

# College of Education

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### Recruiting the teachers of tomorrow

Our Teacher Recruitment Scholars (TRS) program supports underrepresented students passionate about teaching. **Page 6**

### A ground-breaking, new approach to teaching kids with Autism social skills. A game of D&D, anyone?



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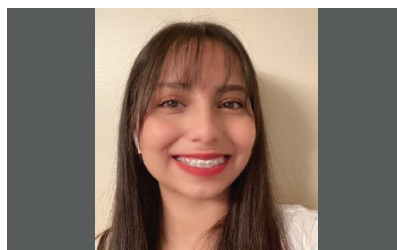
### The UURC helps struggling readers

The University of Utah Reading Clinic serves as a resource for parents with a struggling reader and offers professional development for educators. **Page 8**

## Read our donor and student stories

The College of Education would look a lot different without the diversity of roles, perspectives, and contributions that constitute who we are. Each newsletter we highlight not only the work of our

faculty, but also a donor and a student. You can hear more from Teacher Recruitment Scholar recipient Flor Carina Mejia on page 7 and donor Lily Eskelsen Garcia on page 12.



Interview with TRS recipient Flor Carina Mejia



Lily Eskelsen Garcia on the Importance of Supporting Education

## A Message from Dean Songer

Member of the Utah Council of  
Education Deans



Greetings, alumni, donors, and friends! I am pleased to share the 2022 College of Education Spring Newsletter and FY '21 Impact Report. Within these few pages, you'll get a glimpse of the work we've been doing to realize a more significant impact on education, both here at home and beyond. Some projects have been going on for over 23 years (pg. 6), while others are just getting started (pg. 8). However, regardless of whether a project is long-established or just being launched, you can't miss our commitment to educational quality and equity.

Every day we see more faces on campus. But these faces and their presence on campus do not signal a return to normal. We are crafting a new normal forged by a global pandemic and renewed understanding of the importance of quality education for all. Part of our new normal is a renewed focus on dialogue with you to explore the best ways to support educational communities nearby and far afield. We hope this communication engages you to continue a conversation with us focused on educational quality and access for students and learners from pre-school through adults.

I'm looking forward to sharing who we are and who we can be with you, our supporters. Thank you from all of us at the College of Education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy Songer". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Dean Nancy Songer



**We've been growing education in Utah since 1850.**

# About the College of Education

We believe everyone deserves both access to and the benefits of a high-quality education. The College of Education advances anti-oppression, equity, and inclusion through education to contribute to this goal. We strive to be a beacon of excellence in research, teaching, and service. Our rigorous research addresses the most pressing challenges surrounding education, mental health, and our communities. Our teaching, preparation, and specialized graduate programs reflect both the science and art of evidence-based practices and processes. We engage students, practitioners, and leaders in thoughtful debate, integrative technology, and innovation for deeper learning. Service with

our communities and respective professional fields ensures that we maximize the impact of our scholarship and engagement. Collaborations with local, state, and national partners further ensure that our efforts address relevant issues in society and practice. We foster a diverse, compassionate, and professionally skilled workforce to improve the quality of life for all people and advance social justice. Our graduates become general and special educators, researchers, mental health providers, counselors, leaders, community-engaged practitioners and scholars, and innovators.

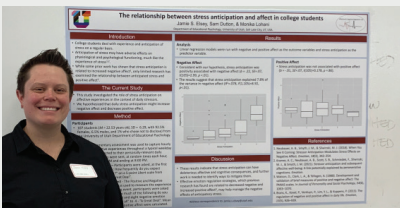
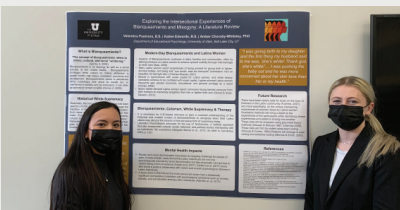
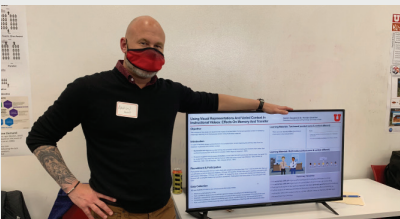


**The College of Education rose 9 points in the *U.S. News and World Report* college rankings. This is but one metric of all we've accomplished this past year, and we are looking forward to building on this and our numerous other achievements!**

## Education Research Symposium

The College of Education was thrilled to hold its annual Education Research Symposium in early April. Students were able to present their research posters, participate in research roundtables, and get feedback on their CVs.

Student research topics covered a wide range from virtual learning and instructional videos to the affect of stress anticipation to the intersection of skin lightening (blanqueamiento) and misogyny to the impact of literacy interest in young readers.



This year's Research Symposium was organized by the College Student Council.

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# Dungeons, Dragons, and Ivory Towers: Leveraging a Role-Playing Game to Build Social Skills in Kids with Autism

*Radley stepped into the half-light of the inn, the thick fortress of a wooden door closing slowly but resolutely behind him. He was glad to be rid of the rain and mud-slicked roads. Every face turned to watch as he made his way through the room. Radley put his left hand deep in his pocket, fingering the cool smoothness of the Arcane Eye, listening as it whispered the secret stories of everyone he passed: hero, thief, sage, villain. Reading them all, Radley knew he'd chosen wisely: This adventure was sure to be a challenge.*



**Dr. Keith Radley**

Radley's work focuses on innovative behavior interventions and analysis techniques. One of the tools he uses to bridge the research-to-practice gap is technology, especially video. "I firmly believe that the impact of research will be limited unless researchers take intentional efforts to make findings and tools accessible in real-world settings," says Radley, "we can't simply cross our fingers and hope that the intended end-users discover our research in empirical journals."

