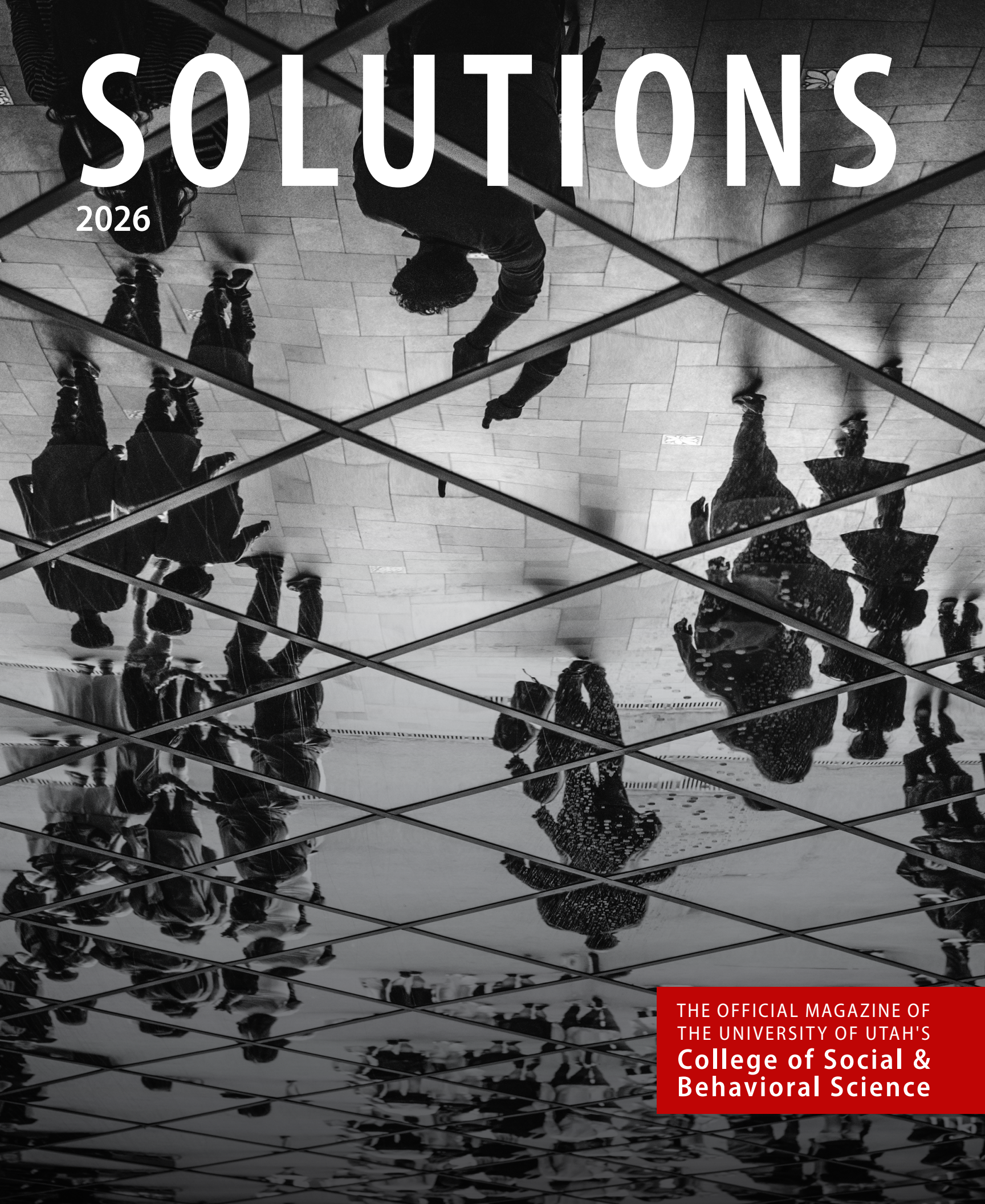




SOLUTIONS

2026

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH'S
**College of Social &
Behavioral Science**



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A Message from Dean Camacho



Michelle M. Camacho
Dean, College of Social & Behavioral Science

I am grateful to have served as your dean for four years, and I’m looking forward to my next chapter in the Provost’s office. During my tenure as Dean, CSBS has successfully navigated significant academic expansion, research growth, and community impact. In collaboration with the CSBS leadership team, we developed and executed a college-wide strategic plan. CSBS tripled research revenues, secured more than \$25.3 million in philanthropic support, and expanded the College with 33 new faculty hires. In partnership with faculty, we launched the School of Environment, Society & Sustainability, bringing together faculty from Geography and Environment & Sustainability Studies (ESS) to expand interdisciplinary opportunities in environmental research and education. We also established a new School of Public Affairs.

In terms of curricular innovation, we launched a series of new professional master’s programs aligned with the provost’s academic priorities. These include the Master of Criminology, Master of Financial Planning & Counseling, a proposed Master of Spatial Data Science in ESS, and a Master of Clinical Science in Psychology. Additionally, we are launching a new undergraduate major in neuroscience in Fall 2026, (in partnership with the College of Science). Our Health, Society, & Policy major is under review for accreditation from the Council on Education for Public Health.

In partnership with our CSBS leaders, we spearheaded artificial intelligence initiatives across CSBS in both research and teaching. We also launched a Global Engagement initiative at the University of Utah Asia Campus in Incheon, South Korea, where the College now supports more than 200 undergraduate students and a new ROTC Military Science capstone.

Coming from the National Science Foundation (NSF), I was excited to pursue a \$2 million NSF grant. This was successfully awarded to support our CSBS Data Science initiative, through a NEXUS Scholars program to provide funding for low-income graduate students.

Our undergraduate student success work yielded measurable outcomes, including reduced DEWI rates (from 12 to 5 percent) within a single year. We expanded supplemental instruction, piloted undergraduate teaching assistants in high-impact gateway

courses, and launched a student ambassador program coordinated across the Colleges of Liberal Arts & Sciences. In Fall 2025, CSBS established its first living learning community, Sustainability Action Leading Together (SALT) in Kahlert Village.

In terms of community impact, CSBS’s Behavioral Health Innovation & Dissemination Center established two bilingual community mental health clinics in low-income areas of Salt Lake City. These clinics provide the university’s largest mental health graduate training program while delivering health-psychology services to Spanish-speaking community members and the unsheltered population.

I’m grateful to our commanders of the university’s Army, Navy, Air Force, and Space Force ROTC units, who helped shape a successful philanthropic campaign for student veterans and military-connected students and reestablish the ROTC programs’ connection to the broader university community.

Finally, I am immensely grateful to our associate deans, chairs and directors, and our dean’s office professional staff members, and all of you. I look forward to our continued partnership. I am happy to pass the baton to Rebecca Utz who will serve as Interim Dean and continue to lead out on many of these initiatives.



A Message from Interim Dean Utz



Rebecca L. Utz
Interim Dean, College of Social & Behavioral Science

It is both an honor and a privilege to step into the role of Interim Dean of the College of Social & Behavioral Science. I do so with deep gratitude for the leadership of Dean Michelle Camacho, and with genuine excitement for what lies ahead.

Michelle’s tenure impacted this college in profound ways—from our research growth and new programs to our community engagement—and I am grateful to build on that foundation. Michelle, on behalf of all of us—thank you.

As I step into this role, I do so as someone who has called CSBS home

for more than two decades. I joined the University of Utah faculty in 2004 and this college has shaped me as a scholar, a teacher, and a mentor. That history gives me both a deep appreciation for where we have been and a clear-eyed view of opportunities in front of us.

My priorities as Interim Dean will be rooted in connection. The strategic work Michelle and our leadership team have set in motion will continue with full momentum, and my first priority is to listen—to hear from faculty, staff, and students what is working, what is needed, and where we can grow together.

I believe deeply in the mission of this college, that we can *Be the Solution*. This year’s edition of the *Solutions* Magazine does exactly that. We highlight the launch of the new neuroscience major (page 6), an interdisciplinary program housed in CSBS that brings together expertise from the Department of Psychology and the College of Science’s School of Biological Sciences. Designed to meet growing student interest and prepare graduates for emerging opportunities in science, health, and research, the program reflects how CSBS

continues to evolve to meet the needs of today’s learners and tomorrow’s world.

We would also like to recognize the late Don Lewon, whose service as a member of the College of Social & Behavioral Science’s board reflected a deep commitment to the U and our mission. His leadership, generosity, and belief in the power of higher education helped strengthen the college and expand opportunity for future generations. We are proud to recognize his lasting impact on our community. To learn more about Don’s legacy, visit csbs.utah.edu.

Looking ahead, CSBS remains committed to advancing research with real-world impact, creating transformative opportunities for students, and fostering the kind of thoughtful leadership our communities need most. I am grateful for this opportunity and committed to serving this community well.

Where Biology Meets Behavior

U Launches New Undergraduate Neuroscience Major

DAVID PACE

Illustration by Todd Anderson

What happens in the brain when you fall in love? Why does a stroke rob one person of speech but leave another's language intact? How does a childhood trauma reshape the architecture of memory? These are the kinds of questions that animate neuroscience, one of the most consequential fields in all of modern science. Not to mention exhilarating.

