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2023-2024 Annual Report



UNIVERSITY of NEBRASKA-LINCOLN



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Partner Schools

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Abel Covarrubias, Director

Grand Island Senior High School

2124 N Lafayette Avenue

Grand Island, NE 68803

Jeff Gilbertson, Principal

Omaha North High Magnet School

4410 N 36th Street

Omaha, NE 68111

Dr. Collette Nero, Principal

Omaha South High Magnet School

4519 S 24th Street

Omaha, NE 68107

Jodi Pesek, Principal

Winnebago High School

202 Osborne Street

Winnebago, NE 68071

Kamau Turner, Superintendent

Everett Wall, Principal

Metropolitan Community College Partnership

Dr. Cynthia Gooch-Grayson, MCC Associate Vice President

Foreword

True to its land-grant mission, the University of Nebraska–Lincoln is committed to providing access to higher education. The Nebraska College Preparatory Academy (NCPA) is a testament to this commitment. I am pleased to report that NCPA had another terrific year.

During the 2023-24 academic year, NCPA celebrated 12 scholars who graduated from Nebraska. These graduates received an exceptional education and are entering their professional careers with a strong community of support without the burden of student loan debt. We continue to be inspired by the strength and talent of our NCPA scholars.

NCPA started as an innovative pilot program in 2006 with a cohort of eighth-grade students and has expanded into a model of college access. It serves more than 314 high school and 168 college scholars, impacting hundreds of students and families in Grand Island, Omaha North, Omaha South and Winnebago High Schools.

In addition to supporting the academic and personal success of our scholars, NCPA continues to develop and create tailored opportunities that can address the phenomenon known as the “network gap.” It acknowledges that first-generation students are often less likely to have mentors within their social networks who can provide recommendations or give them substantial professional advice to leverage their education and secure a professional career. NCPA scholars connected with 50+ businesses from the Greater Omaha Chamber and the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce during NCPA’s Opportunity Fairs. Here, scholars participated in career panels and received one-to-one mentorship, providing them with early career advice and potential entry into high-income generating fields. I invite you to read more on pages 14 and 15.

A trait that sets NCPA scholars apart is their commitment to serving the community. NCPA high school scholars and mentors completed 3,750+ hours of community service-learning hours during the 2023-24 academic year. Some projects included making 106 tie blankets for the Omaha Children’s Hospital, 200 sack lunches for the Open Door Mission and 55 Winter Warmth Kits for the homeless shelter. We are grateful to NCPA scholars for their involvement in the community.

NCPA scholars excelled above and beyond the program goals set before them. NCPA college scholars were accepted into honors programs, earned recognition awards for serving in leadership positions and were actively involved in student organizations. Scholars averaged a 3.19 cumulative GPA, and 66 scholars in the fall and 74 scholars in the spring were honored at the Academic Excellence reception for earning a semester GPA of 3.5 and above. We look forward to welcoming 47 first-year college scholars this fall. The scholars will join the Trenchard Foundation Institute of Excellence, NCPA’s four-year college support program.

The success of NCPA is a result of the commitment of scholars to their futures and the support of NCPA families, the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, high school partners and the many generous individuals and charitable organizations. Thank you for your continued support. Together, we are providing access to education and supporting the success of NCPA scholars in college and beyond.



Abel Covarrubias

Director

Nebraska College Preparatory Academy

100%

100% of NCPA high school seniors plan to enroll at a university or community college, which is 34 percentage points higher (NCPA 100% vs State 65.2%) than the state's average.

3.59

NCPA high school scholars across all levels averaged a 3.59 cumulative GPA. Scholars are expected to maintain a 3.25 and must enroll in at least two Honors, Dual Credit or Advanced Placement courses each semester.



Top Left: Angie De Orta, Grand Island 9th grade scholar, hands Ms. Stacy Quintero her High School Educator of the Year award.

Top Right: NCPA graduating seniors from Grand Island pose for a picture during the NCPA Senior Showcase and Scholar Recognition Reception.

Middle Left: Antonio Tate, NCPA graduating senior and Pillar of Excellence award winner from Omaha North alongside Omaha North Principal, Dr. Collette Nero.

