David D Vail

David Vail is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK). He has published articles in *Kansas History*, *Endeavor*, and *Middle West Review* and is the author of *Chemical Lands: Pesticides, Aerial Spraying, and Health in North America’s Grasslands since 1945*. David also serves as advisor for his department’s Phi Alpha Theta chapter and is book review editor for *The Public Historian*.

**Could you tell me a little about your position UNK? How do you spend your days?**

As an assistant professor of history at UNK, I teach agricultural history, environmental history, history of science and technology, and public history. I teach three courses a semester with opportunities to research and write. UNK offers, in many ways, the best balance of teaching and scholarship. The power of our department is its constant effort—both in our online-graduate program and in-person/online undergraduate program—in placing students first. Much like my experience as a Master’s student at USU in 2004 - 2006, I try my best to offer one-on-one instruction/writing guidance for students.

**How did your time at USU help prepare you for the current work you’re doing? Are there any specific skills that have been useful to you?**

At USU I learned to think critically, to see interconnections, and to innovate. I also learned how to engage in public outreach by connecting complex historical ideas to the community around me. Given my interest in the environment history, I appreciated that Logan is a place where you can literally go into the mountains and see how an environmental and agricultural past inform how landscapes are made and remade today.

Finally, I also appreciated the terrific graduate student community during my time at USU. My cohort worked very well together in seminar, and my fellow graduate students were doing amazing research. I remain good friends of many them today.

*Congratulations on the publication of your new book, *Chemical Lands*. Did that project originate here at USU?*

Well, in a way, yes. Although most of the research for *Chemical Lands* happened at Kansas State, the ideas about the history of intersections between environment, agriculture, and technology and the role of agricultural science and local knowledge—all crucial themes in the book revealed themselves to me in my Master Thesis: "The Thirsty Places of the Earth": Politics, Environment, and the Contentious History of Utah’s Cache County Water Conservation District No. 1"