

FALL 2024

Join the Club

Meet the Ken Garff University Club, an upscale campus venue where you can socialize, dine, and cheer on the U. p. 22

Innovation U

From mind-blowing bionics to game-changing graphics, check out 10 extraordinary inventions and discoveries from the U. p. 34

Survey Says

See what Utah alums had to say about their alma mater in the 2024 U Alumni Survey. p. 40



Is College Still Worth It?

As confidence in higher ed wavers, we dive into stats showing that college—and the U, especially—is a smart investment. p. 28

State Secrets

No, this isn't Mars. But it is the largest Mars research facility on Earth, and you can find it right here in southern Utah. Run by the Mars Society, it's one of the many surprises unearthed in the PBS Utah documentary series *This Is Utah*. In its fifth season, the series shines a light on the sometimes unexpected people, communities, and experiences that make the state unique. The mini-documentary style episodes feature stories on subjects as eclectic as a world-class yo-yo master, a Polynesian music and dance group, and keepers of fireflies on a historic farm.

"We allow people to travel to these incredible destinations without having to go there," says show host Liz Adeola. "It's about getting to know people and places you might not even think exist inside of Utah," adds series producer Nancy Green BA'91 MFA'12.

Whether urban or rural, renowned or obscure, *This Is Utah* celebrates the state's multifaceted identity through rich personal narratives. As Green says, "Utah is a complex mosaic." The University of Utah holds PBS Utah's license on behalf of all Utahns. For the full series of *This Is Utah*, visit pbsutah.org/this-is-utah.





U University of Utah Magazine

FALL 2024
Volume 33, No. 3

Discover 10 landmark U breakthroughs—from bionic limbs to computer animation to cheaper titanium production and more—that have revolutionized our world. p. 34



FEATURES

22

Welcome to the Club Beyond football facilities, Rice-Eccles' south end zone houses a hidden gem: an exclusive social club with gourmet dining and a buzzing calendar of events. Get a look inside the Ken Garff University Club and learn how you can join this upscale campus gathering spot.

28

Is a College Degree Still Worth It? Confidence in higher ed is slipping, with many Americans asking whether a degree is worth the cost. In the first of a three-part series about the value of higher education, we dig into the stats that make the case for college and show that the U is an especially smart investment.

34

Innovation University What does the PDF have in common with genetic testing for inherited breast cancer? They're a few of the many game-changing innovations from U students, faculty, and alumni. Check out our list of 10 jaw-dropping inventions and discoveries from the U that opened new frontiers in health, tech, and humanity's future.



ON THE COVER

Is the tassel worth the hassle? Artist Mike McQuade's illustration signifies the question on many Americans' minds.

WEB EXTRAS

More available at magazine.utah.edu



Fintech is about to take Utah by storm—and the U is here for it. Visit magazine.utah.edu/fintech to hear the *U Rising* podcast's interview with Ryan Christiansen, executive director of the U's Stena Center for Financial Technology, who explains why the state is a hub for the financial technology industry and the opportunities it brings students and faculty.



From picnics on the beach to evenings at the theater, U Alumni's calendar is packed full of fun activities to keep you connected to the U and your fellow alums. Get a taste of the action on p. 42, then visit alumni.utah.edu for a full list of upcoming events.



Four out of five blind people could be cured at any modern eye clinic, says the U's John A. Moran Eye Center. But many people in under-resourced nations lack access to modern eye care. Watch a video to learn how Moran's outreach program brings sight-restoring services to communities in need at magazine.utah.edu/moran.

DEPARTMENTS

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Investing in Our Future



Is a college degree still worth it?

This is a question I've heard a lot lately from parents, prospective students, and even some of our own alumni. I understand the concern. With rising costs, changing job markets, and a world that seems to shift beneath our feet daily, it's natural to wonder if the investment in higher education still pays off.

I wouldn't be in this job if I didn't believe that the answer is a resounding yes.

Don't just take my word for it. Let's look at the facts. Our graduates are earning, on average, \$20,000 more each year than those with only a high school diploma. That's not pocket change—it's life-changing money that opens doors and creates opportunities.

At the U, we're always pushing to make your degree more valuable. Our revamped career center does more than merely list jobs—it launches careers. We're partnering with industry leaders to ensure our

graduates are preparing for the “real world” while also actively shaping it.

No matter where I find myself in our great state, I see the U's mark. It's in the free health clinics staffed by our medical students, the after-school programs run by our education majors, and the local businesses started by our alumni. That's why I believe a college degree is about more than just landing a job—it's about becoming the kind of person who sees a problem in their community and thinks, “I can help solve that.”

Starting with this issue of *Utah Magazine*, we're diving deep into the value of higher education. We'll explore not just the financial returns of a degree (p. 28), but also how universities like ours are lifting communities and driving economic growth.

So, when someone asks me if a college degree is worth it, I don't just say yes. I say it's one of the best investments you can make in yourself and in our shared future.

PRESIDENT TAYLOR RANDALL HBA'90

We Heard You

You may be one of the thousands who recently replied to a comprehensive survey from U Alumni. When asked about what the Office of Alumni Relations can do for you in the next five to 10 years, dozens of you chimed in with input on the magazine—and we couldn’t be more grateful for your kind feedback. Check out p. 40 for more findings from the survey.

“The magazine is so well done and I love how it keeps me connected to the campus community, even from afar. The articles are always engaging. It’s also a pleasure to see the stunning photography and art. Thank you for your dedication to excellence in communication.”

“I look forward to the magazine arriving in my mailbox. I read it cover to cover, share it with my family, then hand it off to the local high school counselor or someone else I think would be interested in the particular issue.”

“I love keeping abreast of all the research being done at the U, be it medical, engineering, business, chemistry, or the humanities. *Utah Magazine* does a great job of highlighting those developments.”