Middle Right: Danya Vazquez, NCPA graduating senior and Pillar of Excellence award winner from Omaha South with Omaha South Principal, Ms. Jodi Pesek.

Bottom left: NCPA graduating seniors from Omaha North and South pose for a picture. This is the first year that these two NCPA academies have come together for the Senior Showcase and Scholar Recognition Reception.



2024 Recognition Reception Award Winners

Each academic year culminates with a recognition reception that brings together NCPA high school scholars, their families, educators and stakeholders. It is an opportunity to recognize the dedication, hard work and achievements of our remarkable NCPA scholars and the individuals who support them. The receptions are held in each NCPA community, and for the first time, NCPA celebrated both Omaha North and Omaha South academies in one reception. By bringing together these academies, NCPA provided a unique opportunity for scholars to share their experiences and celebrate each other's successes as they continue their paths to the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and beyond.

The reception also included a Senior Showcase where graduating seniors present their Capstones, a year-long project that begins at summer camp. All scholars must complete a Capstone during their senior year to meet the NCPA high school component. A few of this year's topics included the Evolution of AI and Robotics, Music Therapy and its Effects on the Brain, How Does Asperger's Syndrome Affect Teenagers' Social Lives and the Criminalization of Immigrants, to name a few.

Scholars across all grade levels, as well as high school and middle school teachers, are commended for their hard work and contributions. We are pleased to recognize the 2024 award winners!

Winnebago High School

Freshman Recognition Award: Jolon Blackbird

Sophomore Recognition Award: Lula DeCora

Junior Recognition Award: Mehawi Grant

Senior Recognition Award: Devin Houghton

Pillar of Excellence Award: Melodine Earth

High School Educator of the Year: Mr. Andrew Halsey

Grand Island Senior High School

Freshman Recognition Award: Angie De Orta

Sophomore Recognition Award: Jorge Carpio

Junior Recognition Award: Jennifer Lara

Senior Recognition Award: Joseph Hayman

Pillar of Excellence Award: Ashlyn Favazza

Middle School Educator of the Year: Ms. Ashley Meyer

High School Educator of the Year: Ms. Stacy Quinteros & Mr. Jesse LaBrie

Omaha North High Magnet School

Freshman Recognition Award: Ethan Hays

Sophomore Recognition Award: Makiyah Weaver

Junior Recognition Award: Jennifer Francisco-Baltazar

Senior Recognition Award: Willie Johnson

Pillar of Excellence Award: Antonio Tate

NCPA Mentor Award: Jaime Zamarripa

Middle School Educator of the Year: Ms. Kristina Voss

High School Educator of the Year: Mr. Ali Al-Saadi

Omaha South High Magnet School

Freshman Recognition Award: Alexis Avalos

Sophomore Recognition Award: David "Oscar" Molina

Junior Recognition Award: Magaly Gonzalez-Lopez

Senior Recognition Award: Getsemani Sotelo-Flores

Pillar of Excellence Award: Danya Vazquez

NCPA Mentor Award: Jocelyn Vazquez

Middle School Educator of the Year: Mr. David Kerr

High School Educator of the Year: Ms. Abigail Kutlas-Prickett

Support System Empowers Confidence

Through NCPA, Sophia Heminger has learned how to reach her goal of pursuing a career in psychiatry.

“The most important things I’ve learned through NCPA are for my future. If not for this program, I doubt I would know half of what I do now about college. It can be daunting to try and hunt down helpful information about what college and adult life is like. NCPA has shown me so many things and answered my questions, and for that, I am incredibly grateful.”

NCPA allowed her to meet new people and create a support system that helped boost her confidence.

“It has changed my life significantly. I used to lack general confidence in my day-to-day life, choosing to avoid being social. NCPA has brought so many people into my life. By interacting and getting comfortable with those people, I have become more social and confident in myself. More than that, my NCPA counselors have helped to create a happier version of myself.”

Being a part of NCPA has not only positively impacted Sophia, but also her family.

“NCPA has taken away a large amount of stress that a lot of families deal with. We don’t have to worry about the means to pay for college, which is a big part of my future. Not only was my eldest brother in NCPA, but my little sister entered the program after me as well.”

