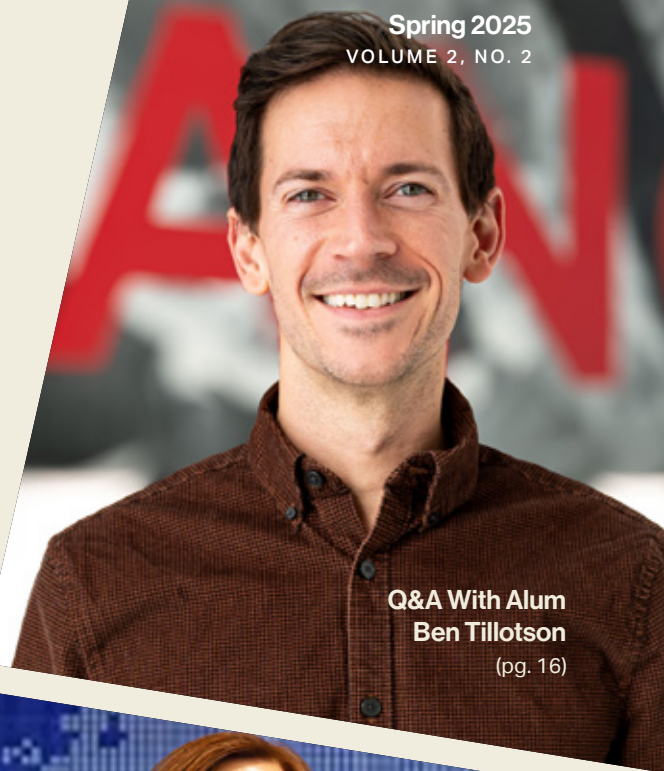


EDU

UTAH EDUCATION

Spring 2025
VOLUME 2, NO. 2



Q&A With Alum
Ben Tillotson
(pg. 16)



Travel Abroad to Tbilisi,
Georgia With Fulbright
Specialist Susan Johnston
(pg. 20)



Utah's Superintendents
get their start in the CoEdu (pg. 24)



Huddle Up With
New U-FIT Director
Samantha Ross-Cypcar
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College of Education
THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

EDU

UTAH EDUCATION



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CoEdu Alum Ben Tillotson expands his reach as 2025 President Elect of the Council for Exceptional Children and Tanner Dance Adult Disability Arts Director. (pg. 16)

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Fulbright Specialist Program Awardee Susan Johnston takes hold of a collaborative international research opportunity at Ilia State University. (pg.20)

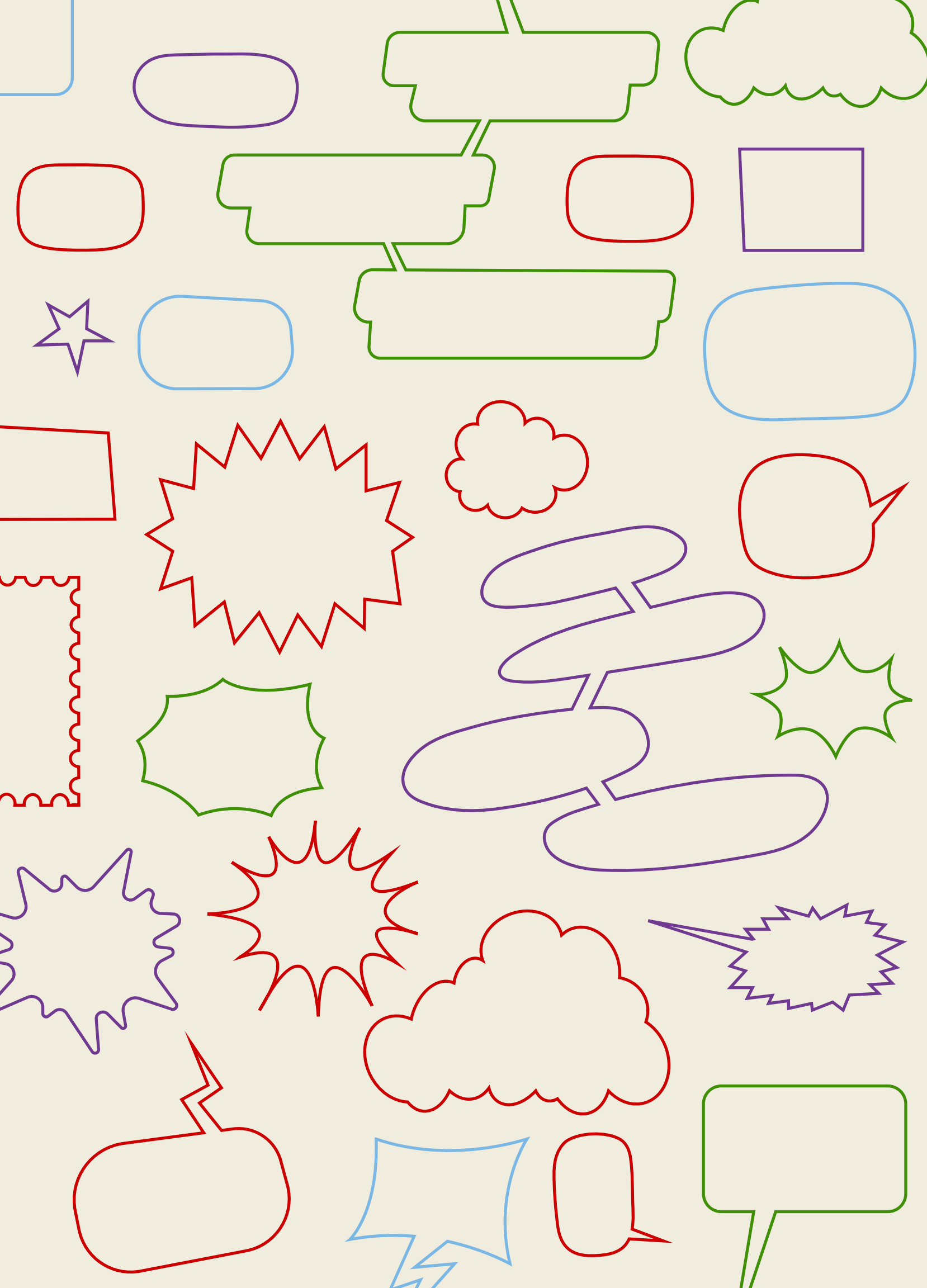


New U-FIT director Samantha Ross-Cypcar has big plans to bring the special needs physical activity program to more communities. (pg.21)



The CoEdu shaped Utah Superintendents Dan Linford (Davis) and Wendy Dau's (Provo) approaches to leadership and policy. (pg. 24)

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FROM THE DEAN



During my next five years as dean, our strategic plan will guide us to grow...

As I introduce the third edition of EDU Magazine, I cannot help but look back with pride on my first two years as dean of the College of Education. I also look forward with hope. I am grateful to the college and to Provost Mitzi M. Montoya and her team for formalizing my appointment as dean of the college for the next five years.

Let me begin by reflecting. In the fall of 2024, we finalized the college's first strategic plan in over two decades. It will take us through the year 2030 and challenge us to meet big goals as we continue to nurture already robust initiatives and community partnerships.

In the 2024-2025 academic year, we grew our college's international reach and impact through Professor Susan Johnston's prestigious grant from the U.S. Fulbright Specialist Program. We recruited nationally recognized faculty like Samantha Ross-Cypcar, Assistant Professor of Special Education and the university's new U-FIT Program Director, who has set in motion plans to expand the impact of her adapted physical activity program serving K-12 students with disabilities. We also watched our superior alumni shine in some of the highest educational positions in the state and country—as Utah superintendents and as President Elect for the National Council for Exceptional Children.

I want to pause here to consider the prefix “super,” a Latin root that signifies going above and beyond. The University of Utah's strategic plan aims for unsurpassed societal impact by the year 2030. The following pages show how the College of Education is going above and beyond to help the university meet this goal. Our stories offer a window into the past academic year and a tone-setting forecast for what's to come. They feature superhero faculty and alumni meeting seemingly insuperable challenges to transform education and better serve Utah's students.

During my next five years as dean, our strategic plan will guide us to grow the college's enrollment & learner supports through refining existing support systems and increasing scholarship and fellowship

support. It will help us to enhance academics and curricular development by conducting a feasibility study for an on-site Pre-K-6 learning lab school, which will benefit our entire community. We will continue to prioritize investing in research enterprise by increasing grant submissions and large-scale national funding, as well as faculty research dedicated to challenging paradigms through innovation. As we drill down to drive external engagement, we will grow alumni and donor engagement while strengthening partnerships with entities who share our values: innovation, excellence, collaboration, and community engagement.

Our strategic plan is a mirror of the College of Education faculty's success, unsurpassed talent, and aspirations. CoEdu faculty are the heartbeat of the college; they prepare our students to enter Utah's classrooms, mental health institutions, and administrative roles around the state and country.

I want to thank, in particular, our heroic outgoing faculty department chairs: Professors Matt Jameson (Special Education), Laurence Parker (Educational Leadership & Policy), and Robert Zheng (Educational Psychology). This issue closes with their reflections and achievements during their departmental leadership.

