Under the leadership of the Joslyn Institute, scores of regional growers, producers, community garden organizers, farmer’s markets, food pantry providers, distributors and other stakeholders attended three charrettes last year, designed to explore the feasibility of establishing a regional food hub in Southeast Nebraska. The Southeast Nebraska Food Hub proposal is intended to consider an interdependent, comprehensive strategy that addresses environmental, socio-cultural, technological, economic and public policy opportunities and consequences. Its sustainability requires that these factors—or domains—be considered in planning and development. The proposed demolition of Lincoln’s Pershing Auditorium has been a catalyst for the timing and direction of the Southeast Nebraska Food Hub feasibility study. The building’s important location, cultural and historic attributes, and overall good condition bring it to the forefront in consideration as a location for the Food Hub’s many activities. Clark Enerson Partners architectural and engineering firm, has drawn plans for retrofitting and rebuilding Pershing and environs that include greenhouse, “artist loft” housing units, restaurants, offices, year-round public market, distribution and processing center, storage, specialized food processing kitchens, parking, outdoor festival/events/dining spaces, and a state-of-the-art high tech power plant that both provides energy for the specialized needs of the food-centric areas of the facility and also feeds the energy needs for the neighborhood.

Strategic Communications Design for Sustainable Development, a two-year Nebraska Environmental Trust funded project to help foster and facilitate targeted communication strategies and deliberative democratic decision making around community sustainability problem-opportunities, is nearing conclusion. Under the leadership of Dr. Jay Leighter, Associate Professor of Communication Studies at Creighton University and a member of the JISC board of directors, the project has manifested in partnerships with groups in Minden, Broken Bow, and Lincoln. In Minden, JISC seeks to better understand everyday energy usage practices of City residents to advise the City on programs and policy changes that might lower energy consumption and energy costs. With community partners in Broken Bow, JISC and WasteCap Nebraska are cultivating interest in a pilot study of a new recycling service in the city for local businesses, while building public support for Zero Waste broadly. The City of Lincoln’s recent move to outcome-based budgeting followed closely on the tails of the city’s first effort to identify sustainability indicators and measurable targets. In partnership with the Mayor’s Office and the Department of Parks and Recreation, JISC will be engaging targeted members of the community to better understand how the public views the city’s dual commitment to sustainability and transparent budgeting vis-à-vis the park system.

The Joslyn Institute joined the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center and UNL Bureau of Sociological Research to conduct a recycling survey across the state in 2014. Nebraskans spent an estimated $33.5 million in 2013 alone burying recyclable materials in landfills. In October 2014, Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality Title 132 expired, legislation stipulating that each solid waste jurisdiction area in the state develop 20-year integrated solid waste management plans. The law also established voluntary waste diversion goals—25% by 1996, 40% by 1999, and by 50% by 2002—without specifying strategies to meet these goals or a standardized means by which to measure progress. The intent of this study is to better understand recycling in Nebraska in an effort to inform policy decisions and to establish a baseline to measure progress in the future. This study included 1) surveys of recyclers, city clerks and county treasurers, 2) a review of recycling practices in other states, and 3) public forums conducted in four communities across Nebraska. The major findings of the study are that Nebraska lags in recycling compared to other states, 2) there are significant gaps in availability and accessibility to recycling in the State, 3) there is not currently a comprehensive plan or strategy to improve recycling in Nebraska, 4) there are best practices demonstrated to be effective in other locations and in Nebraska communities that could be implemented across Nebraska, leading to reductions in waste.
The City of Lincoln has approved funding for the Joslyn Institute to undertake a 12-month study of changes to the City’s management of construction and demolition waste. The proposal has partner agreements with the top four contractors in Lincoln and EcoStores. This project is a continuation of our study of an Eco-Industrial Park on West O Street in Lincoln which has been funded by Nebraska Investment Finance Authority (NIFA). The idea is to increase diversion and life of the county landfill while extracting new economic value from waste. Recommendations from the City’s 2040 Solid Waste Planning Advisory Committee have an aim of progressively higher goals for recycling and diversion of wastes from the local landfill, while recognizing opportunities in “extracting higher levels of community and economic values and higher levels of public safety” from the present and future waste stream for this city and county. The “preferred paths” recommended by the City’s advisory committee identify economic, social, environmental, technological, and public policy opportunities to defer 30 to 60 percent of current waste volume from the city/county landfill. The paths will identify new market opportunities such as higher volume recycling, repurposing of reusable waste materials (i.e., construction and demolition “waste”), extracting energy from waste, and conversion of disposable materials into new resources for industrial and business opportunities.