The University of Utah is offering its first undergraduate degree specifically designed to help students pursue those questions and

many more while preparing for a coveted career in life and health sciences.

The new undergraduate degree (Bachelor of Arts/Science) in Neuroscience, which received approval this past April and launches in fall 2026, is jointly seated in two of the university's most storied academic units: the Department of Psychology in the College of Social & Behavioral Science, and the School of Biological Sciences in the College of Science. The program is also deeply connected to the

university's Health Sciences campus, home to the nationally recognized graduate Neuroscience Program that has long been a hub of cutting-edge brain research. Together, these partners have built something the entire Utah System of Higher Education has never had before: a rigorous, integrated, four-year neuroscience degree for undergraduates.

Science of the Brain and All It Touches

Neuroscience is, at its most fundamental, the study of the nervous system—how it is built, how it works, and what happens when it breaks down. But within that deceptively simple definition lies an enormous range of approaches and perspectives.

At the cellular and molecular level, neuroscientists examine the biology of individual neurons: the proteins that allow them to fire, the chemical signals they exchange at synapses, the genetic instructions that guide their development. At the systems level, researchers ask how networks of neurons work together to generate vision, movement, memory, or emotion. And at the cognitive and behavioral level—the domain most closely associated with psychology—scientists study how those neural systems give rise to perception, decision-making, and mental health.

The distinction between a “biological” and a “psychological” approach to the brain is real but ultimately complementary. A biologist working on a neural circuit might ask: how do these cells connect, and what signals do they send? A psychologist

studying the same circuit might ask: how are such circuits activated, and what does a person (or an animal) actually do as a result? The brain, in other words, is a machine that generates behavior, and understanding it fully requires looking at both the mechanism and the output.

The new U major is designed to hold both perspectives at once. “Neuroscience is inherently interdisciplinary: you can't fully understand the brain from a single level of analysis,” says Jacqueline Walsh-Snow, professor of cognition and neural science in the Department of Psychology who serves as the program's inaugural director. “From the psychology side, we focus on how neural systems support perception, cognition, memory, decision-making, and behavior. When that is combined with biological approaches at the cellular level and quantitative approaches from mathematics and data science, students gain a much more complete picture of how the brain works.”

Academic Major Whose Time Had Come

The idea for the degree originated with then College of Science Dean Peter Trapa and College of Social & Behavioral Science Dean Michelle Camacho, who recognized an opportunity to build something neither department could accomplish alone. Both the School of Biological Sciences and the Department of Psychology had long offered neuroscience-related courses, and student demand had been evident for years.

“Neuroscience is inherently interdisciplinary. From the psychology side, we focus on how neural systems support perception, cognition, memory, decision-making, and behavior. When that is combined with biological approaches at the cellular level and quantitative approaches from mathematics and data science, students gain a much more complete picture of how the brain works.”

Jacqueline Walsh-Snow
Professor, Department of Psychology

“We knew there was interest from undergraduate students across campus based on enthusiasm for brain-based courses in the psychology department, the number of students double-majoring in biology and psychology, pre-med students and their numerous requests to develop a focused major in neuroscience,” says Sarah Creem-Regehr, professor and chair of the Department of Psychology, who co-led the program's development alongside Fred Adler, professor of mathematics and director of the School of Biological Sciences. “We are seeing neuroscience majors develop at universities across the country, and they are extremely popular and successful in cross-disciplinary education.”

What made the collaboration work, Creem-Regehr notes, was a remarkable convergence: both departments had been independently moving toward the same idea at the same time. “Once Fred and I started talking more in depth, we realized that a collaborative approach across our two departments would be the most exciting and successful direction,” she says. “I hope the neuroscience major will be an example for how departments across the Colleges of Liberal Arts & Sciences (LAS) can find synergy and common goals.”

Creem-Regehr and Adler invited a working group of faculty across the two colleges to develop the curriculum. The group included Brennan Payne from the Department of Psychology, who played a large role in advising on cognitive and neuroscience foundations; Alla Borisjuk from the Department of Mathematics who provided expertise from the perspective of computational neuroscience; Leslie Knapp, a biological anthropologist in the Department of Anthropology; and Julie Hollien, director of undergraduate studies in the School of Biological Sciences who brought her extensive knowledge in undergraduate curriculum planning.

For Adler, the new major also fills a notable gap. “At many universities, neuroscience is one of the most popular majors, bridging exciting new discoveries with important applications,” he says. “The entire Utah System of Higher Education had no such major, and we wanted to build on the broad neuroscience community created by the graduate program.” A particular goal, he adds, is ensuring that students headed toward clinical careers have grounding in basic biology, while those bound for research understand the implications of their work for patient care and mental health.

Biology, Psychology, and the Power of Data

The curriculum rests on three interconnected pillars. Biology anchors students in cellular and circuit-level mechanisms which illuminate how neurons are built and how they communicate. Psychology addresses the systems and behavioral level, connecting neural processes to the real-world experiences of perception, memory, and emotion. And a third pillar of quantitative methods, mathematical modeling, and data science gives students the tools to work with the voluminous datasets that modern neuroscience generates.

That third pillar is more than just a technical skill set. Walsh-Snow points out that neuroscience has actually played a foundational role in the development of many tools now associated with artificial intelligence: “Advances in neuroscience continue to inform the development of machine learning and AI, making this exchange between fields both dynamic and mutually reinforcing.” Students, she emphasizes, need to understand not just how to use these tools, but their origins, assumptions, and limitations.

Adler, whose home discipline is mathematics, frames the integration in ambitious terms. “AI and other information technologies are transforming teaching and research,” he says, “and students who want to be prepared for the new world need to have two main strengths: the quantitative skills to harness these new technologies most effectively, and the intellectual depth and breadth needed to deeply understand the field and to change with the changing times.”

He invokes Nobel laureate Peter Medawar to capture the spirit of the collaboration: “Medawar said that every trait is 100 percent

nature and 100 percent nurture—and we want this major to have that same seemingly paradoxical mathematics.” In other words, the biology and psychology of the brain are not competing explanations; they are two complete and complementary accounts of the same phenomenon.

Bridge to Both Health Sciences and the Frontier

One of the most distinctive features of the new major is its formal connection to the university’s Health Sciences campus, where the Department of Neurobiology in the School of Medicine and the graduate Neuroscience Program have long cultivated a world-class research community. Faculty from that program will contribute to the new undergraduate degree, and students will have access to research experiences that were previously available only to graduate trainees.

Moriel Zelikowsky, assistant professor in the Department of Neurobiology and a 2025 HHMI Freeman Hrabowski Scholar, is among the health sciences faculty engaged with the new undergraduate program. Her lab studies the neuroscience of social isolation—research with implications she finds both urgent and profound.

“The brain is one of the most complex organs, and we still really only understand a small fraction of it—there’s just so much left unexplored,” she says. “It really is the new frontier, especially when you consider some of the most cutting-edge tools that are coming online right now to answer questions we’ve had for a very long time.”

What makes neuroscience uniquely compelling as a discipline, Zelikowsky argues, is the rare combination of philosophical depth and experimental possibility. “There

are very few areas where you not only get to contemplate the important and deep questions, but then you can actually walk into a lab and design an experiment to test something you think about,” she says. “That full circle is really rare.”

She is also keen to challenge the perception that neuroscience is unapproachably technical. “I do find neuroscience to be more accessible to people from different backgrounds,” says the former film major who pivoted to philosophy of science as an undergraduate. “A lot of times in the sciences, the point of entry feels really high. What’s nice about neuroscience is that other core values are emphasized: Are you a deep thinker? Do you have the drive to do experiments? It feels very accessible, and I think that’s one really nice thing about it.”

Creem-Regehr echoes this point from her own research perspective. Her work spans cognitive neuroscience and computer science, and she sees the new major as a natural extension of how neuroscience is actually practiced. “In teaching research methods, we emphasize the critical importance of asking questions and applying methods at multiple levels of analysis,” she says. “The connections to the School of Computing and to the Department of Neurobiology will open doors for students to participate in research and support both computational and neurobiological training.”

Training, Not Just Informing Scientists

Walsh-Snow is emphatic that the program is designed to produce graduates who don’t just know about neuroscience, but who know how to do it. “We want students to graduate not just with knowledge, but with experience in how neuroscience is actually done

“We want students to graduate not just with knowledge, but with experience in how neuroscience is actually done through research, quantitative methods, and engagement with real-world problems. That’s what makes them competitive for graduate programs and impactful in their future careers.”

Jacqueline Walsh-Snow
Professor, Department of Psychology

through research, quantitative methods, and engagement with real-world problems. That’s what makes them competitive for graduate programs and impactful in their future careers.”

