNK with a passion to teach, as well as a passion for conducting their own research and creative activity. Their research and creative activity make original contributions to their disciplines and to the educational development of their students.

This passion is expressed in very different disciplines. Adam Jensen has been interested in astronomy since he was eight years old and has developed that interest into fascinating research that has captured the attention of NASA. Noel Palmer’s research on leadership and ethics is influenced by his experiences in the military. Bree Dority, former gymnast turned economist, focuses on economic development research that benefits the cities and people of Nebraska. The creation of new technologies that will improve and support the education of our children and improve learning is the focus of Phu Vu. Matt Bice centers his research on identifying factors that contribute to physical activity behaviors in adults. Many of Chuck Rowling’s topics reflect his interest in U.S. foreign policy, political communication, and international conflict. Mallory Wetherell’s ceramic sculptures have earned her national recognition as one of the “emerging artists to watch in 2015” by Ceramics Monthly magazine.

In short, UNK is committed to supporting the scholarly pursuits of our faculty and students every step of the way. This means encouraging an early interest in original inquiry and discovery through our Undergraduate Research Fellows Program, helping promising faculty ideas crystallize into significant intellectual endeavors, and ultimately turning successful research into accomplishments that will impact society.

I am pleased to introduce you to some of the talented and dynamic individuals who are driving this exciting era in UNK’s history. While they comprise only a small fraction of the faculty as a whole, I am confident that their work will convey the remarkable depth and breadth of research, scholarship and creative activities currently underway at UNK.

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

Rowling challenges himself to reach students with limited worldview

By KIM HACHIYA

It’s hard to imagine a better ambassador for the University of Nebraska at Kearney than Chuck Rowling. As he strides across campus, his eyes gleam with pride as he points out various landmarks.

And he offers this: “I really, almost literally, grew up on this campus. I went to the college’s preschool. My brothers and I would swim in the campus pool. We spent so much time in my dad’s office. This place really shaped who I am.”

Rowling is an assistant professor of political science who joined the UNK faculty in 2012, less than 10 years after earning his bachelor’s degree from UNK. His route back to Founders Hall seems both pre-ordained and random. But his passion for students, for teaching and for research makes that path seem obvious.

Rowling’s father, Jim, retired about seven years ago after a career at the university’s Calvin T. Ryan Library. As head of acquisitions, the senior Rowling was responsible for overseeing the purchase of books, periodicals and other materials for the library’s collections. His love for books spilled over to his personal life, Chuck Rowling said.

“I grew up in a home that was filled with books. My dad very much influenced me, as did my mom. Our dinner conversations ranged from the U.S. Civil War to current events,” he said.

Rowling’s brothers, both UNK graduates, are also accomplished: Jason is a physician in North Carolina, Matt is a faculty member at Iowa State University.

“I think I always wanted to be a college professor. I would have said so had I been asked back in high school. I witnessed what life was like on a college campus. I saw my dad’s interactions with faculty and students. I love that the college is a place of ideas. I love that our work is focused on building knowledge and empowering students,” he said. “It’s a pretty important job.”

But, he noted, growing up in Kearney, Neb., had its limitations. Rowling had never flown on an airplane until his sophomore year in college. But since then, he’s traveled worldwide, mostly to pursue his academic interests, and he wants his students to have those same opportunities.

“I wanted to learn more about the world and break out of the isolation,” he said.

As a student Rowling took a summer class taught by UNK Professor James Scott on U.S. foreign policy, which included a trip to Washington, D.C., to meet with policymakers.

“The stories that come out of monumental foreign policy decisions – going to war, rescuing hostages – show these decisions are sometimes not deeply considered but instead came from personality quirks or beliefs among the players, but the outcomes have deep significance for all of us,” Rowling said.

A study-abroad trip to France and Belgium, and a summer experience in Côte d’Ivoire, further fueled his
interest in political science and closely focused his eye on international affairs, but not before some pretty hardcore experiences with state and national politics.

CAMPAIGN JUNKIE

As an undergraduate, Rowling served an internship in Washington, D.C., for then-Senator Bob Kerrey (D-Neb.). There, he experienced the energy of Capitol Hill and discovered the importance of constituent services. He also met the woman he would eventually marry, Jennifer (Conner) Rowling. She, too, is a UNK graduate and holds a law degree from the University of Nebraska College of Law.

Rowling also was a campaign field officer for E. Benjamin Nelson’s winning bid for U.S. Senate when Nelson ran to replace the retiring Kerrey in 2000. Rowling loved the boots-on-the-ground aspect of campaigns, and the bug hit again when he was in graduate school, this time in Washington state. There he managed a state legislative campaign, and in 2008 was a field officer for two counties critical to the re-election of Washington Gov. Christine Gregoire.

“I loved the campaigns because I found the strategy of it fascinating, and I wasn’t really ready to give it up in 2008,” Rowling said. “It’s addictive and a constant adrenaline rush where you’re on 24 hours a day. It’s fascinating to engage in politics at a different scale. But it’s a younger person’s game. I’ve got a wife and kids now. I could not in good conscience go back. But I am a campaign junkie.”

Being a campaign “insider” gave Rowling the chance to be directly involved, and also to have an impact.

“You see a different side that you don’t get from the daily news. But the lifestyle is a commitment I can no longer make. And there are a lot of unsavory aspects
that make me think I don’t want to do it again. You are selling to your constituents, and you are having to refute misconceptions or lies thrown out by the other side. Today, elections are won or lost via sound bites and clichés, not real issues.

“I felt we were constantly fighting that. So many people are energized by the campaign process. But the nitty gritty of government is less interesting, and disillusioning to voters,” added Rowling. “We don’t always elect the best person to do the job anymore; we are electing the person who best sells himself or herself. The celebrity aspect of politics is inherently harmful and it breeds cynicism.”

With so much experience in American politics, one might think Rowling’s interests would lie stateside, but his research focus has an international twist, which again grew out of his undergraduate experiences.

The study abroad trip to Europe was largely cultural and involved staying with a French family for a week, he said. It was the first time he ventured outside of the United States, and it really opened his eyes. But the three months he spent in Côte d’Ivoire as a research assistant for then-UNK geography professor Laurence Becker was life changing.

Becker needed a student with skills in French language and international affairs, and Rowling had the credentials. The project, titled “Processes of Change in Agricultural Systems: Impacts of Interventions in Ivorian Rice Cropping,” looked at how foreign aid affected the people of Côte d’Ivoire, which is also known as Ivory Coast and is situated in West Africa.

“That experience never left me, and it spurred me to want to learn more about the world,” Rowling said.

The final key for Rowling came in 2002, his junior year, when he won a prestigious Harry S. Truman Scholarship. The award pays toward graduate school and recognizes outstanding students eyeing careers in public service, education or government. It came just before his summer in Africa and cemented his career goals.

Fast forward 10 years and Rowling finished his doctorate at University of Washington after collecting a master’s degree there as well. He was a visiting lecturer at UW-Tacoma and applying for tenure-track positions. Somewhat serendipitously, he learned that there was an opening in his area of expertise, international relations, within the UNK Political Science Department. After a competitive search, Rowling secured the position. He is thrilled to be a colleague with faculty members he so deeply admired and respected as a student; and he is eager to continue the department’s legacy of emphasizing experiential learning through internships and close work with faculty mentors.

**Political Communication**

Rowling’s teaching and research are intricately linked. He notes that most of UNK’s students are like he was at age 18: eager Nebraskans who are a little bit isolated from the larger world. His goal is to expand that view to help students make a difference. In 2016, he’ll be co-teaching a course with political science professor, William Aviles, on the Israel-Palestine conflict, which will include a 10-day trip to the region. He would like to develop a “civil rights” experiential learning course that would travel to U.S. locales important to the Civil Rights movement. And he involves undergraduates in his research.

Rowling’s research involves working with colleagues Penelope Sheets from the University of Amsterdam and Timothy Jones of Bellevue University. The three focus on political communication, especially how national identity affects how people process and understand U.S. foreign policy and actions.

In 2011, the trio published a study in the “Journal of Communication” looking at how the torturing of prisoners by U.S. soldiers at the Iraqi prison, Abu Ghraib, in 2004 was debated among U.S. political officials and covered in U.S. news media, and how this discourse affected citizen viewpoints about the incident. The scandal, framed by the George W. Bush White House and Pentagon as “un-American,” “isolated” acts carried out by a “few bad apples,” was consistently challenged by Democrats and others, the researchers noted, but competing narratives were largely absent in U.S. press coverage of the story.