**Video-based instruction can be accessed by educators everywhere and as their schedule allows.**

Dr. Keith Radley doesn't really find his adventures at dimly lit inns, but he is a wizard in the world of educational research. An Associate Professor and Program Director of School Psychology in the Department of Educational Psychology, Radley's research focuses on behavior modification and behavior analysis in those with Autism and learning disabilities, especially in school settings. His weapon of choice? A modern approach. Take for example his most recent project, a ground-breaking modern way to teach social skills development in 6th-11th graders with Autism that maximizes student engagement and has students applying what they've learned while receiving immediate feedback.

Radley is engaging these students using a role-playing game he refers to as D&D Lite. D&D is the Dungeons and Dragons fantasy role-playing game in which participants select characters (e.g., wizards, heroes, warriors, and so on) and go on adventures to earn points that are then used to level-up their characters (e.g., purchase additional powers, magical items, and tools). Each game in Radley's D&D Lite starts with a brief pre-lesson where a facilitator, usually an educator, teaches students with Autism about the social skill that is the focus of the adventure. For example, one social skill that children need to develop is the ability to access information in an environment, be that school or work, so an adventure in the game might be approaching a farmhouse and asking the farmer for intel. After the pre-lesson, students pick their character, and then the role-play begins with characters at an inn who are given an adventure to complete. In order to successfully complete the adventure, students must show they can effectively use the social skill that was the focus of the adventure (e.g., accessing information, making a request, etc.).

To ensure that critical piece of student engagement, Radley and his team are working with the University of Utah's Entertainment Arts and Engineering (EAE) program, a top-ranked video game education and research group. "Our colleagues in EAE are master story-tellers," says Radley, "and their skill in creating engaging narratives is critical to the success of our groups." In fact, the children get invested in the game to the point that when they miss a session their parents call the team

to find out what their child missed. “In all my experience with social skills groups, I’ve never had a group member so invested in the lesson that they were concerned about what they had missed—which really speaks to the social validity of using role-playing games as a setting for teaching social skills.” And it’s not just engaging narratives that keep the students invested. When they show mastery of a social skill, the students can earn bonus points to be used in the game and any student that does not demonstrate mastery of a social skill will be able to select a new adventure focused on the same social skill to avoid redundancy and boredom. It’s a new approach to teaching social skills that replaces didactic lessons with student learning and skill acquisition through engaging formats and real-time feedback.

The findings from Radley’s pilot studies have been so impressive that he is seeking funding for larger studies, with the ultimate goal of creating a game manual for facilitators that can be used in a variety of school settings (e.g., small schools to large schools or urban schools to rural schools).

**“In all my experience with social skills groups, I’ve never had a group member so invested in the lesson that they were concerned about what they had missed. . .”**

“Ultimately, research on effective teaching strategies is of little use if we never bridge the research-to-practice gap,” says Radley. “As such, making interventions and materials accessible and manualized—and not counting on a practitioner or caregiver to independently find a journal article and recreate those procedures in an applied setting—is paramount to bridging that gap. But even with manuals that can guide someone through the delivery of an intervention, careful attention needs to be paid to providing sufficient flexibility to meet the individual needs of children and adolescents.” Radley explains that the tiered structure of the game lets facilitators move their students through evermore challenging and difficult social skills as they successfully complete each adventure (i.e., master social skills). The increasingly difficult adventures also keep the students invested. The self-contained adventures enable facilitators and educators to start with adventures that focus on the social skills their students need and ensure students won’t miss any of the narrative, which is extremely important to them and to maintaining their motivation and interest. “Previous research suggests that typical social skills groups might only last 10-12 weeks. Given that we often have such a limited amount of time to work with a group, it is essential that we make the most of time spent in a social skills group. Our approach has allowed us to tailor interventions to meet individual student needs in an adaptable and incredibly engaging way—something that is really unique to what we’ve been able to do using role-playing games” says Radley.

(Below) Radley (left) and Dr. Evan Dart (right) presenting their findings on the role-playing game’s efficacy at a conference. D&D at a Glance (Right).



Children with Autism learn real-world social skills in the adventure game, like how to request information by asking a farmer for intel.



**1974 D&D released by Tactical Studies Rules**



**50 plus million people play D&D worldwide**

## Diversity in Front of the Blackboard: Why Representation Matters and How We're Cultivating a Diverse Teacher Workforce

Think back to your early school years. Did you ever have a teacher of color? It would not come as a surprise if you answered no. Fast forward to the present, and as a rule, the profile of teachers in today's classrooms has not changed. Within most communities just around 20% of the teachers reflect the diversity of their K-12 classrooms. Specifically, of the students within our schools, over half of the children in classrooms are from ethnically and culturally diverse communities.

Decades of research have shown that all students, regardless of race or ethnicity, benefit from a more racially and culturally diverse educator workforce. For students of color, having a teacher from a diverse background helps them feel less isolated, perform better academically, and face fewer access and opportunity gaps. Teachers from diverse backgrounds also support students and their colleagues in ways that allow them to connect with students and their families. The question for teacher preparation programs is to examine ways to increase the number of prospective teachers from underrepresented groups with the goal of serving our communities, and to become change agents for future generations. The Teacher Recruitment Scholarship (TRS) program provides such an opportunity. The TRS initiative is a collaboration between the University of Utah's College of Education, Salt Lake Community College (SLCC), and local school districts. The program was designed to increase the diversity of teachers in Utah classrooms along the Wasatch Front with the goal of supporting all students, and particularly students from underrepresented backgrounds within Utah's K-12 schools.