And finally, I want to thank our “superlative” EDU Magazine contributors—the CoEdu Marketing & Communications team, for their efforts in creating this time capsule of a publication. Telling our college's whole story is top of mind, especially as we look toward the 175th anniversary celebration of the University of Utah—175 years and climbing—and celebrate our historically distinctive position within the wider institution.

Warmly,


FRANKIE SANTOS LAANAN
Dean

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

AUGUST 2024-MARCH 2025



CoEdu Faculty & Staff Fall Assembly
August 21, 2024



Inaugural Dean's Distinguished Speaker,
Cristóbal Salinas, "The Politics of Latin
American Labels: Names That Divide"
October 2, 2024



Welcoming CoEdu Students to
the first day of fall semester
August 19, 2024



LEAP Scholars Talk with
League of Women Voters
September 30, 2024



Dean Laanan braves the
Plaza-Palooza dunk tank
August 27, 2024



Faculty-focused conversation
with Tim Shriver, University of
Utah Impact Scholar
October 10, 2024



Strategic Plan Launch & Celebration
September 17, 2024



Scholarship & Donor
Celebration Dinner
October 22, 2024



Dean's Distinguished Speaker, Kara
Mitchell Viesca, "Co-imagining/Creating
Transformative Educational Futures"
December 2, 2024



Dean's Distinguished Speaker, Jungmin Kwon,
"Understanding Transnational Lives and Literacies"
November 4, 2024



Hunter High School & Swoop Visit
November 21, 2024



Faculty & Staff Holiday Luncheon
December 9, 2024



Dean's Distinguished Speaker, H. Chad
Lane, "Navigating the Rapidly Evolving
Landscape of AI in Education"
March 3, 2025



Collegewide Meeting
January 28, 2025



Charles University delegates visit
from Prague, Czech Republic
February 10-14, 2025

FACULTY HIGHLIGHTS



Assistant Professor Sheree Springer and Salt Lake City School District Academic Coach Melissa Engel at the Stegner Young Scholars' Writing Institute.



Connor Warner

Native Excellence in PK-12 Education Award

Connor Warner, Associate Professor and Director of the Urban Institute for Teacher Education (UITE), was honored this year with the Native Excellence in PK-12 Education Award. This award was presented at the Native Excellence Gala, an event celebrating changemakers who positively impact Indigenous communities by bringing together Tribal Nation leaders, educators, and community partners.

Reflecting on the award, Warner shared, "I am deeply honored and grateful. This award is a reflection of the dedication and talent of the amazing people in the Uintah Basin who have worked and continue to work tirelessly to improve educational outcomes and opportunities for Native students." Warner highlighted key collaborators in this mission, including Dr. Ronee Wopsock Pawwinnee, Chris Jones, Zaisha Dashee, Cloee Hackford, and Martha Macomber.

AACTE Advisory Committee in Research and Dissemination

Warner's dedication to Native education also extends to co-designing the Working with Native Communities Graduate Certificate with colleague Cynthia Benally (Diné), a program that equips students to work respectfully with Native communities. In addition to his Native Excellence Award, Warner's recent appointment to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) Advisory Committee in Research and Dissemination underscores his commitment to advancing education and community-focused research.



Cynthia Benally

Native Excellence in Higher Education Award

Cynthia Benally (Diné), Assistant Professor and Director of the Working with Native Communities Graduate Certificate program, was awarded the Native Excellence in Higher Education Award earlier this year. This recognition celebrates educators who elevate Native excellence in postsecondary education and make a lasting impact on Indigenous communities.

Reflecting on receiving the award, Benally shared, "I'm honored by the folks who thought of me as fulfilling the requirements of this award." The accolade acknowledges her dedication to fostering understanding and respect for Native nations in higher education. In addition to this recognition, Benally co-designed the Working with Native Communities Graduate Certificate with Connor Warner. This program equips students and professionals to engage respectfully with Native communities on topics such as Native histories, political sovereignty, and contemporary challenges.

Benally's work exemplifies a commitment to honoring Native knowledge and fostering impactful partnerships between academic and Indigenous communities. The Native Excellence Award highlights her vital role as a leader and advocate in higher education.



Chenglu Li

Faculty Fellow, One-U Responsible AI Initiative

Chenglu Li, Assistant Professor of

Educational Psychology, has been honored as a faculty fellow in the One-U Responsible AI Initiative. This recognition highlights Li's innovative contributions to ethical and responsible artificial intelligence (AI) in education.

The One-U Responsible AI Initiative unites scholars dedicated to advancing AI solutions that prioritize fairness, transparency, and societal impact. As a faculty fellow, Li will play a key role in shaping policies and frameworks that guide the ethical integration of AI into educational settings.

"This recognition underscores the importance of ethical and responsible AI in shaping the future of education, and I'm excited to contribute to this vital conversation," said Li. "It's a privilege to collaborate with colleagues who are equally passionate about leveraging AI for societal good."

Li's work focuses on harnessing AI to enhance educational outcomes while safeguarding ethical principles, ensuring AI serves as a tool for empowerment.



Erin Castro

Lieutenant Governor's Public Service Award, 2024 Utah Philanthropy Day

Erin Castro, Associate Professor of Educational Leadership & Policy, has been awarded the Lieutenant Governor's Public Service Award from Utah Philanthropy Day for her groundbreaking work in prison education. The award honors individuals with a minimum of five years of continuous public service, recognizing those who have improved their communities through advocacy, awareness, and activism. As the co-founder of the University of Utah Prison Education Project (UPEP), Castro has championed educational access for incarcerated individuals, leading the implementation of the university's first prison education program.

In her acceptance remarks, Castro reflected on the collective effort required to make UPEP a reality, expressing gratitude for the "pockets of support" across the university who have backed her mission over the past nine years. She also acknowledged the talented staff and students involved in the program, describing them as some of the most dedicated leaders in the field.

Castro's work, which includes partnerships with organizations and educational institutions, represents a critical step toward expanding educational opportunities for all. "We all benefit when everyone is afforded the opportunity to thrive," she shared, emphasizing her belief in the power of education to drive social change and uplift communities.



Chathuri Illapperuma-Wood

Asia Center Faculty Travel Award

Chathuri Illapperuma-Wood, known as Chat, has been awarded the Asia Center Faculty Travel Award to advance her work in mental health education for educators in Sri Lanka. Originally from Sri Lanka, Illapperuma-Wood moved to the United States in 2015 for graduate studies, completing her doctorate in school psychology from Mississippi State University in 2020. After a two-year postdoctoral fellowship with the U-TTEC Lab, she now serves as research and programs coordinator for the lab and as implementation coordinator for the Utah School Mental Health Collaborative. (USMHC)

This award will help fund Illapperuma-Wood's Early Career International Psychology Grant from the APA, which supports her work with the Sri Lankan Psychology Association to introduce a culturally responsive mental health literacy program in Sri Lankan schools. "Although COVID-19 and political challenges delayed the project, I'm hopeful to see it through this year, using the Asia Travel Award to connect with my collaborators and launch the curriculum," she shared. Her work represents a critical step toward building mental health support for Sri Lankan educators and students.



David Stroupe

American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Fellow

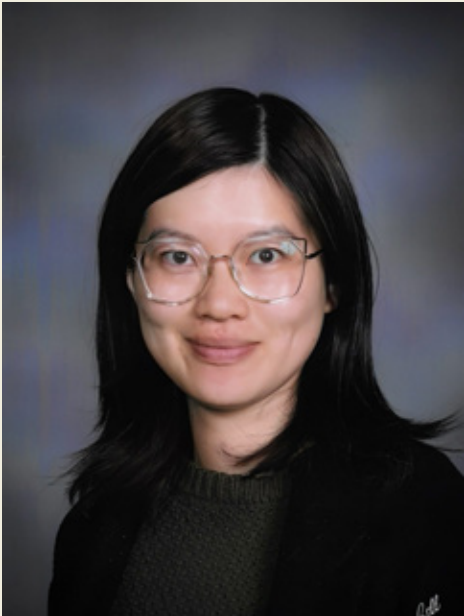
David Stroupe, Associate Professor of Educational Psychology, has been named a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). This honor recognizes his distinguished contributions to science education and teacher education, particularly his innovative research on equity-focused and inclusive teaching practices in diverse classrooms.

Reflecting on this recognition, Stroupe shared, "This is certainly a huge honor. Frankly, I was stunned! My focus is always on improving science teaching and learning, and hopefully, my work is useful to other science educators. Becoming an AAAS Fellow means that my colleagues feel that my research has made a substantive impact on the field of science education, and I am truly humbled and honored by their recognition."

Nancy Butler Songer, former Dean of the College of Education and an AAAS Fellow herself, authored his nomination. In her letter, she highlighted Stroupe's exemplary teaching and research, stating, "Dr. Stroupe is a rising star in science education. His ability to make complex ideas accessible, foster purposeful classroom discourse, and scaffold learning for all students demonstrates his deep commitment to equity and excellence in education."

Stroupe's election as an AAAS Fellow celebrates his extraordinary contributions to advancing science education and his dedication to fostering innovation, and excellence in teaching and research.

STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS



Jiashu Lei

National Travelers Award for Teaching Excellence, National Education Association (NEA)

Jiashu Lei, an ELP graduate student in the K-12 Ed.D. program, has received the National Travelers Award for Teaching Excellence from the National Education Association—an honor awarded to just 48 educators nationwide. Lei, a passionate Chinese dual-language immersion educator at Syracuse Elementary School, exemplifies a commitment to education, leadership, and advocacy.

Reflecting on this achievement, Lei shared, "It is a great honor to receive the NEA Excellence in Teaching Award and to represent public school educators in Utah. I am deeply grateful for how the ELP program has guided and transformed me over the past few years, enriching my understanding of social

responsibility and empowering me to be a more effective educational practitioner." This award highlights Lei's exceptional contributions to teaching, her dedication to expanding opportunities for all students, and her impactful role in shaping the future of education in Utah.



Cydney Caradonna

2025 Fellow of the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE) Graduate Student Fellowship Program (GSFP)

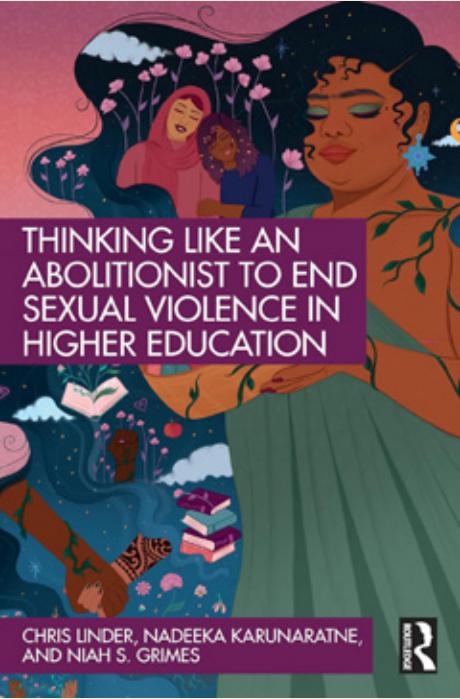
The College of Education celebrates Ph.D. candidate Cydney Y. Caradonna's selection as a 2025 fellow of the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE) Graduate Student Fellowship Program (GSFP). Caradonna, a third-year student in Educational Leadership & Policy, is among only 12 scholars chosen nationwide. The GSFP supports Latina/o/x doctoral students by providing research feedback, professional strategies, and a robust scholarly network.

Caradonna expressed gratitude for joining AAHHE, stating, "I am proud to become part of AAHHE's legacy during a time when we're challenging traditional notions of Latinidad and creating space for Black and Queer comunidad."

Hailing from California's Bay Area, Caradonna is a queer Latinx scholar, activist, and poet whose research explores de/carceral higher education systems. She holds a B.A. in Spanish from UC Merced and an M.A. in Higher Education Administration from CSU Fresno. Her poetry reflects her academic and lived experiences, addressing marginalization and resilience.

Beyond the fellowship, Caradonna contributes to the Utah Prison Education Project and is a founding member of the Black Feminist Eco Lab. Department Chair and Professor of Educational Leadership & Policy Laurence Parker praised her achievements, calling her work "exciting and worthy of this award."

BOOKSHELF



Thinking Like an Abolitionist to End Sexual Violence in Higher Education
Routledge, 2024

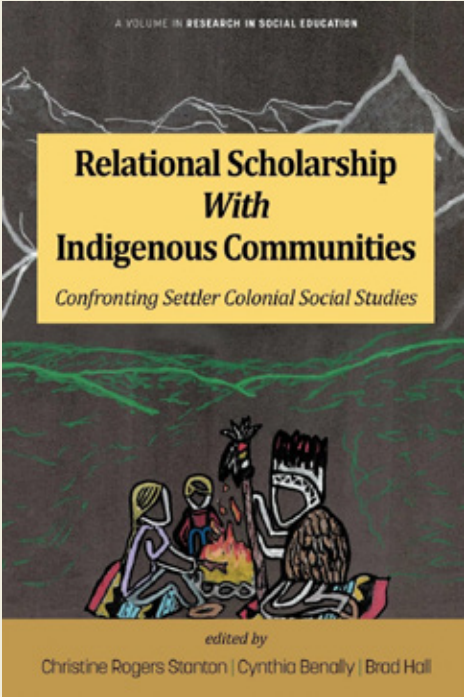
Co-authored By Chris Linder
Director, McCluskey Center for Violence Prevention
Professor, Educational Leadership & Policy



Thinking Like an Abolitionist to End Sexual Violence in Higher Education by Chris Linder offers a new perspective on addressing sexual violence in higher education. As a Professor of Higher Education and Director of the McCluskey Center for Violence Prevention at the University of Utah, Linder combines research and activism to propose meaningful change.

The book explores the ongoing issue of campus sexual violence, where millions are spent annually on prevention efforts with little change of reducing incidents. Linder explores the history of campus policies, tracing their connections to feminist movements and examining their failure to address the harm experienced by marginalized students.

Rather than relying on punishment-focused approaches, Linder advocates transformative strategies. She emphasizes the importance of learning from mistakes, confronting fears, and both individual and community healing. The book challenges leaders in higher education to rethink accountability in ways that bring real and lasting change.



Relational Scholarship With Indigenous Communities
Age Publishing, 2024

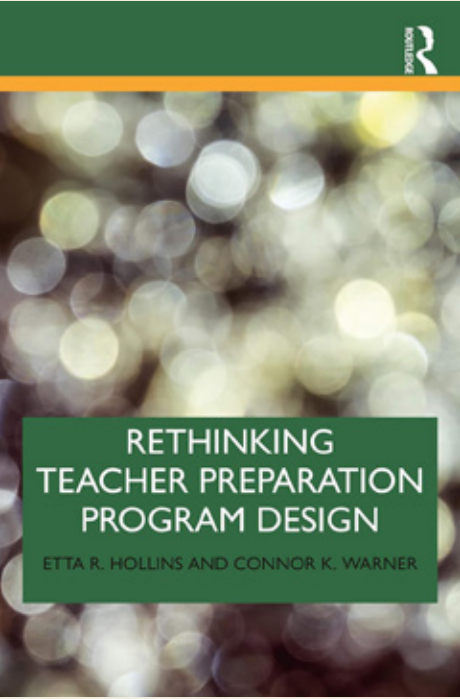
Co-edited by Cynthia Benally (Diné)
Director, Working with Native Communities Graduate Certificate Program
Assistant Professor, Education, Culture & Society



Relational Scholarship With Indigenous Communities, co-edited by Cynthia Benally (Diné), Christine Rogers Stanton, and Brad Hall, dives into how we can reshape social studies education to better reflect Indigenous knowledge. Even though all education takes place on Indigenous lands, U.S. social studies has long ignored or overlooked Indigenous perspectives.

This book challenges that, urging educators and scholars to rethink their approach by building deeper connections with Indigenous communities and acknowledging their ways of knowing.

The book brings together a mixture of Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, educators, and community leaders, sharing personal stories and insights on creating a sense of belonging in the classroom. It provides practical guidance on how to build meaningful partnerships with Indigenous communities. This book offers essential perspectives on how to rethink social studies education, making it more reflective of Indigenous voices and more mindful to the needs of these communities



Rethinking Teacher Preparation Program Design
Routledge, 2021

Co-authored by Connor Warner
Associate Professor (Clinical), UITE
Director, Urban Institute for Teacher Education

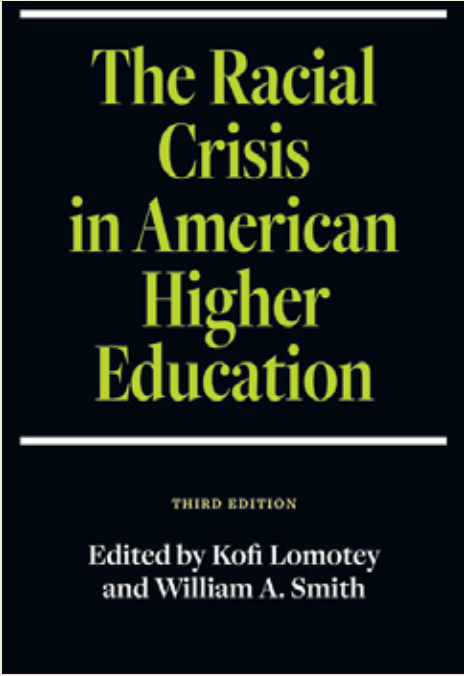


Rethinking Teacher Preparation Program Design by Connor Warner and Etta R. Hollins offers a framework for creating effective and impactful teacher preparation programs. Connor Warner, Director of the Urban Institute for Teacher Education, and renowned educator Etta R. Hollins, provide strategies and insightful examples for improving how future teachers are trained. The book is a valuable resource for educators, administrators, and policymakers

seeking to enhance teacher preparation.

Warner and Hollins emphasize the importance of developing programs that prepare teachers to successfully engage with students from all backgrounds. They advocate for equipping teachers with the professional knowledge and skills necessary to be flexible, responsive, and effective in today's changing classrooms. Their approach aims to ensure better learning outcomes for all K-12 students.