“I love that the college is a place of ideas. I love that our work is focused on building knowledge and empowering students.”
A second study, published in 2013 in the “International Journal of Communication,” built on the previous work and looked at press reports and citizen reaction to the deaths of 23 Afghans during a U.S.-led drone strike. The trio’s premise suggested that when people receive what is called “frame contestation,” what lay people might call “both sides of the issue,” people were significantly more likely to be critical of the incident than if they were subjected to just one side of the story. The novel aspect of this research was to look at how Americans viewed stories that were inherently negative to Americans’ self-identity as “good guys” and threaten the image and reputation of the nation.

They note that the White House and military create a narrative designed to protect or preserve national identity; media are reluctant to broach a competing frame; and citizens are unlikely to reject competing frames and instead “rally round the flag.”

The trio looked at what the impact might be if media and others did present opposing views. Through an experiment, different sets of people were exposed to differing narratives regarding the drone strike. The content of the frame and the source were important factors. The team tested two aspects of framing: minimization and reaffirmation. Minimization downplays the gravity of the incident, reduces the scope or size of the incident and blames the incident on low-level flunkies or outsiders. Reaffirmation shifts focus from the incident to other aspects to portray the participants in a more positive manner. In their study, Rowling, Sheets and Jones looked to see whether Congressional comments that differed from White House and Pentagon comments would change citizens’ opinions of drone warfare policy.

Indeed, they did find that support for drone policy was reduced, but party affiliation seemed to also play a role. Republicans were more likely to decrease their (generally positive) level of support for the policy when confronted with competing narratives than either Democrats or Independents. They also found that presenting opposing frames seemed to further erode confidence in Congress regardless of party affiliation, particularly if the contested content revolved around the reaffirmation part of the equation.

The implications, they note, show that media coverage of “more sides” can move the needle of public opinion when the public is challenged to think, evaluate and react to information. They note that citizens are capable of...
reaching their own conclusions and that media must be willing to report stories that go “against the trend.”

**EXPANDED WORLDVIEW**

In a recent study published in March of this year, the trio again revisited American opinions regarding what they call “national transgressions.” The most recent work, published in “Political Communication,” looks at the 1968 My Lai massacre in which hundreds of Vietnamese civilians were slaughtered by U.S. soldiers. The team suggests there is a predictable pattern in which nationalism tempers public opinion in group-protective ways.

Rowling said that when these events occur, leaders respond by first minimizing the incident, then “contextualizing” the incident through comments such as “it was a confusing” or the soldiers “were under stress,” followed by “disassociation,” in which leaders state the perpetrators were “bad apples” or “aberrant.” The final stage is reaffirmation in which Americans are reminded of our role as “leaders of the free world.”

The My Lai story distinctly follows this trend, Rowling said. The Nixon administration employed various communication strategies to downplay the massacre, highlighted the strife of warfare, denigrated the soldiers who were involved, and finally worked to bolster and restore national identity. The press acted as an echo chamber, Rowling said, despite strong opposition by some in Congress and the antismear movement.

The ability to critically analyze U.S. policy that occurred within the remembered past is useful, Rowling said, because it shows that it is not “anti-American” to expose U.S. transgressions to Americans.

“Exposure means we actually live up to our rhetoric,” Rowling said. “It’s the disconnection between our rhetoric and our behaviors and actions that can lead to anti-American beliefs among foreigners.”

That point of view might be controversial in conservative Nebraska. But Rowling believes it’s important for students, particularly students who attend UNK, to have an expanded worldview.

“I may not touch that many students but if I can impact just a few, that’s enough for me,” he said. “You just never know what may happen. I learn so much from my students. If you come in with an open mind, you can learn just as much from them as they learn from you.

My challenge is to reach Nebraskans who might have a limited worldview and limited experience and give them the opportunities that were given to me here at UNK.

“Giving them an understanding of why they should care and how all of our actions can cause human suffering in the world is important. I was a student here and my concerns then are their concerns now.”

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**CHARLES “CHUCK” ROWLING**

**Title:** Assistant professor, Political Science

**College:** Natural and Social Sciences

**Education:** Bachelor of Arts, political science and history, University of Nebraska at Kearney, 2003; Master of Arts, political science, University of Washington, 2007; Ph.D., political science, University of Washington, 2012.

**Years at UNK:** 3

**Career:** Lecturer, University of Washington-Tacoma, 2008-12; Field Director, Chris Gregoire Gubernatorial Campaign for State of Washington, 2008.

**Family:** Wife, Jennifer; Daughter, Evelyn, 4; Son, Charles, 1.

**Hobbies/Interests:** Road trips, music, ethnic food, Nebraska football, “Seinfeld”

**Interesting Facts:** Chuck’s father, Jim, was a librarian at Kearney State/UNK from 1975-2008. He also attended what is now the Child Development Center on campus, which his children now attend.

**Areas of research/specialization:** Media and U.S. Foreign Policy, Strategic Political Communication, U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East, National Identity and International Conflict; Framing and public opinion.

**Courses taught:** Introduction to International Relations, American Foreign Policy, International Law and Organizations, U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East, War in World Politics.

**Recent Published Articles:**
Mallory Wetherell’s porcelain cross sections of organs with delicately painted interiors may be viewed as dark or morbid by some, but her anatomic sculptures are simply a metaphor for relationships.

“I use anatomy to talk about human relationships, specifically my own relationships with loved ones or myself,” said Wetherell, assistant professor of ceramics at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. “They’re usually internalized, so I’m creating visual depictions of internalized relationships.”

Her non-traditional figurative sculptures of the interior of anatomy are a marriage between Wetherell’s love of the arts and her interest in science.

While attending the University of South Carolina, Wetherell studied biology with the intention of becoming a prosthetic designer. To be admitted into a graduate program, she took a figurative sculpture class.

“I liked the atmosphere of the art department. You walk in the art building and everyone is drinking coffee and a professor brought her five dogs to campus with her. I was like, ‘What is this crazy building on campus and how can I be a part of this community?’”

“It was a totally different experience than the science lecture-based classes with 300 students and the sterile labs.”

During her junior year, she changed her major to art.

“I found myself flying through my organic chemistry and biology homework so that I could spend more time in the studio because that’s where I wanted to be. I had to listen to that.

“I was drawn to the world of art because it was a totally new way of thinking for me,” she said. “I had taken art in high school and always dabbled in it, but I never knew it could be a profession until I was in college.”

She fell in love with ceramics after taking an introductory ceramics course, a requirement to get into figurative sculpting class, which was required for a graduate program she hoped to be admitted to.

“I liked that ceramics was still challenging, but it was challenging to my hands as well as the mind. It was totally different from the science classes, which were mostly academic based and not physically challenging,” Wetherell said. “It was a whole different way of thinking for me. I enjoyed the act of making.”

After earning her bachelor’s degree and then her Master of Fine Arts in ceramics from the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth, Wetherell didn’t know where to go from there.

“It’s not like you get a nursing degree and become a nurse. It’s pretty open ended. You get this art degree and it’s like ‘Welcome to the world, best of luck.’”
But her experience during graduate school curating exhibitions and pop-up shops in empty storefronts enabled her to land a job as a gallery coordinator at a Philadelphia art gallery.

The Clay Studio of Philadelphia, the largest nonprofit ceramics art organization, promotes access to the ceramic arts, at all levels of interest and proficiency, from practicing professionals to disenfranchised children of the inner city to art enthusiasts, students and collectors.

After three years at The Clay Studio, Wetherell began teaching part-time as an adjunct instructor and full-time resident artist at Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia.

She always knew that she wanted to teach, and she gained experience teaching during graduate school.

“Teaching gigs are hard to land – especially in a competitive city like Philadelphia. So you have to pay your dues and stay diligent in applying and making work. Teaching gigs in art are not only based on your teaching experience, but heavily weighted on your exhibitions and showing record. You’ve got to make your work and not lay dormant. You’ve got to keep moving and do the best to create opportunities for yourself.

“I like teaching because I like interacting with people. I love that it’s not a desk job. I like that I get to talk every day and get my hands dirty every day. Thinking creatively and problem solving is something we learn to not do. We’re all born creative and then we grow out of it. The real world happens, and we lose that. I get to reintroduce creativity.”

ORGANS, ANATOMY, ART

Wetherell’s creative inspiration comes from her fascination and fear of the human body’s complexity and her desire to expose aspects of relationships that aren’t readily apparent.

