



**UNMC**<sup>SM</sup>

**BREAKTHROUGHS** FOR LIFE.<sup>®</sup>

COLLEGE OF PUBLIC HEALTH

# Spring Convocation

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA MEDICAL CENTER

Friday, May 08, 2026 | 2:00 P.M.

University of Nebraska Omaha,  
Strauss Performing Arts Center

## ***CEREMONY***

### **Processional**

#### **Marshals**

Aaron Yoder, PhD  
Associate Professor

Sharon Medcalf, PhD  
Associate Professor

#### **Master of Ceremonies**

Nicole Kolm-Valdivia, PhD, MPH  
Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs

#### **Welcome**

Brandon Grimm, PhD, MPH  
Vice Dean, College of Public Health

#### **Invocation**

Megan Wallman

#### **Presentation of Sparks Award**

**Recognition of Doctor of Philosophy Graduates**

**Recognition of Master of Science Graduates**

**Hooding of Doctor of Public Health Graduates**

**Hooding of Master of Public Health Program Graduates**

**Hooding of Master of Health Administration Graduates**

**Recognition of Certificate Program Graduates**

**Presentation of Graduates**

#### **Welcome to Alumni**

Anthony Blake, DrPH, MPH  
College of Public Health Alumni Council

#### **Benediction**

Maria Mickles

#### **Recessional**

***COMMUNITY AWARD***

Chancellor Robert D. Sparks, M.D., Award in Public Health and Preventive Medicine  
**Senator George Dungan, JD**

***DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY***

**Emma Margaret Hymel\***

**Epidemiology**

The Impact of Social and Geospatial Factors on Pediatric Cancer Survival

**Josiane Kabayundo\***

**Epidemiology**

Financial Hardship and Quality of Life among Caregivers of Children with Cancer

**Qianqian Li**

**Environmental Health, Occupational Health, & Toxicology**

Multilayer Environmental Exposures and Coccidioidomycosis:  
From Effect Estimation to Predictive Modelling

**Maria Sharna Mickles\***

**Health Services & Policy Research**

An Examination of Trauma-Informed Care Organizational Readiness  
and Employee Outcomes in Child-Serving Organizations

**Ikenna Orji**

**Environmental Health, Occupational Health, & Toxicology**

Asthma in Agriculture and Powered Respirator Communication Challenges: Implications  
for Occupational Respiratory Protection

**Christopher Pierson**

**Epidemiology**

Does Living in the Ruff Part of Town Matter?: The Impact of  
Neighborhood Disadvantage on Human and Pet Health

***MASTER OF SCIENCE***

**Camryn Tuyet Berry**

**Biostatistics**

Replication and Extension of KRAS-Associated Gene Expression Signatures in Lung Adenocarcinoma: A Cox Proportional Hazards Analysis of Mutation Status, Gene Expression, Multi-Gene Mutation Count, and RAS De Novo Signature

**Alina Therese Cartron**

**Biostatistics**

**Margaret Lapan**

**Biostatistics**

**Diana Pham**

**Biostatistics**

**Trenton David Sedlacek\***

**Biostatistics**

**Xiongyuxuan Wang**

**Biostatistics**

***DOCTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH***

**Kishla Askins**

**Emergency Preparedness**

**Honors with Distinction**

Biosecurity Risks of Thawing Permafrost in the Arctic: A Comprehensive Policy

**Justin Allen Frederick\***

**Emergency Preparedness**

**Honors with Highest Distinction**

Creating a Blueprint: Establishing a Community Reception Center for Radiological Incident Management

**Sumaiya Khan**

**Emergency Preparedness**

**Honors with High Distinction**

Addressing Psychological Realities in Long-term Care Settings during an Infectious Disease Crisis: Best Practices for Western Ontario Health Region (WOHR)

**Wendy Lynn Wasserburger Wells**

**Emergency Preparedness**

**Honors with Distinction**

Recruitment, Training, Deployment and Evaluation of  
Deployable Emergency Response Teams

***MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH***

**Mariah Renee Abney**

**Health Promotion**

**Honors with High Distinction**

Stories of Hope: A Mixed-Method Evaluation of Digital Storytelling  
about Cancer Among Native American Communities

**Edi Koffi Anthony**

**Epidemiology**

Maternal Folic Acid Intake and Risk of Neural Tube Defects: A Case-Control Study

**Edwen Baptista**

**Environmental and Occupational Health**

**Honors with High Distinction**

Task-Based Exposure Assessment to Dust and Gases to Inform Hazard Mapping and Use of  
Personal Protective Equipment

**Armin Barghan\***

**Public Health Administration and Policy**

**Honors with High Distinction**

Integrating Oral Health into Universal Health Coverage: A  
Policy Brief for Advancing Access in the Philippines