A signature feature of the curriculum is a capstone methods course that exposes students to a wide range of approaches—from functional MRI and EEG to behavioral psychophysics and computational modeling—and trains them to think critically about what each type of data can and cannot reveal. “A central theme is the value of converging evidence: understanding how different methods, each with their own strengths and limitations, can be combined to answer fundamental questions,” Walsh-Snow explains.

The new major is also, by design, a proving ground for the university’s recently reorganized Colleges of Liberal Arts & Sciences. By drawing on faculty from two colleges, connecting to graduate programs, and integrating quantitative training from mathematics and data science, the degree

demonstrates what interdisciplinary collaboration within LAS can look like in practice—not merely as a matter of shared administrative services, but as genuine intellectual synthesis.

Workforce-Ready

The timing of the new major reflects more than intellectual enthusiasm. The neuroscience-life sciences workforce is expanding rapidly, driven by demand in pharmaceutical research, medical technology, clinical neuropsychology, data science, and the rapidly growing field of AI which is deeply shaped by brain-inspired models of computation. Nationally, neuroscience is among the fastest-growing undergraduate majors, and graduates with rigorous training in both biology and quantitative methods are sought after across a broad range of industries.

For Utah, the new degree positions the university as a genuine player in the state’s

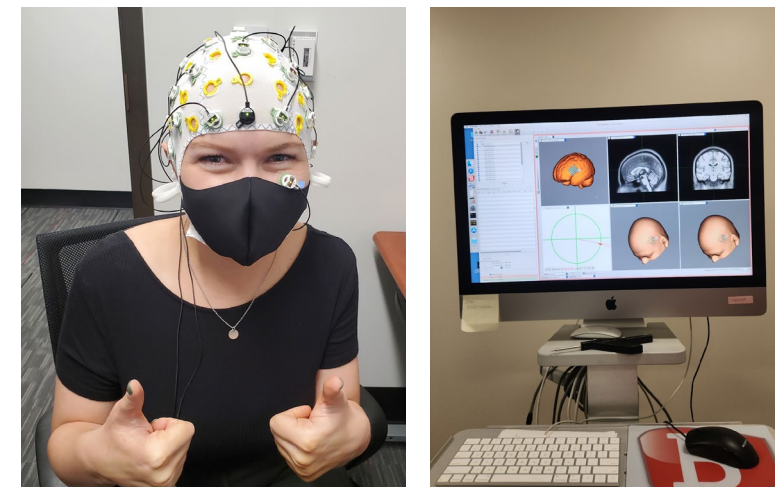
expanding life sciences economy. Utah has become an increasingly prominent hub for biotech, health technology, and medical research. Homegrown talent trained at the undergraduate level is essential to sustaining that momentum. A robust pipeline of neuroscience graduates equipped with research experience, quantitative fluency, and clinical awareness strengthens both the university and the broader regional workforce.

Adler sees the program as an investment not just in students but in building the university’s scholarly reputation. “These goals will challenge us as instructors,” he acknowledges, “and open doors for new research.” That double aspiration of teaching students to think rigorously while opening new lines of inquiry for faculty may be the surest sign that this new program will endure.

Edge of Neural Frontier

Adler, whose own research spans mathematical biology well beyond the nervous system, offers a deliberately expansive view of what neuroscience might become. The brain, he notes, is just one of the body’s remarkable information-processing systems, and neuroscience, at its most ambitious, is really a science of how complex organisms process, share, and act on information at every level. His hope is that the discipline becomes less insular, “that neuroscience becomes a less isolated field and contributes more broadly to thinking about the distributed information processing and sharing of complex organisms in general.”

Zelikowsky, working at the frontier of social neuroscience, captures the urgency behind all of this with her aspirational directness. Understanding how isolation reshapes the brain matters, she argues, not just for treating depression or anxiety, but for understanding



Language and Memory Aging Lab, Department of Psychology

what kind of creatures we are. “I always think of human neuroscience and model systems-based neuroscience as very complementary. Each one can answer certain parts of the problem, and together, collectively, hopefully make some inroads into trying to solve some of the big questions of our time.”

For the students who will walk into their first neuroscience courses this fall, those big questions are now within reach—not just as curious artifacts, but as problems they are being trained to solve.

The University of Utah’s new undergraduate Neuroscience major begins accepting students for fall 2026.

More Than the Sum of Its Parts

How the Department of Sociology & Criminology Is Redefining What It Means To Study—and Transform—Society

DAVID PACE

The University of Utah's Department of Sociology has deep roots—sociology was first offered here in 1896, making it one of the earliest programs in the nation. In Fall 2024, the department took its most significant step in decades: it officially renamed itself the Department of Sociology & Criminology, giving formal recognition to a transformation that had been building since 2018, when the university launched a standalone criminology major. The response from students was immediate and enormous. By May 1, 2026, the department counted 1,085 declared majors in Sociology and/or Criminology, making it one of the fastest-growing majors on campus.

For Department Chair Kim Korinek, the new name was simply a matter of accuracy and representation. "We've grown the faculty," she says, "we've grown the majors, we just changed the name to be more consistent with the composition."

Two Disciplines, One Vision

The most important story here is not enrollment numbers—it is intellectual synergy. Criminology Program Director Heather Melton, an associate professor whose research focuses on gender-based violence and the interaction between

victims and the criminal justice system, is careful to distinguish what the department's criminology major actually is: not a vocational criminal justice degree, but a rigorous social science that places crime in its full societal context. Courses like "Women in Crime," "Social Structure, Inequality and Crime," and "Policing and Society" reflect that broad, analytical approach.

And sociology, far from being displaced by criminology's rise, is what gives criminology its depth. Synergies among the faculty illuminate the connection: sociologist Megan Reynolds, who studies the effects of immigration and state policies on birth outcomes, finds natural common ground with Katie Durante, whose research examines the health consequences of incarceration on mothers and newborns work that has netted Durante not only the CSBS Superior Research Award but also the university's Early Career Teaching Award.

The department's forthcoming Master's of Science in Criminology—expected to launch in fall 2027—will require students to take a sociology elective, because, as Melton puts it, if you are going into the system, you need to understand how institutions, structures, and stratification shape behavior. "Getting into criminology versus just criminal justice gives you more breadth, more opportunities," she

says. “If you’re a criminology and sociology student, the world opens up.”

Korinek sees the pairing as natural and powerful. “Those two degrees anchor each other,” she says. “You can very clearly think about how involvement with the criminal justice system affects health, families, patterns of migration—many of the things sociology already studies deeply.” Politics, social inequality, and social movements—some of our sociology faculty members’ core areas of expertise—also inform criminal legal system involvement and public policy. Double-majoring in both has become a common and organic choice for students who want the richest possible preparation.

**Sociology Informs Practice:
The Chris Burbank Example**

Few alumni illustrate the value of a sociologically grounded approach to criminal justice more vividly than Chris Burbank BS’05, who completed his studies at the U before serving nine years as Salt Lake City’s police chief. Known for a progressive, community-centered approach to policing, Burbank went on to join the Center for Policing Equity, a national nonprofit research consortium dedicated to using data to end racial disparities in law enforcement. His guiding philosophy was clear: “It’s not about crimes and arresting people,” he said in a KSL.com interview. “It’s about preventing crime and not having to arrest people.” That instinct—to examine structural roots rather than simply manage symptoms—is exactly what the department trains students to do.

Meeting a Societal Need

The surge in student interest in criminology reflects something larger than campus trends and the vaulting popularity of the *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* franchise aired primarily by CBS. The U.S. incarcerates more people per capita than virtually any other country. Policing, recidivism, gender-based violence, the collateral consequences of over-criminalization—these are urgent public questions demanding rigorous social-scientific attention. The department is positioned to train the people who will tackle them. Faculty collaborate with the Family Justice Center, the Utah Coalition Against Sexual Violence, Salt Lake County Pretrial Services and other community organizations. Melton has contributed to the state’s sexual assault kit tracking initiative and serves on the board of the McCluskey Center for Prevention of Violence. Students complete internships, assist in community-based research, and go on to careers in advocacy, law, public health, corrections, and research.

A Student’s Journey: Abigail Nelson

Senior Abigail Nelson arrived at the U unsure of her direction. She enrolled in an introductory sociology class, fell in love with it, and—halfway through her sociology degree—realized she had also been gravitating toward criminology. Adding it as a second major required little extra work, and she soon added psychology as a third. “Having the criminology program embedded in sociology was super helpful,” she says.

“The classes have a strong sociological theory foundation, which I think helps you better understand what is really going on and how to better solve problems.” This summer, Nelson heads to Washington, D.C., for an internship with the National Head Start Association—channeling the advocacy instinct her studies have sharpened. Of the faculty who shaped her, she is direct: “The female professors are powerhouses that I look up to, such as Heather Melton. Learning from their courses has empowered me with the information and skills I need to become a powerhouse myself.”