For the past 16 years, TRS has committed to the recruitment of prospective students across Wasatch Front school districts by helping students navigate several obstacles known to keep underrepresented students from pursuing higher education opportunities. Partners across districts support students by sharing information on the teaching profession, outlining scholarship opportunities, and assisting with the application process. Importantly, TRS reduces financial barriers for those pursuing degrees in education. As committed stakeholders, school districts provide financial support for fees, books, and supplies, SLCC waives approximately \$3,500 a year in tuition for 2 years, and the CoE provides up to \$3,000 in tuition for up to two years, based upon enrollments in education course work and a 3.0 GPA while at the University of Utah. These supports are crucial in addressing representation within Utah's educator workforce.

We are proud of our TRS program's impact for underrepresented teachers and Utah students, but funding for the program is at an all-time low. If you share our passion for educational quality and equity, please consider making a gift to the College of Education's TRS fund today. With your help, we can ensure students like Flor (see page 9) can achieve their dream of becoming a teacher and that all of Utah's kids get the chance to envision themselves in front of the classroom one day. Thank you.

To make a gift in support of students like Flor, contact Safia Keller at [safia.keller@utah.edu](mailto:safia.keller@utah.edu).

TRS is a collaborative program between the University of Utah's College of Education, Salt Lake Community College, and local school districts.



{ THE JOB OF AN EDUCATOR IS TO  
TEACH STUDENTS TO SEE VITALITY  
IN THEMSELVES. }  
--JOSEPH CAMPBELL



# An Interview with Flor Carina Mejia, TRS Recipient

In February, the College of Education's marketing and communications staff had the honor of interviewing Flor Carina Mejia (left), a recipient of the Teacher Recruitment Scholarship program on the value of the TRS program, why she loves teaching, and her plans for the future..

**Q: How did the TRS scholarship impact your college experience?**

A: I look back to high school, and I always wanted to be a teacher, but I didn't know how. Nobody in my family had gone to college. One day the high school principal pulled me out of class so I could attend a TRS presentation. I couldn't decide between the TRS and TH Bell Award programs. But TRS offered student support about how to apply, and they gave me Michelle Bauchman's contact info. I contacted Michelle, and she met me in person to help me apply.

Through the whole college application process, I had help while still being able to do my own thing. It's like, TRS was a guide and offered support when I needed it. As a first-generation student learning how to apply for school, how to enroll in classes, and how tuition worked wasn't easy. But I had support all the way to apply to the TRS program and to Salt Lake Community College to transfer from there to the University of Utah. I always had someone to guide me and help me.

**Q: How did you come to elementary education?**

A: First grade was so hard for me. I remember struggling because I had no experience with English. My first-grade teacher stayed after school to help me with phonics and reading comprehension, so I learned English by the end of first grade! I remember the first time I read a book by myself. It was on Martin Luther King, Jr.

I remember going home and teaching my brother. I was teaching him what I was learning in school. Because we didn't have a whiteboard, my parents bought me markers and let me write the lessons on the windows. As long as I cleaned up after, it was OK! [Both laughing] When he went to school, the kindergarten teacher was impressed he understood the alphabet and could read; she said he was advanced in his learning. Everything I learned at school, I would come home and teach my younger brother. I knew then I wanted to be a teacher.

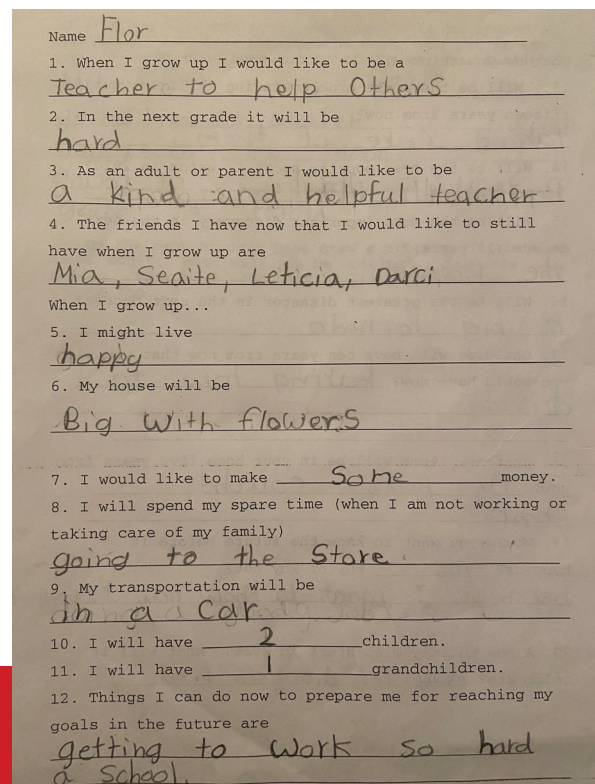
**Q: What's it like now that you get to teach?**

A: Right now, I am student teaching. I love being in a classroom. Time goes by so fast! It always feels like you never have enough time. I get so into the lessons, and it feels like it's only been 2 minutes because I love what I do. I never look at the clock. What matters is being with the students, having them engaged. Sometimes even the students have to tell me it's time to switch! [Both laughing. Flor's students are in dual immersion classes and they switch classes during the day.]