**Julevi Puracan Bernido**

**Health Promotion**

**Honors with High Distinction**

Plan to Develop a Theory-Based Diabetes Social Media Campaign for Spanish-speaking  
Adults in Finney County, KS: Integration of a Promotora, Focused Discussion Groups, and  
Community Feedback to Ensure Cultural Appropriateness

**Devvrat Bhakta**

**Public Health Administration and Policy**

**Honors with Highest Distinction**

A Program Evaluation of the Risk and Resilience Relapse Prevention  
Program Hosted by First Call Kansas City

**Farzana Afrin Bithi**

**Epidemiology**

**Honors with Highest Distinction**

Association Between Maternal Smoking During Early Pregnancy and Cleft Lip with or Without Cleft Palate: Slone Birth Defects Study, 1998 to 2015

**Kylee Michelle Bohrer**

**Health Promotion**

**Honors with High Distinction**

Addressing Mental Health Policy and Services for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: A Narrative Literature Review

**Nu Nhat Bui**

**Health Promotion**

**Honors with Distinction**

Multilevel Determinants of Mental and Behavioral Health Among Southeast Asian Populations: A Literature Review

**Bethany Faith Burklund\***

**Public Health Administration and Policy**

**Honors with Highest Distinction**

Influence of Rural Primary Care Provider Preferences on Colorectal Cancer Screening Methods

**Kim-Yen Cao\***

**Health Promotion**

**Honors with Highest Distinction**

Asian Cultural Values and Burnout Among Caregivers of Individuals with Dementia: A Comprehensive Literature Review

**Rebecca Cederberg**

**Environmental and Occupational Health**

**Honors with Highest Distinction**

A Literature Review of Estrogen Synthesis and Metabolizing Enzymes Produced by the Human Gut Microbiome and Their Correlation with Cancer

**Nishant Chenchiah**

**Biostatistics**

**Honors with Highest Distinction**

Efficacy of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) Medicaid Expansion on Breast Cancer and Colorectal Cancer Screening Rates for Low-income Adults in the United States

**Hannah Christine Cochran**

**Epidemiology**

**Honors with High Distinction**

Maternal Smoking During Early Pregnancy and Cleft lip with or  
Without Cleft Palate: A Case-Control Analysis

**Megan Marie Coffey**

**Emergency Preparedness**

Assessment of Preparedness Knowledge Amongst Operating Room Staff

**Jordan Ryan Collins**

**Health Promotion**

**Honors with High Distinction**

Impacts of Gender-Affirming Care Restrictions on Transgender and Gender-Diverse Youth:  
A Comprehensive Literature Review Using the Social Ecological Model

**Alexis Jordan Connelly**

**Maternal and Child Health**

**Honors with Highest Distinction**

Neighborhood Food Environments and Household Food Availability in Douglas County,  
Nebraska: An Analysis of the Nebraska Perceived Nutrition Environment Study (NEMS-P)

**Chunbo Deng**

**Epidemiology**

**Honors with Highest Distinction**

Maternal Smoking and the Risk of Hypospadias:  
A Case-Control Study in North America

**Andrea Elizabeth Dizona**

**Epidemiology**

**Honors with Highest Distinction**

Periconceptional Folic Acid Intake and Neural Tube Defect  
Risk in a Population-Based Case-Control Study

**Jodi Renee Fleissner**

**Health Promotion**

**Honors with Distinction**

Do Your Patients Vape? Assessing How Nebraska Dental Providers Address  
Patient E-cigarette Use: A Needs and Interest Study

**Sarah Joy Gray**

**Maternal and Child Health**

How is Vaccine Misinformation on Social Media Impacting Immunization Hesitancy Among Pregnant Mothers and Parents in the United States?

**Darianne Greenwood**

**Health Promotion**

Gestational Diabetes and Social Determinants of Health in Black Women

**Dylan Cain Hafer**

**Health Promotion**

**Honors with High Distinction**

Lung Cancer Screening in African Americans

**Jessica Fay Hammers**

**Health Promotion**

Building Trauma-Informed Capacity in Nebraska Arts Education: Literature Review and Evaluation of the Trauma-Informed Pedagogy on Resilience Pilot Study

**Lauren Elizabeth Hauser**

**Environmental and Occupational Health**

**Honors with Highest Distinction**

Indoor Air Quality Sampling for Aerosolized Fungi

**Colleen Nangami Heines**

**Epidemiology**

Maternal Smoking During Early Pregnancy and Risk of Cleft Lip with or Without Cleft Palate: Analysis of the Slone Birth Defect Study