“Each piece is a visual depiction of an internalized relationship that I have with myself, or that I share with those individuals closest to me. With each piece, I use emotional associations linked to various anatomies of the human body – the gut as a metaphor for raw instinctual emotion, a lung to express the need for air. I then manipulate these cellular tissues, organs, and overall system structures in order to explore specific and personal relationships. The finished work is graphic in nature, a combination of sculpted porcelain and detailed underglaze renderings, referencing 18th century medical illustrations and traditional commemorative blue and white ware,” Wetherell writes in her artist statement.

Her porcelain cross sections of organs and anatomy are delicately painted. What Wetherell refers to as “heavy handed, obsessive work.”

“A lot of people see my work as dark and creepy, but I don’t see it that way at all.”

While her work has been scaled down since the birth of
her daughter, Corinne, in August 2014. Wetherell is still exploring relationships through anatomical pieces. Her newest piece, “Shared Space,” is a scaled-down version of a cross section of a two-fused heart. Her original – “Cross-Section: heart” – was completed in 2013. The new piece features much tighter detail, she said.

“My work is really challenging me right now,” she said. Her pieces have been featured in nearly 50 exhibitions from Rhode Island to Montana to Texas to Massachusetts.

In 2015, her exhibitions included “Small Favors” at The Clay Studio, “Side by Side: Mallory Wetherell and Matt Ziemke” at the Arch Contemporary Ceramics Gallery in Tiverton, R.I., “All About Porcelain” in Missoula, Mont., and “Drawn Drawing” at Bridgewater State (Mass.) University.

INTRODUCING TECHNOLOGY

Wetherell recently started exploring 3D printing.

A $3,000 grant from the Research Services Council at UNK allowed her to purchase a DeltaMaker 3D Printer. She plans to convert the printer to print in ceramic slip – or liquid clay.

A 3D printer lays down successive layers of material until an object is created. So far, Wetherell has been experimenting with using the plastic 3D prints to use as positives to create plaster molds. Once the plaster mold is dry, she removes the plastic printed object, creating a negative space in the mold. She then pours ceramic slip into the mold, creating a casted object that she manipulates and fires in the kiln.

“You can’t just say print a flower. You have to use a computer program to create files that will be printed. There’s a learning curve,” she said. “My work is organic and graphic. With this, it’s more geometric. I’m still in the learning stage in figuring out how to get it from a file to an actual object.”

Her anatomical pieces and 3D printed pieces are currently two bodies of work, but she hopes to eventually merge them.

“I want to be on the forefront in my field. It’s just a whole different way of making. I like the idea of making multiples. My own work takes so long – it is super detailed and it takes a while with sanding and painting. It’d be great if I could work in multiples.”

When she becomes more comfortable with 3D printing, Wetherell hopes to introduce the technology to her art students in an alternative methods and materials ceramics class or 3D ceramics class.

Wetherell’s teaching philosophy is simply to make art fun.

“Art is meant to bring a breath of fresh air. It’s a crucial part of society, but a lot of times it’s an overlooked part of society,” she said. “I want my students to come in and recognize that they’re probably not going to be famous artists, but I want them to think creatively and problem-solve.

“Students often ask, ‘What do you want me to make for you?’ They’re not making it for me. They’re making it for themselves. Sometimes they don’t know what to do with that creative freedom. I help them learn to be creative and trust their instincts.”

Mallory Wetherell works in the studio with her husband, Matt Ziemke, who is a part-time lecturer in ceramics and sculpture at UNK. They were selected as two of 16 emerging artists to watch in 2015 by Ceramics Monthly magazine.
UNK OPPORTUNITY

Coming to UNK wasn’t an easy decision for Wetherell. She was working as an adjunct professor and visiting artist at Indiana University Southeast in New Albany, Ind., where her husband, Matt Ziemke, was also an adjunct professor and visiting artist.

“When I came out here to interview, I thought it was isolated. I am used to being on a coast, and (in Kearney) we are equal distances from both coasts. But everybody was so nice.”

Meeting Victoria Goro-Rapoport, assistant professor of printmaking and drawing, made the job appealing.

“Looking at her work and her track record, I saw that she could go anywhere. There’s a reason she’s here. That was reassuring. There seemed like a lot of opportunities at UNK,” Wetherell said.

Goro-Rapoport said she is drawn to the delicate, and intimate, quality of Wetherell’s porcelain sculptures.

“Every single one of them is a little gem, beautifully crafted and intricately painted. … It takes real courage, dedication and determination to deliberately go in a different direction; to slow down and invest one’s time and attention into delicate and elaborate pieces,” said Goro-Rapoport.

“I believe that these qualities of patience and dedication, that are so present in Mallory’s personal work, are the most valuable assets the students can learn from her in a classroom.”

Wetherell’s background in science proves very useful in the so-called “artistic” classroom environment, said Goro-Rapoport.

“Quite often beginner students’ expectations are tainted by the idea that art should be all fun, devoid of hard thought and boring labor. Mallory’s work proves that art, just like science, is a thought process and hard work, and one cannot expect an instantaneous result.”

Doug Waterfield, chair of the Department of Art and Art History, said Wetherell’s enthusiasm in the classroom is infectious.

“Students actually listen to her and want to hear what
she has to say. She has a unique ability to relate to, engage and inspire students within the medium of clay,” he said. “Her own work supports this attitude. It’s insightful, technically flawless and inventive. I can honestly say that I haven’t viewed human organs the same way since becoming acquainted with her work.”

Wetherell is working to grow interest in a UNK ceramics program that was no longer growing. She resurrected the ceramics club called Clay Works, which had two pottery sales during the 2014-15 academic year.

She also organized a Raku workshop. Raku is a firing process developed in 16th century Japan for Japanese tea ceremonies. Pieces are glazed, dried and put into a kiln until the glazes have melted. The piece is then removed and placed into a nest of hay or newspaper and covered with a bucket, creating a reduction chamber. The reduction creates lustrous and crackle glazes.

“I like a challenge. It’s nice to have academic freedom. I get to make the classes I want, and I don’t have somebody leaning over my shoulder. The department really trusts that they hired you for a reason, and that’s refreshing,” said Wetherell, who also hopes to increase the number of students majoring in ceramics.

To further encourage students to explore art and ceramics, Wetherell proposed a class for the summer of 2016 in which students will travel to New York City to learn about art and art history.

“A lot of my students are not going to go on to become ceramic artists. My job is to instill an appreciation of the arts, and also teach them to think creatively.”

In her short time at UNK, Wetherell’s artwork has quickly gained the attention of students and colleagues, as well as national publications. Mallory and her husband, Matt, a part-time lecturer in ceramics and sculpture at UNK, were selected as two of 16 emerging artists to watch in 2015 by Ceramics Monthly magazine. They were featured in the May edition and selected from more than 300 submissions.

“Mallory is not only a presence to be reckoned with in the classroom, but she attacks her own work with a ferocity and dedication that is matched by few,” Waterfield said. “She is an intelligent, professionally active and thoughtful colleague. Her opinions on improving not only the ceramics program, but the department as a whole, have been invaluable.”

MALLORY WETHERELL
Title: Assistant Professor of Ceramics
College: Fine Arts and Humanities
Education: Bachelor of Fine Arts, University of South Carolina, 2006; Master of Fine Arts, University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth, 2010.
Years at UNK: 1
Career: Adjunct instructor and visiting artist, Indiana University Southeast; 2013-14; Adjunct instructor and visiting artist, Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia, 2013; Resident artist, Archie Bray Foundation, Helena, Mont., 2013; Gallery coordinator, The Clay Studio, Philadelphia, 2010-13
Family: Husband, Matt Ziemke, part-time lecturer in ceramics and sculpture at UNK. Daughter, Corinne, 1.
Hobbies/Interests: Working in art studio, Dogs Paloma and Charlotte, Travel, Gardening, Camping, Backpacking, Dining.
Honors/Awards: 2014 Research Services Council seed grant recipient for project “DeltaMaker 3D Printing in Ceramic.” Wetherell modified a 3D printer so that it can print in clay.
Areas of research/specialization: Contemporary ceramic sculpture, China painting and drawing.
Courses taught: Ceramics: Handbuilding, Wheel Throwing, Mold Making; Sculpture, Art Appreciation, Drawing, 3D Design.
Recent Selected Exhibitions:
• “Drawn Drawing,” Bridgewater State University, 2015.
• “All About Porcelain,” The Clay Studio, Missoula, Mont., 2015.
As Phu Vu watched his young sons play video games, he realized that games might be the key to getting the attention of his college students.