The Pillars of Knowledge and Commitment helped Sophia deepen her dedication to create a successful future.

“Knowledge and commitment have always been a part of my life. I have dedicated myself to school, getting straight A’s since I was little, studying and working hard. NCPA has given me a deeper value of character, including treating others how I want to be treated, being kind but not to being walked on and surrounding myself with good people because they impact the character I have.”



Sophia Heminger

Grand Island Senior High School, Class of 2025



Discovering Passion for Student Advocacy

By being involved with student advocacy work, Michael Rieger-Hydar hopes to make a career in politics and improve the educational experience for everyone.

"I want to become mayor of Omaha, but that's my big goal. I will run for some sort of office no matter what. Campaigning alone can change people's lives, if you do so with good intentions. My hope is to leave people better than I found them, continue to spread positivity in our communities and make those same communities better and safer for people."

The staff and students in NCPA have been his favorite part of the program.

"All the people in NCPA, from the friends I've made to the staff supporting me, have been amazing. Every person and situation have taught me a lesson of some sort. I've met people who have helped me learn skills to manage my stress and time. I also really enjoy the community events where we bring the schools together because I'm a social butterfly and love talking to new people."

NCPA provided him with the support he needed to succeed academically and pursue his goals.

"It's helped me out of some high school struggles. I've learned how to manage my time, which is a life skill I'll use forever. I do a lot in my day-to-day life, whether it's work, school or advocacy. Knowing how to manage my time and use a quality calendar is what will get me into an elected office someday."

Michael tells students considering joining NCPA to make the most of it.

"It is so worth it. I can't tell you how great of a program this is. Apply because it's an amazing opportunity that will bring you friends, a support staff ready to help you with all your high school questions and a chance at getting into Nebraska when the time comes."



Michael Rieger-Hydar

Omaha North High School, Class of 2025

"All the people in NCPA, from the friends I've made to the staff supporting me, have been amazing."

Personal Growth Inspires Helping Others

For Shirley, NCPA was a space where she found personal growth and support.

“I was very shy and introverted in middle school. NCPA gave me a space to meet so many new people who helped me become more confident and social. This allowed me to overcome the stress of putting everything on myself to succeed in school. I was able to rely not only on my teachers, but also on my classmates and staff in NCPA to relate to and ask for help. NCPA has truly been there for me whenever I needed them. Since joining NCPA, I have also participated in the University of Nebraska Medical Center High School Alliance, Partnership 4 Kids, National Honor Society, taken on a part-time job and show choir.”

The Pillar of Knowledge has helped Shirley find new meaning in her academics.

“Being a part of NCPA has led me to actually try in my classes. Before NCPA, I just thought of school as ‘at least I’ll get it over with soon’. But now I have a plan for myself. My Pillar of Knowledge has given me expectations to get good grades and attend school. Because of these expectations, I have been able to get closer to reaching my life goals. NCPA has taught me to care about my education and become more involved. The support I have received from my NCPA teacher has helped me pass my classes with high grades. NCPA motivated me to go to school and learn.”

NCPA gives Shirley a chance to pursue her dreams of helping people.

“I have always dreamed of being a doctor, ever since I was a little girl. Due to some of my experiences and hardships, I decided to become a neurosurgeon. There are so many reasons that I could talk about as to why I want to become a neurosurgeon, but the main reason is that I like helping people—seeing smiles on people’s faces is important to me. Being able to receive NCPA’s financial support to attend college has helped relieve my parents from any stress and financial hardship. NCPA has truly given me a chance to pursue my future dreams.”



Shirley Sanchez

Omaha South High School, Class of 2026

Transforming Challenges into Opportunities

Avani Zephier-Wilkie, being the determined and dedicated person she is, wants to become an engineer or veterinarian to help fill a need she saw in her community.

“I want to better understand how things work. As for being a vet, I really love animals. Over the years, my pets [four dogs and six cats] would get sick. But there’s not a veterinary clinic around here, so I have thought of being the first.”

Through NCPA, she’s learned the value of hard work and perseverance.