The significance of this book emphasizes creating teacher preparation programs that are consistent, trustworthy, and rooted in strong partnerships. Warner and Hollins stress the value of collaboration between faculty, community members, and school professionals to build a supportive and effective training environment. This collaborative training helps new teachers feel prepared, confident, and ready to make a meaningful impact in the classroom.



The Racial Crisis in American Higher Education
SUNY Press, 2023

Co-edited by William A. Smith
Distinguished Professor, Education, Culture, & Society; Ethnic Studies
Chief Executive Administrator, Huntsman Mental Health Institute



Smith is the co-editor (with Philip Altbach & Kofi Lomotey) of the book, The Racial Crisis in American Higher Education: The Continuing Challenges for the 21st Century (2002). The third revised edition was published in 2023 with all-new chapters. The book continues to address a critical issue in higher education

in the United States, bringing together a group of scholars to explore the crisis from various areas. In thirteen original essays, the contributors provide a clear framework of current challenges, offer historical context, give a look at everyday realities on college campuses, and examine the role of university leadership. As a whole, the collection presents an analysis of the racial crisis in American higher education and offers practical solutions for change.

IN THE FIELD

LOCAL IMPACT



Q&A with Alum Ben Tillotson

We caught up with alum Ben Tillotson (M.Ed., Special Education-Severe Disabilities, 2012), current Adult Disability Arts Director for Tanner Dance, and 2025 President Elect of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC).

Congratulations on becoming the 2025 President Elect of the Council for Exceptional Children!

Thank you.

Tell us about your journey to the Special Education M.Ed. in severe disabilities here in the College of Education. We know you coached theatre and originally wanted to be a high school counselor. Was there a specific catalyst or “a-ha” moment that led you here?

Mine's an unusual route. I don't have the typical story of people who have a connection to special education, where they have a friend or a sibling or someone like that in their lives. I originally wanted to be a high school counselor, but I also wanted some teaching background. I said to myself, 'I'll go into special ed.' I had no idea what I was getting myself into. I got connected with Kathy Hill

in the College of Education, who was the academic advisor at the time. She set me up with a job working as an assistant in a classroom at Highland High.

And here I am, you know, and I just stuck with it. So I think, for me, it's not necessarily about special education. It is about people. People with disabilities are still people first, and they're just like you and me. They are just experiencing life in a different way than you and I are. Development might be slower, development might be different. But it doesn't mean that they are less human than you and I. They have the same wants, needs, and emotions, and they go through the same lifespan, as well. When they become adults, they're adults. They want to do adult things; they have adult feelings, adult emotions, hormones and so on.

Working in special education has made me a better human, because you realize we are literally all the same, but we all have different needs in order to thrive in our lives.

The theme we're loosely riffing on for the spring, 2024 magazine is “educational superheroes.” Did you have any particularly memorable mentors or instructors during your graduate work at the U?

I first think of Matt Jameson and Shamby Polychronis. Shamby was a great help and mentor. We worked together on the Utah CEC Board of Directors as well. When she was at Westminster, she would send some of her pre-service teachers to gain experience in my classroom. As a cooperating teacher, I would mentor them. I had so many different mentors—and administrators in the college, as well.

In reflecting, I'd define the term superhero differently. Instead of looking at one person as a superhero, I'd say these are ordinary people with unique talents and abilities. The question is, 'are you someone who is willing to see what another individual can offer and bring to you?' If you can go through life that way, then you will see that every person you interact with is some type of superhero.

What other collaborators or colleagues are particularly memorable for you?

Yes, Lyndsey Aiono-Conradi. We did our bachelor's and master's degrees together here; Lynds is like my sister. When we were getting

our master's degrees, Lyndsey's mom was getting her doctorate, and I just got adopted into the family. Now she is an Assistant Professor in Special Education in the College of Education.

Lyndsey and I pushed each other. We could give a lot of feedback to each other. We learned together and we had a great time. We both have big energy. We even worked together at Meadowlark Elementary for a year right after graduating. She had the k-3 class and I had the 4-6 class. We worked right next door to each other. Lyndsey and I were also co-presidents of the student chapter of CEC at the U of U. We went to the first CEC conference in Denver together. Since Lyndsey and I both started working back here at the university this fall, it's been fun to come back to where we started.

...we are literally all the same, but we all have different needs in order to thrive in our lives.

How do you feel your graduate work here in the College of Education has shaped your professional trajectory, especially now that you are President Elect of the national CEC?

In a field that often has a high burnout rate, I have the confidence I need to stay in my profession because of the U and the department of Special Education.

One of the unique advantages in the College of Education, and I would say within the Department of Special Education Severe Disabilities Program, is that our professors would set us up working in the classrooms during the day and our classes would be at night. And that was so beneficial.

We would go to our jobs and get all this information, and then when we went to class later that day, we could ask all these questions based on what we just observed. And then you have your assignments, which you can take into your job the next day.

It is one of the best models, because in education you often don't have a lot of on-the-job training; you're just kind of thrown in to figure it out. And with a lot of education programs, you might have a little time here and there, but typically it's not until the very end of your program that you do student teaching, whereas in my program for special education, I had two full years of working in a classroom while getting my bachelor's degree. I had written behavior plans, implemented behavior plans, and redesigned those behavior plans. I got to be in Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings. I was integrated into the school system and working with administration, all prior to graduating.

When I actually entered the classroom, I was much more prepared.

After your job at Meadowlark Elementary, you co-created the SCORE program (Self-Advocacy, Community, Occupation, Recreation, and Education). Can you tell us about that process?

My first job was at Meadowlark, yes. When I was going to leave, they asked me to stay in the district. They were starting a new program and they wanted me to help lead it with another graduate of the U's special education program, Carrie Bellante. I miss her dearly. We have just become great friends, because for 7 years we worked together and collaborated. Carrie graduated the year after me, also in severe disabilities. She still works with the district's Vocational Independence Program (VIP), which is the other program for students ages 18-22 with disabilities.

You've mentioned that we are all human—across languages, cultures, and backgrounds—which makes sense given your extensive international work experience with Global Education Allies (GEA). How do you plan to integrate your perspective on special education into your CEC Presidency?

Special education across the globe varies in the international work that I've done, especially working with Global Education Allies. In order to understand an education system, you really need to understand the culture, the politics, the history of a group of people, because all those things inform the education system and its values.

For example, a friend of mine taught special education in Japan. Even though she was not an official teacher and was there for a semester or so to study, she told me a story about meeting a doctor who said to her, “Oh, you're a teacher?! I'm just a doctor.”

I know in Finland, the University of Helsinki has to turn away hundreds of applicants aspiring to be teachers every year, whereas in the United States, we don't have enough people applying for teaching programs. I think there's a lot to be learned and gained from other cultures around the world.

Sometimes we think we can do it the best way. But with the increasing numbers of students from diverse backgrounds, we need to rethink and ask ourselves: 'How are we delivering services? How are we becoming culturally competent, respectful, and understanding that the ways people learn, communicate, and connect with other people may be different from the way I do it?'

The more I understand that, as a human and as a teacher, the better I am able to support my students.

Oftentimes, the American education system, we take people out of their own culture and we say, 'here's American culture, and these are the values. And these are expectations of our society.' And then you go a step further and you say, 'Well, you have a disability so now you're part of the special education culture. Here are the expectations for you and here is what this means.'

Instead, we need to say, 'Who are you and how do I support you to be successful in your community and your culture?' If I'm helping you to be successful in my community and culture, I am actually doing you a disservice. Because the people that will support you in your life are your community, your culture. As a teacher, I'm just temporary.

The more I can be informed about what those value systems are, I can support you to be successful in that environment, whatever it is.

Our job as teachers, in education as a whole, is less about the content. It's more about discovering how to support our students to be interdependent, be autonomous, and take ownership of their own life and their own learning. So that type of individual actually requires less support than someone who is dependent and getting everything spoon-fed to them.

Your recent interview with the CEC mentioned future plans for developing a podcast. We are waiting with bated breath—can you tell us more?



A hands-on bird beak adaptation activity leaves Tanner Dance students and teachers smiling.



Tillotson and a Tanner Dance student explore different seed-scooping tools.

I did throw that out there. We're in development, so the details are yet to be determined. But the general idea behind it is that our world has changed. It is different. People that are going to replace us in the places of employment, they don't have the same experience growing up that we do. They don't process information the way I did. I grew up in the age where we still had floppy disks and computers in homes were just a new thing. I remember when we first had videos on the internet. I thought that was so cool. I remember when I got a cell phone in high school and put it in the huge pocket of my cargo pants. I thought I was very cool.

We want to develop the podcast with an awareness that people are learning information in small, quick snippets. My idea for a podcast is to engage our members and have a real, honest conversation. Not these formal presentations, because we have a lot of those, but how do we actually have real, honest conversations about education and special education? How do we highlight the positive things, the challenges, and just be real about it? Not gloss over it and suggest that teaching is a wonderful field, or even demystify special education. We are not angels. We are highly educated individuals with unique skill sets that benefit us in this field.