“We all know that children and adults love to play games,” said Vu, an assistant professor of teacher education at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. “If we can implement the game strategy and principles into the classroom, students will feel more motivated to learn.”

At UNK, Vu teaches instructional technology online classes using game-based learning. Instead of reading textbooks, taking quizzes or doing assignments, students answer questions in an online game. Students can even view a leaderboard to determine who has the best score. The competition helps motivate students to work harder, Vu said.

“It’s a more effective learning tool for younger generations.”

Students studying teacher education are able to learn the content from Vu’s classes using games, and learn how to teach their future students using games.

“Technology is everywhere now. We have cell phones, iPads and more. Technology should be integrated into schools to improve student performance, behavior and academics,” Vu said. “We must follow the trends to educate the pre-service teachers to use technology effectively in their future classroom.”

Vu implemented game-based learning in his classes in his second semester at UNK – spring 2014. He learned about the cutting-edge teaching method at a conference and began conducting his own research.

The lack of research done on the topic has made teachers hesitant to integrate games into their online instruction, he said.

“Technology should be integrated into schools to improve student performance, behavior and academics.”

His study “Using Games in Online Education: Is it a Winning Strategy?,” which was published in the Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, examined the impact of adding game elements on students’ performances in an online setting.

The study examined two online graduate level course sections – a treatment group and a control group. The classes had the same assignment requirements, but one class used game elements to supplement the lectures.

The findings indicated that more studies need to examine the impact of game-based learning on students’ academic performance and whether the nature of the assignments or subject areas make any difference in the impact of students’ grades.

However, Vu concluded that integrating games into
online learning has the potential to help students achieve a higher degree of engagement in their online courses.

“My research interest is in game-based learning to promote student interest and engagement in the learning environment,” Vu said. “I want to motivate students to log in to class more often to promote student learning.”

TRAINING, HELPING OTHERS

While Vu has implemented game-based learning into his teacher education classes, he learned that many teachers don’t always have the technological resources or knowledge to use the technology in their classrooms.

His study, “Availability and Use of Digital Technologies in P-12 Classrooms of Selected Countries,” which was published in Issues and Trends in Educational Technology, examined what digital technologies were available and how they were used in classrooms in 14 countries across the world.

He found that technology differed in classrooms in developed and developing countries. Classrooms in the United States had more digital technology than other countries, but they did not use technology the most.

The study revealed that schools may have the funds to purchase technology, but they don’t always have the funds to hire people to help teachers with technology integration.

Vu is now researching how teachers with little or no technological expertise can create games.

“Introducing a gaming platform with a short training allows teachers to learn how to create games. It’s not a fancy game, but it’s a digital game they can create themselves based on the content of their classes,” Vu said.

Vu received a grant from Nebraska’s Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education to offer professional development to elementary teachers in Grand Island. Those teachers will learn how to use technology in their math classes.

GIVING BACK TO VIETNAM

Vu began his career in education as a high school teacher at the Nha Trang Gifted High School in Vietnam, where he is from.

He was offered a Fulbright Scholarship, the largest U.S. exchange program offering opportunities for students and young professionals to undertake international graduate study, advanced research, university teaching and primary and secondary school teaching worldwide.

Vu earned his master’s degree in English as a second language and his Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction at Southern Illinois University.

He then came to UNK.

His interest in becoming a teacher began when he was a child. “I was inspired by my father, who was not a teacher but always talked about being a good teacher and providing good education to children.

“When I was a child, we were living in a poor neighborhood, and the only way to get out of poverty was to get a good education. That’s why a lot of families in Vietnam sold their homes or belongings, in order for their kids to go to college.”

Getting a college education wasn’t common – only two in Vu’s elementary school class earned college degrees.

“It was an investment. I’m the only one in my extended
Phu Vu got the idea to incorporate game-based learning in his online classes after watching his young son, Andy, play video games.

As a new professor just getting started in research, Vu says he is still working to identify his research interests and discovering his areas of expertise.

“I have a curiosity and passion to discover new things. I do research to find the answers to specific questions I had either in my teaching or in my field,” Vu said.

“Some of my research projects sounded irrelevant to many researchers and educators, but I did them to test my teaching theory and ideas. You may be surprised to know that I had many research unpublished or technically unaccepted, but I am happy with what I did because what I found really informed my teaching.”
When 8-year-old Adam Jensen pointed his first telescope to the sky in the early 1990s, scientists already knew there had to be planets beyond Earth’s solar system. They just couldn’t prove it. It was a dilemma Jensen could have sympathized with. Whether seeing dinosaurs come to life in the movies, turning the pages of chemistry and astronomy books at the library, or searching for deep-sky objects in his backyard, Jensen’s scientific interests were fueled early by a desire to “see the stuff that otherwise you can only imagine.”

Today, according to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, more than 1,000 exoplanets have been confirmed. Scientists are now searching those planets for something else they’ve long imagined must be out there — signs of life. Scientists such as Dr. Adam Jensen. An assistant professor at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, Jensen’s work with exoplanetary atmospheres has earned him a spot on NASA’s Nexus for Exoplanet System Science. NASA hopes the interdisciplinary group will lead to better understanding of exoplanetary systems, and will develop techniques to search for life beyond Earth.

“We want to understand these exoplanets better,” Jensen said, explaining that so far astronomers have studied bigger planets, called “hot Jupiters,” because they’re the easiest to observe with current technology. He and other scientists, though, have much larger goals. “As we improve these techniques, as technology improves, then we’ll be able to observe smaller and smaller planets in this way and start looking at the planets that are more like earth’s size, and we want to understand those as well, and then obviously some of the discussion at least goes toward questions of are these planets habitable.”

The NExSS appointment came after Jensen was awarded a $215,443 research grant from NASA’s Exoplanet Research Program last fall. He has published numerous analyses of exoplanetary atmospheres and the material found between stars, called the interstellar medium.

Absorption Pattern

At UNK, Jensen is part of the faculty for Nebraska’s only astronomy major. While he’s been awarded time on some of the world’s largest telescopes, Jensen works with the data, rather than with the equipment. His work starts when an astronomical target (a planet, gas cloud or other object) passes in front of a star and is backlit. Ground-based or satellite telescopes then take photographs and readings of the light passing through the target.

That data usually reaches Jensen as a plot, showing how bright or dim the targeted object is at each wavelength on a light spectrum. An absorption spectroscopist, he analyzes that data to measure how much light is absorbed at what wavelengths.

Using a specialized program, Jensen then “fits” the data to theoretical calculations. He explained this step as finding the data’s absorption pattern, which ultimately tells him about the materials that make up the object. For example, if he sees...
dimming at a wavelength he knows is absorbed by oxygen, then he not only knows oxygen molecules are present, he can measure how much oxygen there might be.

“Each element tends to interact, each element or type of molecule tends to interact with certain wavelengths of light, and that turns into a fingerprint that we can identify, and that’s the main reason for doing spectroscopy,” he said.

Jensen began his career analyzing the interstellar medium, (gas clouds and other material between stars), partly because of the data he had a chance to work with while in graduate school at the University of Colorado-Boulder. That school was heavily involved with the Far Ultraviolet Spectroscopic Explorer, a satellite telescope launched in 1999.

“It had greater sensitivity than some of the previous satellites, so we were able to look at some slightly dimmer targets,” Jensen said. He and others looked for gas clouds where the molecules were starting to transition into dust, using ultraviolet light rather than the infrared spectrum that’s typically used to observe dusty, “darker” gas clouds.

While the team didn’t see the transitions they’d hoped for, Jensen published articles in the Astrophysical Journal based on the research, analyzing the molecular hydrogen, magnesium and gas-phase iron they did find. He said the significance of that research was mostly that it laid the groundwork for further analysis using ultraviolet light, with a new instrument put on the Hubble Telescope several years ago.

“The reason that any astronomer would want to understand what’s going on in the interstellar medium is that everybody’s looking through it. So whatever you want to see, you are literally looking through a bit of a haze. There is gas and dust out there between us and other stars, and us and other galaxies. So if you want to really understand those other stars and galaxies, then you should have some idea what it is your observations might be filtering through,” he said.

HYDROGEN ALPHA ANALYSIS

The switch in Jensen’s research emphasis, from the interstellar medium to exoplanetary atmospheres, came after his postdoctoral fellowship at NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center, while at Wesleyan University in Connecticut. Drawn by a “nice data set that was waiting to be analyzed,” Jensen saw that he could immediately apply the methods of absorption spectroscopy to this new field.

