



Nebraska State
College System

CHADRON | PERU | WAYNE



RURAL HEALTH OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAM

*More than 30 Years of Developing
Healthcare Professionals for Rural Nebraska*

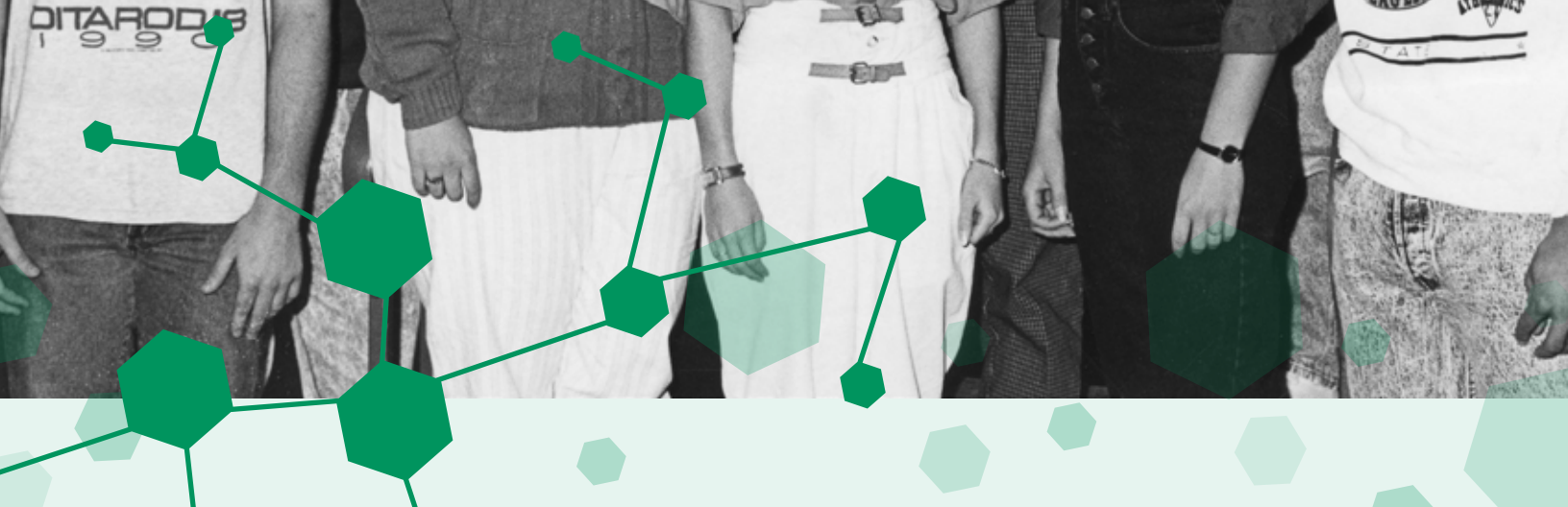
“

The Rural Health Opportunities Program facilitated my return to a more rural setting and definitely helps promote the return of physicians to these areas that traditionally experience a shortage of providers.

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— **Jeffrey King, M.D. '94** Health Sciences
Gordon, NE

(Attended Chadron State College and UNMC as part of the first RHOP cohort and chose to practice in Grand Island.)





More than 30 Years of Developing Healthcare Professionals for Rural Nebraska

The **Rural Health Opportunities Program** (RHOP) is a collaborative educational initiative between the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) and the Nebraska State Colleges. It was designed to address the healthcare needs of rural Nebraska by encouraging and financially supporting rural residents to pursue a career in a number of healthcare fields. The Program was developed and first implemented through individual College-level partnership agreements in 1989 for both Chadron State and Wayne State, with Peru State joining the RHOP initiative and establishing an initial partnership agreement in 2012.

While updated agreements have continued to be developed on an individual College basis, the most recent review and revision of the RHOP Program resulted in a System-wide RHOP Agreement which was approved in January 2020 and is in effect for a three-year term.

To be eligible for the RHOP Program, students must:

- Be a rural Nebraska resident (excluding the municipalities of Omaha, Ralston, Boys Town, Elkhorn, Lincoln, Bellevue, Papillion, LaVista, Chalco, and Offutt AFB);
- Be an incoming freshman who has applied and been accepted to Chadron, Peru, or Wayne State College; and
- Complete and submit all RHOP application materials.