**Celebrated and Clear-Eyed
About Challenges**

The department’s successes are real and well-documented. Faculty publish in the discipline’s top journals such as the *American Sociological Review*, win university research and teaching awards, and mentor students with a commitment that goes well beyond the classroom. A recent external review found the department to be “a collegial, high-functioning unit” whose students described a “tangible shift in well-being” from being part of it. At the same time, leadership is clear-eyed about challenges: criminology’s rapid growth has strained faculty workloads, graduate funding has not kept pace with cost of living, and the federal research environment has grown more difficult for social scientists. These are problems the department is working to solve—not signs of a program in retreat, but the growing pains of one on the rise.

A Name That Finally Fits

After more than a century as the Department of Sociology, the U now has a department whose name tells a truer story: two disciplines that sharpen each other, faculty who move fluidly between them, and students who arrive wanting to make the world more just. Korinek puts it plainly: “We really care about our students. We’re implementing solutions for challenging problems in the classroom and involving students in our research—helping them bring that into their careers once they graduate.”

From Abigail Nelson, headed to the nation’s capital to work on behalf of children in poverty, to Chris Burbank, whose sociologically informed vision of policing shaped a department and a city, the evidence is clear. The Department of Sociology & Criminology is not simply two fields sharing an address. It is, as its best work demonstrates, something genuinely greater than the sum of its parts.

“We’re implementing solutions for challenging problems in the classroom and involving students in our research—helping them bring that into their careers once they graduate.”

Kim Korinek
Chair, Department of Sociology
& Criminology

much more dietary fiber. The nutritious snacks were highly valued, easy to travel with, and provided a consistent diet. In 2024, DNA analysis of the living plant populations revealed genetic corridors along which people transported and cultivated new populations. Indigenous people prepared potatoes and other crops using manos and metates. The grinding process releases starch granules from plant tissues, which get lodged deep into crevices of the stone. Over the last decade, Louderback has advanced the method for extracting, isolating, and identifying the starch granules.

Her team sampled 401 metates and manos from 14 archaeological sites within and beyond the tuber’s natural range. More than half of the tools came from the Natural History Museum of Utah’s archaeological collections, with the rest borrowed from various repositories across the country. The tools with the highest proportion of *S. jamesii* starch granules came from the Four Corners region of southern Utah (North Creek Shelter), southwest Colorado (Long House, Mesa Verde), and northwest New Mexico (Pueblo Bonito, Chaco Canyon). These sites also have populations of live plants growing nearby.

Historically, archaeological discussions about ancestral Indigenous foodways in the U.S. Southwest have largely focused on “classic” plants like maize, beans, and squash, explains Wade Campbell (Diné), an archaeologist at Boston University who was not involved in the study.

“This study highlights the importance of other, less well-known plants like *S. jamesii* and the diverse roles they played in various Southwestern societies over time, including the socially, politically, and religiously complex Chacoan world,” Campbell says. “Importantly, this study also reminds us that while *S. jamesii* use might not be as common today, the techniques, contexts, and histories of its use remain rooted in the traditional knowledge systems of contemporary Southwestern tribal groups—what other aspects of Indigenous foodways has the Western world ignored?”

“The starch granules corroborate our previous assertion that tubers were transported long distances, but it also suggests that the species was used persistently for thousands of years within the region we describe as the ‘anthropogenic range,’” adds Louderback.

Agricultural Legacy on the Colorado Plateau

Academia has long dismissed the notion that Indigenous people of the American Southwest domesticated native plants, arguing instead that local agriculture relied primarily on crops domesticated in Mesoamerica, such as maize, beans, or squash. Recent studies have challenged this paradigm by presenting evidence of people cultivating and influencing native plants, including agave, barley, and amaranth. Yet these studies often fall short when compared to the robust documentation associated with plants from other regions of the world.

In the last decade, the study’s research team has pursued multiple, independent lines of evidence for *S. jamesii* domestication, including genetic, ecological, archaeological, biogeographical, ethnographic, and linguistic data. Indigenous people routinely traded plants across the region, altering local landscapes and leaving ecological legacies that persist to this day. In 2021, the research group found dense concentrations of culturally significant plants surrounding archaeological sites, even when the species was absent from the wider environment. The Four Corners potato was one such species.

The study’s interviews revealed that Diné farmers and elders still know, grow and eat *S.*

“The mobility of Indigenous foodways was driven by kinship-based practices across the landscape. Indigenous knowledge holders, especially matrilineal women, held on to these seedlings and stories across generations to sustain ties to ancestral land and foodways.”

Cynthia Wilson
Doctoral Candidate,
University of California, Berkeley

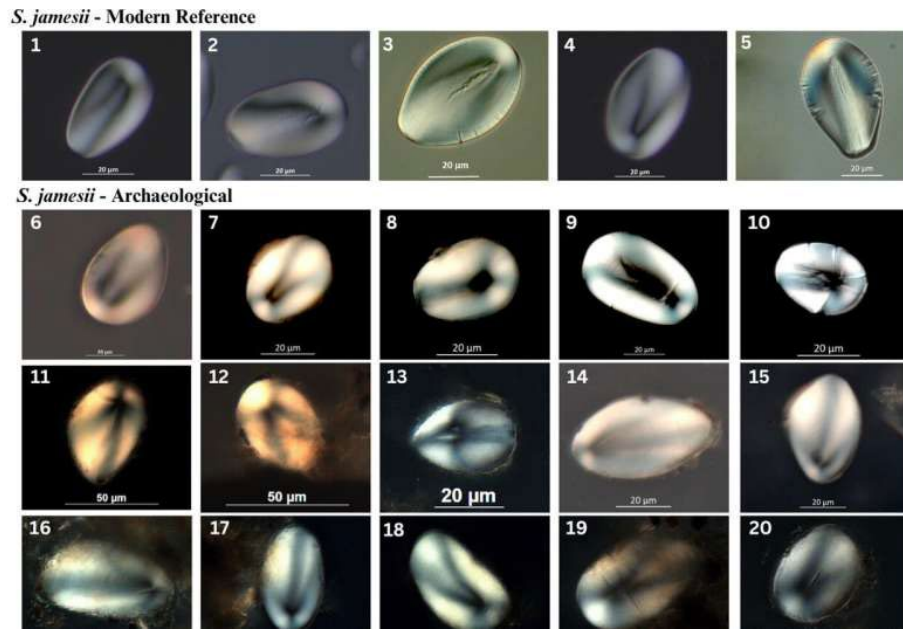
jamesii tubers, as well as use them for spiritual purposes, including in water offerings and seedling ceremonies. There was a striking difference in the way interviewees referred to the potato. Women used the present tense and knew how to process and eat the potato—all mentioned using glésh (special white clay) to reduce its bitterness. The men spoke about the potato in the past tense and had no specific understanding of its preparation. The interviewees talked in detail about how they use other wild plants and domesticated crops. All spoke of contemporary struggles, including access issues, that hinder their ability to continue traditional land-use practices and food systems.

“Engaging the voices of Indigenous farmers and foragers on land-use practices is essential to preserve the Indigenous health of the land and the people by maintaining access to the tiny tubers from traditional, undisturbed populations,” Wilson says.

Other authors include Stefania Wilks, Kaley Joyce, and Sara Rickett of the University of Utah and the Natural History Museum of Utah; John Bamberg of the USDA/ARS, U.S. Potato Genebank; and Alfonso del Rio of the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Based on the study, “Ancient use and long-distance transport of the Four Corners potato (*Solanum jamesii*) across the Colorado Plateau: Implications for early stages of domestication,” published in PLOS ONE on Jan. 21, 2026.

Lisbeth Louderback documents Four Corners potato plants growing in Escalante, Utah. Credit: Lisbeth Louderback



Images of *S. jamesii* starch granules found on stone tools near archaeological sites, with modern granules for reference. Credit: Louderback et. al. (2026) PLOS ONE



These metates came from Rooms 28 (left, item #H/3293) and 54 (right, item #H/5773) at Pueblo Bonito in Chaco Canyon and yielded starch granules of *S. jamesii*. Credit: Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History

ROTC Legacy on Display

University of Utah Honors WWII Airman Eugene Tobin

ELIZABETH JOHNSON

At the University of Utah, the presence of Air Force ROTC is more than a pathway to military service; it is a living connection to generations of courage, leadership, and global impact. On December 3, 2026. Lt. Col. Trek Potter, chair of the university's Aerospace Department and Commander of Air Force ROTC Detachment 850, welcomed attendees to reflect on that legacy in a ceremony honoring Salt Lake City native and World War II pilot Eugene Tobin.

Honoring the 85th anniversary of the Battle of Britain and the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II, the event brought together university leadership, international military representatives, and students to reflect on the enduring role of service and sacrifice. Cadets played a central role in

the ceremony, from presenting the colors to participating in a program that emphasized ROTC's mission to develop future leaders grounded in history and purpose.

Tobin's story is one that resonates deeply with the ROTC ethos. Born in Salt Lake City in 1917, he pursued aviation early and chose to act when the world needed it most. Before the United States entered the war, Tobin volunteered to fight against Nazi forces, eventually joining the Royal Air Force in 1940. He became one of only 10 Americans to fly in the Battle of Britain, defending the skies over England during one of the war's most critical turning points.