“When you are looking at exoplanetary atmospheres, the process is very similar, because instead of looking at
“There is gas and dust out there between us and other stars, and us and other galaxies. So if you want to really understand those other stars and galaxies, then you should have some idea what it is your observations might be filtering through.”
ADAM JENSEN

Title: Assistant professor, Physics and Physical Science

College: Natural and Social Sciences

Education: Bachelor of Science in physics and computer science, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 2001; Master of Science and Ph.D. in astrophysical and planetary sciences, University of Colorado-Boulder, 2004 and 2007.

Years at UNK: 1

Career: Postdoctoral Fellow, NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center, 2007-10; Postdoctoral researcher, Wesleyan University, 2010-13; Visiting lecturer, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2013-14.

Family: Wife, Lani; Sons Seth, 8, and Zane, 4; Daughter, Adelyn, 5

Hobbies/Interests: Professional and college sports: Kansas City Chiefs, Chicago Bulls, Chicago Blackhawks, Kansas City Royals; Electric, bass guitar; Active in church; Science-faith issues.

Honors/Awards: Procured $215,000 research grant through NASA XRP program; NASA Nexus for Exoplanet System Science research team.

Areas of research/specialization: Astronomical absorption spectroscopy, applied to exoplanetary atmospheres (observing planets orbiting other stars and examining light of those stars as it is filtered through the planets’ atmospheres); Interstellar medium (observing how light from stars filters through interstellar gas, trying to understand the composition of interstellar gas and dust).

Courses taught: Modern Physics, Introductory Astronomy, Introductory Physics, Physical Science

Recent Published Articles:


...and looking through the interstellar medium to that background star, with an exoplanet what we’re doing is we have a star and we have a planet going around it. And when the planet passes between us and the star, then the planet’s in front of it, and some of the star’s light filters through what’s around the planet,” Jensen explained. He was able to analyze and compare data from the atmospheres of four separate exoplanets.

The most significant article from that research, Jensen said, was his analysis of hydrogen alpha, or haalpha, in the atmospheres. Haalpha is a wavelength of red light that’s absorbed by hydrogen, but only when hydrogen is warmed by energy, and therefore in an excited energy state.

“In only one target, but it was very clear, we did see that,” Jensen said. It was the first detection of haalpha in an exoplanetary atmosphere using the methods of spectroscopy.

“It tells us that the hydrogen has some source of energy,” Jensen said, which is probably some interaction between the star and the planet. The results were published in a 2012 article for The Astrophysical Journal, “A Detection of Haalpha in an Exoplanetary Exosphere.”

Since then, Jensen has done follow-up observations of the same target with the Keck telescopes in Hawaii, confirmed the 2012 results, and found what might be a bow shock, or hydrogen located out in front of the planet. He said that finding is particularly exciting, because “where we see that hydrogen out in front of the planet, it has the potential to tell us some things about the magnetic field of the planet” because the magnetic field is probably affecting it.

He will continue analyzing hydrogen alpha levels using the research grant he received last fall. Jensen said he plans to study the exospheres, or outer layers, of exoplanetary atmospheres using data taken from different angles.

The team Jensen will lead as part of NExss will focus on study of exospheres. He said what makes the group different is that it brings together earth scientists, planetary scientists, heliophysicists and astrophysicists. At an April meeting, he said, “(organizers) were really pushing us to talk to people outside our subfield and see what types of unusual connections we could make.”

Jensen said if his research into exospheres reveals something about a planet’s magnetic field, that information could suggest what might be happening in the planet’s interior. Connecting with somebody who understands more about how magnetic fields are generated inside planets could lead to both of them learning more than either one could individually.

That 8-year-old boy he was, Jensen said, would undoubtedly be surprised at what he’s been able to do and see as a scientist. But that could be just a small part of what’s to come.

Every research study, every program such as NExss that focuses on exoplanets, helps refine analysis techniques so that as soon as the technology exists, scientists will be able to learn about exoplanets that are earth-size, and therefore more likely to support life.

“It’s something I hope to see in my career,” he said.
MILITARY MAN

Palmer zeroes in on ethics, developing leaders

BY JAN TREFFER THOMPSON

Low hills run below a sky streaked with blues and violets. Palm trees line a stream, their leaves stark silhouettes. The landscape looks quiet and a little hazy, like it may be a peaceful early morning in Iraq.

The scene hangs behind Dr. Noel Palmer’s left shoulder, in his office at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. It’s a reminder of the place, and the people, who have shaped his academic career.

“I don’t feel like it’s mine,” he says, turning toward the painting. “I feel like I’m just kind of entrusted with it, right now. Because the things that people went through in Iraq, that’s theirs.”

An assistant professor in UNK’s College of Business and Technology since 2011, Palmer researches and writes about leadership and ethics in management. His ideas have literally been battle-tested, through two overseas deployments with the U.S. Army Reserves. His first, in 2003, took him to Tikrit, Iraq. There he watched part-time soldiers become full-time military leaders, and the difficult transition helped start him on the path to graduate school.

“Being deployed is a tough thing because you really live in a glass house. You don’t get to go home from work and leave your colleagues behind. You share a living space, you eat together, you have community bathrooms, it’s very close living,” he said.

Pressures common to leaders in any organization are magnified in a tour of duty, he explained, so he quickly saw not only what made some people good leaders, but how others fell short. For example, Palmer knew one married company commander who broke the Army’s fraternization policy by starting a relationship with an enlisted soldier.

“I saw it happen with so many leaders; dumb, dumb decisions like that. It was like ‘come on, really? We haven’t figured out how to lead?’ And so I thought ‘Well, maybe I could go back to school and study about leadership and teach about it.’”

Not only does Palmer now teach about ethics in UNK’s Management Department, he wrote a chapter titled “Leader Development for Dangerous Contexts” for the 2011 book “Leadership in Dangerous Situations: A
“Being deployed is a tough thing because you really live in a glass house. You don’t get to go home from work and leave your colleagues behind.”
Handbook for the Armed Forces, Emergency Services and First Responders.”

A common theme in his publications is that leaders can be developed, and leaders can influence the people around them. He’s also co-authored two refereed articles and one book chapter on ethical efficacy. Ethical, or moral, efficacy is the confidence people have that they’ll act in accordance with their ethics regardless of situation. Palmer’s work earned him an Outstanding Faculty Award from his college in the 2012-13 school year.

For his 2011 book chapter, Palmer teamed with a fellow Army veteran and New York City fire fighter who’d been among the 9/11 first responders. He said their work gives organizations a framework for developing leaders in dangerous contexts; the main message is that current theories on leadership development still apply, even in highly dangerous situations.

The best way to develop leaders, Palmer said, is to be one. And that’s where his interests in leadership and ethics converge. Creating good leaders ultimately leads to more ethical behavior throughout an organization, and fewer abuses of power.

“I want leaders to be more aware of their role as a leader, that people are looking up to them. I’m trying to show that they have an effect on people by looking at how they affect the confidence of people to behave ethically,” he said.

**CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE**

Trim and clean-cut, Palmer looks like the soldier he still is. He’s been part of the military since the early 1990s, entering the U.S. Military Academy in New York after high school. He spent six years on active duty in
the U.S. Army, and two years in the Individual Ready Reserve. At the end of his commission he joined a reserve unit, which just two months later was mobilized. He commanded a company that built bases at both Tikrit and Kirkuk, Iraq.

After that one-year deployment and graduate school, Palmer taught as an adjunct at UNK for the Spring 2010 semester, then applied for a full-time position. He had just finished the formal interview when he got the voice mail from his reserve unit saying they were being deployed again.

He spent his first year as a full-time UNK employee in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

Palmer’s unusual mixture of experiences, as a soldier and scholar, has informed his research and his viewpoint on why leadership and ethics are important.

“If you’re walking around in Iraq you generally had at least one weapon. … Maybe you had a rifle and a pistol, maybe you had a vehicle with a machine gun on it,” he said. “So you have a lot of power that it’s easy to abuse. Recognizing that, in my research, recognizing that civilians aren’t combatants … that leaders are the ones that set the tone, they’re the role models.

“That was an important part of my dissertation, looking at how leaders build people’s confidence in behaving ethically, and hopefully reduce their confidence in behaving unethically.”

While at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, in 2009, Palmer helped write an article for the International Journal of Leadership Studies that looked at how leaders can maintain their own values even while adapting and being sensitive to other cultures. The article found a relationship between authentic leadership (qualities such as self-awareness, balanced processing, relationship transparency, and a moral perspective) and cultural intelligence.