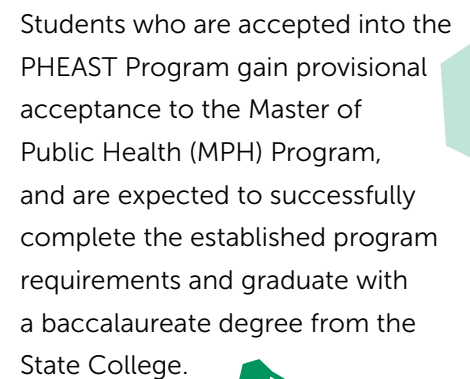
The RHOP selection committees look for well-rounded students who are dedicated to the health professions and have demonstrated commitment to the rural areas of Nebraska. They also seek students who are willing to work hard and have the academic skills to complete the rigorous programs in health professions at the State Colleges and UNMC.

Students selected for the RHOP Program are provided an RHOP Tuition Waiver which fully covers the cost of tuition for all coursework completed at the State Colleges. They are also guaranteed

admission to UNMC, provided all program requirements are met and the pre-professional studies are completed. In order to ensure the RHOP "slots" continue to be filled, the State Colleges also select and financially support a number of students as "RHOP Alternates," who are offered slots if they become available through attrition or changes of major.

The **Public Health Early Admission Student Track** (PHEAST) Program is a collaborative educational partnership between UNMC College of Public Health (CoPH) and the Nebraska State Colleges. It was established in 2011 to recruit, educate and graduate public health leaders from Nebraska. All three State Colleges participate in the Program.

Students who are accepted into the PHEAST Program gain provisional acceptance to the Master of Public Health (MPH) Program, and are expected to successfully complete the established program requirements and graduate with a baccalaureate degree from the State College.



Where We are Now

The RHOP and PHEAST Programs allow the State Colleges to recruit high-performing high school seniors from rural Nebraska to receive a tuition waiver and be granted early admission at UNMC to complete their degrees in a health-related profession. Students are selected for these waivers based upon their academic credentials, community involvement, and commitment to rural Nebraska. Each year, the State Colleges and UNMC co-interview and co-select high school students from rural communities across the State to participate in these Programs. Along with the full tuition waiver support, these students also receive early registration privileges and opportunities to visit UNMC during their time at the State Colleges to

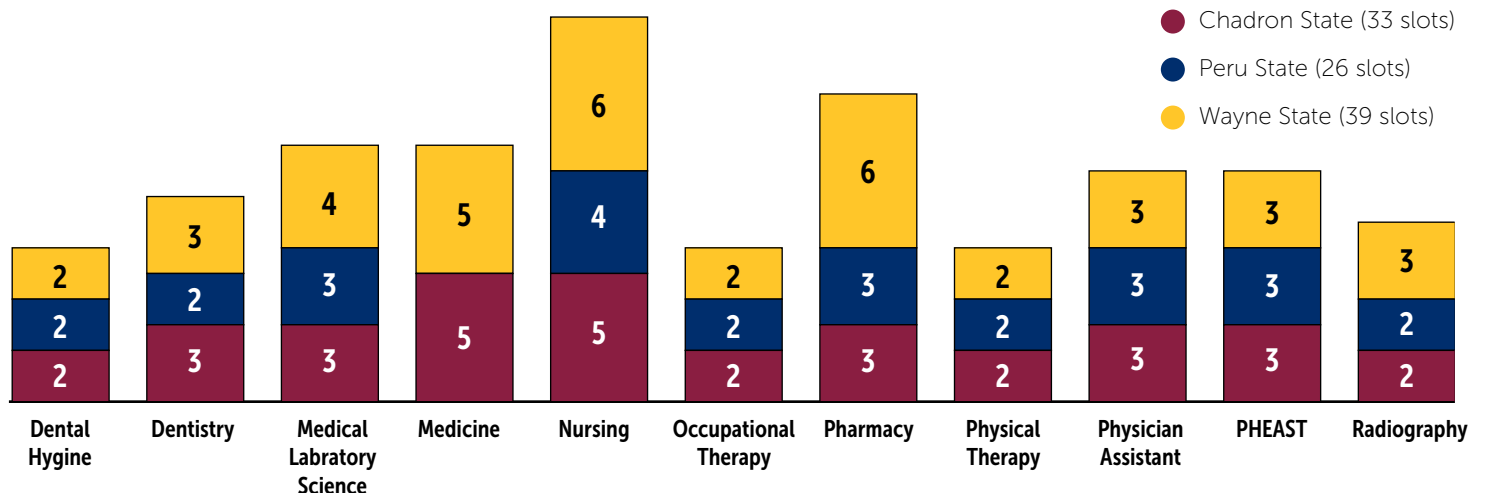
aid their transition into their chosen health program.