**Q: What is next for you?**

A: I am hoping I can get a job teaching. I would like to teach in Salt Lake School District because that is where I'm from. But teaching is something I love, so it doesn't matter where I end up as long as it's in a classroom!

**Right: An elementary school assignment of Flor's asking her what she wants to do as an adult; she wanted to be a "kind and helpful teacher!"**



# Reading is



A book is a gift you can open again and again. -- Garrison Keillor

## Nothing to Fear when the UURC is Here

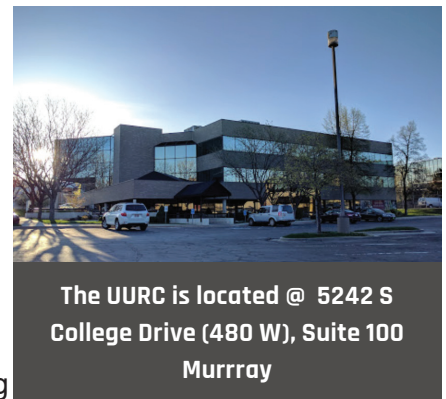
The greatest fear you had as a child is probably not your greatest fear today. But what if your greatest fear as a child had been not being able to read? That's a fear that could follow you your whole life. What is more, the inability to read carries with it the potential to stymie careers, undermine success and confidence, and rob children of the futures they want for themselves. In addition, low literacy rates among adults take a toll on society. Estimates are that more than 43 million U.S. adults cannot read or write, costing \$2.2 trillion in lost annual income and at least \$106 billion in additional healthcare costs.

To support grade-level reading skills in Utah's kids and prevent an economic drain due to low adult-literacy rates, the Utah Legislature established the University of Utah Reading Clinic (UURC) in 1999. As part of the College of Education, the UURC has served as a statewide safety net for struggling readers from kindergarten all the way through 12th grade for over 23 years. The UURC provides reading assessments and interventions; evidence-based, nationally acclaimed professional development and resources for educators; and support for parents. In 2016, the UURC added the Distance Technology Lab to meet outlying urban and rural needs. UURC distance services have grown exponentially and were crucial in the UURC's ability to continue to provide services during the pandemic.

Even prior to the pandemic, demands for reading support and intervention were high. Every year the UURC provides reading assessments and interventions to about 7,500 kids across the state and professional development to 900 educators, administrators, and paraprofessionals statewide—many of which work in high-poverty, urban, and rural areas. In addition, the UURC has provided training to 500 educators through the Wilson Reading program, an intensive course preparing educators to support students with dyslexia.

Earlier this year, Governor Cox's office increased their award to the UURC from \$968,861 to \$1,321,574. And that's funding well spent. The UURC has a high impact, with students progressing more than 1-grade level in as little as 45 sessions, including those with learning disabilities and English language learners. Students with dyslexia average a gain of nearly 1.5 years in 50 sessions through the Wilson Reading program. It's exactly this sort of impact in advancing reading ability that has parents claiming the UURC an "academic game-changer."

The UURC also provides invaluable training for University of Utah students. Students in the College of Education's elementary and special education who are candidates for licensure are trained to tutor one younger struggling reader and one older struggling reader twice a week over two semesters with oversight from an experienced coach. An additional 70-90 work-study students at the University of Utah's Bennion Center receive training from the UURC, and these work-study students will go on to tutor 200-300 children each year. In 2015, the UURC began training volunteers who tutor residents in Utah juvenile justice centers in Ogden, Farmington, West Valley, and Provo. These youth see their reading skills increase by an average of 1.65-grade levels in just 28 sessions.



The UURC is located @ 5242 S College Drive (480 W), Suite 100 Murray

Today, the UURC serves

- 40 Utah School Districts
- 55 Charter schools,
- 5 Youth-in-custody facilities
- 6 Utah schools for the deaf and blind.

If your child is struggling with reading, you can reach the UURC at: [uurc.utah.edu](http://uurc.utah.edu) / [UURC@ed.utah.edu](mailto:UURC@ed.utah.edu) / 801.265.3951



The UURC Distance Technology Lab was crucial for regular operations and services during the pandemic.



# Creating Pathways for Pacific Islander Students



When Dr. Kēhaulani Natsuko Vaughn accepted a position at the University of Utah in 2018, she was invested in creating culturally relevant and sustaining pathways for Pacific Islanders. Pacific Islanders are a highly diverse community and represent the Indigenous people of Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia. For example, the 2010 US Census identified over 20 ethnic groups living in the US. Although Pacific Islanders have a long and rich history in Utah, they continue to be underrepresented in all facets of higher education: undergraduate and graduate students, staff and faculty. Through the U's first awarded [Andrew W Mellon](#) grant,

Vaughn established the [Pasifika Scholars Institute](#) (PSI). PSI offers an intensive 5-day program teaching Pacific Islander scholars interested in higher education, Pacific Islander culture and history, resources to better navigate higher education, and mentors to be both effective students and leaders.