His courage, and the courage of his fellow pilots, helped alter the course of the war. Their actions inspired the famous words from Winston Churchill: "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

For our ROTC cadets, Tobin's legacy is a standard. The commemorative plaque, now housed in the Naval Sciences Building and entrusted to our stewardship, serves as a daily reminder that the call to lead, serve, and act continues for each new generation.

From left to right: Natalie Okeson; Andrea Clark; James Clarke, the Honorary Consul to the UK in Utah; Lt Col Trek Potter; Group Captain Nevin of the Royal Air; Dean Michelle Camacho



College of Social & Behavioral Science Fulbright Awardees

DAVID PACE

Governing the Energy Transition

Associate Professor and Associate Director in the School of Public Affairs Jon Fisk has most recently focused his research on energy and water policy, specifically how we deliver energy and clean water in ways that are efficient, affordable, reliable, and environmentally responsible.

Fisk will travel to Vaasa, Finland, to collaborate with the University of Vaasa on research examining the governance of data centers especially related to energy and water consumption and innovation, and how this emerging infrastructure impacts communities. Vaasa is considered the Nordic Energy Capital and is a leading site for clean energy and digital innovation.

"For me, Vaasa represents a unique opportunity to learn directly from stakeholders on the ground; to exchange ideas, research, and information; to build long-lasting relationships; and to highlight what we do here in Utah," says Fisk.

Shedding Light on Our Evolutionary Past

Professor of Anthropology and Curator of Paleontology at the Natural History Museum of Utah Tyler Faith, who departs for South Africa's Congo Valley this summer, will continue his work as a paleoecologist specializing in climate change, terrestrial ecosystems, and human evolution. Located in the Western Cape, the Congo Valley is riddled with limestone caves that have potential to preserve fossils extending deep in time—i.e., hundreds of thousands to millions of years. Beginning in 2022 in collaboration with scientists from South Africa and beyond, he launched a research program aiming to explore the valley's paleontological potential.

"We have found more than 20 'new' caves, with test excavations at four of them in 2025 recovering well-preserved fossils from multiple time horizons," he wrote in his project proposal. Faith plans to involve both US and South African students in his paleontological fieldwork, noting that "the Congo Valley offers unparalleled research, teaching, and training opportunities."

Synthesizing Long-Term Findings on Humans and Ecology

Cultural anthropologist Shane Macfarlan has been conducting research in Baja California Sur's remote mountain ranges for years, and his Fulbright Scholar award will allow him to deepen that work considerably. Beginning in August he'll be based at a branch campus of the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur in Loreto, layered on top of a full university sabbatical, during which he's also writing a book synthesizing his long-term findings on the relationships between humans and ecosystems they inhabit across the peninsula.

His research centers on traditional ranching culture, migration, rancho abandonment, and urbanization. Essentially, it is related to why some families stay and others leave as multi-year droughts become more frequent and the desert ecosystem struggles to support livestock. Communities with access to ecotourism or cultural tourism, he has found, show more stable populations than those without economic alternatives.

"Normally I just talk about Baja to American college students here in Utah—it's not necessarily the most important audience," he says. Now he'll be teaching Mexican undergraduates social science research methods, partnering with local NGOs on policy briefs for municipal leaders, and communicating his findings in Spanish to the ranching communities themselves.



Jon Fisk (upper), Tyler Faith (middle), Shane Macfarlan (lower)

Honoring Resilience

Department of Economics Alum Shows Gratitude for the Past Through Gift for the Future

AUDREY MAYNARD

Adam Rose's BA'70 story begins in a place defined both by loss and abundant hope.

Born in 1948 in the Bergen-Belsen Displaced Persons Camp, Adam spent his earliest years a mere mile away from one of the most notorious concentration camps of World War II. His parents, Isaac and Eugenia Rose, were among the few members of their families to survive the Holocaust, enduring ghettos, forced labor, and five concentration camps before reuniting at war's end.

"I tend not to say I was born in a refugee camp because it gives the impression of people living behind barbed wire and all," Adam explains. "My parents and I lived in a two-room suite in a converted former German military base, and I got to be just a regular young kid. It was actually a

good example of how refugees can and should be treated."

The camp closed in 1951, and the Roses were one of the last families to leave. Adam's mother had gotten severely ill shortly after he was born, and the family was forced to remain in place until she was strong enough to travel to their next destination—one that was wholly unknown to them.

Options for resettlement included Israel, Venezuela, and the United States. The Roses felt the US would present the best opportunity to rebuild their lives. But without the funds to commence on the next phase of their journey, they had to rely on a network of people—Jewish communities throughout the US—who were willing to help those like them begin again.

"We had no relatives in the United States, so it turned out to be the

luck of the draw that the Jewish community in Salt Lake sponsored us," he says. "We couldn't have come here without their support—many people extended a hand to help us."

Growing up in Salt Lake City, Adam enjoyed an "idyllic" childhood. The Roses settled into a modest duplex near 300 South and 500 East, and Adam enjoyed playing baseball with the kids in his neighborhood, many of whom were immigrants from Mexico.

Isaac Rose, who was an accountant before the war, initially accepted a job as a janitor for a locally owned Jewish furniture store. He then worked in his profession for several Salt Lake brokerage and accounting firms, and subsequently for Shapiro Travel Goods toward the end of his career. Eugenia Rose, known for her elegance and shrewd business sense, built a

Jewish displaced persons at the Bergen-Belsen camp, 1945–50
(U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Herbert Steinhouse)

devoted clientele as a salesperson in the ladies department of prominent downtown retailers like Auerbach's.

"My parents were wonderful people, and after everything they went through, I think they appreciated living a low-key life in Utah," Adam says. "They were both supportive of me, stressed education, instilled in me a good sense of ethics, and worked hard to provide."

Although not the strongest student from a GPA standpoint in high school (Adam insists the primary objective there was to have fun), he was accepted to the University of Utah with a plan to pursue a career in law. He soon found himself drawn in a different direction, however, enrolling in class after class in the Department of Economics. There Adam encountered faculty, like legendary economics scholar Lawrence Nabers, who both inspired him intellectually and demonstrated the allure of life as a professor.

"These were very scholarly people, but they were fun-loving, too," Adam says. "They really took me under their wing and showed me what a career in academia could be—although this career turned out to be more strenuous than for professors in the 1960s!"

For Adam and his peers, learning extended well beyond the classroom. Conversations stretched over long lunches and informal gatherings, where economics blended with philosophy, politics, and broader questions about society. Equally influential was the department's

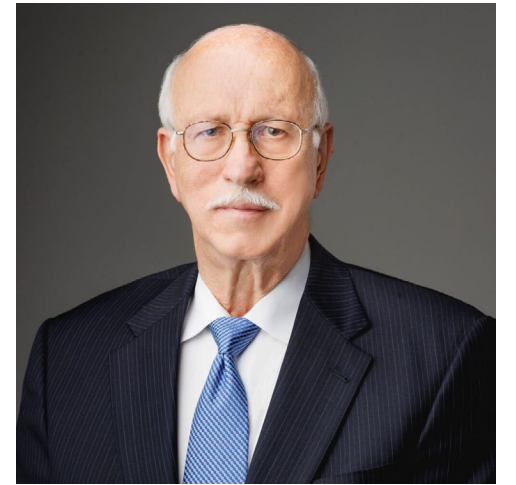
openness to diverse perspectives. Rather than adhering strictly to traditional frameworks, faculty encouraged students to challenge assumptions and think creatively—a mindset that would shape the course of Adam's career.

"What was great about my experience at the U was that I was never indoctrinated into some traditional orthodoxy," he says. "My professors emphasized the freedom to think outside the box, which has rewarded me time and again throughout my career."

After graduation, Adam went on to earn his PhD in economics at Cornell University. Over a decades-long career, his scholarship has influenced global conversations on disaster recovery, climate policy, and economic resilience. Today, he is a research professor in the Sol Price School of Public Policy and director of the Center for Risk and Economic Analysis of Threats and Emergencies (CREATE) at the University of Southern California, continuing his contributions to the field he helped pioneer.

"My family's story is one of great resilience, so clearly the connection between my career and my personal history is not incidental," he says. "For me, the opportunities that shaped my early life were not inevitable—they were assisted along the way by those who wanted to make a difference in the lives of others."

Now in a position to give back himself, Adam established the Adam Rose Family Scholarship



Adam Rose, Economics Alum, 1970

for Refugee Students in the Department of Economics in 2022 to help close the affordability gap for refugees seeking higher education.

"As a refugee, I understand both the opportunities and the challenges of someone with this status," he says. "I believe America is still the land of opportunity, but people have to overcome many hurdles in achieving success."

Adam believes the US has benefited greatly from its pluralistic roots and that refugees exhibit traits—like bravery, industriousness, and perseverance—that strengthen American society. He hopes his scholarship helps recipients overcome the barriers they face to reaching their personal and professional goals.

"I hope my scholarship helps students understand that someone cares about them and stands by ready to help. I also hope it will inspire them to one day 'pay it forward' and help the next generation of refugees achieve their dreams."

