

# CONNECTING LEARNING WITH LIFE

IMPACT REPORT | PUBLISHED AUGUST 2022



## *Why Student Affairs?*

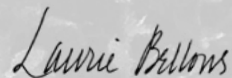
Learning on college campuses doesn't stop at the door of the classroom or lecture hall. It permeates into campus unions, throughout recreational and outdoor spaces, and into dining and residence halls. Community engagement projects and student leadership experiences stretch students' skillsets while creating relationships that support belonging and mattering.

In Student Affairs, we strive to ensure that every student is able to learn and grow so they can be their best. Through programs like Husker GROW, participation in student organizations, involvement in intramural activities, and interactions with peers and staff, students learn how to make good decisions, build on their strengths, and seek broader viewpoints. Our work cultivates student success through engagement, well-being and a commitment to diversity.

In this report, you'll connect with stories of personal journeys, passions and challenges. You'll hear about unique, hands-on, leadership opportunities and witness individual growth. You'll experience student life through the words of students who've come to see UNL as a community where they feel engaged and supported.

And most of all, you'll see how Student Affairs at Nebraska helps make learning possible.

Thank you for reading,



Laurie Bellows  
Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs



**Services for Students with Disabilities served 1,007 students in Fall 2021.** That's 3.5 times the number of students served 20 years ago; and almost double the number of students served 10 years ago.

**Fraternity and sorority members have a higher first-year retention rate than non-Greek peers.** 92.1% of members were retained from Fall 2020 through Fall 2021, compared to 79.7% of all undergraduates at UNL.

**1,132 students and campus community members completed REACH© training to help prevent suicide.** This brings the campus total to more than 6k trained since the program's implementation in 2018.

**Counseling & Psychological Services directly served 2,603 students in 2021-2022.** This all-time high is 22.6% more than the prior academic year. Students participated in 406 crisis appointments, up from 208 the prior year; and a total of 11,756 counseling sessions.

**CARE has experienced a 93% increase in requests for services over the past three years.** This past year, the team connected directly with 129 individuals and offered outreach to more than 2,700 individuals.

**Dining served 2,484,806 total meals last year.** Of those, 31% were ordered through the mobile app.

**90% of students say their self-confidence improved through participation in Campus Recreation programs.** 14,720 unique individuals visited Campus Recreation in 2021-22, totaling nearly half million visits.

**62% of students say involvement offered experiences/skills relevant to their academic major.** With nearly 400 Recognized Student Organizations, students have numerous options.

**Learning Communities in University Housing retained 94.5% of first-year students from fall to spring in 2021-2022.** This is more than 5 percentage points higher than residents not in a Learning Community.

**More than 19k intentional conversations in University Housing were logged by resident assistants.** This included intentional personal outreach to more than 400 students to increase enrollment in the subsequent semester.

# LEAD

*Huskers will change the future by embracing big, bold ideas, accepting challenges and inspiring positive change.*



Watch Alex Neill share his experience as a peer mentor in the Learning Communities.



## *Connections Create a Home Away from Home*

As the first in her family to attend college, Yahaira Castro is a trailblazer driven by personal ambition. She doesn't take her experience for granted and recognizes the importance of a strong support system.

"I'm very grateful for all of the opportunities that I have been given with just being able to receive my education," said Castro. "And I aspire to be a lawyer one day, so that's essentially what keeps me coming back to school."

However, Castro is quick to credit her campus involvement, particularly through sorority leadership, as a constant motivation. From the moment she joined EMERALDS, the colony that later became a chapter of Kappa Delta Chi, Sorority Inc., she held leadership roles like recruitment chair and secretary.

“When I came to campus my freshmen year, I decided I wanted to rush a sorority,” recalls Castro. “I tried the traditional process and I didn’t see the diversity that I wanted, so I decided that I wanted to look elsewhere—and that’s where I found Multicultural Greek Council.”

The Multicultural Greek Council (MGC) was founded at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 2003 and serves eight historically Asian, Latinx and multicultural interest organizations.

Through MGC, Castro felt she found her perfect fit and her leadership evolved. As chapter president, she led her sorority through the national chartering process to establish the third Latina sorority at UNL.

“It’s kind of an approval process – and it’s a lengthy process, but we basically have to prove that we are worthy of holding a chapter name and show that within the past two years we have given our colony reason and that we’ve done the things that Kappa Delta Chi stands for.”

As the leader of the Gamma Zeta chapter of Kappa Delta Chi Sorority, Inc., Castro says she learned many organizational skills such as planning far in advance as well as people skills like empathy and patience. But more importantly, she claims she found a home away from home.