My vision is interviewing a lot of people, not just teachers, but interviewing people with disabilities. I want to ask, 'If you could go back and tell your special education teachers something, what do you wish they had known about you? What's your message?' How can teachers change what they do to have a positive impact on their students today? I want to have conversations with parents, have conversations with international educators, and learn from them. I want to find the people who have received no awards, no recognition, and yet they are doing phenomenal things every day.

For me it will be having those real and honest conversations about the lives of special educators and the disability community, and bringing back that humanity.

Can you talk more about your role as the Adult Disability Arts Director for Tanner Dance? We know you taught musical theatre, and that movement was a core component of SCORE.

Sure. Sometimes we focus so much on supporting people with disabilities in order to bolster their academics and employment skills. The reality is that a vast majority of students with extensive support needs or intellectual disabilities do not end up working 40 hours a week. So, what do they do for the rest of the time? We see the general population getting less active, because we have our screens, and it's so accessible.

We see that happening even more so when it comes to individuals with disabilities. How do we give them the skills and abilities so that they have other things to fill their lives with that are enjoyable, that are meaningful?

And not only that, but things that lead to healthy lifestyles. People with disabilities often have higher rates of other health concerns. Some have low muscle tone or other physical disabilities that impact what they are able to access. How can we change that mentality, that lifestyle, and realize it doesn't have to be the determining factor of life outcomes?

Maybe they aren't going to do a ton of sports. But do they like dance? Do they like to go on a walk in nature? Do they like to play with animals?

So as part of SCORE, what we would do is provide our students with so many opportunities to engage in different recreational things — whether that's basketball, soccer, swimming, biking,

disc golf, music, dance, theatre — all these different things so that they then got to choose. Because another thing that happens with people with disabilities, and this is again more so with those with extensive support needs, is that they are often not asked what they want to do.

It's all about providing opportunities for students to better know themselves and what they enjoy doing.

For example, one of the things I've been teaching at Tanner Dance is how to regulate emotions. I ask, 'What are the things that you enjoy that help you regulate your emotions?' Some people like yoga, some people like listening to music. I tell my students, if you don't like this activity, you don't have to add it to your toolbox. If you like this activity, add it to your toolbox. It's about exploring different things that provide the health benefits of movement, healthy lifestyle, and that includes hobbies and activities that help students engage with other people. Students need opportunities to gain these skills that are going to lead to happier, healthier, longer lives.

At Tanner Dance, we've had great success with someone who, for example, may have typically needed help getting up off the floor, but she can do it on her own now. It might take someone several years to learn how to turn around in a circle, just because of the unique way that they process information. But now they can. Now they can walk backwards where before they never were able to, and these are adults. When people think, 'oh, you know, you can't learn anymore. You've learned all you can.' They are demonstrating they

It's all about providing opportunities for students to better know themselves and what they enjoy doing.

can learn more. We have students who really had very limited verbal skills who are now talking and singing on stage. Their high school teachers rarely saw this stuff.

What made you want to return to the U?

It was an opportunity to see myself grow in different ways and expand the breadth of my experience. I've worked as a paraeducator at a high school. I worked elementary.

I worked post-high. I worked at a middle school. I was working with students with

learning disabilities. I was working with the gen-ed students as well. It is about personal growth, so that no matter where I go or what I do in life, I have more information to better support other people.

And I think this is true of so many in the field of special education. We look out for each other. I do know that at any point I could reach out to my advisors, teachers, and mentors here at the U and elsewhere, and anybody would offer me suggestions, advice, tools, and tips.

Don't be afraid of the future. It's not meant to be easy. It is meant to be worthwhile.

This is really a community, and working with Tanner Dance is about deepening my breadth of knowledge and understanding.

You mentioned that the future educational professionals who are going to replace you and your colleagues have had different experiences, different childhoods, and are processing information differently. Considering all this, what advice would you give to a current College of Education student?

Don't be afraid of the future. It's not meant to be easy. It is meant to be worthwhile. Make your life worthwhile. Ask yourself: 'What is the effort that you're willing to put forth to make your life worthwhile?'

Accept challenges and learn from those experiences! Speak up and be creative. It is going to be a learning process and you're in it for the journey.

Other advice I always give is that the best investments you can make in life are the ones you make in yourself and in your experiences. If you invest in yourself, if you invest in your experiences and then if you invest in other people, that will take you far.

The whole reason I was able to work for Global Education Allies is because I went as a participant. They saw who I was, and they asked me to come back and work for them.

The whole reason I'm in the national CEC, and I have been where I am, is because someone saw me interacting with other people and said, 'We would love you in this position, please apply!'

It's about asking yourself: 'How do you treat people? How do you carry yourself?' That speaks volumes more than any degree you may have. In the end, I think it is just getting clear about who you are.

Thank you, Ben!



Tillotson teaches dance class.



Tillotson practices yoga alongside his students.

U.S. Fulbright Specialist

program fosters Susan Johnston's International collaboration with Ilia State University in Tbilisi, Georgia

In September of 2024, Susan Johnston, Professor of Special Education, set out for Tbilisi, Georgia as an awardee of the competitive Fulbright Specialist Program. Just over 400 specialists receive support from the Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board and the U.S. Department of State each year.

After clearing Fulbright's rigorous review process, Johnston's areas of expertise were matched with a proposal submitted by Professor Nino Tsintsadze. Tsintsadze directs Ilia State University's program in Communication, Speech, and Language Therapy, the only program of its kind in the country. Professor Tsintsadze sought a collaborator through Fulbright with Johnston's extensive experience in Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) for people with Complex Communication Needs (CCN).

The term "AAC" encompasses research-based methods and tools that individuals with disabilities can use to support—or replace—spoken and written language. Some examples of AAC tools include picture boards, gestures and sign language, and computer systems that produce spoken language based on users' input.

Individuals with CCN and their communication partners can face two different types of barriers when utilizing AAC: access barriers and opportunity barriers. Access barriers center around limitations in the current capabilities of the individual with disabilities or their AAC system; while opportunity barriers occur as a result of limitations in policies, practices, attitudes, and skillsets of professionals and communication partners. Johnston's 2023 co-authored book focuses on the latter and, until recently,



Students in Ilia State University's Speech Language Therapy Program.

much of the research and practice around AAC largely focused on the former. This made Johnston's recent work on opportunity barriers particularly exciting to ISU faculty, students, and graduates.

Enhancing the Fulbright Collaboration

Once the match was approved by Fulbright, the two professors spent the summer of 2024 connecting virtually via Zoom as they planned for Johnston's September trip to Georgia. Tsintsadze and Johnston outlined workshops and designed activities for ISU students and faculty, each one centered around Johnston's leading-edge research and these three areas of collaboration:

- Conducting research to identify AAC opportunity barriers for individuals with CCN and their families in Georgia.
- Engaging with faculty at ISU to further develop and refine their supervision model to support their pre-service students.
- Utilizing case-based learning with students at ISU to enhance their understanding of how to support individuals with complex communication needs.

It was pretty darn fabulous... I was just so welcomed and trusted immediately, which allowed us to dive deeper into conversations...

Johnston was pleased with the ISU pairing, as one of her top motivators for seeking Fulbright Specialist status was the opportunity to build lasting connections with international colleagues; with the goal of nurturing those connections toward meaningful collaboration between the College of Education and its counterparts at international peer institutions. Collaborating with ISU is particularly meaningful given that ISU's Speech Language Therapy program is only ten years old, and its first cohort graduated just eight years ago.

Carrying the Collaboration Forward

The program was a resounding success. Professors Johnston and Tsintsadze—and current University of Utah doctoral student in Special Education Ashley Raines—are currently analyzing data based on focus



groups conducted during Johnston's visit to Georgia. They plan to publish a paper based on findings that will also serve as a foundation for their continued collaboration.

By considering all kinds of barriers to communication, as well strategies to approach to those barriers, scholars like Johnston and Tsintsadze can work together to increase the effectiveness of AAC. Johnston and Tsintsadze's work illustrates the power of collaboration in making meaningful differences in the lives of individuals with disabilities and their families.

Said Johnston of the experience, "It was fabulous. A lot of people talk about the hospitality of the people of Georgia. I was welcomed and trusted immediately, which allowed us to quickly dive deeper into critical conversations...and this was not necessarily something I expected to happen."

Being a Fulbright Program Specialist has reenergized my desire to gain a deeper understanding of the barriers faced by individuals with complex communication needs around the world," she continued. "This understanding can foster a global awareness that transcends borders. By recognizing universal as well as context-specific cultural, social, and infrastructural barriers, researchers and practitioners can develop collaborative solutions that resonate locally. This knowledge not only has benefit on a global scale but also drives local initiatives. By sharing insights and strategies, we can create a ripple effect that enhances support systems for individuals with disabilities who use AAC around the world."

New U-FIT Director

Samantha Ross-Cypcar primes program for season of expansion

Samantha Ross-Cypcar's expertise in community-university adapted physical activity programs primes U-FIT for a season of expansion—outward into the community and further into serving adults with disabilities. A recent U-FIT participants' needs assessment confirmed what Assistant Professor Ross-Cypcar already knows from experience: partnering with community organizations will be key to growth.

