KNOWLEDGE • CHARACTER • COMMITMENT
NEBRASKA COLLEGE PREPARATORY ACADEMY
2016-2017
annual report
Grand Island Senior High School, Omaha North High Magnet School
Omaha South High Magnet School, Winnebago Public School (affiliate member)
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FOREWARD

Since 2006, the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Office of Admissions has provided counselors, teachers and other staff the opportunity to work with talented low-income first-generation students at Grand Island Public High School and, since 2008, Omaha North High Magnet School. Both are schools with significant populations of underrepresented minority students.

Scholars in the grant and charitable contribution-funded program outscore both state and national averages on the ACT college admissions test. They have better college retention rates than other university students. More so, every single graduate of the Nebraska College Preparatory Academy during the past six years has gone on to college. The NCFA scholars at NEBRASKA have excelled above and beyond the program goals set before them, from being accepted into honors programs and studying abroad to serving in leadership positions and being actively involved in student organizations.

In the fall of 2016, the Nebraska College Preparatory Academy announced plans to expand the program. Due in part to the success of NCPA’s first decade, the Sherwood Foundation, based in Omaha, provided a $2.5 million grant to make it possible to expand the NCFA program to Omaha South Magnet School. The academy will also be offered at Winnebago Public School, as an affiliate partner. Adding the new schools will make the program available to roughly twice as many students during the next four years.

We have recruited the first cohorts of scholars from Omaha South and Winnebago and look forward to sharing their success in next year’s report.

Thank you again for your continued support of the Nebraska College Preparatory Academy.

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AMBER WILLIAMS, ED.D.
Director, Nebraska College Preparatory Academy
Assistant Vice Chancellor, Academic Services & Enrollment Management
2017 RECOGNITION RECEPTION

AWARD WINNERS

Each year, the school year culminates with a Senior Showcase and Recognition Reception held in each city. All NCPA Scholars must complete a capstone research project their senior year to successfully complete the NCPA high school component. The scholars showcase their projects, which paves the way for their next step of collegiate thinking and research. This year’s research topics included cultural and gender issues, literature, history, science and health.

In addition, younger NCPA scholars, as well as high school and middle school teachers are recognized for their hard work and contributions. We are pleased to recognize the 2017 award winners.

GRAND ISLAND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Freshmen Award: Raul Sanchez Barraza
Sophomore Award: Clarissa Orona
Junior Award: Zitilalic Parra Valencia
Pillar of Excellence Award (Senior): Lizbeth Daniela Chavez
Middle School Educator of the Year: Chuck Dewitt
High School Educator of the Year: Andrew Placke
Peer Mentor Award: Madelin Gentry

OMAHA NORTH MAGNET HIGH SCHOOL

Freshman Award: Say Wah
Sophomore Award: Jelani Ladd
Junior Award: Clarice Santos
Pillar of Excellence Award (Senior): Arelis Placencia-Monroy
Middle School Educator of the Year: Maraleigh Lewandowski
High School Educator of the Year: Morgan Chatmon
High School Educator of the Year: Michelle Porter

College scholars at UNL have an average cumulative GPA of 3.24, the highest in the history of the program

NCPA staff held 1,062 individual meetings with NCPA college scholars

29,420 minutes in individual meetings with NCPA high school scholars
Throughout high school, Candelario “Candy” Diaz juggled a rigorous academic schedule in the Nebraska College Preparatory Academy with his heavy involvement in the school’s fine arts programs including marching band, jazz band, symphonic band, varsity show choir, chamber choir, and the “Madrigals”— the high school’s top singing group. He’s also participated in several musical productions and small plays.

“For school, I have always believed that you will only get what you put into it,” he explains. “This idea can be applied to many aspects of life, but the main idea to understand is that life will only be as great as you make it.”

Candy credits the skills he’s developed in NCPA and NCPA staff for helping him deal with the stress of high school activities and preparing for college. He’s confident he will carry those skills with him when he begins classes as a business major at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln this fall.

His parents, Angelita and Jose, agree. “The qualities we see in Candy is that he manages his time wisely and is accountable for all he does. Getting homework done is a priority. He shows leadership by not being influenced by negativity and removes himself from it.

“We know Candelario is making positive choices and focusing toward his future. He has a great group of friends in NCPA and the comfort of knowing he can go to any NCPA staff member in the time of need.”

His participation in NCPA has made a positive impact on the Diaz family in other ways, too. “Candelario is a great role model to his younger sister. I have witnessed Candelario give his sister positive advice when she has struggled with homework or outside peer pressure,” his mother added.

