



Lincoln



Omaha



Kearney



Medical Center

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Contacts:

Melissa Lee, University of Nebraska
(402) 472-7127, (402) 580-3297 (cell) or melissalee@nebraska.edu

LCDR Stephanie Murdock, USSTRATCOM Public Affairs
(402) 294-4130 or murdocks@stratcom.mil

Jim Fagin, director of communications, U.S. Sen. Ben Nelson
(402) 391-3411 or Jim_Fagin@bennelson.senate.gov

University of Nebraska, USSTRATCOM to partner on University-Affiliated Research Center

The University of Nebraska announced today that it has entered into a long-term partnership with the United States Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM) at Offutt Air Force Base to create a University-Affiliated Research Center (UARC). The UARC will serve as a primary research and development center that supports USSTRATCOM's missions to deter and detect strategic attacks against the United States and its allies, and to defend the nation as directed.

Through the UARC – housed in the university's National Strategic Research Institute, which the Board of Regents approved in May – the university will provide research and development services for USSTRATCOM in areas in which NU faculty have demonstrated significant strength. These areas, which are critical to national security, include: nuclear detection and forensics, detection of chemical and biological weapons, passive defense against weapons of mass destruction, consequence management, and space, cyber and telecommunications law.

The UARC is a university-wide initiative, drawing on a broad range of expertise from all four NU campuses. Faculty will have the opportunity to participate if their research aligns with federal funding opportunities. Their work will be solutions-oriented, geared toward meeting – and ultimately anticipating – USSTRATCOM's needs.

The initial contract award from the Department of Defense to the university provides for up to \$84 million over the next five years to support the early research activities of the National Strategic Research Institute. Research opportunities through the UARC are expected to grow significantly in the coming years, and the university anticipates additional funding in the future.

Only 14 U.S. institutions, including the University of Nebraska, host a UARC. All UARCs are affiliated with leading research universities, including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Johns Hopkins University, Penn State University and others. Those universities are among the national leaders in research and development expenditures financed by the Department of Defense; the top tier also includes prestigious institutions such as the University of Michigan, Stanford University and the University of Illinois.

“The UARC is a tremendous distinction for the University of Nebraska which recognizes the outstanding capabilities of our faculty,” NU President James B. Milliken said. “The impetus for the university’s participation in the UARC is much like that of our other university-wide initiatives, such as water and food security, early childhood education and rural futures: that a 21st-century land-grant university should be addressing in a significant way the great challenges facing the world. This new UARC and the research it supports will be good for the university, the state and our nation.”

Milliken added, “I am very pleased that the University of Nebraska’s unique combination of strengths will be leveraged for the benefit of our neighbor and partner, USSTRATCOM.”

Gen. C. Robert Kehler, commander of the United States Strategic Command, said that “this UARC will create an important strategic relationship between DoD and the University of Nebraska, and will provide STRATCOM and the DoD essential engineering and research.”

U.S. Sen. Ben Nelson, who is chair of the Strategic Forces Subcommittee on the Senate’s Armed Services Committee, praised the selection of the University of Nebraska to host a UARC. “The university has demonstrated its desire, capacity and expertise to conduct important research and development in areas relating to national security and defense,” Nelson said. “The UARC will provide one-stop, close-to-home services to USSTRATCOM that will serve our country well.”

Robert Hinson, who retired from the U.S. Air Force at the rank of Lieutenant General after serving for 33 years, is the founding executive director of the National Strategic Research Institute. Hinson is a command pilot with more than 3,000 flying hours who has previously served as deputy commander at USSTRATCOM and, most recently, vice president of government programs and corporate lead executive at Northrop Grumman Corp. Hinson has degrees from the University of Tennessee and Arkansas State University and has completed the Program for Senior Officials in National Security at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government.

“It’s not often one gets the opportunity to be on the leading edge of such an exciting new venture as the National Strategic Research Institute,” Hinson said. “I’m very excited about being involved in this UARC, promoting the exceptional research capabilities of the university, and delivering potential solutions to some of the most challenging missions of USSTRATCOM.

“I believe the University of Nebraska, through this UARC, is well-positioned to grow as one of the best research and development programs in the country.”

Prem Paul, vice chancellor for research and economic development at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said: “I’m thrilled to support USSTRATCOM and the United States on important issues related to national security. Through the UARC, we look forward to leveraging UNL’s tremendous research strengths in science and engineering and the social sciences.”

Jennifer Larsen, vice chancellor for research and Louise and Morton Degen Professor of Internal Medicine at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, said: “Being selected by the Defense Department to establish a University-Affiliated Research Center (UARC) is a landmark event for UNMC researchers who already have a long history of Department of Defense funding. Over time we realized that our investigators have the expertise that STRATCOM and other defense agencies need and want. By forming this new collaboration, we hope to provide benefits for the defense of our troops as well as new funding opportunities for our investigators.”

Scott Snyder, associate vice chancellor for research at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, said: “The National Strategic Research Institute provides an exciting opportunity to grow UNO’s long-standing association with STRATCOM by conducting research essential to the defense of our nation. UNO researchers bring special knowledge to the institute in a number of areas, including human-computer interactions in support of decision-making and the protection of critical computer and data infrastructure from cyberattack. We look forward to working with our partners at STRATCOM and across the University of Nebraska to meet vital research needs.”

Charlie Bicak, senior vice chancellor for academic and student affairs at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, said: “The UARC has tremendous mutual benefit for both the NU system and the U.S. Department of Defense. Individual campuses within our NU system, like ours in Kearney, have faculty expertise that can be leveraged in combination with that on the other campuses and along with that of the sponsor to ensure our continuing edge in research and development. This is so critical in meeting the needs of the citizenry of our country. This is truly a watershed announcement for the NU system, for the state of Nebraska and indeed for the country.”