When Ross-Cypcar joined the Department of Special Education and took the helm of U-FIT in July of 2024, she inherited more than a successful adapted physical activity program for youth with disabilities, she inherited a community of dedicated volunteers, participants, and parents. U-FIT volunteers come from a strikingly wide variety of majors around the university: their backgrounds range everywhere from Health & Kinesiology and Education to Business and Engineering. U-FIT participants' ages span 3-21. Many attend local K-12 schools or local inclusive schools, such as Spectrum Academy. "U-FIT is the best part of the week," said Sam, a teenage U-FIT participant and student at the Academy.

But the 2024 needs-based assessment revealed a crucial gap: U-FIT participants fiercely want to maintain their connection to the U-FIT community after aging out of the program.

Professor Ross-Cypcar's response? A groundbreaking partnership with Special Olympics Utah, which marks the beginning of her plans to deepen the program's



commitment to inclusive physical activity for all ages and connect with community collaborators. Ross-Cypcar is also focused on sustaining what works about U-FIT: community and connection through movement as a foundation for healthy futures.

The U-FIT Formula

During 10 weeks of programming each fall and spring semester, U student volunteers pair up with participants and guide them through four dynamic activity areas: dance; swimming; individualized, sensor-friendly activities, often arts or crafts; and sports—or skill-building toward team sports. Any given evening at U-FIT comes alive with energy as participant-volunteer pairs meet and reunite.

We caught up with Assistant Professor Ross-Cypcar during one U-FIT event in November 2024, a few weeks into her first semester as director. She was quick to express how impressed she was with both parent and volunteer support of the program. "We get a ton of energy from our volunteers," she said.



A U student volunteer guides their mentee through the aquatic portion of U-FIT's activities rotation, located in the HPER Complex.

"I was able to step in with recommendations from the past director for group leaders in each activity area, which has made all the difference."

U-FIT group leaders guide volunteer-participant pairs through activity areas by planning and preparing ahead of time. Ross-Cypcar spent a large part of fall 2024 simply supporting her visionary leaders and volunteers. "They've been doing fantastic," she said. This gives her time to focus on expanding the program.

After reviewing the 2024 U-FIT participants' needs assessment and connecting with parents and participants during events, Ross-Cypcar again summarized her goals: "What is really important to families is that they remain part of the U-FIT community, which is awesome," Ross-Cypcar said. "Our goals right now are identifying strategies for providing an adult transition program to continue building the skills, knowledge, confidence, and resource utilization that allows U-FIT participants to continue to be physically active in the community as they age."

...we can provide an adult transition program that allows them to continue to be active in the community as they age.

Ross-Cypcar's spring 2025 partnership with Special Olympics Utah and Sam Robinson, Special Olympics Utah Health Program Manager, marks a huge step forward—especially because these two organizations share the goal of providing on-campus adult programming.

Partnership with Special Olympics Utah in Spring 2025 Foretells Further U-FIT Growth

Ross-Cypcar and Robinson's shared goals portend a long-lasting partnership between the College of Education and Special Olympics Utah. Ross-Cypcar credited Robinson for crystallizing the collaboration.

"It is a perfect partnership," Ross-Cypcar said. "Both organizations are looking for an on-campus adult program opportunity, and have a shared goal of developing sustainable physical activity habits." And Utah Special Olympics has been looking for a way to develop presence on the U campus for some time.

Robinson's Unified Fitness Club will partner with U-FIT for spring 2025 adult programming. Unified Fitness Club focusses on nutrition as well as fitness, and brings in peer mentors for adults with disabilities over



A U student volunteer and their mentee prep for the dance portion of U-FIT's activities rotation .

the age of 18. Robinson and Ross-Cypcar will collaboratively host the spring 2025 program and include U-FIT volunteers.

Professor Ross-Cypcar sees the collaboration as a point of entry for addressing these questions: “What tools do U-FIT participants need to successfully transition into community living, and how can we motivate U-FIT participants to maintain the physical activity habits they learn here with us as part of a healthy lifestyle?”

To help ensure sustained change for participants, partnering with organizations at the city and statewide level is the answer. It worked for Professor Ross-Cypcar when she led similar programs in Oregon and West Virginia, and now, the College of Education and U of U community are lucky to have Ross-Cypcar apply her expertise to U-FIT. “Moving from U campus out into the community will be a hard sell, though, mostly because all of the UFIT participants love coming to campus and connecting with U students!” said Ross-Cypcar.

Creating Leadership Pathways for U Students

Once community-university partnerships are further established, Ross-Cypcar aims to help community partners build U-FIT-style peer mentoring into their own programming. This would offer a pathway for youth with disabilities to begin building fitness skills here on campus, build a relationship with their peer fitness partner, and then continue to build community and healthy lifestyle habits in off-campus fitness centers, such as cycling centers or yoga studios.

This model would also create leadership pathways for U student volunteers. Passionate volunteers might have the opportunity to move from U-FIT group leader to head coach in Unified Fitness Club or, even further down the line, a role as the disabilities program coordinator at a future U-FIT-partnered yoga studio.

It is perhaps because of her own trajectory through the world of community-university movement programs that Ross-Cypcar is so passionate about creating leadership

opportunities for U-FIT volunteers. After college, Ross-Cypcar was working as an instructor at a therapeutic horseback riding center when a student suggested she apply to the Kinesiology graduate program at Oregon State University. It turned out that OSU’s graduate program was partnered with IMPACT, a northwestern analogue to U-FIT. Ross-Cypcar’s organizing work with IMPACT would eventually prepare her to step into her current leadership role.

“It is not uncommon for experiences [like mine] to be the ‘a-ha’ moment or the connection point that tells students ‘I really love doing this. They might say to themselves, ‘I hadn’t thought about it before, but now I’m going to look for a pathway into Special Education or pursue incorporating a minor in disability studies,’ into whatever the student’s professional training might be. It’s a really cool place to bring people in and just share.

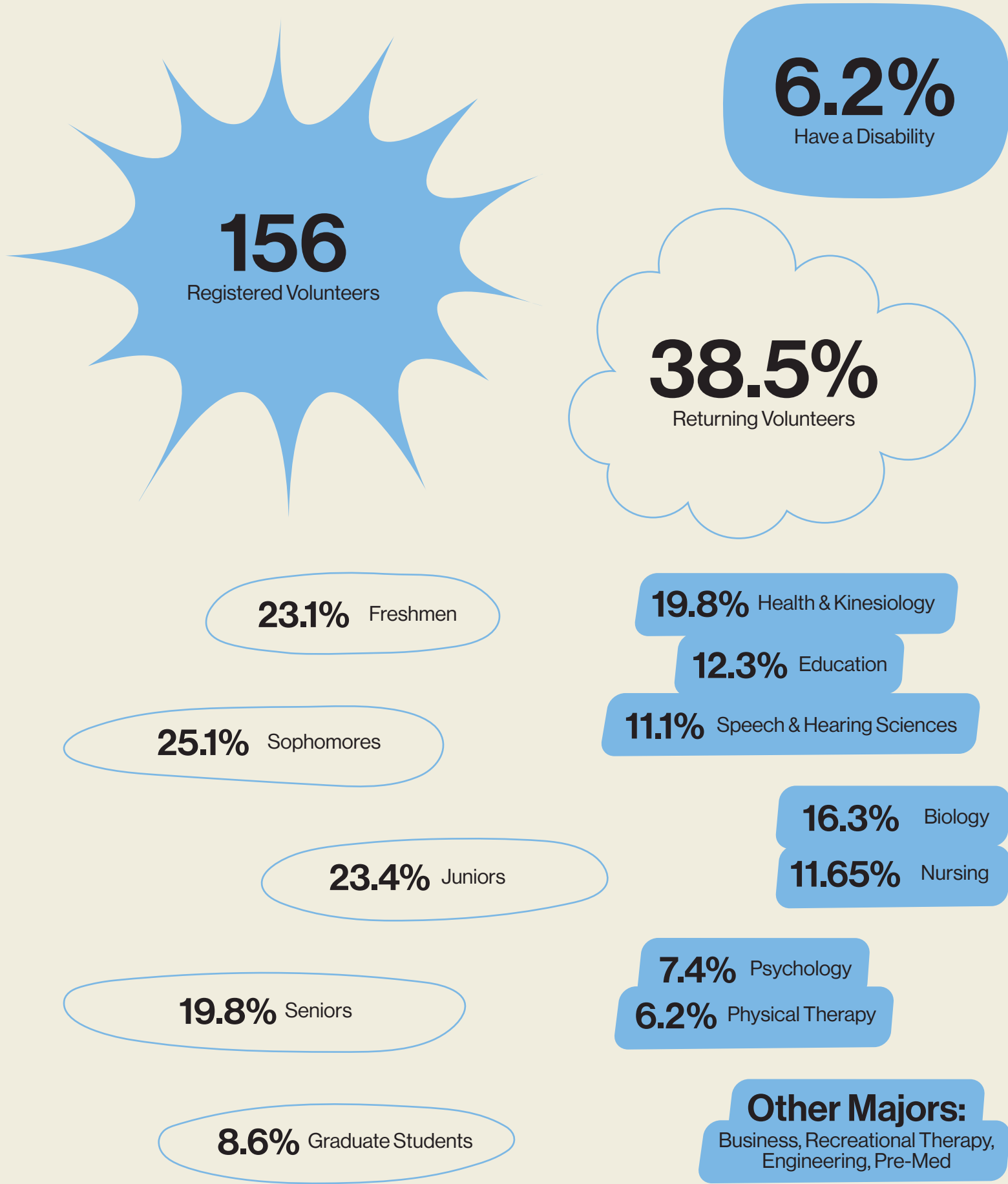
Pretty much any aspiring professional in pre-allied health or educational settings will work with individuals with disabilities. Volunteering with U-FIT can connect students early on with this population, and build skills and knowledge to feel prepared to advocate for and better serve individuals with disabilities,” Ross-Cypcar said. As U-FIT continues to flourish under Ross-Cypcar’s leadership, we have no doubt that the program will continue to provide these vital opportunities for University of Utah students from all majors and backgrounds.