“I’d like to continue to receive the U of U magazine. I also have a degree from USU and my husband went to BYU, so we get three magazines, and it is no contest how much better ours is. Ever since the move from the old format, this magazine is a staple in our house. My kids read it, my husband reads it, visitors read it. I like how easy it is to skim or to dive into some of the articles. Keep up the good work! I think it’ll help convince my kids to go to the U instead of BYU like their dad.”

“I recently read an article in *University of Utah Magazine* about student mental health. I was shocked at how much things have improved since I was a student. When Giving Day came around, that story helped guide my gift. I also have that cover hanging up in my office (I’m a therapist). Outstanding work!”

“Keep sending information through magazines. You are doing great.”

“Keep the magazine.”

“Continue to publish and provide *University of Utah Magazine*.”

“Keep sending *University of Utah Magazine*.”

“Keep up the quality of the magazine.”

“Love *Utah Magazine* and would like it to continue.”

“Keep sending *Utah Magazine*. It really does keep me connected with the U.”

“Continue *University of Utah Magazine*—the breadth of stories and information is invaluable and helps maintain connection.”

SOCIAL SPOTLIGHT

Talk about U students in action! @backcountrysquatters_uofu rocked their U spirit in Grand County during @protectwildutah’s conservation weekend. These students traded textbooks for trail tools, helping heal southeastern Utah’s stunning landscapes.



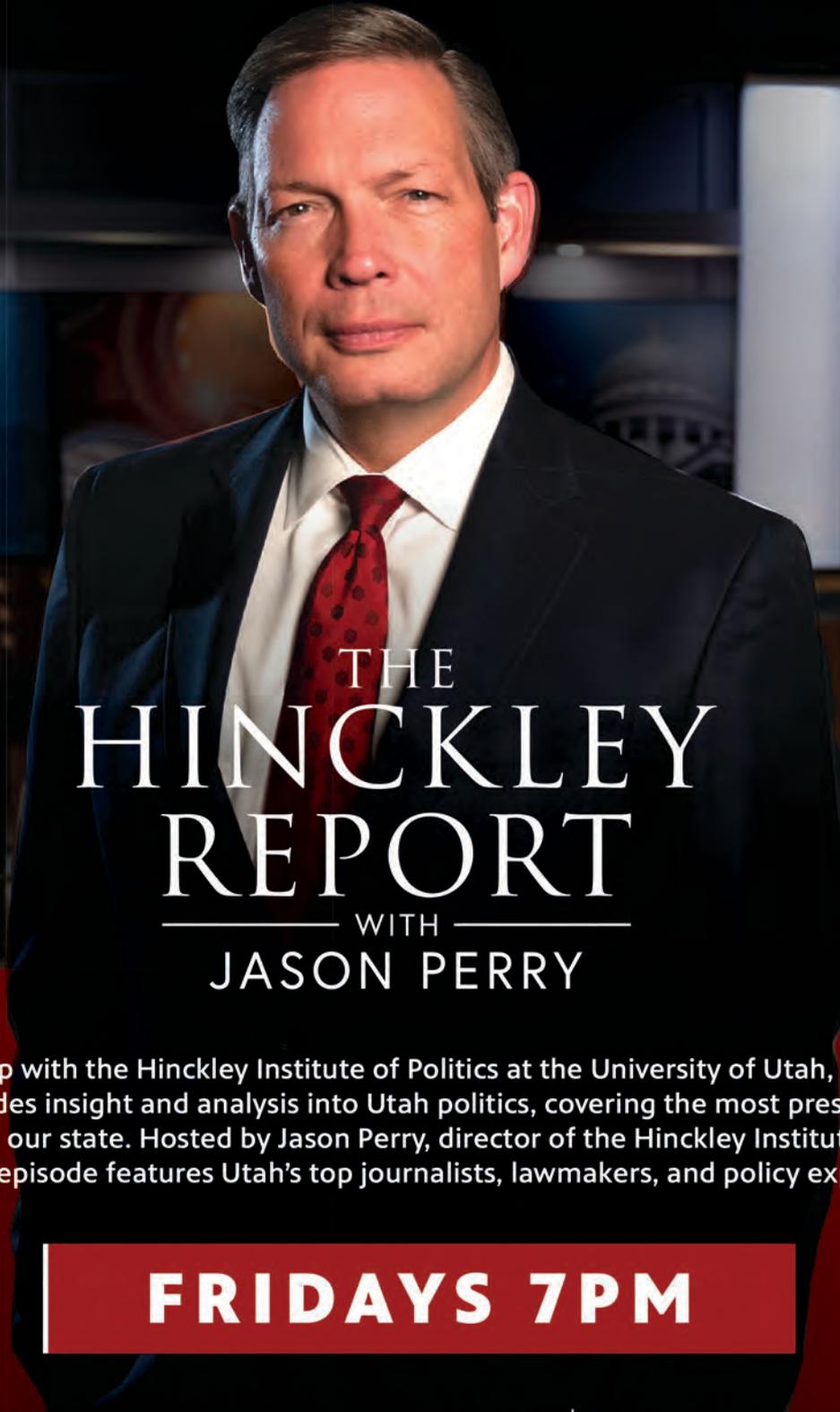
“Keep sending me *University of Utah Magazine*, please. I love staying in touch that way and the magazine is outstanding. Great work!”



We want to hear from you!

Join the discussion at magazine.utah.edu or email us at magazine@utah.edu. Comments may be edited for length and clarity.

UTAH'S WEEKLY POLITICAL ROUNDUP

A portrait of Jason Perry, a man in a dark suit, white shirt, and red tie, standing in a modern office or studio setting. The background is slightly blurred, showing office furniture and a large window.

THE HINCKLEY REPORT WITH JASON PERRY

In partnership with the Hinckley Institute of Politics at the University of Utah, The Hinckley Report provides insight and analysis into Utah politics, covering the most pressing political issues facing our state. Hosted by Jason Perry, director of the Hinckley Institute of Politics, each episode features Utah's top journalists, lawmakers, and policy experts.