Leading the Way

The First Class of Psychology Graduates at the Utah Asia Campus

YOONJI KIM



The psychology program at the University of Utah Asia Campus (UAC) stands as a dynamic bridge between rigorous scientific inquiry and global engagement, embodying the mission of the College of Social & Behavioral Science in a uniquely international context. Located in Incheon, South Korea, the program offers students a pathway to earn a degree from the U while beginning their studies in Asia and completing their final year in Salt Lake City, thereby creating a fully integrated academic experience across campuses.

Rooted in the U's established curriculum, the program spans key areas including developmental, social, cognitive, and clinical psychology, while emphasizing hands-on research from the undergraduate level. This continuity ensures that students transition seamlessly into upper-division coursework alongside peers in Salt Lake City, maintaining academic consistency and rigor across locations. Students are encouraged not only to engage in research activities with faculty but also to extend their research experiences beyond the classroom.

A recent highlight demonstrates the program's commitment to experiential learning and global

academic engagement. In 2025, UAC psychology students presented original research at the Korea TESOL (KOTESOL) International Conference, examining the complex role of generative AI in education. Their work explored how AI can both support and undermine critical thinking, emphasizing the importance of preserving student agency and authentic voice. Originally accepted as a short talk, their proposal was later elevated to a full 25-minute research presentation, underscoring the strength and relevance of their work. Guided by Dr. Carina Pals, associate professor, the students engaged directly with an international community of educators and researchers, gaining first-hand experience in scholarly communication and academic exchange.



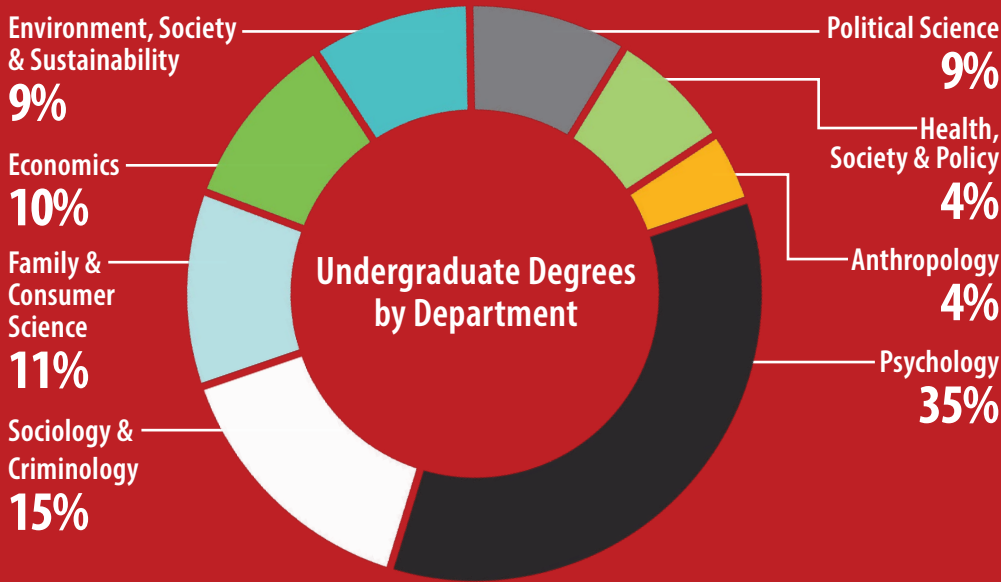
Hamin Cho, Honors BS Psychology, 2026

Experiences like these illustrate the program's broader impact on campus culture. Psychology students at UAC are active contributors to a vibrant academic community, regularly engaging in research, conferences, and interdisciplinary dialogue. Their academic journey—spanning multiple countries and culminating in study in Salt Lake City—positions them to approach psychological questions with both cultural depth and global perspective.

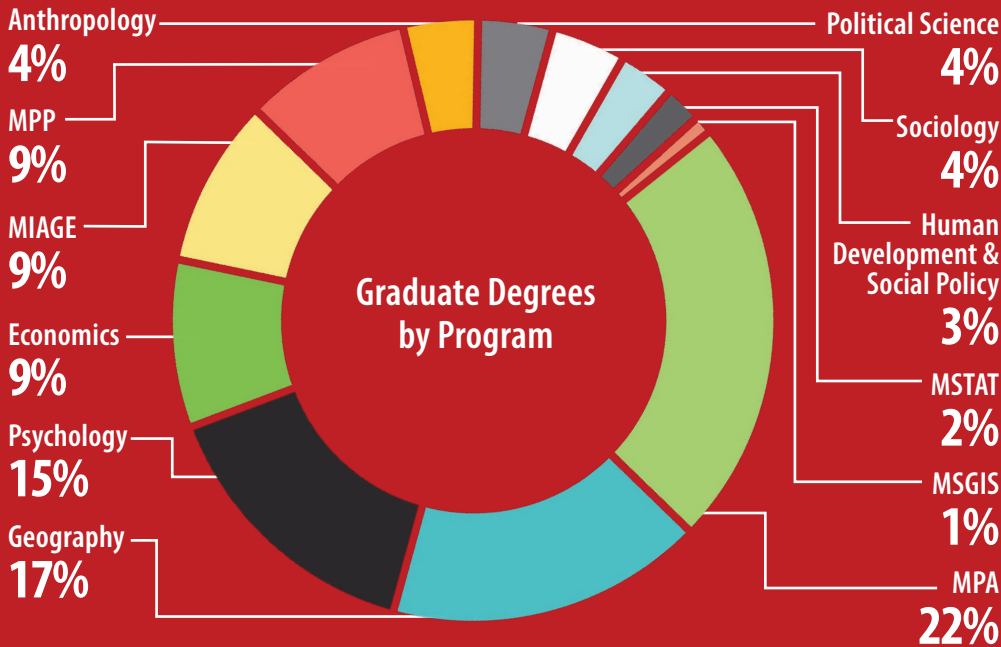
By integrating rigorous academics with real-world research opportunities and a cross-cultural framework, the UAC Psychology program prepares students to become globally informed scholars and future leaders in an increasingly complex world.

CSBS Graduating Class of 2025

Undergraduate Degrees: 1,521
Average GPA: 3.5



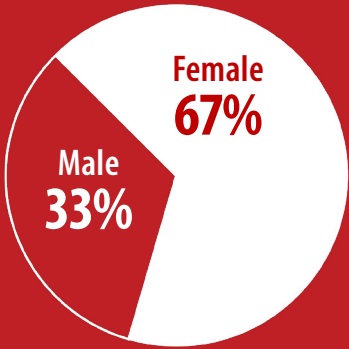
Master's Degrees: 97
Doctoral Degrees: 30



25% of all undergraduate university degrees awarded are in CSBS

Top 10 University Majors:
#1 Psychology
#10 Economics

Student Mix:



#1 University of Utah college alumni graduate from

U Alum Spotlight

Colonel Phil Heseltine

ELIZABETH JOHNSON



As a proud University of Utah Political Science alum, Colonel Phil Heseltine (Ret.) BS'93 has built an

extraordinary career of service and leadership since commissioning through the U's ROTC program the year he graduated. Over three decades in the US Air Force, he rose to the rank of colonel, becoming a command pilot with thousands of flight hours in the KC-135 and holding key leadership roles, including flight commander and executive officer to the commander of the US Air Force Expeditionary Center. He most recently led the 931st Air Refueling Wing at

McConnell Air Force Base in Kansas, where he oversaw the historic transition from the KC-135 to the KC-46A Pegasus and guided the wing through challenges ranging from COVID-19 to the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Now retired, Heseltine reflects on those experiences and his personal journey in his 2025 memoir, *Certamus Volare*. In this Q&A, he shares lessons learned, reflections on his time at the U, and the insights he hopes to pass on to the next generation of leaders.

weight in pizza. I also loved exploring the library, the Union, and so many other buildings across the campus to find obscure locations to study.

How did your time at the U influence the direction of your career and life after graduation?

Looking back at my time at the U, my experiences as a Residence Advisor (RA) in Van Cott Hall helped pave the pathway for me to appreciate what service to others means both for your classmates and yourself.

If you could go back, what advice would you give your college-age self?

I would encourage myself to live more in the now. Meaning not every moment needs to be a preparation event for after college. I would have spent more time exploring the hills behind the U, and I would be more involved with the myriad other campus organizations, like student government. Read more books. Go to every sporting event on campus. Make more time for yourself. Try to have fun and laugh every day.

Was there a moment at the U that you now see as a turning point in your story?

Being reinstated in the AFROTC program played a major role in the rest of my life. Without the support of the faculty and staff my life would have gone an entirely different direction.

What do you hope current students take away from hearing your experiences?

College is a once in a lifetime experience and the friends and people you meet at the U will lay the foundation for the rest of your life. Remain connected with those you are in school with today.

How does it feel to look back now and see your Utah story as part of a memoir?