Cultural intelligence is understanding and adapting to the values of other cultures. While those qualities could be seen as oppositional to authentic leadership, the authors found that the two qualities build on each other. Having one without the other is what can get leaders into trouble. With only cultural intelligence, they may be too willing to adapt to local norms. Authentic leadership qualities without cultural intelligence, though, can lead to insensitivity and conflict.

From that early publication, Palmer found the influence of his military experience coming through. The negotiation necessary to maintain his integrity, while remaining sensitive to others’ culture, was familiar.

“We didn’t have the luxury in Iraq of saying ‘Well my culture’s better, you need to work with us.’ We were in a different country, a different culture, we had to learn about those other cultures. We had to work with the Iraqi police, the Iraqi military, to be successful. It didn’t mean that I was going to adopt Islam as my religion, it didn’t mean I was going to share the same values, but if you can understand other people, and where they come from, and maybe be respectful of that, then you can get past that and work together when you have to. Because you had to. Iraq here was the context, but still today, there are a lot of other cultures we have to work with.”

TIMELY RESEARCH

In the book “Managerial Ethics: Managing the Psychology of Morality,” Palmer’s chapter focused on the ways organizations can increase ethical efficacy. Like a muscle, Palmer writes, efficacy grows stronger when it’s worked. A key message of the chapter is that instead of offering a one-time ethics class or occasional training opportunities, organizations that want ethical employees should develop complete ethics programs.

“If ethics is important to you, it should be part of your evaluation program. If it’s so important, evaluate people on it. If it’s so important, create incentives for it. If it’s so important, have training. If it’s so important, have leaders talk about it. It isn’t just this thing you do once in a classroom, it’s a discussion that happens regularly, and it’s rewarded when it happens.”

In his current research, Palmer is turning his attention to ethics in the classroom, but again looking at the influence of leaders. He’s analyzing survey data from students, and developing a measure of their unethical efficacy – how confident they are that they can cheat successfully. By comparing measures from the same students at the beginning
and end of a semester, he wants to identify what instructors did to effect change. From that, he hopes to identify actions instructors could take that would make students less confident of their ability to cheat and get away with it.

“They’ve developed the confidence to do it and get away with it, and they will carry it through college and off into the working world, and that’s just a shame if that happens. So we have an opportunity here to maybe talk about ethics and get them to think twice, and maybe, maybe break the cycle,” he said.

Arguably, Palmer’s twin focus on leadership and ethics couldn’t be more timely. Not only have military actions around the globe created a need for more leaders and stronger ethics, but recent controversies such as the death of Baltimore’s Freddie Gray have put a spotlight on law enforcement officials in the United States.

Palmer said there is a greater need than ever for leadership from people in authority.

“When you’re in another country, or when there are civilians at risk, you’re in a combat environment. The decisions of leaders have potential to impact the lives of a lot of folks. And if we can make better leaders, it has a serious effect on the safety of our own soldiers, and also the safety of the people who get stuck in the middle of these kinds of conflicts.”

As an example, he describes the Iraqi surveyor who painted the landscape on his office wall.

“The story he told was that in Iraq, with Saddam as president, you weren’t allowed to dream,” he says. “He was very serious and he said ‘You know, (in Iraq) you say you have a dream, and your dream is that you’re going to become the president of Iraq, and you share that dream with somebody. What happens is that the word gets out, the police show up, and you disappear.’ That’s what he meant, that you can’t dream.”

The man’s words made it clear how much depended on American leaders doing their jobs, and doing them right, Palmer said.

“Getting that perspective was a reminder that we do have an opportunity to do some work here that’s more than just fighting a war or overthrowing a dictator. We have an opportunity to maybe improve the future.”

NOEL F. PALMER
Title: Assistant professor, Management
College: Business and Technology
Education: Bachelor of Science, mechanical engineering, U.S. Military Academy, 1995; Master of Arts, business, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2007; Ph.D., management, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2013.
Years at UNK: Five
Hobbies/Interests: Spending time with family, Army Reserves
Honors/Awards: College of Business and Technology Outstanding Faculty Award for teaching, 2012-13.
Areas of research/specialization: Leadership, Ethical decision making
Courses taught: Organizational Behavior, Social Responsibilities of Business: Issues and Ethics
Recent Published Articles:
‘Nebraska-Centric’ Economics

Passion for home state brings Dority back to Kearney

By KIM HACHIYA

Bree Dority was a college sophomore when she realized a class was speaking to her way of thinking. That class, introductory economics, often is dreaded by business majors. Marketing, accounting or finance seem more “real world.” Economics has a reputation as being the “dismal science,” dreary and boring.

But Dority clearly remembers her epiphany during principles of microeconomics that “this is exactly how I think about making choices. This makes so much sense to me.” She was fascinated by the models used in economics, and although she avers that mathematics is not one of her strengths, she loves the applications and solutions that the discipline of economics offers.

Now an assistant professor of economics at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, Dority’s academic life started at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where she was recruited from Kearney High School to compete as a collegiate gymnast.

The only Husker in school history to score a perfect 10 on bars, she was the 2001 Big 12 bars and beam champion and a second-team All-American on bars the same year. Her academic efforts were also noteworthy, earning third-team academic All-America honors while also garnering three scholastic All-America awards and two first-team academic all-conference nods.

But she suffered a major knee injury her sophomore year, and an off-season back injury ended her gymnastics career after her junior year.

That’s when Dority turned her mind fully toward academics, and economics in particular. She landed a student job with UNL’s Bureau of Business Research, which focuses on issues specific to Nebraska or the region. And she found her calling.

“I really loved doing applied research on regional economic issues,” she said. “I just felt I was really making a difference and doing something important.”

Dority’s work involves collecting and examining sets of existing data, looking for patterns, correlations and links. While she has often been involved in creating surveys and other methods of collecting the data, she prefers analyzing established data.

The Bureau of Business Research published two of her undergraduate projects. One, published in 2002, examined reasons behind the prosperity of the tri-cities area of Kearney, Hastings and Grand Island. Another, also published in 2002, noted that Nebraska’s sales taxes are considered regressive because they consume a larger percentage of low-income families’ annual income than higher-income families’ annual income. Sales taxes, the study notes, are a significant burden on low-income families.

KENO, SCHOOL LUNCHES

Dority earned bachelor’s (2003) and doctoral (2008) degrees in economics from UNL and along the way participated in research projects that were topical, relevant and timely.
For example, with a team, she analyzed whether Keno revenue dropped after laws barred smoking in Nebraska bars and restaurants. Keno is a type of gambling usually carried out in bars. When Lincoln first banned smoking in 2005, Dority’s research showed that keno revenue from bars in Lincoln did drop significantly, and revenue in “smoke-friendly” bars in nearby towns rose.

Now that non-smoking laws are statewide, and not limited to particular cities, a more recent study showed that the effects of non-smoking ordinances on keno revenue are less noticeable, she said.

Another study looked at the long-term savings from school consolidation, a perennial issue in Nebraska. That study, published in 2013, showed that rural school districts only experienced lower expenditures if multiple consolidations occurred, and the savings only began with the second consolidation. Dority, along with her colleague Eric Thompson, director of UNL’s Bureau of Business Research, were invited to present their findings to the Nebraska Legislature’s Education Committee.

Her doctoral work, funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and conducted with UNL economics professors Mary McGarvey and Patricia Kennedy, was among the first to show a link between the sales of so-called “junk food” in schools during school breakfast and lunch periods and teen obesity. The work suggested that banning à la carte junk food sales during school mealtimes reduces the likelihood that teens will be overweight or obese by 18 percentage points. The researchers recommended expanding the list of banned foods to include candy bars, chips, cookies and high-fat snack foods.

The study also recommended that marketers of foods and beverages to children and adolescents limit or eliminate sales to that target market. They noted that marketers prefer to build long-term relationships with consumers, capturing the youth market early because it’s more profitable to maintain loyal buyers versus attracting new buyers.

**OPPORTUNITY COSTS**

By the time the school lunch study was published, Dority and her husband, Matt O’Callaghan, moved to Denver, where she accepted a “dream” job with the Analysis Group of Lakewood, Colo. While she loved the position, the fascinating work and the collaborative culture at Analysis Group, she and her spouse experienced in real life the economic principle of “opportunity costs.”