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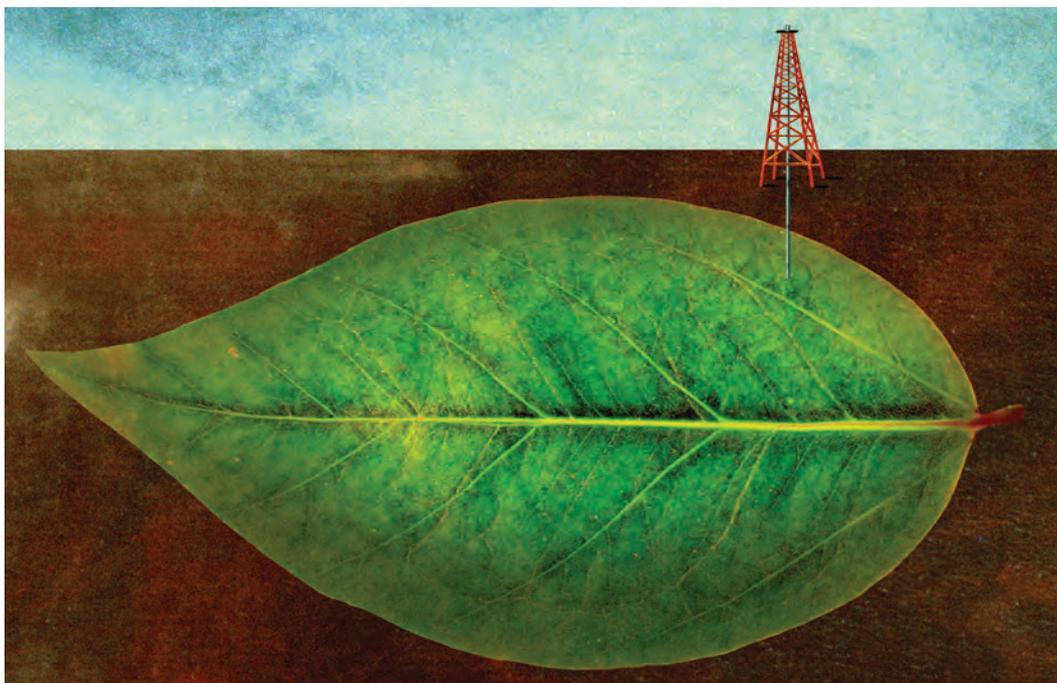
BY UTAH. FOR UTAH.

As Utahns ourselves, we know what matters most to our community. That's why our health insurance is designed to serve Utahns best. From our local customer service advocates and personalized plans to our award-winning network of providers, we're committed to keeping Utah healthy and strong. Because when we take care of each other, **we all thrive.**



HEALTH PLANS
UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

BRIAN STAUFFER



Hidden Coal Riches

Mining seams in Utah hold a hidden treasure—concentrated rare earths, the building blocks of a greener future

The key to a carbon-neutral future may be buried deep in America's coal country. U researchers have discovered significant concentrations of rare earth elements (REEs), critical for clean energy tech, near coal deposits in parts of Utah and Colorado.

"The rare earths are concentrated in the muddy shales above and below the coal seams," says study co-author Lauren Birgenheier, associate professor of geology and geophysics. "If mines are already moving rock, could they shift operations to also extract these resources vital for the energy transition?"

REEs such as neodymium and dysprosium, essential for wind turbines, EV motors, solar panels, and electronics, are largely imported from China. These 17 metallic elements, mostly found among the lanthanide series, reside in the third column and sixth row of the Periodic Table. The U.S. uses more than 8,000 tons of rare earth oxides annually, nearly all from ores processed in China.

In partnership with the Utah and Colorado Geological Surveys, the U team analyzed rock samples from the region's coal mines. They discovered REE levels often approaching 300 parts per million, the federal threshold for economically viable extraction.

"We're trying to find alternative, unconventional domestic sources for these critical minerals," says Michael Free BS'90 MS'92 PhD'94, a professor of metallurgical engineering and leader of the Department of Energy-funded project.

With promising results from 11,000 total samples so far, the researchers are seeking additional federal funding to quantify the size and quality of these REE deposits. They theorize that the rare earths, once concentrated in ancient peat bogs that became coal deposits, have migrated over time into adjacent rock layers.

The recent discoveries raise hopes that this iconic coal region, long vital for powering the nation, may play a key role in America's clean energy revolution.

NEWS ROUNDUP



The University of Utah has purchased the City Centre building for \$38 million, expanding its presence in downtown Salt Lake City. The 238,800-square-foot building, located at State Street and 400 South, includes parking and is adjacent to the UTA TRAX red line, providing a central location for future university growth.



U student Sam Watson medaled and broke records in men's speed climbing at the 2024 Paris Olympics. After qualifying to compete in the race for bronze, he scaled the 49-foot wall in 4.74 seconds, breaking the world record he set two days earlier.



Huntsman Mental Health Institute at the University of Utah in partnership with the Ad Council has launched a new public service announcement with 11 professional sports leagues for the "Love, Your Mind" campaign. The national initiative features star athletes sharing their personal mental health rituals. The campaign aims to normalize mental health discussions and direct people to free resources at loveyourmindtoday.org. The campaign has earned more than one billion impressions.



Visionary Outreach

Southeastern Utah is known for its sweeping cinematic landscapes and unspoiled open spaces. But the same remoteness that makes this wilderness so enchanting also presents unique challenges for its residents. The Utah strip of the Navajo Nation is one of the most isolated areas in the lower 48, with scarce access to services like specialized health care. There is not a single ophthalmologist, for example, for the area's 6,100 residents.

Without treatment, common vision impairments can lead to blindness, says Jeff Pettey BA'03 MBA'20, M.D., vice chair of clinical affairs at the University of Utah's John A. Moran Eye Center and the Dr. Ezekiel R. and Edna Wattis Dumke Endowed Chair for Global Outreach. He and his colleagues examined records from 2,251 Navajo Nation patients seen by Moran's outreach team between 2013 and 2021 and found that 3 percent of patients were blind, while 10 percent had moderate to severe vision loss.