***“Being surrounded by all of the women who have likeminded mindsets as me—or come from similar backgrounds as me—has been very beneficial with making sure that I keep my motivation.”***

“We study together. We cry together. We rant together about frustrations about being a minority often, and that keeps us very close-knit, but also keeps us safe within one another as well.”

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**Watch Yahaira  
share her story**

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“I have benefited from working with other student employees and collaborating on projects for the Women’s Center. One of these would be the podcast that the Women’s Center puts out, that my colleagues and I helped start.”

**Syrah Andrews**

*Podcaster & Student Employee in the Women’s Center*



# LEARN

*Huskers will seek broader viewpoints, actively reflect and apply learning to solve complex problems.*



Watch Kara Peightal share how she's grown thanks to Husker GROW (Guided Reflection on Work) and her experience as a student employee in Intramural Sports.



## *Giving back offers hands-on experience and fuels career ambitions*

As members of University of Nebraska Dance Marathon (UNDM), Ethan Carlson, Caitlyn McCarthy and Ashley McMurchie spent countless hours planning, fundraising and leading their peers. A labor of love, the 13.2-hour Huskerthon program annually raises funds and builds awareness for the Children's Hospital and Medical Center in Omaha to ensure every child can receive the highest quality care. While they knew they'd give back to the community, they never expected to gain so much personally.

### ***Ethan Carlson***

Early in his Husker journey, Ethan Carlson knew a business degree would be in his future, but he wasn't sure how it would be used. Then came UNDM, where he discovered first-hand how direct engagement changed the lives of participants and families. This led to his later involvement as the vice president of engagement, where he recruited peers to get involved and give back.

Along the way, Carlson found purpose and determined his career direction.

*"In college, I became more focused on impacting youth," said Carlson. "You can find a lot of purpose and service in every industry but the idea of working with the next generation and developing young minds is something I found a lot of passion and interest in."*

Rather than a traditional business path, he decided to use his skills to invest in business education. Carlson graduated in May 2022 and plans to work with the Bay High where he'll support young creatives in nontraditional learning environments.

### ***Caitlyn McCarthy***

For Caitlyn McCarthy, UNDM was the culmination of three personal passions—dance, volunteering and technology. She had personally witnessed the benefits of the Children's Miracle Network Hospitals when her younger sister was treated in Chicago.

Motivated to increase the organization's ability to help others, McCarthy employed her coding knowledge with another team member to automate fundraising forecasting and continually engage UNDM team members. Now the organization can use data analytics to drive fundraising strategies. McCarthy also developed and piloted a corporate sponsorship kit and presentation. In total, her team raised \$26,000 in corporate sponsorships in 2021-22, the most ever for UNDM.

After graduating in May 2022, McCarthy returned to Chicago where she'll work in technology consulting.

### ***Ashley McMurchie***

Like many involved with UNDM, Ashley McMurchie's personal connection with the Children's Hospital and Medical Center in Omaha powered her involvement in UNDM. Growing up, she'd watched a cousin who was born with a congenital heart disease and his family face three open heart surgeries and multiple other procedures. Knowing the benefits of the UNDM organization, McMurchie was invested in changing peers' lives by building leadership skills and giving back to the community.

***“Being the executive director for UNDM enhanced my communication skills and pushed me out of my comfort zone to foster growth in my leadership and empathy,” said McMurchie.***

While leading the UNDM organization, she put an emphasis on improving organizational communications and reframing the success of the organization's success to be that of its members. Her leadership and communications skills furthered through UNDM will continue to benefit her as she explores graduate school or work within a non-profit.



“This leadership experience has allowed me to be with a group of people who I barely know and get the opportunity to bounce ideas off each other. The time we have each month is precious, so to be able to work with others precisely and still manage to have fun makes the job that much easier. This advisory board has also shown me that I enjoy working with others. I am very social, but I enjoy hearing others' ideas, stories, feedback and concerns so I can brainstorm ideas to help them.”

### **Erica Castillo**

*Student Affairs Diversity, Equity & Inclusion  
Student Advisory Board Member*

# INCLUDE

*Huskers will embrace inclusion to strengthen and build communities centered on belonging.*



Watch Viangri Sonjay Lopez, a member of the Nebraska College Preparatory Academy (NCPA), explain how NCPA opened her eyes to additional opportunities.



## *Cooking Up a Taste of Home*

*When homesickness had one Husker down, a friend's thoughtful outreach led to new culinary experiences and a creative partnership.*

For Anna Janostikova, a first-year psychology major from the Czech Republic, the opportunity to attend school in Nebraska was a dream come true. In spring 2021, Janostikova applied for the prestigious Robitschek Scholarship and participated in several rounds of interviews before learning that she would soon be headed to Nebraska to become a Husker.