A bedrock concept in economics, opportunity costs are the sacrifices forced by one’s choices. In Dority and her husband’s example, they realized that while the choice of the job was ideal, it forced them to sacrifice other things they loved. They discovered that they didn’t like living in a highly populated community. They didn’t love the mountain climate and weather as much as they thought they would. And they missed Nebraska.

“We realized that maybe we were too Nebraskan at heart,” Dority said. She grew up in Kearney, and her husband in Hebron. They missed the plains, the skies, the grassland, the thunderstorms, the lack of people. When Matt landed a job near Kearney in 2010, she wrapped up her position in Colorado and joined him later that year.

Knowing there was a position open in UNK’s Department of Economics, but also knowing she had missed application deadlines and wasn’t qualified for the senior position, Dority bravely sent query letters, eventually landing a visiting professor position in 2010. She was hired in 2012 for the tenure track assistant professor position she currently holds.

College-level teaching had not been on her radar screen, she admitted, mainly because of a fear of public speaking. While she had taken one course in teaching methods in graduate school, she pursued a research track (even earning the outstanding dissertation award in 2008 from UNL’s Department of Economics). And she’s still a little nervous about teaching.

“The first thing that I noticed in her classes was the extreme passion she showed. From day one, she was excited to have us in class and begin research projects.”

— UNK graduate Aaron Scholl
“Working with students is gratifying because they seem to appreciate and enjoy mentoring, and with a little coaching they respond well and run with the assignments.”

“I teach in ways that feel comfortable for me,” Dority said. “I try to treat my students like we were treated at Analysis Group. It’s a collaborative environment, a flat and fluid situation where we are all respected and we all learn from each other. I really want to learn from my students, and I always do.”

She tells a story that exemplifies that: On her first day teaching at UNK, she held the students for just 20 minutes. “I let them go early because I was basically scared to death,” said the former athlete, who held entire gymnasiums spell bound with her physical performance. “This senior teaching major came up to me after class and said, ‘hey, you will be OK. You just need to calm down and breathe. Your voice was really shaky.’ He was right. I did need to calm myself and just slow down. I can laugh about that now, but it was scary.”

Later, a colleague said to her: “We’re not surgeons. No one is going to die if we make a mistake in class. Just go back and correct yourself.”

Dority took this advice to heart. “Even though in economics we do tons of math, doing math in my head is difficult for me. So by showing that to my students, they realize ‘oh, professors make mistakes, too,’ so students are more likely to be less fearful,” she said.

**MOTIVATING STUDENTS**

One of Dority’s former students is emulating her career path. Aaron Scholl, a 2014 UNK graduate, is enrolled at UNL this fall pursuing a doctoral degree in economics. Scholl first met Dority when he was a junior and already an economics major. Like her, he enjoyed the rigorous habit of mind that the discipline requires, but unlike her, he also enjoyed mathematics.

“I would very much say that Dr. Dority was, and still is, a mentor to me,” Scholl said. “The first thing that I noticed in her classes was the extreme passion she showed. She made the idea of collecting and interpreting research interesting. From day one, she was excited to have us in class and begin research projects.

“I was so impressed that she took the time to sit down with everyone, offer advice, and really show an interest in everyone’s projects,” added Scholl. “Having the support and collaboration with my professor made my assignments feel less like a ‘must’ and more like a ‘want’ to produce an impressive research paper.”

As part of an independent study project with Dority, the two examined existing downtown businesses in Kearney, and suggested possible business ideas based upon the demand of Kearney residents.

“This project concluded with me writing a report and presenting my research to the Mainstreet Kearney Economic Vitality Committee,” Scholl said. “I believe this project is still in continuation with marketing students at UNK.”

After several conversations with Dority, Scholl became convinced that he could find success in graduate school. “I chose economics because there are so many interesting topics that I enjoy learning about,” said Scholl, whose short-term goal is to complete his Ph.D. “I find myself thinking about and implementing what I have learned in my economics courses in my everyday life. … Someday, I would love to end up back at UNK teaching economics where I got started on my future.”

Scholl’s interest in applying economics to everyday life no doubt grew from his collaborations with Dority.

**COLLABORATION IMPORTANT**

Dority’s passion lies in doing purposeful research for Nebraska, and Nebraskans.

“I really don’t want to spend time doing something that will end up in some journal that just four other people read,” she said. “I want to do things that help my community.”

Typical of those projects is one Dority undertook to examine the economic impact of UNK on Kearney and its surrounding counties. Conducted by Dority and Shawn Kaskie, director of the UNK Center for Rural Research and Development, the study revealed that spending related to UNK total about $164 million annually. Those figures include $68.9 million in payroll and physical plant expenditures; $75.9 million in spending by UNK students; $13.6 million in spending by visitors to campus; and $5.9 million in spending from UNK-related units such as the bookstore and dining services.

And the two estimated that about $82 million in direct spending is increased by a multiplier effect of 1.41, meaning that for every dollar spent by a student, employee or visitor, another 41 cents is generated in the community. This is a conservative estimate, Dority notes.

The pair used data from 2009 for the study released by the university in 2013. UNK and UNK-related organizations employed more than 1,600 full- and part-time employees in fiscal year 2009-10. An estimated 730 jobs at Kearney area businesses are needed to support student and visitor spending. With an estimated employment multiplier of 1.3, the university’s overall employment impact is more than 3,000 jobs. Approximately 9 percent of the area’s non-farm
employment can be attributed to UNK’s presence.
And, Dority and Kaskie note, UNK provides other
benefits not captured in the study. For instance, students
provide a workforce of part-time workers and interns,
and faculty and staff provide service and leadership in
the Kearney area. The report can be found at http://www.
unk.edu/about/economic_impact_study/index.php.
In addition to that study, Dority has done similar
economic development research for North Platte.

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Her dream project, she said,
would be “Nebraska-centric,”
but it’s not so much the topic
that intrigues her as much as
the collaborations with others.
“What I miss most about
my non-academic job is
working with a group of like-
minded people who wanted
to accomplish an assigned
task. I miss the teams that
worked toward common goals
to produce a great product,”
she said. “So working with
students is gratifying because
they seem to appreciate
and enjoy mentoring, and
with a little coaching they
respond well and run with the
assignments.”

Now, Dority is preparing
to teach her first fully online
course. And she’s interested
in two topics that are close to
to home: solutions for alleviating
a severe housing shortage in Kearney, and looking at and
suggesting solutions for income inequality in rural settings.

“Why can’t something cool start here and be emulated
by folks on the coasts?” she asked. “I would love it if other
people saw what we’re doing here and copy us.”
Fitness >> Motivation

By TODD GOTTULA


The list—and hype—of wearable fitness trackers continues to grow, and the technology has evolved into a popular social trend that is part of many of our daily lives.

They provide insight into our fitness and allow us to analyze personal data, track activity, and monitor progress.

But if you think your fitness band is key to losing weight, dropping your blood pressure or increasing strength? Not so fast, warns Matthew Bice. “A Nike Fuelband or Fitbit might not be all that you hope it will be.”

Activity trackers have generated overwhelming interest from people who are both starting to become physically active and those maintaining current physically active lifestyles.

But do they increase physical activity motivation for adults? Bice’s 2015 study “Technology and Physical Activity Motivation,” set out to answer that question.

His research, which focused on 42 participants using the Nike Fuelband SE for eight weeks, showed that those using fitness monitors experienced a significant increase in motivation.

Bice’s study suggests that electronic activity tracking devices can be valuable tools for behavior change and help efforts to increase adult physical activity levels.

“People are attracted to the immediate feedback, and that can be a great motivation. However, many people buy Fitbits and Fuelbands with the misconception that they will make them more active. As popular as they are, they just don’t help people become more active long term,” Bice says of his research findings.

The success of fitness tracking technology depends on where a person is in terms of behavior change.

“If you’re ready to change or need to change, they’re much more effective,” explains Bice. If you’re a fitness newbie looking for extra motivation to get started and stick to your goals, the bands proved to be a valuable tool. They make physical activity less of a chore.

What about those already living physically active lifestyles with set exercise regimens? That group isn’t too excited about, or motivated by, health and fitness trackers, according to Bice’s research.

“If you’re already active, using devices to track areas such as calories and steps isn’t of much interest. If you are at a high level of fitness, activity trackers don’t give a lot of meaningful information in terms of something that motivates you.”

RESEARCH SUPPORTS TEACHING

An assistant professor of kinesiology and sport sciences, Bice came to UNK in 2013. He teaches classes on physical activity and fitness testing, physiology of exercise and research methods.

He is quick to point out that his research supplements his teaching.