"Those are very high numbers, and they occur in remote communities without access to eye care," Pettey remarks.

In 70 percent of cases, blindness was caused by curable, preventable, or treatable conditions, including cataracts and the unmet need for eye-glasses. That's why Moran Eye Center providers and staff have made near-monthly trips from Salt Lake City to the Navajo Nation since 2013, partnering with the Utah Navajo Health System (UNHS) to bring vision screenings, glasses, and sight-restoring eye surgery to residents. The outreach team also trains UNHS providers to conduct eye exams and refer complex cases to Moran ophthalmologists.

Thanks to a decade of improved access to vision services, "it's quite rare now to see someone who is actually blind from cataracts when we visit the Navajo Nation," Pettey says.

The outreach is part of Moran's donor-funded Global Outreach Division, aimed at expanding vision care to communities in Utah and around the world. Says Pettey, "We're driven by the idea that everyone deserves access to the same level of eye care, no matter where they live."

SPOTLIGHT

Navajo Nation



As the state's flagship university, the U is committed to improving the lives of all Utahns. These stories highlight how we're making an impact in every county.



Expert

The Start-up Uplifting Gen Z Girls

Launching a start-up is an audacious undertaking, and scoring coveted shelf space at a retail behemoth like Target is a feat that few entrepreneurs achieve. Yet this is precisely what SadieB Personal Care, conceived by U student Sadie Bowler and her sister Abby, has accomplished. Their line of hair care products, which now grace the aisles of more than 500 Target stores and the retailer's digital storefront, is an improbable success born from a bold idea: to create a brand that uplifts girls with offerings that support and speak to them as real people.

While pursuing her marketing degree at the U's David Eccles School of Business, Sadie, with Abby's partnership, transformed a passion for hair care into a venture that challenges convention. "Having our products in Target feels unreal," Sadie remarks. "This is exactly what our vision was, and the fact that it happened so quickly is blowing our minds." But SadieB is more than shampoos and conditioners; it's a mission to help build self-worth and success for young women. In this endeavor, SadieB fills a niche within Target's offerings, becoming one of the few hair care brands specifically marketed to and tailored for Gen Z girls.

Their journey from a high school concept to retail success was not only fueled by creativity and family support but significantly aided by the U's Lassonde Entrepreneur Institute, says

Troy D'Ambrosio BA'82, the institute's executive director and an assistant dean at the Eccles School. Sadie had access to office space, coaching, a peer network, and opportunities to showcase her brand through the institute's programs.

"SadieB is a great example of what students can accomplish as entrepreneurs at the University of Utah," adds D'Ambrosio. "She went from an idea to launching her product in stores across the country in only a few years. We look forward to seeing her company continue to grow and all the great things Sadie will accomplish in her career." D'Ambrosio notes that all U students can participate in the Lassonde Entrepreneur Institute's multifaceted offerings, and alumni have access to its entrepreneurial events and resources through Lassonde for Life.

Horned and Dangerous

Natural History Museum of Utah unveils a new dinosaur discovery with the largest frill ornaments in paleontological history

Move over, *Triceratops*—there's a new horned dino in town. The *Lokiceratops rangiformis*, meaning “Loki’s horned face that looks like a caribou,” was recently excavated from the badlands of northern Montana, and a cast skull is now on display at the Natural History Museum of Utah (NHMU) at the University of Utah.

This behemoth, which roamed the earth 78 million years ago, boasts the largest frill horns ever found on a horned dinosaur. Its distinctive features include two huge, blade-like horns on the back of its frill and a unique asymmetric spike in the middle, reminiscent of the antlers of modern-day caribou.

“This new dinosaur pushes the envelope on bizarre ceratopsian headgear,” says Joseph Sertich MS’06, co-leader of the study. “These skull ornaments are one of the keys to unlocking horned dinosaur diversity.”

The discovery of *Lokiceratops* is particularly significant as it’s the fourth centrosaurine, and fifth horned dinosaur overall, identified from a single assemblage. This unprecedented concentration of species in a small geographic area challenges assumptions about dinosaur diversity.

“Previously, paleontologists thought a maximum of two species of horned dinosaurs could coexist at the same place and time. Incredibly, we have identified five living together at the same time,” explains Mark Loewen PhD’09, U professor of geology and geophysics and researcher at NHMU. Loewen was co-lead author of the study.

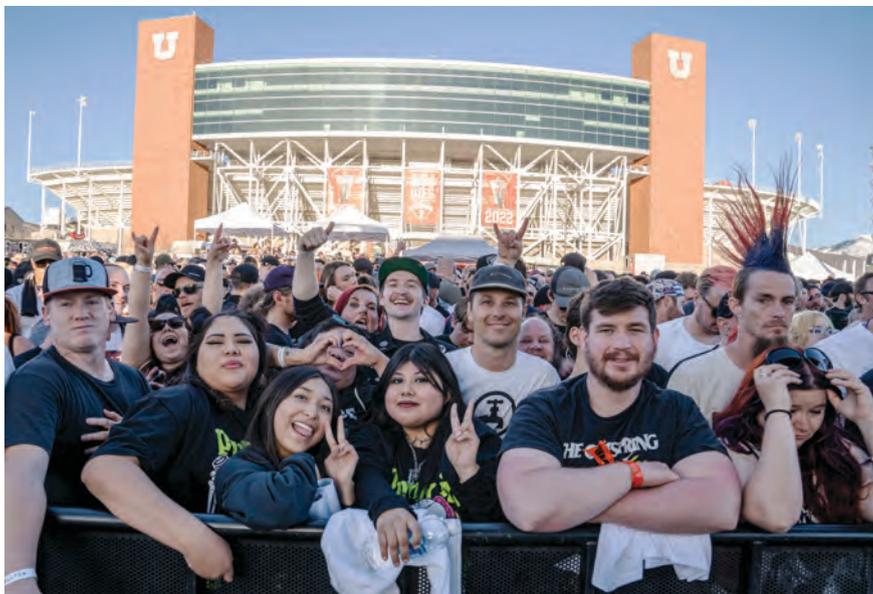
This high prevalence suggests that dinosaur diversity may be vastly underestimated. Scientists now believe that rapid evolution, possibly driven by sexual selection, led to a turnover of individual species every 100,000 to 200,000 years.