“The challenging coursework and high expectations have taught me that success doesn’t come easily, but with dedication and effort, I can achieve my goals. This lesson extends beyond academics and applies to all areas of life, emphasizing the importance of resilience and a strong work ethic.”

It’s also allowed her to create strong study habits, learn how to manage her time and practice other skills that are helpful for first-year college students.

“Being part of NCPA has significantly impacted my life in various ways. The wide range of extracurricular activities has allowed me to discover new interests, develop leadership skills and build a well-rounded college application. The opportunity to network with alumni, college representatives and professionals has been invaluable for future internships and career advice. The supportive and challenging environment of NCPA has fostered my personal growth and readiness for college.”

NCPA not only positively impacted her college readiness, but it brought her family closer through the process.

“My family has become more involved in my education, attending school events and meetings. It’s also sparked conversations at home about college and future plans, making us all more focused on my academic and career

Avani Zephier-Wilkie

Winnebago High School, Class of 2025



goals. Overall, it’s been a positive influence, encouraging a supportive and goal-oriented environment for our family.”

For students considering joining NCPA, Avani says to just go for it.

“You’ll get great academic preparation, access to helpful resources and opportunities to grow through extracurricular activities. Just be prepared to work hard and make the most of it. I’ve become more curious, value learning opportunities and developed integrity, respect and responsibility. I understand the importance of dedication and perseverance in achieving my goals. Overall, I believe NCPA has helped me become the person I am today.”

CliftonStrengths Help NCPA Build Success

Every year, first-year scholars in the Nebraska College Preparatory Academy (NCPA) complete a first-year seminar in which they take the CliftonStrengths assessment to identify their individual strengths and learn how they can help them in their respective fields. With better knowledge of their CliftonStrengths, scholars learn to leverage themselves in academics and career awareness, as well as engagement and well-being during college.

NCPA partners with the Clifton Strengths Institute (CSI) at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and their Executive Director, Dr. Timothy Hodges, to offer and lead NCPA's first-year seminar.

“Transitioning from high school to college often brings big challenges,” said Dr. Hodges. By focusing on scholars’ inherent talents, CliftonStrengths can help build confidence and develop a personalized approach to the academic and social challenges experienced by NCPA scholars. “The seminar introduced scholars to their top five CliftonStrengths and how to apply those strengths in their relationships, coursework and future careers. We also explored other positive psychology topics including recognition, employee engagement and wellbeing. This strengths-based framework encourages self-awareness and positive self-regard, enabling scholars to navigate the complexities of campus life with resilience and purpose,” said Dr. Hodges.

NCPA scholars have the opportunity to engage during weekly meetings, and they also receive a one-on-one coaching session from one of the Clifton Strengths Institute student coaches. These meaningful connections with peers and mentors help foster a supportive community that values individual contributions and empowers first-generation students to thrive academically, socially and personally, enhancing their overall college experience and success.

This past year, NCPA was recognized by CSI as one of two Strengths Partnership Award recipients. This award is provided to on-campus organizations that embrace and champion CliftonStrengths. “We are incredibly grateful for our partnership with the Clifton Strengths Institute,” said Abel Covarrubias, NCPA Director. “Dr. Hodges is an expert CliftonStrengths coach, and NCPA is fortunate to have him leading our first-year seminar and helping our NCPA scholars understand how they can use their strengths to be successful on campus and in their future careers,” said Covarrubias.





Preparing First-Generation Professionals

Despite achieving academic success, NCPA scholars experience challenges due to the "network gap." Affected scholars are less likely to have mentors within their social networks who can help them navigate their career paths. Without high-quality networking opportunities, NCPA scholars miss out on valuable mentorship that can provide them with industry knowledge, internship opportunities and professional development.

"NCPA recognizes that access to a high-quality network is essential for career development and advancement," said NCPA Director, Abel Covarrubias. "Through mentorship initiatives, we can ensure that students are not only prepared academically but also socially and professionally for the challenges of the modern workforce. By leveraging institutional resources and partnerships, we are innovating student experiences to prepare graduates for lifelong success and prioritizing participation and professional development for all Nebraska students."