Perhaps that’s not surprising since Candy’s older siblings are positive role models for him. His brother, Alejandro, was in NCPA and graduated from UNL this May. Now Alejandro is headed to Colorado State University to pursue a master’s degree in Student Affairs in Higher Education. And this fall, Candy will join his older sister, Raquel, who currently attends UNL.

“They have all been a great support system for me and I wouldn’t trade them for the world,” Candy says.

Meanwhile, Candy says if it wasn’t for NCPA he would be having a stressful time trying to manage his way through the transition into college.

“NCPA has exceeded the standards of preparing scholars for college. The program has molded me into a strong, well-prepared, and confident student ready to take college head on.”
“The most important thing I’ve learned being in NCPA is that no matter what background or culture you come from, anyone can succeed if they try hard enough,” explains Brenda Heracleo-Flores. “It doesn’t matter your social status or your past, everyone can become the person they want to be as long as they commit themselves to their goals.”

Brenda’s college goals are to double major in Psychology and English, and use her skills and experience to help others.

“I want to be an author and a psychotherapist. I want to be able to be a part of people’s lives and help them. Motivate them. Let them achieve success and reach their dreams.”

She’s already doing that as an NCPA scholar. “Many of my close friends, mostly all, are in the program with me. We tend to have the same classes and try to help each other with homework or material in classes we don’t understand.”

She’s also making a difference at home. Her parents don’t speak English so she helps her younger brother with his homework. Her involvement in NCPA has also taught her brother about college and that he needs to work hard to get opportunities like the ones she has had.

“As a family all together, we are close and tend to be very humorous around each other. We have a bond that is stitched together with support and love.”

Tight-knit families like Brenda’s can have a hard time letting their child leave home but she said NCPA has helped her entire family learn more about college and to become more comfortable with the concept of going to college.

NCPA has already opened up doors to places outside of Omaha and her home. She said the events, camps and end of the year trips have given her an opportunity to see the world outside of her comfort zone. Even being on the university’s campus has helped her prepare herself and motivates her to keep working hard.

“Our struggles we are faced with, plus the stress put upon us can make us thrive and become a better person.”
Since 2006, the University of Nebraska–Lincoln has provided counselors, teachers and other staff to work with talented low-income, first-generation students at Grand Island Public High School and, since 2008, Omaha North Magnet High School. Scholars in the grant and charitable contribution-funded program outscore both state and national averages on the ACT college admissions test. They have better college retention rates than other university students. And every single graduate of the Nebraska College Preparatory Academy (NCPA) during the past six years has gone on to college.

This kind of success helped persuade Omaha’s Sherwood Foundation to give a $2.5 million grant to expand the program to Omaha South High Magnet School and Winnebago Public School. Adding the new schools will make the program available to roughly twice as many students during the next four years.

Cheryl Burrell, assistant superintendent for Winnebago Public School, said the Nebraska College Preparatory Academy will serve as a strong complement to the Winnebago Academy, a previously established program in and by her school district.

While the Winnebago Academy provides a wide array of benefits for its participating students, the Nebraska College Preparatory Academy adds two crucial benefits: college retention services and financial support.

“It’s a wonderful opportunity for our students,” Burrell said. “One of the reasons we wanted to participate in the Nebraska College Preparatory Academy is that our students graduate from high school and go to college but they don’t stay there. They come home. They have a strong cultural connection to their families and it’s hard to leave.”

NCPA will help students build connections on campus so that they won’t feel so far from home, she said.

Before the NCPA announced its expansion there, Omaha South High School had already been offering college prep programming with several outside organizations. Students at South want to participate and belong to something, says Ruben Cano, principal at Omaha South, but those programs are at capacity.

“I see it as my mission to bring in as many of those opportunities as possible for our kids,” says Cano. “From the moment NCPA was explained, I was all for it. To have a program that would meet the needs of our college-bound group and with it the possibility to earn a scholarship to the University of Nebraska–Lincoln—it’s huge.”

Meanwhile, the first class of NCPA scholars from Omaha South and Winnebago came to the University June 13-15 for the Brothers and Sisters of the Academy retreat. Through team-building activities and skills development sessions, the strong bonds between scholars began to form.
The first class of NCPA scholars from Omaha South and Winnebago came to the University June 13-15 for the Brothers and Sisters of the Academy retreat. They participated in team-building activities and skills development sessions, while starting to form bonds between fellow scholars.

NCPA expanded into Omaha South Magnet High School and has selected 50 scholars to begin as freshmen in Fall of 2017.

NCPA high school retention has increased for the fifth consecutive year, even after the program has increased its academic standards and implemented a rigorous selection process.