The individual fossilized skull bones of *Lokiceratops* were integrated into a state-of-the-art reconstruction of the complete skull, which is permanently reposit-ed and displayed at the Museum of Evolution in Maribo, Denmark, alongside a collection of other scientifically significant dinosaurs.



Paleontologists found *Lokiceratops*' skull in 2019 and estimate the dinosaur lived around 78 million years ago. Illustration by Andrey Atuchin.

PICTURE



No, these throngs of students and others swarming Rice-Eccles Stadium aren't there for an athletic event. These raucous fans at last spring's NOFX show were just some of the thousands who descended on campus recently for electrifying live music performances, from pulsating sets by Zeds Dead to the country stylings of Luke Combs, and from the pop rock of Imagine Dragons to legendary hits from Garth Brooks, among others.

BY THE NUMBERS

With input from the U community, we're charting an ambitious new course to elevate our national standing while delivering unparalleled positive impact across the state. The road map calls for major growth, enhanced student success, and new ways to address critical issues facing Utahns. By boosting graduation rates, job placement, and research funding, Impact 2030 seeks to significantly increase the value of a University of Utah degree.

Impact 2030 Goals



40,000 STUDENTS
(currently 35,000)



80% graduation rate
(currently 65%)



\$1 billion
*in research funding
(currently \$691 million)*

90%
job placement at graduation

Top 10
public university with unsurpassed societal impact

Impact the lives of all
3.5 million Utahns

Snapping the Chains of Addiction

Funded by a Wellcome Leap grant, U scientists are developing a revolutionary new treatment for substance use disorders

Every four minutes, someone dies from the grip of addiction. But U researchers are developing a groundbreaking new treatment that could loosen addiction's stranglehold.

The Huntsman Mental Health Institute at the University of Utah has been selected by Wellcome Leap, a global health nonprofit, to create an innovative, noninvasive approach for treating substance use disorders. The interdisciplinary team, led by professor of psychiatry Brian Mickey, will use a novel ultrasound device to modulate brain regions associated with opioid addiction.

"Addictions are driven by dysfunction in deep brain areas that are challenging to access," explains Mickey. "Our goal is to develop circuit-targeted interventions that can restore healthy neural functioning and break the cycle of addiction."

The \$50 million Untangling Addiction program funds teams working on scalable ways to assess addiction risk, quantify its impacts, and devise new treatments. Mickey's group—with experts spanning psychiatry, engineering, neuroscience, radiology, and social work—is one of just 14 teams selected to share the funds worldwide.

"Substance use disorder is a significant global health problem, and yet the treatment options are limited," says Mickey. "This funding will help us validate and generate the data to support the next



critical step: an efficacy trial to determine the effectiveness of the intervention."

The announcement comes amid construction of a new translational research facility focused on brain health and mental illness, notes Huntsman Mental Health Institute CEO Mark Rapaport. "Solving complex mental health issues requires diverse disciplines working together in new ways," he notes. "There is hope, if we can change trajectories through innovative thinking."



PICTURE

Scaling new heights, the U climbing team clinched the USA Climbing Collegiate National Championship for a third straight year. They swept the bouldering category and sent eight top climbers to the next world championships, coming in 2025.

The Truth Is Out There

UFOs are typically the stuff of summer blockbusters and sci-fi novels, not Congressional hearings. But in July 2023, the House Oversight Committee listened to testimony from retired U.S. Navy Commander David Fravor about a mysterious flying object that he and three others observed over the Pacific Ocean in 2004. The hearings riveted the world by bringing unidentified anomalous phenomena (UAP) out of the “alien truther” realm and into the mainstream.

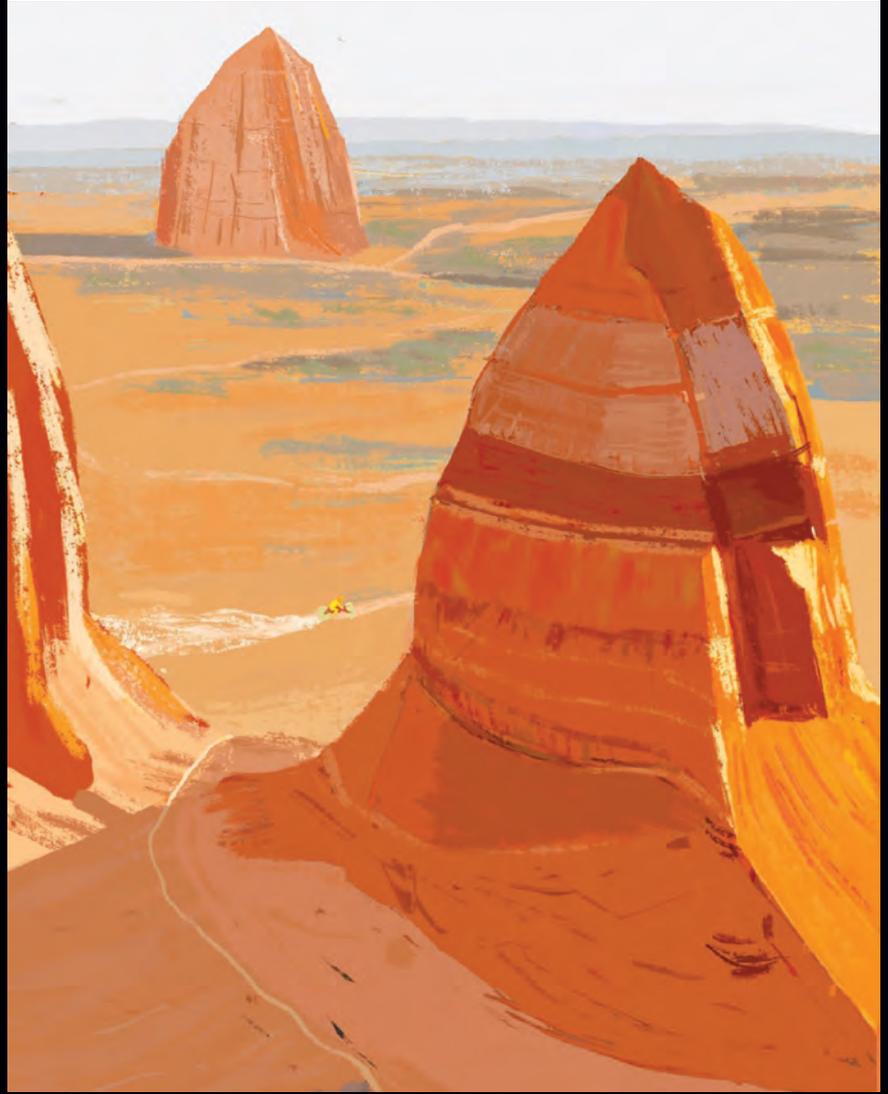
The U.S. Department of Defense is increasingly taking UAP—the new U.S. government name for objects formerly (and still more commonly) known as unidentified flying objects (UFOs)—as a serious threat to national security. Yet there is limited research on UAP sightings, making it hard to analyze patterns.