With regard to the City of Lincoln’s waste management (see column at left), one of the key preferred paths is a recommendation for proof of feasibility for one or more waste transfer stations to facilitate reduced transportation costs for moving waste to either new market opportunities or more efficiently to landfill disposal. The proposed transfer stations would also facilitate separation and sorting of actual waste from the economic value of consumer materials, efficient handling of toxic and hazardous materials, and the facilitation of extracting and using renewable energy from the waste stream. The study will consider sites for possible future development of waste management transfer stations at 545 West O Street, a site whose existing infrastructure could accommodate such a project. JISC President W. Cecil Steward has been studying approaches used in other cities and states, researching best practices, and finding concepts that might work best for Lincoln.

EcoStores Nebraska is embarking on a project to build a green roof structure at its site on West O Street in Lincoln this spring to demonstrate to the public the possibilities of green roofs and living architecture. It would look at the use of mostly recycled materials to create a demonstration green roof at the EcoStores site that could also provide for research assessments and serve as a site to inform the public about green roofs. EcoStores will also be installing a Hestia Biogas Digester in the next few months. Biogas provides clean burning fuel for year-round cooking and a small amount of stand-by electric. Just as solar panels depend on the amount of available sunlight, the amount of biogas that can be produced depends on the amount of organic waste available. A typical American household with a lawn or garden will generate enough energy to cook three meals a day. A two cubic meter (525 gallon) home digester is intended to be fed between 10 and 30 pounds of mixed waste per day, such as table scraps and garden waste, animal manure, grass clippings and tree leaves.
Nebraska Nexus: Resources, Conservation, Development and Change was the featured film at Omaha’s Reel-to-Real Festival this past year. Nebraska Nexus explores five critical resources—food, water, energy, land and materials—and their interconnectedness in the face of global flux. Produced by JISC, this film is intended to spark consciousness-raising dialogue on how best to develop and conserve our state’s natural resources. Dale Gubbel, Chairman & CEO Firstar Fiber, President Nebraska League of Conservation Voters, Governing Board Business Ethics Alliance, moderated a panel discussion following the film screening. Panelists included State Sen. Rick Kolowski (District 31); Jay Leight, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Communications Studies at Creighton University; Don Nelson, publisher of Prairie Fire newspaper; and Katie Torpy Carroll, Office & Program Director, Joslyn Institute. JISC is exploring possibilities of screening the video in Lincoln venues, and is working with students at UNL to develop a teacher’s guide for the purpose of utilizing the video in high schools in Nebraska and elsewhere.

Success with sustainable development projects requires holistic approaches and transparent community communications. Most existing community communications are single-issue focused, and they often miss the opportunity to understand related and interdependent issues. The Nebraska Environmental Trust has approved a JISC proposal to develop a strategic communications design for conservation and sustainable development that can be applied throughout Nebraska on any and all environmental issues. The initiative will be an annual series of public lectures, workshops, conferences, and distributed information on applied practices with emphases on priority categories of the NET. JISC will focus on the following objectives:

- Scheduling of at least two public lectures by national and internationally recognized specialists, in partnership with The Hyde Lecture Series (see next column);
- Partnership with Central Community College and Metropolitan Community College, Omaha, for nine annual Sustainability Leadership Presentation Series webcasts;
- Production design of an annual Nebraska Ecospheres Conference on conservation and sustainable development;
- Establishment of an annual public awards and recognition program for successful applications of conservation and sustainable development practices;
- Production design of a web-based, and hard copy library of information on statewide resources for conservation and sustainable development.

The Joslyn Institute will be instrumental in providing nationally and internationally recognized specialists to speak at the Hyde Lecture Series, as part of JISC’s sustainable communications initiative being funded by the Nebraska Environmental Trust. The Hyde Lecture Series is a long-standing endowed program within UNL’s College of Architecture. Each year the College hosts experts in the disciplines of Architecture, Interior Design, Landscape Architecture and Planning that enrich the ongoing dialog around agendas which are paramount to the professions and our graduates. Jim Powell, JISC Board Member and expert on the environment of Alaska, among other subjects, was a member of a panel discussing The Exploration of Sustainability Design Research. Among other speakers this past year were Robert Trempe, Mark Cavagnero, Jason Jordan, Martin Despang, Ghislaine Viñas, Tim Love, Lynette Klein, Jason Griffiths, Noah Ives, Brett Steele, Carl Kinkade, Nancy Rottle, Scheri Fultz-see and Marta Gomez-Chiarri.