NCPA has partnered with the Winnebago Academy and provides limited NCPA resources. Scholars from Winnebago are projected to begin enrolling at UNL as soon as Fall of 2019.
The two-way radio on Ruben Cano’s belt is rarely quiet during the school day. Staff check in with updates and relay messages. Suddenly, another voice comes through: It’s Cupcake Wars Day in Family and Consumer Science and the students want him to see their sugary creations. Cano smiles and heads down the hall to the classroom.

Cano never wanted to be a teacher but he knew he wanted to help people, so the New Mexico native went to college to study political science. During his sophomore year, he took a course on adolescent literature and liked it. “I wanted to make an impact but not down the road,” Cano explained. “Education was a way to make an effect immediately.” He changed his major to education with an emphasis in social studies.

When Cano graduated from college, he interviewed with Omaha Public Schools but took a job in New Mexico. However, one of the OPS interviewers continued to call Cano and encourage him to consider Omaha. Eventually Cano flew to Omaha to check it out.

“After that I thought I’d be all right to move to Omaha. I can’t imagine going anywhere else. I love it.”

He taught at Omaha South from 2004-2007 before heading to Lewis and Clark Middle School, where he served as dean of students. After that, Cano began a six-year stretch at Norris Middle School; first as assistant principal, and then as principal. In 2014, Cano was named principal of Omaha South High Magnet School.

Cano noticed a huge shift in the overall attitude at South from when he started there to when he returned. In the beginning, he said “There was a feeling that there wasn’t anything for them beyond South High School—that because of ethnic background or the part of town they lived in or what their parents did for a living that college was off the table for them.”

“When I came back that attitude had really changed,” he recalled. “The principal before me did a nice job of creating South as a viable option for our neighborhood kids to come to school. Graduation rates rose. Now we’re less than one percent away from district average.”

“Yet I want to make sure we’re not graduating kids who just walk out of here with a high school diploma but rather that they are really ready and going to college,” Cano explains. “We’ve started to build that college-going culture.”

Introducing the Nebraska College Preparatory Academy is another avenue that will help keep that momentum going.

Before when I’d ask students how many have a sibling or know someone in college, very few hands would go up. Now when I ask that question, more than half to 75 percent go up.”
Nestled along the rolling hills in northeast Nebraska, the town of Winnebago proudly displays its heritage. Signs welcome visitors in HoChunk and English. Across from the Blackhawk Community Center, a sign points the way to Little Priest Tribal College.

The hub of the town is Winnebago Public School. A metal sculpture of children and a storytelling elder graces the outside of the school. Inside, colorful murals featuring native history and imagery greet visitors.

Inside the school, which houses grades K-12, you’ll also find Superintendent Dan Fehringer and Assistant Principal Cheryl Burrell. It’s mid-July and they’re preparing for the school year.

Fehringer inspects the freshly painted white and blue walls and rails in the gymnasium, and notes he needs to call the contractor about finishing work on the wooden floor.

Burrell walks down the hallways passing mural after mural, which were created by students each year. She points to a phrase on one of them, “Be strong and educate my children.” Those were Chief Little Priest’s dying words.

“That’s the motto—that’s the heart of what we’re doing here.”

Around the school are examples of how those words are taking shape. The remodeled auditorium and stage is a showpiece of a venue where students put on musicals each year.

In the science lab, workstations now have running water and gas hookups for Bunsen burners. She’s worked at the school for more than 20 years and until last year, students did not have that equipment to conduct experiments.

A Family and Consumer Science classroom features remodeled kitchenette areas and new ovens. Another room serves as the media center where students make HoChunk language videos.

Winnebago Academy is another resource the school offers to serve the educational needs of its students. From 7th grade through graduation, high-achieving students take advanced courses. As juniors, they spend part of their day taking science and math at Little Priest Tribal College and earn 15-18 college credit hours before they’re seniors.

Now, the Nebraska College Preparatory Academy will add two more benefits to Winnebago Academy’s programming: college retention services and financial support.

The first NCBA cohorts from Winnebago have been to campus for orientations and its first scholars are projected to begin enrollment at NEBRASKA as soon as fall 2019.

Meanwhile, there’s much to be done before school starts back up in August and Fehringer, Burrell — and all the Winnebago staff—continue their work to serve, inspire and educate all of Winnebago’s children.
THE MENTOR EXPERIENCE

Preparing for college requires more than academic readiness and financial resources. Factors stemming from in and outside of the classroom can have a stressful and adverse effect on scholars. Providing peer support and understanding is a crucial component to scholars’ success.