It's been a fantastic journey to lay out the path to get to where I am today. As I go back through the book and read about my time at the U, there are so many great memories of times as an RA, snowball fights, marching across campus, meeting friends for dinner at the Union, and rooting against BYU for anything and everything! Just great times. Would love to go back and do

it all again... though I probably would have studied a little harder.

Can you share a little about your book?

The title *Certamus Volare*, is the motto of the University of Utah's Air Force Reserve Officer Training Detachment 850 Cadet Corps and is emblazoned on the patches worn by these students for more than 75 years. The book lays out the myriad experiences and lessons I have learned throughout my 30 years as an officer and pilot in the United States Air Force, which all began as a student on the campus of the University of Utah. There are stories of significant personal and professional challenges on the road to becoming a military aviator, experiences during numerous global deployments, leadership lessons from times when I was both a squadron and wing commander, and the impact so many have had throughout my life, particularly my parents who both recently passed away. For me the book is an oversized thank you letter to those I've met on this long, strange journey who forged who I am today as a leader, mentor, husband, father, and friend. I hope you enjoy the ride!

When you look back, what stands out as your favorite memory from campus life?

One of my favorite memories is the first time we had a blizzard during my first year. In Van Cott Hall there were several of the football team players who lived on my floor. Watching so many of these enormous guys from the islands of Hawaii, Samoa, and Tonga running outside in their flip flops and sarongs laugh and roll around in the snow that they had never seen before still makes me smile.

Was there a class or professor who shaped your path in a lasting way?

My Air Force Reserve Officer Training Courses (AFROTC) shaped the leader I became throughout the entirety of my Air Force Career. Major Scott Hill, the AFROTC Detachment 850 Professor of Aerospace Studies, had the greatest impact on me both as a student and a future officer. I would not have been the successful leader I became without his mentorship and guidance at a pivotal time in my life, which extended well beyond my time at the U.

What was the biggest challenge you faced as a student—and how did you overcome it?

During my Junior year I was medically disqualified from commissioning in the Air Force. I stayed enrolled in AFROTC and Major Hill worked tirelessly to get the diagnoses corrected, and I was able to graduate and commission on time and alongside my classmates.

Did you have a “go-to” spot on campus to study, reflect, or recharge?

The Pie was the “go-to” place to meet up and attempt to eat your body

U Student Olympic Athletes

NATHAN MURTHY AND JULIA ST. ANDRE

Thirty-one athletes with ties to the University of Utah competed on Team USA in the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milano-Cortina. In fact, the U ranked No. 1 among all US colleges and universities represented at the Games with 31 athletes in total.

Ten of these esteemed U athletes were embedded in the College of Social & Behavioral Science. Some were alumni of the U; others were set to graduate soon. Here, we profile each of them.

The College extends a hearty

congratulations to our students who competed in Italy. We are proud of all of U!



Marin Hamill | Freeskiing: Slopestyle & Big Air



Marin is a Utah native and competed as an alpine skier before discovering park skiing. It was the creativity required to succeed that fascinated her. As she progressed, Marin used that creativity to earn a silver medal in slopestyle at the 2022 World Cup in France. At the 2021 FIS World Championships in Aspen, Colorado, she finished fifth and was the only American to reach the eight-person final.

In her first Olympics in Beijing, she

placed seventh on her first run. But on her second run she fell—tearing both her meniscus and ACL. These injuries left her sidelined for two years. After recovering, she quickly regained traction and notably won the gold medal at the X Games knuckle huck in Aspen last year.

This year at the Olympics, she placed 16th in slopestyle and 22nd in big air. She also graduated from the U with a degree in Financial Planning & Counseling while competing at the highest level of sport.



Grace Henderson | Freeskiing: Slopestyle & Big Air



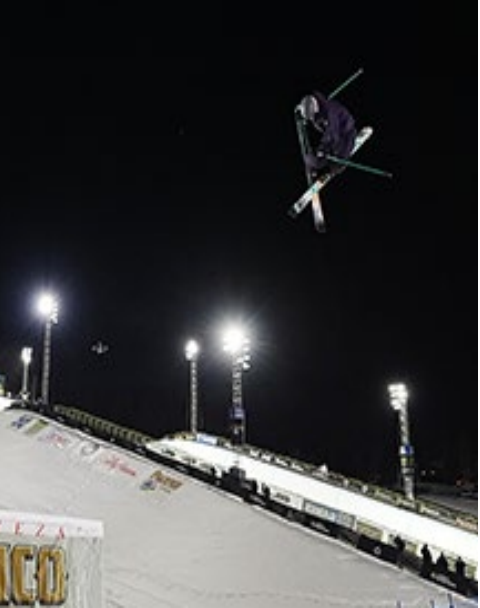
Grace Henderson grew up in the mountains of New Hampshire and started skiing at the age of two. She started as an alpine skier but switched to freestyle.

She developed her skills at Waterville Valley Academy. Notably, both her and her brother joined the US Freeski Slopestyle Rookie Team in 2019. Together, they pursued the dream of competing in the Winter Olympics.

During the 2022–23 season, she placed third at the Stubai World Cup—establishing her on the global stage. She also won silver

at the 2025 Aspen X Games and was ranked highly in both slopestyle and big air—10th and 27th, respectively. She achieved this success despite numerous injuries, including multiple ACL tears and a broken collarbone. These injuries even prevented her from competing in the PyeongChang Olympics in 2018.

This year, she placed 14th in big air and 15th in slopestyle and completed her degree in psychology. Whether it was injuries, school, or the hard work required to stay at the top of her sport, Henderson pushed through to realize her childhood dream.



Alex Hall | Freeskiing: Slopestyle & Big Air



Alex Hall was born in Alaska but was raised in Zurich where his parents were professors. As a kid, Hall built his own custom rails in their backyard and perfected his craft. Today, he is one of the most versatile freestyle skiers in the world.

He has an international background and holds citizenship in both Italy and the US. But, when he was 16, he moved to Park City and decided to compete for Team USA. After joining the team, his career took off. He earned 16th in slopestyle at

Pyeongchang and Gold at the Beijing Olympics. Beyond the Olympics, he is the only person in X Games history to win gold in big air, slopestyle, knuckle huck, and real ski. These accolades earned him skier of the year in 2020, 2022, and 2026. He also won Utah's male athlete of the year in 2022 at the Governor's State of Sports Awards.

In Milano-Cortina, Hall won the silver medal in slopestyle and 26th in big air. This was his third Olympics. He continues in Environment & Sustainability Studies and produced ski films through his brand, Magma.



Novie McCabe | Cross-Country Skiing



Novie McCabe is from Winthrop, Washington and was exposed to cross-country skiing at a young age. Her mother, Laura, competed in both the Norwegian and Japanese Olympic games. Early on, Novie declared that her goal was to compete in the Olympics someday.

While at Liberty Bell High School, she led her team to three straight Washington State Championships before moving on to the U. In the 2023 NCAA championships in Lake Placid, she claimed first place in

both the 5-kilometer freestyle and the 20-kilometer classic events.

In 2022, she helped team USA achieve a sixth-place finish in the relay at the Beijing Olympics. She took a step back from the sport in 2024 due to both Hashimoto's and celiac disease. However, she learned how to deal with these issues and qualified for the 2026 Olympic games.

In Italy, she placed fifth in the relay, 26th in the 2 x 10 km skiathlon and 31st in the 10 km freestyle. McCabe graduated from the U in political science and is pursuing her master's at the University of Denver.





Annika Belshaw | Ski Jumping Psychology

 Annika Belshaw hails from Steamboat Springs, Colorado where she began

skiing at three years old. Six years later, she discovered ski jumping and began training at the Steamboat Springs Winter Sports Club along with her brother Erik.

Annika joined the USA Ski Jumping Team in 2017. When she joined the U, she won five consecutive national ski jump championships from 2021 to 2025. On the world stage, she was the most consistent American on the World Cup circuit. In 2024,

she stacked 14 top-30 finishes and was ranked 29th globally. Notably, in 2025 at the World Cup in Lake Placid, New York, she finished a career-best 14th on American soil. That was the first time a US woman placed better than 15th since the 2016–2017 season. In short, Belshaw’s achievements put US Ski Jumping on the map.

This year in Italy, she placed 7th in the mixed team normal hill event and 21st in the individual normal hill event. She is now an alumna of the U, where she earned a degree in psychology.



Julie Letai | Speedskating Sociology, and Health, Society, & Policy

 Julie Letai describes competing in short track speedskating as a mix between

“demolition derby and NASCAR.” This is exactly the type of challenge she embraced when she first laced up her skates as a toddler in Medfield, Massachusetts.

Early in her skating career, Letai earned a spot on the US national team in 2019 and made her Olympic debut at the 2022 Winter Games in Beijing, competing in the 1500 m and women’s relay events.

However, the path to the 2026 Winter Olympics was anything but smooth—a

series of injuries threatened her dreams of competing in the Olympics again. But, she persevered and performed when it mattered—earning her a spot on the 2026 Olympics Team. Letai placed eighth in the 2000 m relay mixed and 3000 m relay women’s events, 16th in the 500 m, and 28th in the 1000 m at the 2026 Olympic Games in Milan.