Volunteering can show students how to advocate for and better serve this population.



A U student volunteer talks through art plans with their mentee.

U-FIT Volunteers By the Numbers
2024-2025 Academic Year



IN THE CLASSROOM

Utah's SUPERintendents get their start in the CoEdu

CoEdu Graduate Program Educates Utah's Superintendents

Wendy Dau and Dan Linford chose to pursue doctoral degrees in Educational Leadership & Policy and continue to affect student-centered change as administrators across Utah's K-12 schools. Today, they are superintendents for Provo and Davis school districts; Dau was appointed in August of 2023 and Linford began his role in July of 2022. What they learned and experienced in the College of Education is still shaping the way they approach leadership and policy.

But before joining cohorts in the College of Education and leading thousands of students across Utah, both superintendents spent years in secondary humanities classrooms. Dau taught history for 17 years and Linford taught English for seven.



Wendy Dau

Ed.D. Candidate, ELP
Superintendent, Provo School District



Dan Linford

Ed.D., ELP
Superintendent, Davis School District

Humanistic Roots

Superintendent Linford traces the beginning of his career path to an early love for writing. His creative writing skills even landed him a college scholarship awarded by a small magazine. Linford sat on the scholarship for a few years before deciding to pursue a degree in English instead of joining the thriving family construction business.

"I taught for seven years and loved every second of it. Whenever people ask me about my regrets, I tell them that it's just not teaching longer. If I could do anything over again, it would be spending a few more years in the classroom. I loved it. It's the best thing I've ever done. I miss it all the time," Linford said.

Superintendent Dau's passion for English and history led her to pursue bachelor's degrees

I taught for seven years and loved every second of it. Whenever people ask me about my regrets, I tell them that it's just not teaching longer.
—Linford

in both subjects and, later, a master's degree in history from the University of Utah College of Humanities. She spent 17 years in the classroom as a history teacher. The experience solidified what she already knew: a K-12 education grounded in the humanities brings far-reaching benefits.

"Teaching was truly the most incredible job I've ever had," she said. "One of the best parts was being able to teach kids how to think about things critically. You're teaching them to use text, you're teaching them how to cite evidence, you're teaching them how to understand bias, and the context of where the author is coming from. I still have students come back and say 'I'm a better thinker because of your class,' 'I was able to go to law school,' or 'I was able to be a better reader because you taught it very explicitly. We don't usually teach writing explicitly, and it needs to be taught explicitly,'" Dau said.

What's more, "Humanities provides access to a way in which we might understand other human beings and their experiences. It's not a textbook. It's not just reading the facts. It's about what they lived," she said. It is from a shared foundation as humanities teachers that Dau and Linford found their way to the College of Education's Ed.D. program in the Department of Educational Leadership & Policy.

Teaching was truly the most incredible job I've ever had. One of the best parts was being able to teach kids how to think about things critically.
—Dau

The Path to Leadership through the College of Education

Superintendent Linford can still remember the recruitment presentation that inspired him to apply to graduate school. It took place in the very building where he now keeps offices as Superintendent of Davis school district. He entered the presentation wary; he did not see a way to reconcile becoming an administrator with his passion for teaching. But Jerry Frank, a former high school principal and CoEdu administrator, spoke directly to Linford's biggest fear about a career change: "I remember that she said administrators don't have to leave their commitments to students behind. In fact, you can deepen that commitment by bringing all that passion with you and beginning to influence in a bigger way," he said.

Linford joined the ELP Ed.D. cohort in 2012 and the doctoral program's rigor quickly became apparent. "Professor Rorrer alone will kill you!" Linford said of Andrea Rorrer, Director of the Utah Education Policy Center. "Hers is such a challenging course and she doesn't accept anything but your best." Rorrer's courses in organizational change were particularly pivotal for Linford.

Linford said Professor Rorrer was the first one to tell him he would become a superintendent one day. She encouraged



Linford at North Layton Junior High School.



Dau and a Provo City School District elementary student.

him to create a capstone project and develop a research profile that would help him in his future career. He began by interviewing working superintendents for his dissertation. Today, many of the people he interviewed are his colleagues.

Rorrer has played a significant role in Superintendent Dau's doctoral work, as well. Dau's current research, supervised by Rorrer, focuses on building trust between superintendents and board members. "You have to build a lot of trust in order for a school district to function well," she explained. "Otherwise you're spending all of your time navigating that relationship rather than actually helping to educate the kids."

Dau further emphasized the importance of parent partnerships: "There are so many important ways to partner with parents and to figure out win-wins for both in a system that is serving many, many students. The more you can understand that parents care

about their kid, you will maximize your opportunities." It's good advice for any aspiring educational administrator.

It was in one of Rorrer's classes where Dau and her cohort grappled with a particularly wicked question: "Are you willing to lose your job to do what you believe is right for students?" Both Rorrer and Cori Groth, Professor of ELP and Associate Director of the UEPC, were instrumental in teaching Dau and her cohort how to balance student advocacy with the realities of politics, "because it can get really easy to see it as a black and white situation" Dau said.

Linford completed his Ed.D. in 2016 and was quickly hired as an assistant principal at Viewmont High, the same school where he had been teaching English. His entire graduate school experience proved transformative: "Everything I did in the ELP program stretched me, and I didn't know that I could be stretched much more. I became an academic, became really interested in literature and was already into the research on my own, but ELP really stretched me into new ways of thinking about things, being curious about new concepts and new ways of thinking about things. It pushed me to think about other perspectives, and know that the world is not binary and everything isn't black and white."

Championing Public Education

Both superintendents advocate passionately for humanities education. "If we told parents that we were going to take athletics out of the schools, they would freak out," Dau said. "Well, I feel like we need to freak out about the idea of taking humanities out of public school as well."

Dau sees humanities education as crucial to democracy: "I am a firm believer that public education is the foundation of a democratic

society. Understanding isn't just a skill of reading and writing math, it's about understanding how humanities allows us to access the perspectives of others; to disagree with someone and exist in the same room as them."

Building Lasting Networks

For both Dau and Linford, one of the most valuable aspects of the ELP program was the connections formed. During his doctoral studies, Linford met Fidel Montero in a Latinx studies class taught by former CoEdu professor Enrique Alemán. Montero was pursuing his doctorate at Columbia University at the time and taking one class a year at a local university. "Montero was the first person I heard articulate the pitfalls of binary thinking," Linford recalled. "Getting trapped in binary, black and white thinking is really the worst mindset we can have if we are really trying to learn something."

Years later, when Linford needed an assistant superintendent, he immediately thought of his former classmate. "I was overjoyed when he applied for the job," Linford said. Montero and Linford's connection exemplifies how the ELP program creates lasting professional relationships that shape Utah's educational landscape.

Expanding Educational Roles

As Superintendent Dau reflected on her first 18 months in her role, she highlighted the diverse career opportunities within education that many undergraduates may not consider—administration being one of them. "I think we could actually get more people into education if they knew how many distinct career opportunities there were—from instructional coaches to data analysts to research & assessment, and even law," she said. A graduate with a bachelor's in education and a juris doctorate would be particularly valuable in her district, she noted, bringing a unique and marketable skill set to the table.

The College of Education's new B.A. in Educational Psychology opens unexpected

doors to industries such as wilderness therapy, for example. "I think we need to do a better job of showing even undergraduate students what all of those opportunities are," Dau said.

Dau is also passionate about changing the narrative around careers in education: "We need to stop thinking about education in such a negative way. This conversation has to go; it has to stop. Talk about the positive things that happen. I loved being a teacher. I felt very respected. I worked very hard. I wish we could get more people to stick to it and realize how rewarding it is."

After nearly three decades in the field, her enthusiasm hasn't wavered: "There hasn't been a day where I don't love my work. I don't ever want to do anything else."

For both superintendents, their journey from humanities teachers to district leaders demonstrates how the right educational foundation can transform passionate educators into impactful leaders. Linford reflected on his ELP experience: "If ELP did nothing else for me, it definitely did this: it made me stretch myself into recognizing that we need the best

thinking around the table, even if my initial reaction might be 'I don't like those ideas; I'm not interested in those ideas.' It did that and a lot more, but at minimum it stretched me into conversations and spaces and seeing the goodness in people that I would otherwise probably come to the table disagreeing with, and the knowledge that we need to get people around a table period."