While NCPA staff members meet regularly with scholars to discuss school and for wellness checks, scholars appreciate having someone other than staff, teachers or parents to talk to. NCPA’s Mentor Program connects scholars and peers to further bolster their support system and enhance the social aspect of NCPA.

“Students know that they can reach out to us and feel comfortable,” notes a current mentor.

Mentors are current UNL undergraduate students, who go through a vigorous interview process. Students are selected based on their previous experience, interest in working with underserved populations, and ability to connect with others.

Mentors attend a minimum of three events per semester with their students. These include program-organized events as well as individually planned activities. During the Spring 2017 semester, events included Rec Night, Junior Shadow Day, laser tag and bowling, a park clean-up activity, Defy Gravity, and pizza. Many mentors went to Omaha individually to see their mentees in non-program planned events on multiple occasions. They often went to lunch or dinner, to see a movie, or to support them in their extracurricular activities and senior graduation events.

However, the scholars aren’t the only ones who benefit from the program. The mentors gain valuable experiences and insight about themselves, as well.

“I would honestly say that my experience with NCPA saved my college career. I had previously been struggling and lost sight of why I began my journey in higher education,” recalls Yasmin Perez Pesina. “After becoming a part of NCPA, I did my best every semester so that I could continue being a part of this amazing family. Helping students realize their potential and to strive for a higher education reassured my strengths as a person, mentor and a scholar.”

Mentor Justice Wright puts it another way. “I was more than a mentor, I felt like a big sister!”

As more NCPA scholars enter UNL, more and more are joining the mentor program. They’re eager to give back to NCPA while supporting students just like them. During the Spring 2017 semester, 50 percent of our Mentors were current IOE scholars.
I just want to say that NCPA is a wonderful program for both mentors and mentees. As someone who was fortunate enough to come from a middle class and quite supportive family, this program allowed me to better understand the realities of students who face an uphill battle because of their socioeconomic status or upbringing. I developed such profound admiration and respect for the students in this program for working hard to better their education and future. I felt this program has provided me with qualities that will enable me to be a better leader, communicator, and listener. I am so thankful to have been a part of a program that is giving back to students in Nebraska in such a significant manner.

“I love NCPA, it’s helped me learn a lot about myself and I hope to carry on doing similar work as a career.”

“Thank you for such an amazing opportunity for mentors and mentees. This is such a wonderful program and I am glad to have been a part of it.”
When Jonathan Williams graduated in May 2017, he had a degree in electrical engineering, a good job, a fiancée and a bright future. There's one thing he didn't have though—college debt.

Alleviating the stress about finances was one of the major benefits of being in the Nebraska College Preparatory Academy for Jonathan.

"It helped me continue my education without worry of being in debt and NCPA staff motivated me from day one.

"I wanted to make something more of myself and being able to do it with low to no debt was all the motivation I needed to join NCPA," he recalls.

He was then able to concentrate on the rigorous demands of his major.

"I chose Electrical Engineering because it intrigued me senior year in high school and I never changed after that." As he studied engineering in college, he liked learning about everything the field entailed—aspects he didn't realize existed when he first started. He also enjoys the hands-on experiences of engineering.

College wasn't without its challenges but Jonathan was able to rely on NCPA staff to help him stay focused and motivated.

"I had a setback sophomore year with my lowest GPA ever and Deena was hard pressing to ensure I got back on track," he recalls. "Deena" is Deena Curtis, counselor for the college scholars in NCPA at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. She worked with him on time management and life balance, as well as encouraging him to meet the potential program staff saw in him from his beginning at Omaha North Magnet High School.

With his determination and hard work, his GPA rebounded and he still found time to be involved on campus. He joined the Institute for Electronics and Electrical Engineers and was encouraging to future and fellow scholars in NCPA. He even took on an internship.

When Jonathan walked across the stage to take his diploma, he already had a job waiting for him for Geist Engineering who partners with Union Pacific. He looks forward to moving up the ranks in his career and wants to travel with his fiancé and explore the world.

The opportunities he wants for his life motivated him and is why a college education was important to him.

"It’s important because life is hard without a degree in today’s society and having that helps to make a better future for yourself."
SUCCESS ON CAMPUS

In addition to fulfilling their NCPA requirements, scholars at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln are engaged on campus in a variety of ways and excel above and beyond the program goals set before them. From being accepted into honors programs and studying abroad to serving in leadership positions and being actively involved in student organizations, NCPA scholars made their mark on campus during the 2016-17 academic year.