**Regan Theodore Hill**

**Public Health Administration and Policy**

Bottlenecks to Service Delivery for Children with Developmental Delays in Arizona

**Sarah Marie Jaksich\***

**Biostatistics**

**Honors with Highest Distinction**

Adult Caretaker Engagement, School Connectedness, and Health Outcomes Among American Indian and Alaska Native High School Students, A Replication Study

**Micah Cristin James**

**Maternal and Child Health**

Restoring the Sacred: Traditional Pregnancy and Birthing Practices  
Among African American and Native American Communities and  
Their Relevance to Contemporary Maternal Health Care

**Tyler Erin Jefferson**

**Public Health Administration and Policy**

**Honors with High Distinction**

Bridging the Gap: Program Recommendations for Strategically Expanding  
Access to Perinatal Mental Health Services at United  
Community Solutions, Chesapeake, Virginia

**Ibrahima Kaba\***

**Biostatistics**

**Honors with Highest Distinction**

Socioeconomic and Spatial Determinants of Elevated Blood Lead Levels  
Among Children in Douglas County, Nebraska (2018-2024)

**Siddiq Gaffin Konneh**

**Environmental and Occupational Health**

Safety Culture in Military Healthcare: Identifying and Measuring Staff  
Perceptions of Safety Culture at Navy Medicine Readiness  
and Training Unit (NMRTU), Mayport, Florida

**Blaire Josie Kratochvil\***

**Public Health Administration and Policy**

**Honors with High Distinction**

Type 2 Diabetes in Rural Nebraska: The Importance of an Individualized Care Plan

**Corey Jacob Lance**

**Epidemiology**

**Honors with High Distinction**

Maternal Smoking and the Development of Hypospadias in Male Infants

**Elizabeth Abigail Laskowski**

**Epidemiology**

**Honors with Highest Distinction**

Association between Unwanted Pregnancy and Neural Tube Defects in  
United States Women: A Subset Case-Control Study of the Slone  
Epidemiology Center Birth Defects Study, 1998-2015

**Philipp Lirk**  
**Emergency Preparedness**  
**Honors with Distinction**

Analysis of the Hospital Medical Surge Preparedness Index in Relation to  
Hospital Characteristics and Social Determinants of Health

**Charles Scott-Otto Lorinser**  
**Public Health Administration and Policy**  
**Honors with Highest Distinction**

Program Evaluation of the Iowa Disability and Injury Prevention Program

**Colleen Marie Malashock**  
**Epidemiology**  
**Honors with High Distinction**

Maternal BMI Classification and the Risk of Orofacial Clefts in  
North America: A Case-Control Analysis using the Slone  
Epidemiology Center Birth Defects Study, 1998-2015

**Kathleen Farris Malmgren**  
**Environmental and Occupational Health**  
**Honors with High Distinction**

Developing Floor-Specific Emergency Evacuation Plans to  
Enhance Occupational Safety at Omaha's Zoo

**Chloe Nicole Maye\***  
**Public Health Administration and Policy**  
**Honors with Highest Distinction**

The Impact of the Comstock Act on Abortions: A Policy Review

**Kelly Lynne McCauley**  
**Environmental and Occupational Health**  
**Honors with Highest Distinction**

Culturally Responsive Public Health Messaging for Emerging  
Tick-borne Diseases: Evaluating Public Health Messaging on  
Alpha-Gal Syndrome in Tribal Communities in Nebraska

**Skye Marie Medcraft**  
**Environmental and Occupational Health**

The Road to Regulation: A Literature Review of The New Proposed Silica Standards

**Stefan James Merchant**

**Epidemiology**

**Honors with Highest Distinction**

Maternal Smoking Status During Pregnancy and Hypospadias in Male Infants. An Unmatched Case-Control Study Among North American Women from 1998 to 2015

**Tyler Mucha**

**Epidemiology**

**Honors with Highest Distinction**

Pre-Pregnancy BMI as an Effect Modifier of the Association Between Periconceptional Folic Acid Intake and Neural Tube Defects: A Case-Control Study

**Kelli Ann Mutchler**

**Emergency Preparedness**

**Honors with High Distinction**

Perceptions of Youth Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Training Among Tribal Emergency Professionals

**Erin Lynn Nash**

**Maternal and Child Health**

**Honors with Distinction**

Treatment and Interventions for Sexual Assault in Humanitarian Contexts: Addressing Gaps in Refugee and IDP Camp Care in Myanmar

**Kayla Quim**

**Biostatistics**

**Honors with Distinction**

Frequent Social Media Use and Experiences with Bullying Victimization, Persistent Feelings of Sadness or Hopelessness, and Suicide Risk Among High School Students, A Replication Study (2026)