Now, University of Utah geographers are contributing to this under-studied area. In a 2023 study published in *Scientific Reports*, the researchers attempted to understand whether local environmental factors affect the number of sighting

reports. Reviewing 98,000 reports from the National UFO Research Center, the study authors found that most sightings occurred in the western U.S.—perhaps not surprising given the West’s historic association with UAP in locales like Nevada’s Area 51 and Roswell, New Mexico. The researchers attribute the prevalence of sightings to the West’s physical geography—lots of wide-open spaces and dark skies. UAP-reporting hot spots also had credible relationships with air traffic and military activity, suggesting that people are spotting real objects but not recognizing what they are.

“There’s more technology in the sky than ever before, so the question is, what are people actually seeing?” asks Richard Medina PhD’09, U associate professor of geography and study lead author. “It’s an important question to answer, because any uncertainty can be a potential threat to national security.”

Understanding the environmental context will make it easier to explain sightings and help identify truly anomalous objects that are a legitimate threat, the researchers say.



Illustration's Emerging Stars

In just four years, the U's reanimated illustration program has gone from blank canvas to masterpiece-in-progress—growing from five students to nearly 60 and nurturing a new generation of visual storytellers.

“We weave illustration-specific skills with the broader art curriculum,” explains Michael Hirshon, assistant professor of illustration. “Students learn technical skills across disciplines, then focus those abilities on illustration challenges—developing concepts, telling stories, and bringing ideas to life.”

The program's palette includes editorial illustrations, book covers, advertisements, and more. It also keeps pace with industry trends, embracing digital tools and emerging technologies. “We're preparing students for the evolving landscape of illustration,” notes Hirshon, who has also had a successful art career, with work appearing in *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, and many other top-tier publications.

Relaunched in 2020 after being sunsetted more than a decade ago, the program housed in the College of Fine Arts in the Department of Art & Art History helps students become entrepreneurs as well as artists. They engage with visiting professional illustrators and take courses to learn essential business skills like building websites, negotiating rates, and filing taxes for gig work, says Danielle Horlacher BFA'24, a scientific illustrator for the U's College of Engineering. Recently, Horlacher's illustrations for a study on a novel type of battery helped the research gain the cover of the prestigious *Energy & Environmental Science* journal. “Good illustration can bridge the gap between groundbreaking research and public and academic recognition,” Horlacher remarks.

The program helps students draw a line from the classroom to a career, adds Hirshon. “And I believe that in the world of art, creativity and practicality can make a perfect picture.”

Image credits clockwise from top left: Sally Logue, Callie Sweeten BFA'24, Hui Zheng, Danielle Horlacher BFA'24, Piper Leishman BFA'24, Maren Lawrence BFA'23, Josh Hart



Students Shine in Space Engineering

The U robotic club clinched third at NASA's Lunabotics event with their robuster rover designs

Why settle for a few small steps when you can robotically move lunar mountains? Just ask the award-winning rover team from the U. The Utah Student Robotics club recently returned from NASA's Lunabotics competition at Kennedy Space Center, where they finished an impressive third in multiple categories for their design of a moon rover tasked with building berms—essentially, protective embankments—from the regolith layer of rocky debris that blankets the lunar surface.

“The task of robotically building berm structures will be important for crewed lunar missions,” explains NASA's Kurt Leucht. “These teams are literally helping prepare for our Artemis missions to the moon.”

To mimic harsh moon conditions, the U students had to suit up in protective gear during the competition arena challenges. “We brought the heaviest robot and used it to build the biggest berm,” says Andrew Tolton, the team's vice president, describing their “go big or go home” strategy.

But it wasn't just about brute force. “We had many deliverables besides berm construction,” Tolton notes. Teams developed full system engineering plans, gave presentations to NASA judges, and did community outreach teaching STEM principles. Utah's rover could even switch into autonomous mode for extra credit. The robots were also scored on efficiency, with points docked for excessive mass, power usage, and bandwidth.

The Lunabotics competition, an annual NASA-run event since 2010, engages university students in real-world challenges tied to the Artemis moon program. The U team has been a force, nabbing second place last year, while another U group won a separate NASA challenge earlier in 2023.

As lunar exploration ramps up, it's these budding Utah engineers who could be first to get cosmic construction underway, putting their stamp on humanity's return to the moon.