Vaughn says, “The Institute was created because of the educational needs of the Pacific Islander community. Utah’s Salt Lake basin continues to host one of the largest concentration of Pacific Islanders and being the flagship research institute of the state, we needed to make a concerted effort to address the educational inequities that exist within the PI community—a community that is often overlooked when it comes to higher education.” With Vaughn’s guidance and input, PSI has grown from a 5-day intensive summer bridge program to also offering a graduate bridge, and yearlong programming through the community archive which also is a repository for Pacific Islander leaders that discuss their own journeys of higher education and professional pathways. As a result of these efforts, an [undergraduate certificate](#) was created which allows students to integrate Pacific Islander studies with their major. All of these offerings aim to empower Pacific Islander students with a deeper and more meaningful understanding of their history and the concerns facing Oceania today and the diaspora locally. “There is a long history of exploiting Indigenous communities including Pacific Islanders in the pursuit of research. Rather than being the object of research, we aim to tell a fuller history of our diverse community that contextualizes the vast experiences of Oceania today. Having courses on Pacific Islanders including their cultures, histories, and experiences, demonstrates to aspiring Pacific Islander scholars that we are relevant within higher education. Our communities matter. Also, it signals that Pacific Islanders continue to be knowledge creators, researchers, and artists. That we have something worthy that other non-Pacific Islanders can learn from. These histories and understandings benefit all students to be leaders and engaged in making positive change for their communities.”

Vaughn and other Pacific Islander scholars continue to counter the erasure and the reductionist colonial and settler colonial centered histories of the region and its people. Instead, Vaughn and others are (re)telling the dynamic Indigenous people of the Pacific including those that are living in Turtle Island. Showcasing the emergent field of Pacific Island Studies and the growing number of scholars focusing on Pacific Islander histories, languages, cultures, and forms of resistance to colonialism and militarism in the Pacific. Utah plays an important role in Pacific Islander history in Turtle Island. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) missionaries landed in the islands in 1844 and Utah has been home to a population of Pacific Islanders parishioners since the 1870s. Faced with discrimination in the city, they were pushed to create a community 75 miles outside of Salt Lake City in Skull Valley named Iosepa. A historically based yet emergent community, Pacific Islanders in Utah have devastatingly low college enrollment and completion rates despite graduating high school at near the statewide average. The work of Vaughn and the PSI will address these low enrollment and completion rates among Pacific Islander students.

In fact, Vaughn and her colleagues in the Pacific Islander Studies program were awarded a \$1 million grant, on which Vaughn is the co-principal investigator, by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in early 2022. With

# Creating Pathways Continued

Want to learn more? Check out the PSI video archive of lectures [here](#).

these extra funds, program offerings will be extended to include a graduate certificate, establish a Center for Pasifika and Indigenous Knowledges, and create an international network of trans-indigenous scholars. Pacific Islanders are a part of our Utah community and have been for over 150 years. Now, thanks to the work of Vaughn and some of her University of Utah Pacific Islanders and Indigenous peers, a greater share of Pacific Islander students will enroll and complete college through high-quality, culturally relevant educational programs at the state's flagship university.



Dr. Kēhaulani Natsuko Vaughn (left) is an Assistant Professor in the [Department of Education, Culture and Society](#) and Pacific Island Studies Initiative and a Ford Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow in Critical Indigenous Studies at the University of Minnesota. Her research interests include Pacific Island studies, Indigenous methodologies, and higher education. As a former practitioner and first-generation scholar, Vaughn is committed to creating access and pathways and [Continued] decolonizing Indigenous histories and developing higher education resources that serve and support Pacific Islander and other Indigenous students. Vaughn is also a Co-PI on a Spencer grant: *Signs of Power and Dominance: The Role of Mathematics Curricula in U.S. Assimilationist Policies and Practices in Indian Boarding Schools, 1879-1932*. This project interrogates the relationship between math curriculum and implemented in boarding schools during the employment of the Dawes Act, which forced Natives into private land ownership and U.S. citizenship. She is committed to centering and documenting Indigenous histories and experiences.

Her first book manuscript is titled *Trans-Indigeneity: The Politics of California Indians and Pacific Islander Relations*. *Trans-Indigeneity*, is about the trans-Indigenous recognitions between Pacific Islanders living in the U.S. and California Indian Native Nations. An interdisciplinary ethnographic project, *Trans Indigeneity* utilizes a Native Feminist praxis to forge new methodological, theoretical, and political directions for Indigenous recognition-based politics. She is also a founding board member of Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC). With EPIC, she assisted with the creation of the first national and California state disaggregated data reports on Pacific Islanders and developed and facilitated culturally relevant leadership development programs that addresses the retention and persistence of Pacific Islander college students. In Utah, she is vice President of the Board of Mana Charter Academy, a Pacific Islander culturally based school.

## Disability Advocacy and Education: Supporting a Student Club to Go Beyond Activities

Shamby Polychronis and Ryan Walker, Assistant Professors in the [Department of Special Education](#), share similar interests. And they've used those shared interests to advance the field of education, including their work as board members of the [Utah Council for Exceptional Children](#) (CEC), an international professional organization with state and university chapters focused on improving educational outcomes for students with exceptionalities. One of those CEC efforts has been the advancement of the student chapter of CEC ([SCEC](#)). With Polychronis and Walker as co-advisors, just 3 years after becoming an official recognized student organization on campus, the club has met and exceeded its 5-year plan!

The SCEC seeks to enhance student members' knowledge beyond special education topics by researching more disability studies related issues, mainly disability advocacy and identity. This has been a training ground for them to discover stories told from the perspectives of individuals with disabilities. "Our student

officers want the focus of the club to be on creating opportunities to develop advocates and allies.” says Polychronis. “We don’t just want to plan activities for our student members, instead, we want to improve the K-12 school experience for children with disabilities by deepening the understanding of their teachers and the larger community.” Part of that work includes a film series run by SCEC. These monthly films explore the history of advocacy work, disability as identity, ableism, representations of disability in the media, inclusive schools, and other disability issues. The film experience is enriched with speakers, panels, and/or a Q&A with discussions. Guests have included Andrew Riggle from the Disability Law Center, Emily Bird an assistant principal in Murray School District, Dr. Angela Smith Director of the Disability Studies program, and other diverse voices from within and outside academia, including those with disabilities. “Our primary focus with the student group has been to get students thinking of the bigger picture of the disabled community, through specific stories shown in documentaries and those of local community members,” says Walker.