“I talk about my research in class every day. All of my
students know exactly what my research is about. My research supports my teaching. What I enjoy about UNK is that it’s a university that gives professors room to be very good at both. I love that flexibility.

“My passion is teaching, being influential and helping students meet their goals. I want that to be very clear. But research gives professors such as myself credibility in their scholarly work.”

Bice’s scholarly research examines physical activity as a behavior and lifestyle. Many people think they are more active than in all actuality, says Bice, and “people often ignore the consequences of not partaking of physical activity until problems arise.”

His focus is on contributing factors of physical activity and what motivates children and adults to take part in physical activity.

“The benefits of partaking in physical activity far outweigh the consequences, and my professional career is focused on further identifying factors contributing to adulthood physical activity behaviors.”

Bice has churned out research articles at a loyal pace. He published six articles in 2014 and another three in 2015. Two additional manuscripts have been accepted for publication, and an additional three currently are in review.

As a young researcher with tenure in mind, Bice knows it’s important to dedicate himself to research and writing.

“My research supports my teaching. What I enjoy about UNK is that it’s a university that gives professors room to be very good at both.”

“Professors are scholars. If we don’t have scholarly output, we’re not doing our jobs,” he insists. “I feel strongly about that. And that fits my personality because I love writing.”

Bice’s enthusiasm for writing shows. He sets aside two to three hours to write each day, usually early in the morning from his campus office in Cushing Coliseum after taking 6 a.m. runs with his wife, Jena, and golden retriever DJ.

He often reminds himself of regular advice from his dad, John: Never let anyone outwork you.

“I try to be the first one here and the last one here. I really enjoy closing the office door, writing and challenging myself.”

For Bice, patience and persistence is important when trying to get published.

“There is always a home for a research study, and sometimes it takes time to find that home,” he says. “Just because one journal doesn’t think your work is good doesn’t mean it’s not meaningful.”
It just means it might not be the right home for that audience, says Bice. “It took me some time to understand that not getting accepted right away shouldn’t get in the way of progress.”

At age 30, Bice recognizes he’s early in his research career and has a lot to prove – to seasoned researchers and colleagues, and the journals and publications he wants to accept his work. “I know I have to earn my stripes, and that motivates me to be good at what I do,” he said. “I firmly believe in learning from others who have been there before me. I put a lot of trust in my mentors, and I’m not afraid to lean on them and learn from them.”

**WHAT DRIVES PEOPLE?**

Bice’s most noted research project – “Adults’ Motivation for Physical Activity: Differentiating Motives for Exercise, Sport and Recreation” – published in 2014 and is at the heart of his studies.

The study examined 443 participants and compared their motivations to partake in physical activity in areas of exercise, sport or recreation.

Exercise was defined as fitness components that improve and promote muscular strength and endurance such as running, aerobics, water aerobics and weight training. Recreation included leisure activities such as hiking, gardening, fishing, backpacking and others people take part in for personal enjoyment and leisure.

Sport was defined as organized, competitive activities – individual or team – that involved physical exertion such as tennis, basketball, softball, football, golf, racquetball and soccer.

“We found that motivations vary by the type of physical activity. However, those motivated to participate in recreational activities and exercise as their primary source of physical activity do so for similar motivational purposes,” says Bice.

The study found the majority of participants, 61 percent, reported exercise as their primary form of physical activity, compared to 18 percent for recreation and 12 percent for sport.

The top three motives for exercise and recreation participants were strength and endurance, weight management, and stress management. Participants whose primary choice of physical activity was sport identified competition and enjoyment as their top motives.

“What drives people? That was the main question I had entering this study,” says Bice. “We are all motivated differently, but there were two take homes from this. One is that people understand the importance of physical activity and are motivated by health benefits. The other is that stress reduction stood out clearly as a No. 1 motivation for people. That’s in line with the fast-paced world and society we live in.”

Another arm of Bice’s research focuses on high school sports and shows that individuals who participated in competitive high school sports have higher physical activity levels as adults than those who did not.

The study – “Influence Of High School Sport Participation On Adult Physical Activity” – examined 1,350 adults in Illinois who were surveyed assessing current physical activity levels.

Bice found that participating in high school sports doesn’t necessarily predict future physical activity trends. “The study showed that physical activity derived from high school sports participation can transition into adulthood,” says Bice. “High school sports aids in an active lifestyle, but it wasn’t noticeably different from those who participate in recreational activities.”
Matt Bice sets aside two to three hours to write each day, usually early in the morning from his campus office in Cushing Coliseum after taking 6 a.m. runs with his wife, Jena, and golden retriever DJ.

LINK TO RESEARCH

Bice has been involved in athletics his entire life. He grew up playing baseball and soccer in his hometown of Odessa, Texas, and was a standout soccer player in college at The University of Texas of the Permian Basin.

Sports played a big role in leading him to a career in education.

“That absolutely drew me to this career. I was immersed in an environment that was conducive to physical activity, and that carried over into adulthood,” he recalls. “It’s interesting to look back on that now and recognize the link between my youth and current research interests.”

Bice first became interested in research his junior year of college, which also is when he locked in on a career in higher education.

He credits James Eldridge, chair and graduate coordinator of kinesiology at UTPB, for shaping his research interests.

“Dr. Eldridge was so influential. He is a big-time researcher, and he got me excited about research,” Bice says. “I remember testing rats, drawing blood and just becoming so immersed in those labs.”

Eldridge provided the mentorship, and friendship, Bice needed to become a successful researcher.

“I can’t tell you how many times I walked into his office to talk about sports, school, life or whatever was on my mind. He honestly cared about me,” Bice says. “I drove him nuts, and he probably wanted to throw me through the wall sometimes, but he was always there for me.”

Student research is what reinforced Bice’s decision to teach. “It became very clear that this is what I was meant to do. Research challenged me. I was eager enough to ask questions that come with research and probably arrogant enough to think I could solve the toughest issues. I still enjoy that challenge of ‘can I do it?’”

PERSONAL MOTIVATION

While attaining tenure and reaching the level of full professor is important as Bice advances in his career, it’s not his primary motivation.

“Tenure scares me because you can’t get complacent. Academia is constantly evolving and progressing, and I need to consistently produce in and out of the classroom. “My motivation is 100 percent family. I want to make my family proud. I want my parents, wife, and sisters Jenifer and Jordan to say ‘well done.’ That’s probably not a driving force for many researchers, and it probably seems a bit out of place, but it is a very powerful motivator for me. It is important because they’ve always supported me and never let me down.”

The other driving force behind Bice’s research is simple. “I care about people. I hope I can change lives. I want people to learn something from my research that gives them the skills, knowledge and motivation to move forward.”

Lack of physical activity is a universal public health problem, reminds Bice. Small incremental increases in activity can result in a decreased risk for heart disease,
“I hope I can change lives. I want people to learn something from my research that gives them the skills, knowledge and motivation to move forward.”

Matthew R. Bice
Title: Assistant professor, Kinesiology and Sport Sciences
College: Education

Education: Bachelor of Science, The University of Texas of the Permian Basin, 2007; Master of Science, The University of Texas of the Permian Basin, 2009; Ph.D., Southern Illinois University - Carbondale, 2013.

Years at UNK: 2

Career: Graduate teaching assistant, Department of Health Education, Southern Illinois University – Carbondale, 2011-13; Graduate Research Assistant, Department of Health Education, Southern Illinois University – Carbondale, 2012-13; Doctoral Research Assistant, Center of Rural Health and Social Services, Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, 2010-12; Graduate Research Assistant, Environmental Health, Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, 2009-10.

Family: Wife, Jena, CPA at McDermott and Miller. Parents, John, auger designer and manufacturer in Odessa, Texas, and mother, Barbara, who works for the Ector County (Texas) Sheriff’s Department. Sisters Jennifer and Jordan.

Hobbies/Interests: Fly fishing, hiking, cycling, golf, coaching soccer

Interesting Fact: Matt graduated in 2003 from Permian High School in Odessa, Texas, which is the school featured in the best-selling book and popular movie “Friday Night Lights,” which documented the winningest high school football team in Texas history.

Honors/Awards: College of Education Outstanding Researcher Award, UNK Interfraternity Council “Faculty of the Month”

Areas of research/specialization: Motivation to partake in physical activity, Influence of technology on physical activity, Influencing factors of continual physical activity, Influencing factors associated with inactivity, Coordinated School Health Programs, Professional Preparation Training - Best practices and Training techniques

Courses taught: Introduction to Physiology of Exercise, Fitness Testing, Research Methods

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