Immersive Virtual Reality Trains Miners for the Real World

It's the end of a shift in an underground mine, and you're midway through a safety checklist. Suddenly, smoke fills the cavern and emergency lights flash. Your co-workers yell, and chaos ensues. What do you do?

Before you panic, you remember that this is a practice scenario in an innovative, virtual world simulation helping participants prepare for the worst.

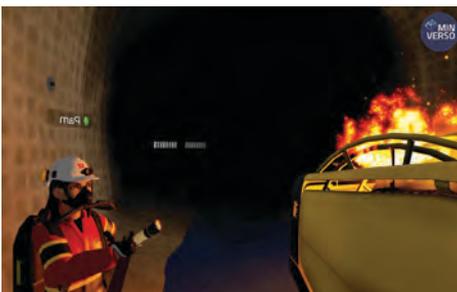
The Center for Mine Safety and Health at the Department of Mining Engineering at the University of Utah, in collaboration with the Chile-based company Minverso, has developed the initial phase of a first-ever metaverse platform that includes a mining training program using virtual reality. This collaborative initiative blends cutting-edge technology with academic expertise for the benefits of both students and the mining industry.

"This mining metaverse is not just technological innovation," says mining department chair Charles Kocsis. "It is, most importantly, a product of shared experience and dedication to providing students and the mining industry a holistic and immersive learning experience."

The initial phase features a mine rescue simulation where workers handle a fire in an underground machine. Students at the department's open house experienced the VR firsthand, navigating a virtual classroom and mine. Future plans include augmented reality for real-time interactions and remote equipment operation.

"VR technology promises not only to serve future mining companies that can customize the experience to their own sites, but also to serve as a recruitment tool for mining engineering programs," says Minverso's commercial director, Dallin Wood BS'07.

This platform bridges theory and practice, preparing students for industry challenges while prioritizing safety. Its appeal spans from high school students to senior professionals, showcasing its potential to revolutionize mining education and safety training worldwide.



Elevating Utah's Medical Education

The new Spencer Fox Eccles School of Medicine building promises top-tier training and facilities for tomorrow's health care leaders

In a pivotal moment for medical education in Utah, the U celebrated the completion of the structural phase for its new Spencer Fox Eccles School of Medicine building. The "topping off" ceremony in June marked a significant milestone in the construction of this state-of-the-art facility, which is expected to open its doors in 2026.

The eight-story, 211,457-square-foot edifice, nestled in the heart of the University of Utah Health campus, will replace the 1960s-era medical school building. It will feature high-tech labs, tailored classrooms, an advanced simulation center, and collaborative spaces to serve more than 500 students.

"I have long believed that no state or region can become truly great without a world-class medical center at its nucleus," said Spencer

Fox Eccles BS'56 at the topping-off ceremony. Eccles, the school's namesake and CEO of both the George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles Foundation and the Nora Eccles Treadwell Foundation, has played a central role in the creation of the \$185 million facility. Funds from a landmark \$110 million gift from the two foundations provide support for medical education programs and cardiovascular research. "When completed, this facility will help ensure the university provides the highest quality medical education for the doctors who serve Utah and the entire Intermountain West."

U President Taylor Randall HBA'90 echoed this sentiment, saying, "The Spencer Fox Eccles School of Medicine will propel the U forward as a world-class integrated academic medical institution."

Leading the Charge in Fintech Excellence

If you've ever split a bill via Venmo or checked your bank balance on your phone, you've experienced a taste of fintech—the convergence of finance and technology. Fintech is all about using apps, data, and digital platforms to reimagine how we spend, save, invest, and access money in our modern world.

At the cutting edge of this fintech frontier is the U's new Stena Center for Financial Technology—an entrepreneurial hub launched in 2023 through a partnership between the U and the Stena Foundation, which was founded by Jana and Steve Smith BS'93. Its bold mission is to establish Utah as the worldwide capital for fintech innovation. In a recent *U Rising* podcast, director Ryan Christiansen, a former senior VP at Mastercard, discussed Utah's unique approach to shaking up the fintech world with fresh ideas and big ambitions.

What makes Utah well positioned in fintech?

Our fintech foundation runs deep, tracing back over a century to visionary figures like Marriner S. Eccles, the first Federal Reserve chair hailing from Utah. This financial pedigree coalesces with our state's spirit of technological disruption—from WordPerfect to Adobe, a potent culture of tech innovation courses through our state.

Quantifying this advantage, over 160,000 Utahns are employed in finance and tech roles with average annual salaries approaching six figures. Global titans like

Mastercard and SoFi have staked their claim here, recognizing the fertile terrain and talent pool.

How is the Stena Center redefining fintech education?

Our multidisciplinary scope defies traditional academic siloes, merging the business acumen of the David Eccles School of Business with the coding prowess of the John and Marcia Price College of Engineering and the regulatory insights of the S.J. Quinney College of Law. This integrated approach, combined with direct partnerships with local companies, immerses students in real-world challenges, preparing them for immediate employment and playing a crucial role in fostering start-ups and collaborations. This year, the results of this hands-on strategy are evident as our cohort of 19 students graduated. The forthcoming fintech master's program will serve as a capstone to this enriched talent pipeline.

What is the fintechXstudio?

The Stena fintechXstudio is designed to energize Utah's fintech scene by connecting promising start-ups with the critical resources they need to succeed. We provide funding to these start-ups, alongside comprehensive mentorship and essential services. This not only accelerates their growth but also helps us cultivate the robust ecosystem of innovation right here in Utah, making it a true hub for financial technology.



Web Extra Listen to the full podcast with Christiansen at magazine.utah.edu/fintech

A Feast of Student Services

What's the secret sauce for college student success? At the U, it's a sizzling campus life seasoned with mental and physical health, a hearty portion of financial wellness, and a dash of civic engagement. The master chef orchestrating this buffet: Student Affairs. With more than 20 departments, Student Affairs turns every U student into a VIP by dishing out health and wellness resources, social events, volunteer opportunities, a safety net of basic needs, and much more. Check out these stats for a taste of how U students are feasting on the offerings.