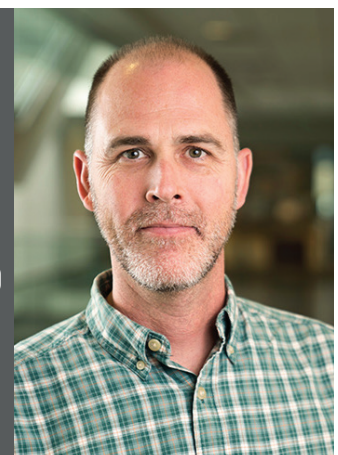
In addition to the film series, the SCEC hosts fundraisers with local businesses to raise money in order to send club officers to the national CEC conference. Attending the conference connects students with professional networks, gives them new ideas, and helps them engage with moving the field of special education forward. “This club has provided an important connection to the University of Utah for student members, especially during remote learning. The events have given students an opportunity to connect with others across programs and cohorts. These connections have helped students find support during their schooling and even after graduation,” says Polychronis. Partnering with local businesses also provides an opportunity to share information with the community. One local business has even been reaching out to Polychronis after SCEC’s winter fundraiser to ask how they could better support their employees and customers who require support and/or accommodations.

The work of the SCEC also includes disability as diversity. “How do we go beyond the medical and behavioral model of disabilities,” queries Walker. “Disability isn’t just about legislative mandates and accommodations; it shapes and informs identity intersecting with race, gender, and sexual orientation.” As a matter of fact, the Department of Special Education has worked with the Diné Nation in the Four Corners region and in other rural districts like Blanding, Moab, and Duchesne in their distance education teacher preparation programs. Looking ahead, the SCEC plans to reach out to current and former distance students to strengthen connections beyond the Salt Lake City campus. “Disability is diversity,” says Walker. “We are fortunate to have an EDI team at the U who understands that,” adds Polychronis. Indeed, Polychronis notes that the work of the SCEC and in special education overall should be to create inclusive spaces and provide access by honoring the intersectional identities of their students. To expand the reach of the SCEC and build community, Polychronis and Walker also plan to strengthen connections with the Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion (EDI) initiatives at the U of U. “Typical student support structures have strict protocols to ensure confidentiality, but this can also lead to disabled students becoming isolated from others with similar experiences. We want to engage with other campus divisions, departments, and clubs working to develop opportunities for understanding and connection,” says Polychronis.



Dr. Shamby Polychronis

**Factoid: The University of Utah is only 1 of 2 Utah universities with an active CEC student chapter, the other being Weber State. The two chapters have developed a strong bond through travel experiences and co-sponsored activities such as the recent donation of disability-centered book bundles to local schools. Currently, Polychronis (left) and Walker (right) are collaborating with Weber State faculty to present at the next annual CEC conference in Louisville. The topic? Tips for starting and supporting a new SCEC club.**



Dr. Ryan Walker

# The Importance of Supporting Education

by  
Lily Eskelsen Garcia



Lily teaching elementary school children

I do not have a humble heart because I am a good teacher. And a good teacher can change the world. You must respect the worth of your work before you have the right to ask anyone else to respect it. A good teacher must understand this. I understand this.

My first job in a school was as a lunch lady in a Head Start program. Sometimes, I'd bring my guitar and sing silly songs with the kids. And one day the kindergarten teacher asked a life-changing question. She said, "Have you ever thought about going to college and becoming a teacher?"

After that, it was all I did think about. On student loans and a baby on one hip, I graduated from the University of Utah in 1980 and launched my career as a 4th-grade teacher at Orchard Elementary where my weirdly creative colleagues inspired me to be weird and creative. We bought the best children's novels from yard sales and taught kids to love to read instead of slogging through boring basals. We produced Shakespeare plays and organized blood drives dressed as vampires. We wanted a computer lab but had no funding, so we held "Cavities for Computers" Bake Sales.

When serving as president of the Utah Education Association, I challenged the insanity of our overcrowded classrooms, and Governor Bangerter sat with me in his office and agreed to support Utah's first-ever class size reduction funds. Later, as president of the National

Education Association, I sat in President Obama's office challenging the insanity of No Child Left Behind. I proudly stood behind him at the signing ceremony that ended federal high-stakes testing mandates. In all, I've used my "good teacher" skills to give children opportunities that would develop critical, creative minds; healthy bodies; and compassionate, ethical characters. But now, I face the challenge of retirement, and I have decided that a good teacher must sometimes abandon that role and accept another: A good student.

I just received my acceptance letter to begin the doctoral program at the University of Texas-El Paso to study Teaching, Learning, and Culture. I'll do research on transformative schools that expand beyond the



Lily volunteering at an elementary school close to her former home in Washington, D.C. teaching music activities and yoga to kindergarteners and third graders.

school walls and become the heart of a community. I'll explore the importance of culture, and language in creating a welcoming atmosphere for families – a belief that led me years ago to endow a scholarship at the University of Utah that I called Maestros Para Los Niños for aspiring educators who are bilingual in English and Spanish. And I'll investigate what school leadership looks like when it's inclusive of administrators, students, parents, neighbors, teachers, and school support staff. (If you don't harness the leadership of the school secretary and custodian, you have ignored the most powerful logistical force known to education.)