When the RHOP Program initially began in 1989 and 1990, 24 students participated across four healthcare tracks. In comparison, our most recent data reflect 144 students currently filling RHOP slots offered by the State Colleges, across ten healthcare tracks, with almost as many RHOP Alternates also identified. Each year, UNMC allocates 98 slots to the State Colleges RHOP Program healthcare tracks, with a specific number of seats allocated to each State College (see chart below).

The financial commitment of the State Colleges to the RHOP Program is significant. With an expected 30 credits of coursework completed by each student,

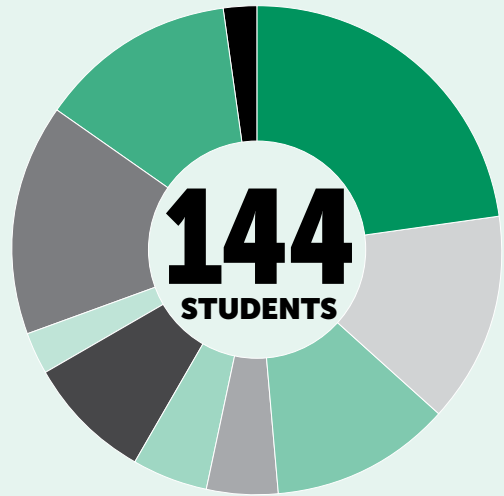
at the current undergraduate tuition cost of \$186 per credit, the annual cost of the tuition waiver averages \$5,580 per student. With 98 RHOP and PHEAST slots annually allocated by UNMC to the State Colleges, the overall cost is \$546,840 to fully finance these tuition waiver slots for each year these students attend. Most students receive this tuition waiver for three years prior to transitioning to UNMC to complete the final year of their healthcare program; however, students in Medicine and Dentistry receive the tuition waivers for four years to allow them to complete their baccalaureate degree program at a State College prior to transitioning to UNMC.

Annual RHOP and PHEAST Seats by Healthcare Track and College



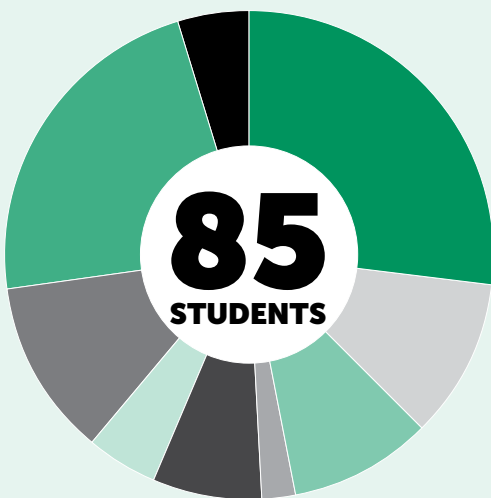


Undergraduate Pipeline



Enrolled in RHOP in ten healthcare pathways at Chadron, Peru, and Wayne State.

UNMC Pipeline



Actively participating in nine healthcare pathways at UNMC.

Healthcare Pathways

- Medicine
- Physician Assistant
- Physical Therapy
- Radiography
- Medical Laboratory Science
- Dentistry
- Dental Hygiene
- Nursing
- Pharmacy
- PHEAST
- Occupational Therapy



HEALTHCARE CAREER PATHWAYS

Dental Hygiene

Acceptance into the College of Dentistry at UNMC is contingent upon satisfactory completion of the two-year undergraduate program at Chadron, Peru or Wayne State. After successfully completing two years in the dental hygiene program, students receive their Bachelor of Science degree from UNMC.

Dentistry

RHOP students are guaranteed a position at UNMC's College of Dentistry upon satisfactory completion of the four-year undergraduate program at Chadron, Peru or Wayne. Students follow a specific curriculum that prepares them for their dental studies at UNMC.

Medical Lab Science

Students gain acceptance into UNMC medical laboratory science program contingent upon satisfactory completion of the three-year undergraduate program, and then experience 11 weeks of basic laboratory classes at UNMC during their senior year. The final nine months of clinical education is completed in Grand Island, Hastings, Kearney, Norfolk, or North Platte. The use of web-based course material enables students off campus to receive the same lectures and experiences as those students in the classroom. This arrangement enables students to complete all of their clinical education at a site serving a rural community.