With great anticipation, Janostikova stepped onto the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus where she recalls feeling welcomed and making many friendships. However, she recalls that that homesickness was rough.

“I miss my family and hearing Czech on the streets,” said Janostikova. “When driving around I don’t recognize any of the ads nor any of the brand names of the shops. The food is not that different in regard of types of produce used but I still miss my mom’s cooking. And the bread. We don’t have white bread as the French but ours is a darker sourdough bread. I miss that.”

As Janostikova expressed her fondness for Lincoln as well as her longing for home, she confided in Elliott Pickinpaugh, a friend and neighbor in her residence hall. The two friends ate meals at the East Campus Dining Center, rode the bus





to and from City Campus and explored Lincoln together. And that's when the idea sparked – Pickinpaugh wanted to offer her friend a taste of home.

To help her accomplish this culinary feat, Pickinpaugh reached out to Wahadi Allen, executive chef at the East Campus Dining Center, the first person to come in mind for such a task.

“He blew my expectations out of the water,” said Pickinpaugh.

Allen quickly became a coconspirator in creating a menu for a special holiday meal between friends.

“I was overwhelmed with gratitude at the idea of being able to prepare food that celebrated her culture and heritage,” said Allen. “It not only informed me, it inspired me, and to see her delight in the nostalgia that food creates was a powerful moment.”

The meal began with an open-faced potato salad sandwich, a typical Czech snack, and was followed by a dish of a traditional tomato and onion salad; braised red cabbage, mashed potato and parsnips; steamed Czech dumplings; braised beef with mustard and caraway reduction; and a blueberry and plum tart for dessert.

With tears in her eyes, Janostikova was speechless.

***“I don't think that anyone has ever surprised me like that The effort, commitment and creativity that went into the preparation of this meal is the kindest thing ever done for me.”***

During the meal, Janostikova, Pickinpaugh and her boyfriend enjoyed the company of Allen as he introduced each dish. The group continued to bond as they conversed about favorite foods, their hometowns and the people connected to those memories. For Janostikova, she knows this meal will hold a special place in her heart.

“As simple as the tomato salad is, it was so similar to my mom's that it made my day.”

Being able to participate in Student Affairs' DEI has helped me learn more about diversity and strategies to be inclusive – it helps broaden my skillset to help students feel welcome. In our role of helping students grow into their academic and life potential, we have to provide leadership and diversify our skills to keep up with a changing world. It makes me a better person and employee. It gives me a chance to walk the walk, not just talk the talk; and I think students can feel our willingness to change and learn.

**Mark Lukin, Ph.D.**

Licensed psychologist at Counseling & Psychological Services

Member, Student Affairs Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Council

# ENGAGE

*Huskers will engage with their communities and embrace holistic well-being.*



Hunter Godina observed a friend struggling with mental health and suicidal ideation, which led to his choice to work with Big Red Resilience & Well-being to become a REACH suicide prevention trainer.



## *Sport Clubs Find Success with Grit and Determination*

As the past two years offered fewer opportunities for meeting people, trying new things and developing a sense of belonging, members of the rugby team embraced practices as time to connect with friends, decompress and work toward their common goal of advancing their team one match at a time.

Before the sun comes up, before attending classes or heading to work, members of the men's rugby team practice four times per week. Their determination doesn't stop there as they practice two more evenings per week and attend games and tournaments during their three-month long season.

And on top of the challenges presented by COVID, the team was shaken by the unfortunate loss of a teammate.

"The last two seasons have been rough," acknowledged Brennan Palmer, the club's president. "It really means a whole lot to this team and to the coaches. This was the first sevens season for some guys that are already juniors."

However, the skills on the field are not all the players take away. If you ask head coach Niko Waqalaivi it's about more than the game.

***"It's about building relationships that will last a lifetime and trying to make an impact on players lives," he said.***

Palmer agrees, explaining "This team has given me a home away from home and a group of friends that I couldn't have gotten anywhere else. All the coaches really want us to excel on the field, but they also want to teach us how to be successful in life too."

That sense of brotherhood translated to gritty practice sessions and not only a closeness to current rugby team members, but also to others who have been a part of the club in the past.

"It helps when we have the great support of everyone at Campus Recreation and we also couldn't do it without the Nebraska Rugby Alumni Foundation, so a huge thank you to everyone involved."

At season's end the team earned an automatic qualifying bid out of the Heart of America Collegiate Conference to compete at the national tournament at Kennesaw State in Georgia on May 14-15. This was the second time the team qualified, previously earning an at-large bid in 2019.