To bridge the network gap, NCPA has partnered with Commitment to Opportunity, Diversity and Equity (CODE) through the Greater Omaha Chamber to offer unique experiences that meet the needs of NCPA scholars. CODE is focused on creating positive, measurable outcomes leading to increased opportunities and equity for underrepresented populations by collaborating with Omaha and Lincoln businesses.

This past academic year, NCPA and CODE partnered to host two Opportunities Fairs; one in the fall and another in

the spring semester. The Opportunity Fair connects NCPA scholars with businesses in the Omaha area, exposing them to potential internships and career opportunities. Over 100 scholars attended the Opportunities Fair in the fall and spring. In the spring semester, NCPA expanded this event and hosted businesses from the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce. A total of 50 businesses attended the Opportunities Fair including Hy-Vee, Streck, Local Art Plug, Edward Jones, Viterra, University of Nebraska Medical Center, United Exchange Dental Assisting School, Physicians Mutual, Hudl, Nebraska Medicine, Sandhills Global and the City of Lincoln.

NCPA scholars also attended the 2023 Conference on Opportunity, Diversity and Equity hosted by CODE. Attending the conference was a transformative experience for scholars, providing them with invaluable insights into professional development and the essential steps to thrive in their chosen careers. Engaging in workshops and panels, scholars learned about industry trends, effective communication and strategic career planning. The event fostered a supportive environment where scholars were able to connect with potential mentors, building upon their network that will guide and support them throughout their professional journey.

"College attainment alone is not enough to close the socioeconomic wealth gap which continues to disadvantage students from underrepresented groups," Covarrubias said. "By connecting NCPA scholars to business professionals, we can ensure that they have access to early career placement and entry into high-income-generating fields."

NCPA Mentor Program Enhances Scholars' Community of Support

The Nebraska College Preparatory Academy (NCPA) Mentor Program aligns with the mission and goals of NCPA by assisting scholars in developing a community of support toward their futures.

NCPA mentors are current University of Nebraska–Lincoln undergraduate students, many of whom participated in NCPA and have completed the high school component of the program. Mentors go through an interview process and must attend a minimum of three events per semester to connect with their NCPA high school mentees. They also complete continuous training opportunities throughout the academic year which align with the NCPA Pillars of Excellence—Knowledge, Character and Commitment. This year mentors received training that addressed Knowledge—Tips for Sharing Knowledge and Shared Accomplishments, Character—Leading by Example and Professional Integrity and Commitment—How to Improve Time Management Skills and Communication Strategies, to name a few.

This past academic year, the Mentor Program gained new leadership through Claudia “Lulu” Diaz-Aldama. Lulu is an NCPA alumna who graduated from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln in May 2022. As part of the NCPA alumni community, she found a passion for working with students, especially those who are first-generation or low-income. Since leading the Mentor Program, Lulu has found new ways to raise the bar for mentors and created several new incentives to improve mentor-to-mentee connections.

A new event introduced this academic year was the Mentor Matchmaking event. This event consisted of mentors and mentees participating in various “Getting to Know You” activities to help create more intentional matches between mentors and mentees. After each matchmaking event, mentees and mentors were asked to complete a matchmaking form with questions that would help Lulu identify which mentor would be best to pair with mentees. These events were successful and helped produce over 91 intentional matches.

These connections were fostered through additional NCPA Mentor Program opportunities that created a space to build community. Such outings included Vala's Pumpkin Patch, TreeRush Adventure Center, the Nebraska State Fair, TopGolf, Husker Football Game Day, numerous game nights and community service-learning events.



NCPA Scholars in Research

The Nebraska College Preparatory Academy (NCPA) is always looking for ways to expand opportunities for scholars to develop and gain experiences that will improve their career outlook. One opportunity that NCPA is promoting among its scholars is research.

Data shows that participation in academic research can be a transformative experience both academically and professionally for students. By engaging in research, students can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, which can help them foster a deeper understanding of their field of study. These hands-on experiences often enhance critical thinking, problem-

solving and analytical skills, which are invaluable across various disciplines and career paths. Additionally, scholarly research can provide students with essential professional development opportunities. Through research, students often build close relationships with faculty mentors who can offer guidance, support and networks that are otherwise less accessible. These connections can lead to internships, publications, conference presentations and even future job opportunities, significantly enhancing a student's resume and career prospects.