I am overwhelmed with joy and paralyzing fear at the prospect of learning something new and challenging what I think I know. I suspect I'll be the only student carrying a Medicare card. But I'm ready to start being a good student because, after all, a good student can change the world.

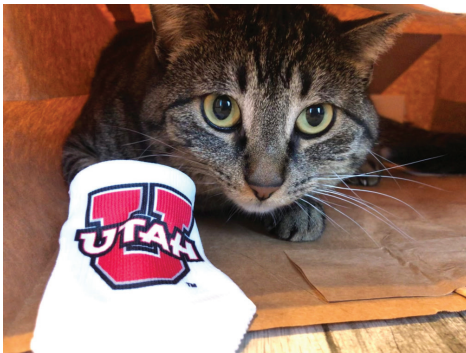


Lily meeting with President Obama to discuss educational issues, including testing mandates in No Child Left Behind and how the law could be improved. Lily would later attend a signing ceremony of an improved law. She would also moderate the presidential candidates forum before 10,000 National Education Association (NEA) members with invited candidate Kamala Harris.



## Giving Day, A Time to Raise Funds for the Student Emergency Hardship Fund

Each year in late February or early March, the University of Utah (UofU) holds its annual giving Day, 1,850 minutes of philanthropy in honor of the year the UofU was established. Colleges and schools from across the campus can participate in this yearly fund raising event, and the College of Education uses Giving Day to raise funds for our Student Emergency Hardship Fund. Students can use scholarship funds for tuition, books, and supplies, but there is little financial support for life's unexpected emergencies like the inability to pay rent or find transportation, buy food, and handle unexpected medical bills. That's where the Student Emergency Hardship Fund comes in. Students in the College of Education experiencing hardship can apply for these funds and use them for life's unexpected costs! For Giving Day 2022, we raised \$10,200 from 106 donors, and we are looking to raise even more funds in 2023. With the funds raised during Giving Day, we can ensure that the unexpected in life doesn't turn our student's educational goals into a dream on hold.



Images from Giving Day 2022 (Left to Right): Cat in a Sack for a social media post inspired by Dr. Suess' Green Eggs & Ham; the winner of 1 of 2 College of Education swag baskets; two students from the College of Education who donated their time to write donor thank you notes for those who made a gift. The College of Education staff won a Swoopy Award for their creativity and professionalism during Giving Day 2022.

# From the Ground Up: ELP Faculty and Alumni Reunite to Make Utah Schools More Welcoming

In 2016, Kody Colvin, a principal in the Salt Lake School District and alumnus of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy (ELP), saw a gap in institutional supports for LGBTQ+ students, educators, and families. As someone from the LGBTQ+ community, Colvin had first-hand experience with the lack of support and understanding, biases, and bullying that are too often facing those identifying as LGBTQ+. So, he and a friend quickly got to work and established FAM (Friends, Allies, and Mentors) to support institutional change and provide resources and a network for LGBTQ+ students, educators, and families.

**Factoid: Only 8% of Utah schools have a comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policy that offers protections for sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and only 26% of LGBTQ students report having a supportive school administration.**

Across the valley, Alli Martin, also an ELP graduate, was developing LGBTQ+ professional learning opportunities for educators, helping leaders in education figure out how to overcome barriers in supporting LGBTQ+ students, educators, and families, and working on ways leadership could empower educators to serve LGBTQ+ students better. These two ELP alumni didn't take long to join forces, and soon Colvin and Martin were developing curricula for interested teachers through FAM. Still, even with an additional person, it was clear that demand for LGBTQ+ supports, professional development, and networks was outpacing what Colvin, Martin, and the small staff of FAM could provide. That's when Colvin applied for and was awarded a grant from the B.W. Bastian Foundation. With this funding, Colvin and Martin were able to bring the first 4 training sessions of Welcoming Schools to Utah. Welcoming Schools is a comprehensive, 6-part training series for schools interested in creating LGBTQ+ and gender-inclusive classrooms and preventing LGBTQ+ bullying. The program also helps school communities with concrete and actionable policies and practices to lift up the LGBTQ+ community.

**A majority (69%) of LGBTQ+ students in Utah report experiencing discriminatory school policies, including**

- 22% being unable to form a school group
- 15% being unable to wear LGBTQ+ apparel
- 10% being discouraged from participating in sports
- and 2% being punished for identifying as LGBTQ+

At last, the group had a formal training program, and they were able to offer it to three different schools in Rose Park. But the group was still missing a university leader, so they reached out to Dr. Irene Yoon, Associate Professor in ELP and dissertation chair for both Colvin and Martin. Yoon was able to help the group avoid creating silos as they expanded and widen their network by bringing in some critical

Starting from the point of radical love and critical hope, Yoon's research is concerned with leadership and teaching in school organizations that contribute to equity, justice, and empowering learning environments for teachers and young people. She engages in research that is geared toward recognizing and dismantling oppression in schools, and imagining and building better systems around and for marginalized students. In particular, she is interested in dignity and belonging across the interactions of race, class, gender and sexuality, and disability, in both teacher learning and school-wide cultural practices and structures.