Medicine

RHOP students are accepted into UNMC's College of Medicine upon satisfactory completion of a four-year undergraduate program. Upon successful completion of medical school, students receive their Doctor of Medicine degree and then complete a residency program to become certified to practice medicine. The RHOP medicine career fields include high-need specialties, such as family medicine, psychiatry, general internal medicine, general surgery, pediatrics, and obstetrics/gynecology.

Nursing

Acceptance into UNMC's College of Nursing program is dependent upon satisfactory completion of the two-year undergraduate program at one of the State Colleges. After successfully completing two years in the Nursing program, RHOP students receive their Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree from UNMC and are qualified to take the NCLEX-RN, which is the national licensure examination for nursing. The BSN also qualifies students to enter graduate school to become a nurse educator or nurse practitioner, or to pursue a nursing doctorate.

Occupational Therapy

Completion of a four-year undergraduate program in applied human and sport physiology at a State College qualifies RHOP students to enter UNMC's occupational therapy education program. Upon successful completion of a three-year program at UNMC, students receive a Doctor of Occupational Therapy (OTD) degree and are eligible to take the national certification examination.



Pharmacy

Acceptance into UNMC's College of Pharmacy is contingent upon satisfactory completion of the three-year undergraduate program at one of the State Colleges. Students obtain a Bachelor of Chemistry degree from the State College after completing one year of pharmacy school. A Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.) degree is awarded upon successful completion of the program. The fourth year at UNMC is experience-based education through clerkships in a variety of clinical settings.

Physical Therapy

Upon successful completion of a four-year undergraduate program in biology at one of the State Colleges, students enter UNMC's physical therapy education program. Clinical instruction is provided at hospitals and medical centers, home health care, private clinics, and specialized practices in sports medicine and pediatrics. Upon successful completion of a three-

degree before entering the Physician Assistant program at UNMC. Participants then complete 13 months of basic medical science and pre-clinical coursework followed by 15 months of supervised clinical education with physicians in rural Nebraska. Upon successful completion of the program, students receive a Master of Physician Assistant Studies degree from UNMC.

Oriented Primary Care, Epidemiology, Environmental and Occupational Health, Maternal and Child Health, and Public Health Administration.

Radiography

Upon successful completion of a two-year program at one of the State Colleges, RHOP students enter the radiography program at UNMC and complete a 21-month basic

I joined RHOP because I grew up in a rural community and wanted to give back to rural Nebraska. My plans are to attend the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha for physician assistant school. Upon completion of PA school, I hope to return and work in family practice in rural Nebraska so that I can provide health care to people in their own hometown. The small classes and one-on-one opportunities are one of a kind. Attending WSC has also allowed me to learn so many skills by shadowing a local physician assistant for more than 50 hours, right here in Wayne.

— Natalie Gasseling '21 Biology (Pre-Physician Assistant)
Hemingford, Neb.

year program at UNMC, students receive a Doctor of Physical Therapy degree and are eligible to take the national licensure exam.

Physician Assistant

Students gain acceptance to UNMC's Physician Assistant program upon completion of the four-year undergraduate program at one of the State Colleges. RHOP students complete a prescribed course of study for a Bachelor of Science

PHEAST

Upon acceptance to PHEAST, students gain early admission to the UNMC Master of Public Health Program and receive a tuition waiver of up to 16 credits per semester for their junior and senior years at the State Colleges. Students are required to choose a concentration upon beginning their Masters of Public Health at UNMC. The seven areas of concentration include: Biostatistics, Community Health Education, Community

health sciences and clinical study at UNMC. Upon successful completion of the program, students receive a Bachelor of Science degree in radiation science technology and are eligible to apply for the national certification exam for radiographers.



60% of RHOP graduates are working in healthcare fields in Nebraska. 85% of those are serving in a rural area.



Healthcare Challenges in Nebraska

The healthcare workforce challenges facing Nebraska require an increasing number of healthcare professionals to fill the current shortages across each of the fields supported by the RHOP and PHEAST Programs, especially in rural areas of the State. Recent findings provided by UNMC in their *Status of the Nebraska Healthcare Workforce: Update 2022* compares data from 2019 to 2021 and includes the following:

- The number of active physicians per 100,000 population decreased from 257.7 to 249.8 per 100,000;
- While the number of counties with any primary care physician increased from 79 to 80 of the 93 counties, the number of primary care physicians per 100,000 population continued to decline;
- Out of 93 counties, 49 had active OB/GYN physicians in 2021 compared to 39 counties in 2019; however, the number of physicians in this specialty has continued to decline;
- The State experienced a 17.7% increase in the number of Nurse Practitioners (NP);
- The number of dental professionals, including dentists and dental hygienists, decreased;
- The number of pharmacists per 100,000 population fell, while the number of pharmacy technicians grew substantially, from 3,511 to 5,044;
- The number of emergency medical technicians increased by 4%;
- The workforce is aging for several types of healthcare professionals. A significant portion of Nebraska's dentists (26.9%), licensed practical nurses (20.6%), podiatrists (20%), physicians (19.4%), optometrists (18.6%), and registered nurses (17.2%) are in the pre-retirement age group of 61 years of age and older;
- Since the 2021 data collection, existing workforce shortages

have only been exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic.