Across campus, NCPA scholars can be found participating in several research opportunities, including the Ronald E. McNair Program, Undergraduate Creative Activities and Research Experience (UCARE), Summer Research Opportunities Program (SROP) and First Year Research Experience (FYRE).

The McNair Scholars Program aims to increase the number of underrepresented students in doctoral programs by preparing them for graduate studies, engaging in research with Nebraska faculty mentor guidance and developing relational skills critically needed for doctoral studies. For over four years, NCPA has had scholars selected to participate in the McNair Scholars Program.

“Being a McNair Scholar has provided me not only with an opportunity to have more experience in research but also provides me with the proper steps to be the first in my family to obtain a Ph.D. Because of McNair, I feel more prepared and secure in my path to pursue graduate school.”

-Monique “Mona” Miller

NCPA Scholars in the McNair Scholars Program and their research topics:

Nayla Torres Ruiz – Bicultural Identities and Sense of Belonging Among Span-Eng Bilingual Immigrants in Nebraska

Samuel Aguilera Robledo – Elucidating Metabolic Connections Between Liver and Brain via Metabolomic and Integration Modeling in Epilepsy

Monique “Mona” Miller – Relationship Between Parents’ Gendered Beliefs and Gendered Emotion Socialization Behaviors

Karen Rodriguez – The Role of Social Networks and Loneliness in Discrimination-Related Mental Health Outcomes Among Hispanic Immigrants Women in Nebraska

Clarice Santos – Unsterile Needle Acquisition Among PWIDs in Rural Puerto Rico: A Comparison Between Those in and Out of Treatment

Other NCPA scholars have found opportunities through UCARE in which applicants write a proposal to conduct research under the guidance of a faculty mentor. Additionally, UCARE provides its participants with professional development workshops, two annual research symposiums and access to funding for travel or supplies. For Chris Nguyen, UCARE led to other hands-on experiences.

“After working with Professor Griffiths on my UCARE project regarding sustainable designs using engineered lumber, I was brought onto The Backloop: Curve Continuity and The Mizer’s Ruin projects. Through this, I gained hands-on experience working with engineered lumber at the Nebraska Innovation Studios and on-site at Cedar Point Biological Station in Ogallala, Nebraska. Both were valuable experiences that improved my ability to work in architecture.”

-Chris Nguyen

UCARE Researchers:

Chris Nguyen – PLAIN Design-Build Eastern Redcedar Microdwelling and Firewall House and Curved CLT Composites Collaboration

Kennedy Whiting – Impacts of the Urban Environment and Season on Diapause Physiology in the Monarch Butterfly and The Effects of Larval Sodium Intake on Metabolic Demand and Energy Allocation in *Danaus Plexippus*

Marcus McCaskill – Defining and Detecting the Composition and Presence of Microbes in Cattle with Pinkeye

One NCPA scholar, Angie Gomez-Job, is creating a new path to research through the Summer Research Opportunities Program (SROP) offered through the Big Ten Academic Alliance. SROP aims to increase the number of underrepresented students pursuing graduate studies and research careers by helping prepare undergraduates through intensive research experiences with faculty mentors and enrichment activities. Participants engage in weekly campus-based activities to broaden their understanding of graduate admission procedures, financial aid opportunities, test-taking skills, preparing presentations and strengthening their technical skills. At the end of the summer, participants will present the results of their research project at a symposium on campus. Angie was invited to Pennsylvania State University to conduct research in Nutrition and Health Sciences.

SROP Participants:

Angie Gomez-Job – Penn State University, researching Nutrition and Health Sciences

The First Year Research Experience (FYRE) Program supports full-time, degree-seeking, first-year students who are eligible for work-study. Under the supervision and guidance of a faculty mentor, FYRE students participate in skill-building events and workshops as well as the interactive HuskerWork professional development program.