HONORS & AWARDS

- Accepted into Glenn Korff School of Music for Vocal Performance
- Accepted into Johnny Carson School of Theater (3 scholars)
- Charlotte Kramer Foreign Study Scholarship Recipient
- College of Business Honors Academy
- Gilman Study Abroad Scholarship Recipient (2 scholars)
- Named to Franco’s List for character and integrity
- Named a Harvard Public Affairs Fellow
- Named McNair Scholars (4 scholars)
- Selected for Cornhusker Marching Band
- University Honors Program (7 scholars)

STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS LEADERSHIP ROLES AND INVOLVEMENT

- Ambassador – College of Arts & Sciences
- Ambassador – College of Education & Human Sciences
- ASUN Student Government
- NASPA Undergraduate Fellow
- Marching Band Academic Honorary
- Mexican American Student Association
- NCPA Mentor
- New Student Enrollment Leader (2 scholars)
- President – Afrikan Peoples Union
- President – Phi Mu Sorority
- President – Selleck Residence Hall Council
- President – Sigma Lambda Beta Fraternity (2 scholars)
- President – Sustain UNL
- Residence Hall Assistant
- Track and Field Team Member
THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

We are proud of all of our NCPA scholars and commend them for their years of hard work, motivation and determination. The following scholars have graduated from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln since 2013. We’ve attempted to stay in touch with our scholars, and where known, we’ve listed their post-graduation employment and pursuits.

**Jose Almanza**
History, Spanish, & Latin American Studies, Employed at College Possible

**Jhany Alvarado**
Business Administration, Executive Team Leader at Target

**Yosivel Alvarado**
Child, Youth, and Family Studies, Pathfinder Support Services

**Rene Aranda-Fregoso**
Criminology & Criminal Justice, Master's degree in social work at UNO

**Taylor Armstrong**
Child, Youth, and Family Studies, Master's degree in gerontology at UNO

**Elsa Barragan**
Spanish

**Robin Barrera**
Nutrition, Exercise, and Food Science, Health Coach at JBS

**Miguel Betancourt**
Finance, Employed at Werner Enterprises

**Jessica Bober**
International Business

**Alyssia Casillas**
Sociology, Dental Hygiene degree at UNMC

**Abel Covarrubias**
Finance, Employed at University of Nebraska–Lincoln

**Alejandro Diaz**
Secondary Education – Social Science, Master’s program in Higher Education Administration at Colorado State University

**Gavrella Dickey**
Dental Hygiene, My Pediatric Dentist, Inc.

**Gabrielle Esquitin**
Geography & Anthropology

**Ashley Fast Horse**
Anthropology, Employed at Westgate Assisted Living

**Cristina Garcia**
Psychology, Executive Team Leader at Target

**Dennis Garcia**
Business Administration, Nebraska Department of Labor

**Haley Goakey**
Psychology, Recently graduated from an Occupational Therapy Assistant program

**Christian Griepenstroh**
Construction Management, McCarthy Building Companies, Inc

**Mary Hernandez**
Biological Systems Engineering

**Stephanie Hernandez**
Business Administration, Employed at Zillow

**Valeria Holguin-Gutierrez**
Child, Youth, and Family Studies, Behaven Kids

**Carolina Ibarra**
Criminology & Criminal Justice, Mutual of Omaha

**Miranda Majorins**
Psychology, UNMC School of Pharmacy

**Christina Nguyen**
Psychology

**Linda Nguyen**
Biological Sciences, Cancer Researcher at UNMC

**America Ornelas**
Child, Youth, and Family Studies

**Leidy Perez-Santiago**
Child, Youth, and Family Studies

**Alyssa Randall**
Psychology, Hiland Dairy

**Elizabeth Sanchez**
Psychology & Spanish, Pursuing Doctorate in Occupational Therapy at Nebraska Methodist

**Nathaniel Scofield**
Geology

**Karina Solorzano**
Nutrition, Exercise, and Food Science, Employed at Lincoln Public Schools

**Patrick Sullivan**
Criminology & Criminal Justice, Lincoln Police Department

**Elvira Rosales**
Forensic Science, Specimen Accessioner at LabCorp

**Kimberly Ruiz**
Child, Youth, and Family Studies, Master's program in Marriage and Family Therapy at University of Nebraska–Lincoln

**Sarai Urbina**
Criminology & Criminal Justice, Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services

**Ulises Valencia**
Management

**Jonathan Williams**
Electrical Engineering, Geist Engineering
NCPA college scholars have had an average of 91.8% freshmen to sophomore retention rate over the last five years. The UNL average freshman to sophomore retention rate is 82.2%.

NCPA graduated 15 students in the 2016-2017 academic year from UNL.

NCPA has had a total of 38 college graduates to date.