Within the same study, UNMC identified nine recommendations for addressing the findings, two of which directly align with the RHOP Program. These are:

- Enhance existing pipeline programs and educational initiatives that incentivize individuals from rural areas to become healthcare professionals to practice healthcare in these communities, particularly for health professions exhibiting shortages; and
- Enhance the availability of tuition waivers and student loan repayment programs for health professional students and practitioners at all levels, particularly for those professions experiencing significant shortages and those interested in serving rural and underserved urban areas to recruit and retain the needed healthcare workforce.

Developing Healthcare Professionals Successes at the State Colleges

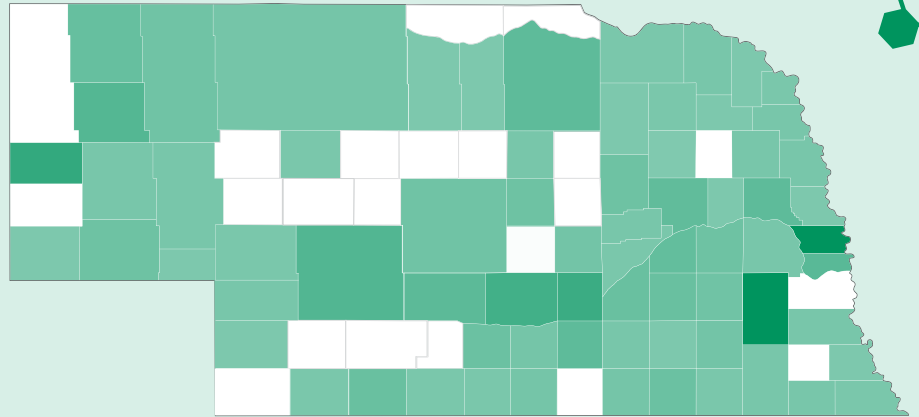
For over 30 years, the State Colleges have proven success in developing medical talent from rural Nebraska students, and the results of the RHOP and PHEAST tuition waivers are impressive. Since 1992, 675 State College students have completed an RHOP or PHEAST Program at the State Colleges, been admitted to UNMC, and successfully completed their chosen programs in a health-related field. Of that number, around two-thirds (2/3) of these students remain in Nebraska, and nearly half (1/2) have returned to rural Nebraska communities to serve as doctors, physician assistants, physical therapists, medical radiographers, medical lab scientists, dentists, dental assistants, nurses, and pharmacists.

While the annual retention rate for these graduates remaining in Nebraska varies by year, the last decade reflects retention rates of up to 60% of RHOP alumni who remain in Nebraska, with up to 85% returning to rural parts of the State to serve those communities. The impact of this initiative, while focused on the needs of rural Nebraska, extends to all of Nebraska. While the majority of RHOP and PHEAST students return to rural areas of the State, some do choose to serve in Nebraska's urban areas after graduation, with a 15% ten-year average of those who choose to serve in urban areas.

The Nebraska State Colleges remain committed to the mission of the RHOP Program



and recognize the importance of continuing and potentially expanding the Program to meet the increasing workforce shortages across the State. This may include adding additional slots to existing healthcare program tracks or adding slots for new program tracks, such as Behavioral Health. The RHOP Program's ability to recruit Nebraska students into these highly needed healthcare program tracks and ensure that their education is affordable and accessible, while guaranteeing pre-admission to their chosen UNMC program, has an established track record and clearly aligns with the recommendations identified by UNMC.



71 Nebraska counties have an RHOP graduate serving its residents in a healthcare field.





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The RHOP program was a way for me to take my passion for health sciences to the next level. Having completed my time at Peru State and moving to the next level, it is very clear that the faculty in the natural sciences department has thoroughly prepared its students. I would encourage anyone interested in a health profession to visit with Peru State’s RHOP coordinators and apply.

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— Nicholas Hohensee '19 Biochemical Science
Sutton, Neb.

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