Students who engage in research during their first year typically have the opportunity to learn alongside faculty mentors and develop career-relevant skills. They also experience a sense of connection and community within a research team and gain knowledge about future careers and graduate study options. Students gain greater self-awareness and confidence in pursuing academic, professional and personal goals.

FYRE Participants:

Mona “Mona” Miller

Penelope “PJ” Johnson

From Childhood Influences to Scientific Aspirations

After growing up with the influence of people like Steve Irwin and shows like Go Diego Go, Samuel Aguilera-Robledo knew he wanted to go into science, studying cellular biochemistry.

“I chose this major because I wanted to find a way to stay involved with science and look at life from both a chemical and biological perspective. Growing up, I got to learn more about wildlife and became interested in preserving all the bits and pieces of life that inhabit the world around us.”

To further his learning, Samuel wants to get a post-secondary education and work in a wildlife or athletics field. He’s currently a sports assistant where he coaches 3–5-year-olds in organized athletics and has attended research conferences such as ABRCMS.

“In my future, I hope to continue my educational path and pursue either a master's or a PhD. I also aspire to have a career in research where I am looking to specialize in athletics research or wildlife and marine preservation research. Then, if possible, I want to circle back and work with or establish a wildlife reserve and rehabilitation center.”



Samuel Aguilera-Robledo
Grand Island Senior High School
University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Class of 2025

For Samuel, NCPA has given him the opportunity to attend college, something he thought wasn’t possible for himself or his family.

“It’s no exaggeration that college would not have been an option for me without NCPA, and my future would not have been so bright. They have provided me and my family an opportunity to build ourselves a better future. NCPA allowed me to pursue the life and career that I dreamed about as a kid, and because of the constant support I have received, I am getting closer and closer to making those dreams a reality.”

Finding a community away from family can be tough, but through NCPA Samuel found his home away from home.

“I grew up in a tight-knit community, spending most of my time outside school at church or with my brother and mom. It was a huge change coming to Nebraska and living farther from my family. Through NCPA, I connected to campus more and managed to build relationships with people I now consider family. That would have really been a struggle for me if it weren't for the NCPA community, and I'm grateful for that.”

Success on Campus

Awards & Notable Scholar Achievements

Elizabeth Miller (Grand Island) received the Student Luminary Award, with only 10 students selected. Elizabeth also met the University Honors Program requirements and graduated with honors.

Dywan Williams (Omaha North), a senior at Nebraska, was invited to complete a second internship at Ernst & Young in downtown Minneapolis. Dywan spent three months during the Spring semester participating in the internship program, while completing his coursework.

Nayla Torres Ruiz (Grand Island) was selected from among 13 students to participate in the Ronald E. McNair Program and conduct research during the summer. Nayla's research focused on "Bicultural Identities and Sense of Belonging Among Span-Eng Bilingual Immigrants in Nebraska". Nayla is also a University Honors student who will be a Teaching Assistant for an honors seminar course.

Angie Gomez-Job (Omaha South) was selected as a participant in the Summer Research Opportunity Program (SROP) through the Big Ten Academic Alliance to conduct research on Nutrition and Health Sciences at Pennsylvania State University.

Marcus McCaskill (Omaha North) was among 19 university students to present their research to state senators at the Nebraska Governor's Mansion. Marcus presented on "Defining and Detecting the Composition and Presence of Microbes in Cattle with Pinkeye". Marcus was also admitted to Iowa State Veterinary School as part of a partnership with Nebraska. Only 30 students from Nebraska are selected annually.



Involvement on Campus

Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences (MANRRS)

Mexican American Student Association (MASA)

All-Collegiate Choir

University Honors Program

Combs Honors Scholars

First-Gen Nebraska

TRIO Scholars

Circle K

Teachers Scholars Academy

Intramural Sports

Education Abroad

The University of Nebraska Inter-Tribal Exchange (UNITE)

Multicultural Greek Council

University Learning Communities

Outdoor Adventure and Challenge Course

NCPA Peer Leader

NCPA Mentor Programs

LGBTQA+ Student Organization

Afrikan People's Union (APU)

Minority Pre-Health Association

McNair Scholars Program

Undergraduate Creative Activities and Research Experience at Nebraska (UCARE)

Future Teachers of Color

American Institute of Architects

First-Year Research Experience (FYRE)

Peter Kiewit Scholars

Top Right: Elizabeth Miller, NCPA graduate of the class of 2024, is introduced by Grace Clark, NCPA academic advisor, as she has received the UNL Luminary Award. Only 10 students from UNL receive the award annually.