Yoon (left) is a runner and foodie, as well as an active traveler and novel-devour-



connections across the field of education. Yoon was also able to secure an additional grant from the B.W. Bastian Foundation for the final 2 trainings of the Welcoming School program, and hopes to expand the program to other schools in the future. With Welcoming Schools providing training by certified facilitators, Colvin, Martin, and Yoon have built on that work, offering formal professional development trainings to interested educators, providing social support to LGBTQ+ educators through fun, informal gatherings, and connecting LGBTQ+ educators, families, and allies to a network of like-minded advocates. "The work we're doing is very similar to a professional learning community, also known as a PLC," Yoon says. The role Yoon plays is greatly appreciated by Colvin and Martin: "It might be easy to lean back and be disengaged, be those scholars on the hill as the UofU [University of Utah] can be at times, but Yoon isn't doing that; she is leaning in and making a difference, says Colvin."

**Welcoming Schools has provided training to over 125,000 educators across 43 states, impacting over 10.5 million students.**

By helping LGBTQ+ communities, the group sees their work as also helping children of color, undocumented children, and children with learning disabilities because these groups are also represented within the LGBTQ+ community. However, Colvin, Martin, and

Yoon all stress that they do not speak for schools, including the three Rose Park schools participating in the Welcoming Schools program. Rather, what they are doing is speaking up for LGBTQ+ students, educators, and families.

In the future, the group hopes to create more formal support modules that are offered online for convenience and greater reach. "We have LGBTQ+ educators and families in rural areas that are really struggling, but they can't access these supports because of distance," says Yoon, "and that's something we are working on." Yoon says

**Factoid: Utah's LGBTQ+ students also experienced harassment and discrimination based on their religion (40%), disability (25%), and race/ethnicity (26%).**

that while a commitment to equity can be hard work, "there are ways to move forward. Every step and action counts." And this is important work; as Martin says, "It might be easy to see LGBTQ+ people as a statistic, but they are real people who make contributions. They should be able to envision a bright future of possibilities. They offer as much as every other beautiful soul does."

**Factoid: LGBTQ+ students report higher levels of positive school experiences and academic achievement and less victimization and absenteeism when they attend schools with supportive and inclusive policies, supportive personnel, and LGBTQ+ resources.**



## Our Projects Go Deep, Geothermal Deep

The College of Education's Urban Institute for Teacher Education (UITE), is proud to be one of the Utah FORGE collaborators. FORGE is a project funded by the U.S. Department of Energy located in Milford, UT, FORGE is an enhanced geothermal systems research project investigating how to harness geothermal energy where no naturally occurring geothermal reservoirs exist. As FORGE's education collaborator, UITE is creating lesson plans for high school students that align with engineering education (SEEd) standards in addition to hands-on and virtual experiments to help students understand heat transfer and other geothermal-related topics. Lessons include topics like exploring different renewable resources across the U.S. and designing devices that work within certain constraints but are still able to convert one form of energy into another. As Professor Burbank, Director of UITE and Associate Dean of the College of

Education says, "We consistently strive to advance the material taught in schools both in Utah and around the country. This collaboration with Utah FORGE allows us to introduce important new subject matter."

**Read more about Project FORGE [here](#) and [here](#).**

# FY21 IMPACT REPORT

**\$809,290**

in scholarship funds awarded in the  
2020-21 academic year

**102**

students received scholarship support in  
the 2020-21 academic year

**EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY**  
**EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP & POLICY**  
**URBAN INSTITUTE FOR TEACHER EDUCATION**  
**SPECIAL EDUCATION**  
**EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SOCIETY**

**5** The College is made up of 5 units: 4 departments & 1 institute

**2:6**  
**2 UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES WITH 6 EMPHASES**  
**1:15**  
**1 SECONDARY ED LICENSURE WITH 15 EMPHASES**  
**21**  
**MASTER DEGREES**  
**7**  
**PHD PROGRAMS**  
**3**  
**EDD PROGRAMS**

**34** The College offers 34 different non-clinical degrees/programs

**2 CLINICAL PHD PROGRAMS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY**  
**1 CLINICAL PHD PROGRAM IN THE DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION**

**3** The College offers 3 clinical PhDs in which graduates see patients

Department (2020-21)	# of Students
Educational Psychology	241
Educational Leadership & Policy	186
Urban Institute for Teacher Education	201
Special Education	125
Education, Culture, & Society	59
<b>TOTAL # OF ENROLLED STUDENTS</b>	<b>812</b>

Student Demographics	
American Indian/Alaskan Native	3
Asian	33
Black/African American	12
Hispanic/Latino	132
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	5
Non-Resident	10
Two or More Races	47
Unknown	13
White	557
<b>TOTAL # OF STUDENTS</b>	<b>812</b>

**\$1,417,283**

in donations from donors in FY ' 21 from  
458 unique donors



# FY21 IMPACT REPORT

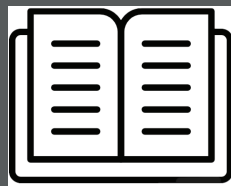
**58%**

increase in the number of donors in FY '21 over the previous year

**97%**

increase in the dollars raised in FY '21 over the previous year

Research at a Glance  
\*Data from March 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021



**217**

College faculty publications, a 19% increase over the prior year



**\$6,406,431**

secured in funding for faculty research and projects

## Scholarships at a Glance

**\$7,934**

average scholarship amount

**~72%**

of scholarship funding comes from donors, the remaining amount comes from state and federal sources

**5**

new donor-funded scholarships were created in 2021

**12/55**

including the 5 newly created scholarships, the College of Education has 12 annually-funded scholarships and 55 endowed scholarships across all 5 departments



**165**

students supported (e.g., wages & benefits, conference travel, tuition assistance) with research funding

**35**

College faculty, staff, and students won over 35 awards in 2020-21