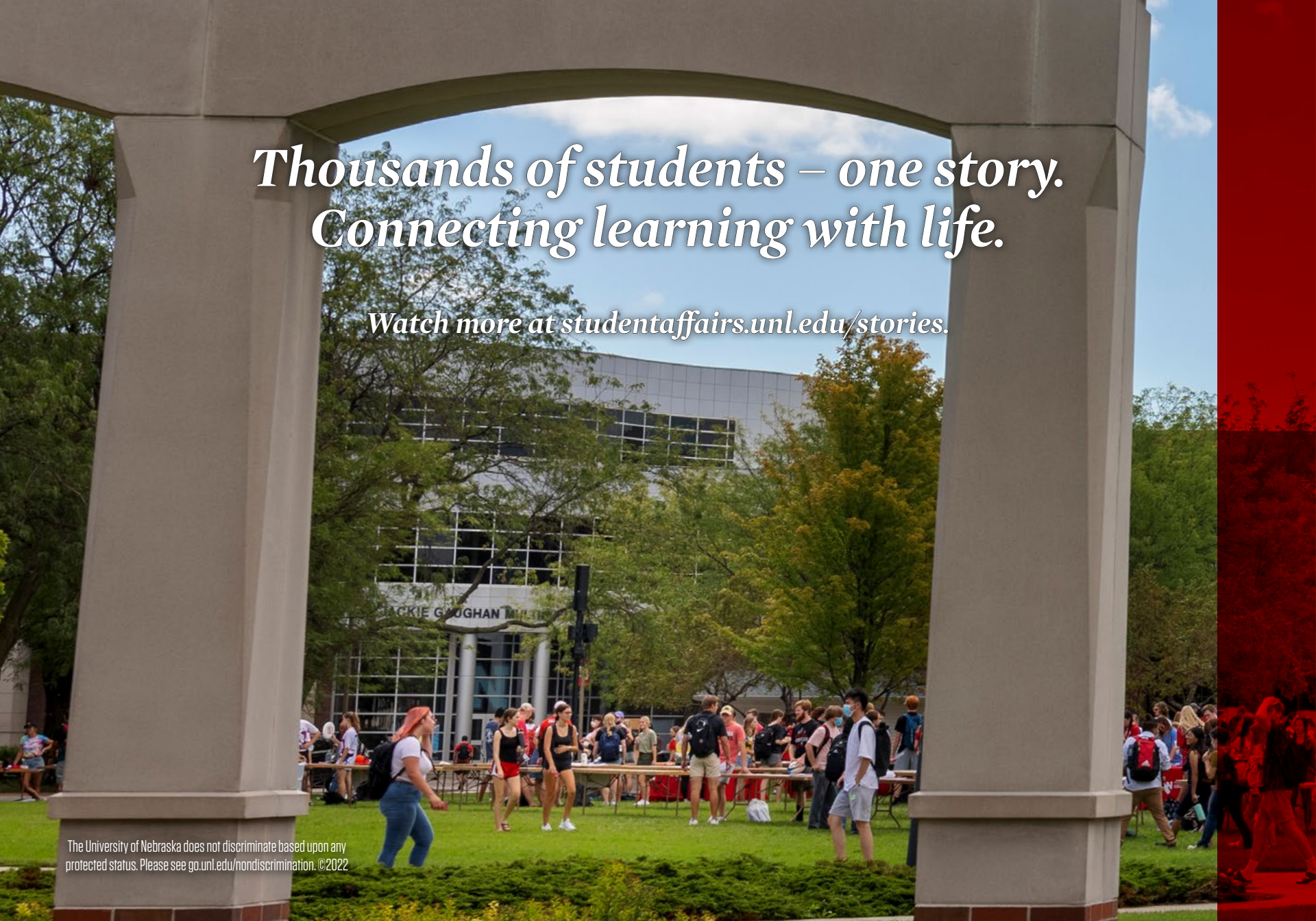


"I have been able to help cultivate a community of people committed to ending rape culture/sexual assault on campus and meet so many different types of people. Having a leadership position makes me less afraid to speak out about things that are important to me and has improved my leadership abilities. In my job, I have to take a leadership role when I show prospective students around campus, and my leadership role in Know More has aided in that. I am much more outgoing and confident, which I am so thankful for."

### **Taylor Adams**

*Exec Team Member for Know More  
(Recognized Student Organization)*



A large stone archway frames a view of a university building and a crowd of students on a lawn. The building in the background has a sign that reads "JACKIE GAUGHAN MILITARY". The scene is set outdoors with trees and a clear sky.

# *Thousands of students – one story. Connecting learning with life.*

*Watch more at [studentaffairs.unl.edu/stories](https://studentaffairs.unl.edu/stories).*