**Punam Rai**

**Epidemiology**

**Honors with High Distinction**

Association Between Maternal Smoking During Pregnancy and Cleft Lip: A Case-Control Study Using the Slone Birth Defects Study

**Christine Marie Rohe**

**Health Promotion**

**Honors with High Distinction**

Evaluating Front-of-Package Nutrition Labeling as a Public Health Communication Strategy in the United States

**Aubrey Faye Schieuer**  
**Health Promotion**  
**Honors with Highest Distinction**  
The Role of Trust in Clinical Trial Participation

**Amelia Strand**  
**Environmental and Occupational Health**  
Revisiting the Relationship Between Drinking Water Nitrate and Human Health

**Kevin Douglas Sullivan**  
**Public Health Administration and Policy**  
**Honors with Highest Distinction**  
Policy Assessment of Missouri's Postpartum Medicaid Extension Bill No. SB45

**Daisy Lee Valdez**  
**Public Health Administration and Policy**  
Scoping Literature Review: Preventive Oral Health Program and Interventions for Geriatric Populations in Skilled Nursing Facilities

**Megan Marie Wallman\***  
**Public Health Administration and Policy**  
**Honors with Highest Distinction**  
Tracking Infant Progress Statewide Program Evaluation Design

**Zander Lee Wells\***  
**Epidemiology**  
**Honors with Highest Distinction**  
Pre-pregnancy Body Mass Index and Risk of Neural Tube Defects:  
Evidence from the Slone Birth Defects Study

**Brittany Nicole Williamson**  
**Maternal and Child Health**  
**Honors with Highest Distinction**  
Developing the Genetic Counseling Assistant Training Manual:  
A Resource for Standardizing and Streamlining Specialty Clinic Workflows

**Tyler Alexia Wilson**  
**Maternal and Child Health**  
From Coverage to Care: Examining Medicaid's Role in Access  
to Doula Care for Black Women

**Brittany Kathleen Yockey**  
**Biostatistics**

**Honors with High Distinction**

Cumulative ACE Exposure and Adolescent Mental Health: A Replication  
and Effect Modification Analysis by Sexual Identity

**Brian Robert Young**  
**Biostatistics**

**Honors with High Distinction**

Changes in Quality of Life, Physical Health, and Mental Health Outcomes  
Related to Marijuana Cessation among U.S. Adults, 2019-2021

***MASTER OF HEALTH ADMINISTRATION***

**Megan Elizabeth Morton**  
**Health Administration**

**Honors with High Distinction**

Oncology Rehabilitation Program Development in Rural Healthcare

**Claire Margaret Sandeen**  
**Health Administration**

**Honors with High Distinction**

Dental Insurance Literacy and Its Impact on Patient Care  
Utilization and Health Equity in Oral Health

***CERTIFICATES***

**Dezarae Brandt**  
**Maternal and Child Health**

**Frances Jo Brewer**  
**Public Health**

**Allison Christina Dye**  
**Emergency Preparedness**

**Yu Gu**  
**Public Health**

**Tyler Erin Jefferson  
Maternal and Child Health**

**Jared Everett Jensen  
Public Health**

**Jiarui Jin  
Public Health**

**Daniel Edwin Kent  
Occupational Health and Safety**

**Amanda Korth  
Biostatistics**

**Ning Ma  
Public Health**

**Mawaba Donald Mewenemesse  
Biostatistics**

**Yuhan Miao  
Public Health**

**Russell Andrew Schmidt  
Public Health**

**Mounica Soma  
Biostatistics**

**Nicole Tuzicka  
Emergency Preparedness**

**Patricia Del Rosario Varillas Berlanga  
Public Health**

## ***Academic Honors***

To recognize outstanding academic achievement of graduating students in College of Public Health professional degree-seeking programs, honors are awarded to those who have shown special proficiency and have excelled in their studies.

Graduation with honors is conferred in the following way:

The degree with **highest distinction** is awarded to students with a UNMC cumulative grade point average of 4.0.

The degree with **high distinction** is awarded to students with a UNMC cumulative grade point average of 3.85 or above.

The degree with **distinction** is awarded to students with a UNMC cumulative grade point average of 3.75 or above.

*Final semester grades are not included and total hours at the College must exceed 30.*

## ***Delta Omega Honor Society*** *(\* Indicates inductee)*

Gamma Omicron Chapter of the Delta Omega Honor Society in public health members are inducted to the chapter through a highly selective process that assesses their outstanding performance and devotion to the field. To maintain the credibility of this prestigious society, chapters are limited in the number of members they may induct each year. Inductees don a salmon-colored stole bearing the symbols of the honor society.