And when Wendy and I meet around a table, we kind of give each other a knowing look, a look that says you've gone through the ELP program at the U. We have a lot of pride in ELP for sure."

There hasn't been
a day where I don't
love my work.
—Dau



Dau leads a Provo City School District staff meeting.



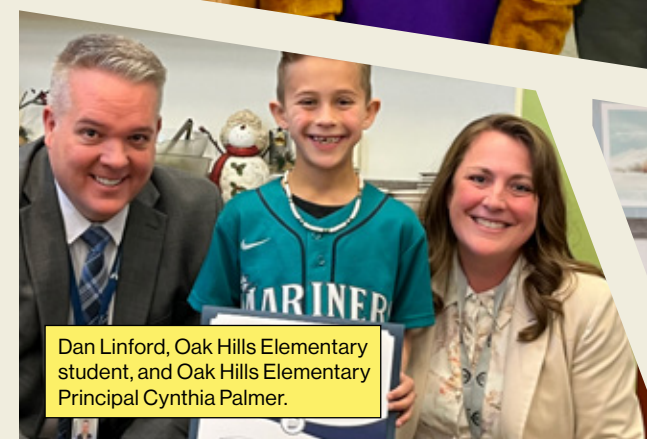
Linford visits Business Depot Ogden.



Former Davis Board of Education President Liz Mumford and Dan Linford.



Linford and Representative Paul A. Cutler, District 18 (Davis County).



Dan Linford, Oak Hills Elementary student, and Oak Hills Elementary Principal Cynthia Palmer.



Dau reads with a Provo City School District elementary student.



Dau visits a Provo Peaks Elementary classroom.



Dau at work in Provo's district office buildings.

All photos courtesy of Dau + Linford's PR teams.

BACK MATTER

OUTGOING DEPARTMENT CHAIRS LOOK BACK ON THEIR SERVICE



Robert Zheng

After years of remarkable contributions to the Department of Educational Psychology, Robert Zheng is stepping down as Chair. A distinguished scholar, inspiring leader, and dedicated educator, Zheng has left an indelible mark on the university and the broader academic community. His tenure as Chair, beginning in July 2022, culminates two-and-a-half years of leadership rooted in vision and service and an enduring legacy of nearly two decades of scholarship and innovation.

Reflecting on his time as Chair, Zheng shared, "It has been a great honor to serve as the chair for the Educational Psychology Department, which boasts an incredible body of faculty who do cutting-edge research and who are dedicated to the state-of-the-art teaching and services." His words reflect his deep respect and admiration for his colleagues, as well as his passion for advancing the field of educational psychology through collaborative research and innovative teaching.

Zheng is an educational psychology professor and served as interim associate dean for research at the College of Education during the academic year 2023-2024. His research is internationally recognized, focusing on the intersections of cognition, learning, and technology. His scholarly pursuits encompass multimedia learning, individual differences, cognitive load theory, instructional technology, and K-12 technology integration. Over the years, Zheng has made significant strides in understanding how learning technologies can mitigate the constraints of human cognitive capacity, particularly in complex problem-solving scenarios. His work in multimedia and web-based learning environments explores how these tools can reduce cognitive overload while enhancing learning outcomes.

A key aspect of Zheng's research centers on individual differences, examining how learners interact with a variety of technologies to maximize their educational experiences. His vested interest in K-12 curriculum and educational technology integration has positioned him as a thoughtful leader in improving instructional design for younger learners, ensuring that the latest advancements in learning science translate into practical and effective applications in classrooms.

Throughout his career at the University of Utah, which began in July 2006, Zheng has embodied excellence as a professor in the Learning Sciences Program. He has served as a pillar of the Instructional Design and Educational Technology (IDET) community, mentoring students and fostering research that bridges theoretical insights with real-world impact. Under his leadership as Chair, the Department of Educational Psychology has thrived, embracing cutting-edge research and advancing the university's mission to prepare students for an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

Zheng's scholarly contributions, administrative leadership, and unwavering commitment to innovation have earned him a respected reputation among his peers. As he transitions from the role of Chair, his colleagues, students, and the broader university community extend their gratitude for his exceptional service.

Thank you, Professor Zheng, for your years of dedication, leadership, and visionary contributions. Your legacy will continue to inspire the department and shape the future of educational psychology for years to come.

It has been a great honor to serve as the chair for the Educational Psychology Department.

I am excited about the future, where Special Education faculty will continue to be recognized as leaders.

Matt Jameson's leadership as Chair of the Department of Special Education in the College of Education has been a defining chapter in his more than two decades of service at the University of Utah. With a career dedicated to advancing inclusive education and supporting students with significant cognitive disabilities, Jameson has made lasting contributions to the department, the college, and the broader field of special education.

A Professor in the College of Education, Jameson has taken on multiple leadership roles, including Program Coordinator for Severe Disabilities, Director of Undergraduate and Graduate Studies, and Honors Liaison. His work has been instrumental in strengthening the college's programs, ensuring they prepare educators equipped to meet the diverse needs of students. Under his guidance, these programs have maintained a strong focus on collaboration, research, and innovation, positioning the College of Education as a leader in teacher preparation.

Jameson's research focuses on instructional strategies and inclusive practices for students with significant cognitive disabilities. His work addresses critical areas such as intellectual and cognitive disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and rural education. Additionally, he has explored the effectiveness of distance education and teacher preparation programs, contributing valuable insights into expanding access to quality education in underserved communities. His emphasis on evidence-based strategies has influenced practices that improve outcomes for students with diverse needs.

Reflecting on his time as Chair, Jameson remarked, "It has been an honor serving the Dean and the faculty in the Department of Special Education for the last five years.

There have been tremendous changes in the department and college, and I am excited about the future, where SPED faculty will continue to be recognized as leaders in research, teaching, and service."

During his time as Chair, Jameson worked closely with faculty to navigate significant changes while continuing to strengthen the department's core mission. Within the College of Education, he has been a tireless advocate for collaboration and innovation, ensuring the department remains at the forefront of research, teaching, and service in special education. His leadership has helped expand opportunities for both faculty and students, leaving the department well-positioned to address the evolving needs of the field.

Jameson's impact reaches beyond his administrative work. As a mentor and educator, he has guided countless students and faculty, fostering their growth and encouraging them to advocate for equity and inclusion in their own careers. His work has helped advance understanding of the unique challenges faced by students with significant cognitive disabilities and provided practical strategies for educators to create inclusive, equitable learning environments.

As Jameson steps down as Chair, his influence will continue to be felt throughout the College of Education and beyond. His vision, dedication, and collaborative spirit have set a strong foundation for future success in the Department of Special Education.

The College of Education celebrates Matt Jameson's remarkable contributions and his unwavering commitment to advancing inclusive education and preparing educators to make a meaningful difference in the lives of their students.



Matt Jameson



Laurence
Parker

...the main role
of a department chair
is in service to faculty,
staff, and students.

Laurence Parker, professor of Educational Leadership and Policy, is stepping down as Chair of the department after four years of distinguished leadership. A nationally recognized scholar and advocate for social justice in education, Professor Parker has played a pivotal role in shaping the department into a leader in transformative leadership and policy practices.

Parker’s tenure as Chair was defined by his steadfast commitment to fostering collaboration and innovation. Under his leadership, the department expanded its influence, preparing future educational leaders to address systemic inequities and improve opportunities for all students. His work has bridged the gap between research and practice, equipping students with the tools to navigate complex challenges in K-12 schools and higher education.

Reflecting on his journey, Professor Parker shared: “I jumped into this job in May 2021 as I was still recovering from a heart transplant earlier that winter. I had the transplant due to a rare disease, inherited amyloidosis, which affects Black populations in the form of heart failure. I really did not know what I was getting into, but I had faith in my ELP faculty colleagues, staff, and students—to be like the old Obi-Wan Kenobi in Star Wars and use the power of the Force to not just try, but do!”

A renowned scholar in critical race theory and educational leadership, Parker has been at the forefront of research around race, policy, and equity in education. His research has

reshaped how educators and policymakers approach issues of social justice. Beyond his scholarship, he has been a dedicated mentor, inspiring students and faculty alike to lead with purpose and to “do the right thing” in their respective educational spaces.

“For me, the main role of a department chair is in service to faculty, staff, and students. I aimed to help our faculty do what they do best—teaching, research, and service—and to mentor graduate students in making meaningful change in education,” he said.

Professor Parker expressed deep gratitude for those who supported him throughout his tenure: “There are so many to thank along this journey—from Marilyn Howard, whose expertise kept ELP running smoothly, to James D. Anderson at the University of Illinois, who served as a model of leadership during my time there. My sincere appreciation goes out to Dean Frankie Santos Laanan and the entire dean’s staff, my colleagues across the College of Education and the University of Utah, and most of all, the ELP faculty, staff, students, and alumni.”

As Parker steps down as Chair, his legacy of leadership, scholarship, and commitment to social justice will continue to resonate within the department and beyond. His influence has helped position ELP to address the evolving challenges of education in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world.

Thank you, Professor Parker, for your exceptional service, vision, and dedication. Or, as Spock would say: “Live long and prosper.”



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