Empowering Individual Journeys

NCPA creates space and develops confidence in scholars like Maria.

“As a first-generation student, there were times when I doubted if attending a university was even possible, and I felt like maybe I would not belong. However, NCPA constantly supported me throughout my entire journey at Nebraska and made me feel that I was meant to obtain a degree. Knowing that NCPA was there for me reinforced my sense of belonging at Nebraska and affirmed that I was destined for a college education.”

Maria was able to seize the opportunities at Nebraska and followed her passion.

“My time here at Nebraska helped me discover that I am passionate about applying scientific principles to solve real-world problems, and I’m excited to continue collaborating with other engineers. I envision using my engineering degree for years to come, finding fulfillment and joy in supporting others.

Thanks to NCPA, I have gained more confidence and learned not to shy away from pursuing ambitious goals. I consider myself fortunate to have had the opportunity to represent NCPA. If I could relive my college experience, I would want NCPA by my side once again.”

Maria found a support network within NCPA.

“The mentors within NCPA were a constant source of support throughout my college journey. They regularly assisted me with reference letters, checked in on my academic and emotional well-being and kept me informed about other scholarship and internship opportunities.

Thanks to Vanessa Vaught, I applied for a diversity scholarship through JE DUNN. As a result, I was chosen as one of the five diversity scholars to represent JE DUNN and was awarded a \$5,000 scholarship along with an internship. Throughout my time at Nebraska, NCPA always made me feel like I had a friend looking out for me, and for that, I am immensely grateful.”

NCPA creates a transformative experience for scholars like Maria.

“Attending college has been an incredibly enriching experience, shaping me in ways I couldn't have imagined. I've made some amazing friendships that I believe will endure long after graduation—perhaps even evolving into potential business partnerships in the future. Being here at Nebraska, I strengthened my connections with my family due to the distance. But I also learned to be more independent and trust my own abilities. I take immense pride in the person I've become and leave Nebraska with a sense of accomplishment and excitement for what lies ahead.

NCPA is an extraordinary program that encourages people like me to dream ambitiously. It has played a significant role in shaping the person I am today, and I can never truly convey just how grateful I am for everything NCPA has provided me.”



Maria Dominguez

Grand Island Senior High School

University of Nebraska—Lincoln Alumna, Class of 2023

Nebraska Graduates

Adrina Melgoza, Computer Science, minors in Business and Mathematics

Amber Magallon, Psychology, minor in Child, Youth and Family Studies

Caitlin Pieters, Broadcasting

Christopher Nguyen, Architecture

Elizabeth Miller, Child, Youth and Family Studies and Psychology

Fatima Jaramillo Costilla, Criminology and Criminal Justice

Jaden Melgoza, Nutrition and Health Sciences

Jaidan Payer, Child, Youth and Family Studies, minors in Sociology and Psychology

Karina Pedroza Sotelo, Psychology

Malaki Mileg, Finance, minor in Marketing

Maria Dominguez, Agricultural Engineering

Yuviny Serrano, Construction Management, minor in Business



Karina Pedroza Sotelo, NCPA graduate of the class of 2024, poses for a picture with her parents following the 2024 Undergraduate Commencement.



Fatima Jaramillo, NCPA graduate of the class of 2024, poses for a picture.



78

NCPA scholars honored at the Academic Excellence reception for earning a GPA of 3.5 and above.

93%

NCPA college scholars average a 93% freshman-to-sophomore retention rate and have better graduation rates than other university students.

162

NCPA has had a total of 162 college graduates to date from Nebraska, with 12 scholars graduating in the 2023-24 academic year.

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knowledge | character | commitment

Grand Island Senior High School
Omaha North Magnet High School
Omaha South Magnet High School
Winnebago Public Schools



UNIVERSITY of NEBRASKA-LINCOLN



METROPOLITAN
Community College