University of Nebraska at Kearney
Department of Biology
Kearney, Nebraska

Site of the 45th Annual ACUBE Fall Meeting
October 11-13, 2001

History: The University of Nebraska at Kearney began as the Nebraska State Normal School in 1905. In 1921, the name of the institution was changed to Nebraska State Teacher’s College at Kearney. In 1963, it became Kearney State College. Both names were a part of system-wide changes for the state. In 1989, however, legislative action moved the institution from the State College System to the University of Nebraska System. The university community is in its 10th year as a NU System campus.

Mission: Today, UNK is a comprehensive residential university distinguished by its commitment to be the state’s premier institution for undergraduate education. The university pursues the preservation, enrichment, and transmission of knowledge and culture across a broad scope of academic disciplines. It places the highest priority on programs of instruction and learning that educate students to be lifelong, independent learners. UNK has 350 faculty, 7000 students, and about 30,000 living alumni. UNK has 176 undergraduate programs, and offers masters degrees in several disciplines.

Department of Biology: The Department of Biology has 15 tenure track faculty, 3 full time lecturers, and about 250 majors. The Department also offers the thesis-focused M.Sc. degree as well as an M.Sc. science teaching (MSST) degree. The Department stresses both the content and processes of biology in seven emphasis areas; the comprehensive major, agricultural emphasis, environmental emphasis, environmental health emphasis, molecular emphasis, wildlife emphasis, and secondary biology emphasis. All students complete an extended independent research project that culminates with a scientific research report written in the conventional fashion, a 20 minute oral presentation in the format of a scientific meeting, and submission of a poster. Student posters adorn the halls of the Biology floors celebrating the accomplishments of recent graduates.

The faculty typically teach “across the curriculum” with most involved in both majors and general education biology courses as well as lower and upper division offerings. Active faculty “groups” in prairie ecology and molecular biology have formed in recent years. This dynamic clustering of 3-5 faculty in each instance has enhanced undergraduate research opportunities.

Geography: The city of Kearney lies just north of the Platte River, the key water resource for wildlife and agricultural production across central Nebraska. Renown for the annual spring migration of some 500,000 sandhill cranes, the central “Big Bend” region of the Platte River harbors other migratory waterfowl in the spring, bald eagles in the winter, and an abundance of other wildlife. The Department of Biology utilizes or manages classic tallgrass prairie preserves in the lowland areas along the river and mixed grass prairie preserves in the upland loess hills minutes north of Kearney.

Kearney, a city of 30,000, is home to the Museum of Nebraska Art (MONA), the Great Platte River Road Archway Monument, a Cabela’s sporting goods outlet, and Fort Kearny State Historical Park. The Fort adjacent to the Platte River along the Oregon, Mormon, and California Trails was a major staging ground for pioneers heading west.