Letai graduated from the U in December 2025 with degrees in sociology and health, society & policy, and a minor in psychology. In the future, she looks forward to pursuing a career in healthcare after her days on the ice end.



Kamryn Lute | Speedskating, Short Track Economics

 When Kamryn Lute watched the Olympics as a young girl, she believed

that she belonged there at the highest level. Nearly 16 years later, the University of Utah student headed to the 2026 Olympics.

Lute’s journey here was far from straightforward—especially in the past four years. She was diagnosed with Hashimoto’s, Lupus, and mixed connective tissue disease (MCTD). These conditions changed her preparations as a speed

skater, but her resiliency was stronger. “I’m focused on the positives,” she wrote. “This journey is so far from what I ever expected, but even if it hadn’t culminated in this, I could be proud that I can confidently say I gave it everything I could.”

In her first Olympics, Lute placed eighth in the women’s 3000 m relay and 23rd in the 1500 m at the 2026 Olympic Games in Milan. There is no doubt that her resiliency will carry her forward as she continues to compete and study economics at the U.



Chris Lillis | Freestyle Ski Aerials Team Political Science

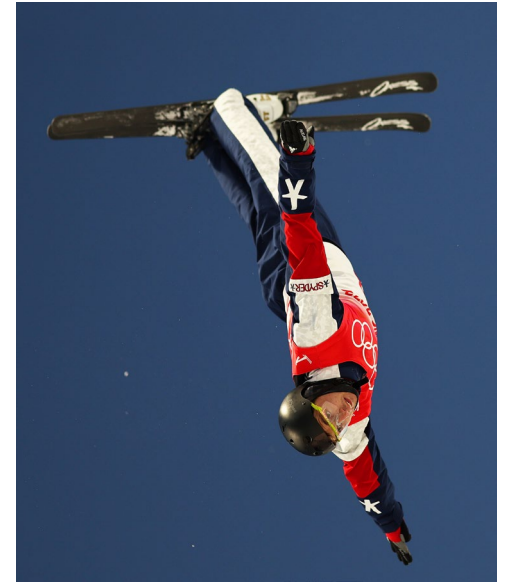
 For Chris Lillis, training doesn’t start on the snow, it starts in the

pool. Lillis and fellow Freestyle Ski Aerial athletes practice all sorts of tricks, like a 60-foot triple backflip with five spins, into a pool before bringing the trick to the snow. These maneuvers are so dangerous that you need to be an expert before attempting on the snow for the first time.

For the Rochester, New York native, defying gravity for the US Freestyle Aerials Team was years in the making. He first

stepped into skis at the age of three and joined a freestyle team while in elementary school. At 17, he became the youngest man to ever win an FIS aerials World Cup event. This success carried into his first Olympics in 2022, where he won gold at the mixed team aerials event.

This year, Lillis won gold in the mixed relay, yet again, and finished eighth in men’s aerials. Despite winning two gold medals—a feat most of us could never imagine—Lillis continues to push himself to improve in the sport and in his studies in political science at the U.



Jaelin Kauf | Freestyle Skiing, Moguls Environmental & Sustainability Studies

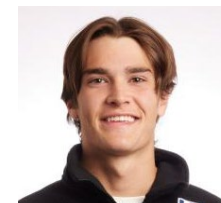
 For U alumna Jaelin Kauf, moguls skiing was never just a sport; it was

a central part of her upbringing. Raised in Alta, Wyoming by parents who were both professional mogul skiers, she learned early what it meant to commit fully to the mountain. As a toddler, Kauf’s mother even carried her onto the X Games podium.

In 2018, Kauf made her Olympic debut, where she finished seventh place in the women’s moguls event. In 2022, she improved her performance by earning the

silver medal and establishing herself as one of the world’s most dominant mogul skiers. At the 2026 Games, Kauf was focused on being present in her performance. “Once we go in, it doesn’t matter if I already have a medal or not,” she said. “I’m still there to win and put down my best runs and lock in on that.” This mindset propelled her to silver medals in both dual moguls and moguls at the 2026 Olympic Games in Milan.

Outside of the sport, she founded Deliver the Love—a nonprofit empowering girls in sport.



Charlie Mickel | Reestyle Skiing, Moguls Economics

 Raised in Durango, Colorado, Mickel first skied on the bumps at

Purgatory Resort, inspired by his family’s love of the sport. Early morning practices, countless car rides, and long days on the snow led him to the Wasatch Freestyle program in Park City, where his talent and determination propelled him through the ranks to the World Cup circuit.

“What an incredible journey it’s been getting here. It’s hard to believe in just a few weeks I’ll be competing on moguls skiing’s biggest stage. I feel so blessed... I

never would’ve made it this far without the support of my friends and family,” Mickel wrote on an Instagram post.

A U student and first-time Olympian, Mickel was ready to tackle both traditional and dual moguls. “I move toward this milestone with great excitement for what’s ahead, but also with extreme gratitude for what has already come,” he said during the Games. Mickel’s journey had been defined by dedication, family, and a lifelong love for the sport, a testament to what could be achieved when passion meets perseverance.





THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

College of Social and Behavioral Science

CAROLYN AND KEM GARDNER
COMMONS BUILDING, SUITE 3725
260 S CENTRAL CAMPUS DR.
SALT LAKE CITY, UT 84112

At the University of Utah College of Social & Behavioral Science, we study what shapes people, communities, and societies—and turn knowledge into meaningful change. From advancing mental health and education to informing public policy and strengthening families and neighborhoods, our work touches lives across Utah and around the world.

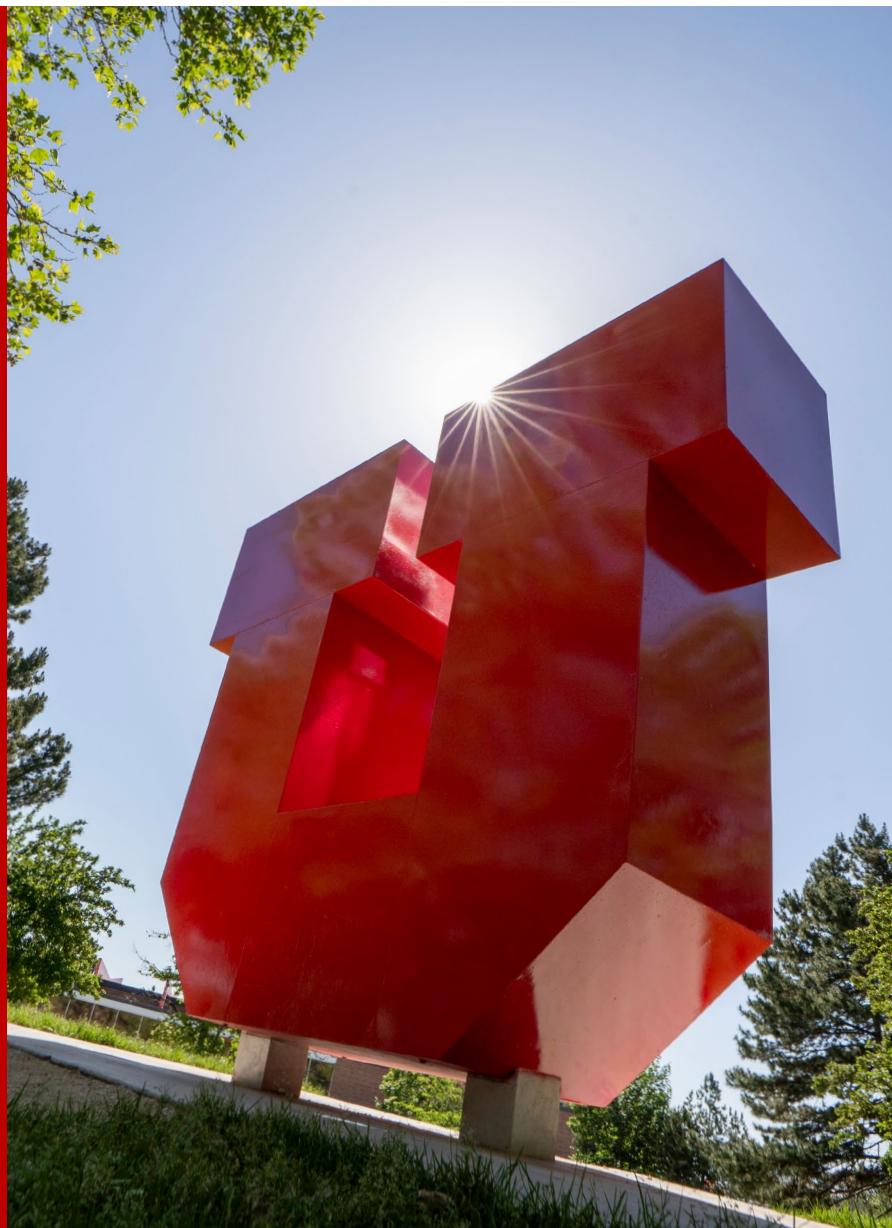
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