In academic year
2022-23:



662,235 UCard swipes at the Eccles Student Life Center, the main campus recreation facility



15,022 appointments at the University Counseling Center

7,473 students participated in volunteer activities through the Bennion Center

5,126 students attended Crimson Nights, the U's biggest campus party in fall 2023



5,345 students served by the Financial Wellness Center



1,021 student-focused events posted on Campus Connect

750+ students employed by Student Affairs

526 student clubs and organizations registered



341 students served at the Basic Needs Collective, which connects students to resources for housing, food, and other needs

A Legacy in Motion

Tanner Dance Program's 75-year journey continues to inspire and transform lives through artistic expression

From pirouettes to pliés, the U's Tanner Dance Program has been twirling its way into the hearts of Utahns for 75 years. Founded in 1949 by visionary dance educator Virginia Tanner BS'41, the program has blossomed into a cornerstone of arts education in the state, reaching over 40,000 children and adults annually.

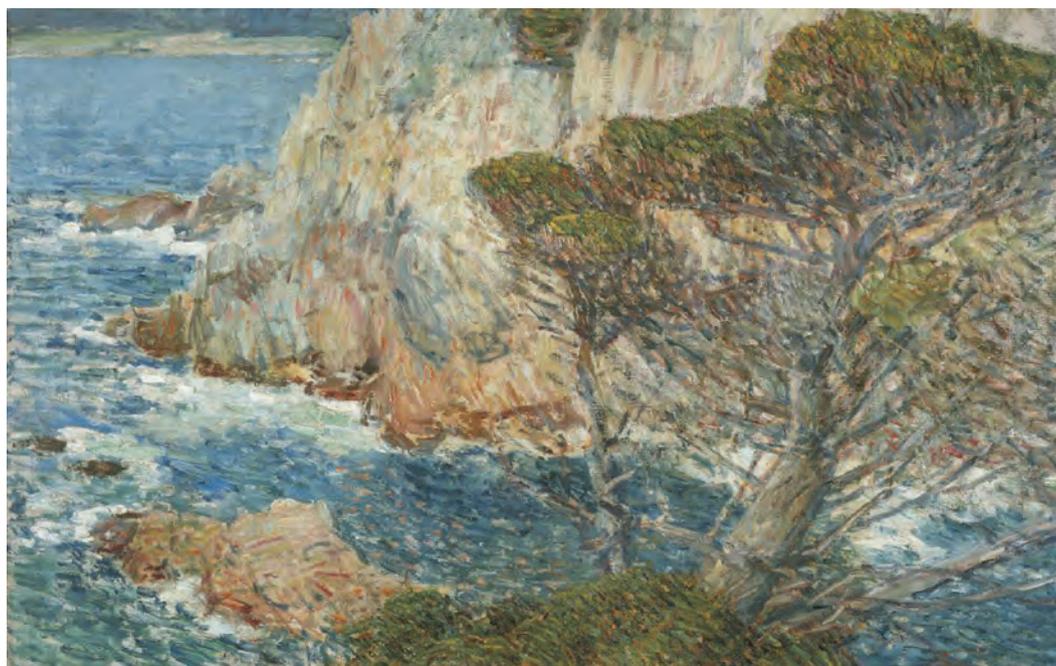
"Tanner Dance is more than just movement—it's a catalyst for personal growth and creativity," says Mary Ann Lee BA'68, artistic director. "We're not just teaching dance steps, we're nurturing the next generation of innovative thinkers and compassionate citizens."

Tanner Dance's influence extends far beyond the stage. Through its Arts in Education Program, it serves 7,800 students in 40 schools, with a focus on underserved populations. Programming for individuals with disabilities has also expanded.

"I love Tanner Dance because it's a new way for me to express myself as a person with a disability," shares Drake Becker, an adaptive needs dance class participant. "The productions make us feel special as performers."

As the Tanner Dance Program celebrates its diamond anniversary, aspiring dancers and dance enthusiasts can visit tannerdance.utah.edu to explore class offerings and view the exciting lineup of fall and spring performances. From the Fine Arts Preschool to the Children's Dance Theatre and the other contemporary companies, there's a place for every dancer to shine.

The Tanner Dance legacy is built on Virginia Tanner's enduring philosophy of developing "useful, imaginative, worthwhile human beings" through dance. This inspiring vision continues to guide the program as it leaps boldly into its next 75 years, fostering creativity, discipline, and a love for the arts in Utah's youth and beyond, says Lee.



PICTURE

Blue Grass, Green Skies: *American Impressionism and Realism* from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art is on view now through December 29 at the U's Utah Museum of Fine Arts. Showcasing 17 iconic works by artistic pioneers like Mary Cassatt and Childe Hassam, this exhibition marks 150 years since Impressionism's infamous 1874 Paris debut. It's presented concurrently with *Photo-Secession*, highlighting the historical interplay between painting and photography at the dawn of the 20th century.

F. CHILDE HASSAM, *POINT LOBOS, CARMEL* (1914), OIL ON CANVAS, 28 5/16 X 36 3/16 IN. (71.91 X 91.92 CM), MR. AND MRS. WILLIAM PRESTON HARRISON COLLECTION, AMERICAN ART

Computing's Bold Future

The U's new John and Marcia Price Computing and Engineering Building will usher in a new era for tech education and innovation

The tech world is evolving at breakneck speeds, and the University of Utah is stepping up its game. The U recently broke ground on the John and Marcia Price Computing and Engineering Building, marking a significant leap forward in educating future tech leaders.

This new facility isn't just about expanding space—it's about creating an environment where the next generation of computer scientists and engineers can thrive. With cutting-edge resources at their fingertips, students will be better equipped to tackle the challenges of our rapidly evolving digital world.

The facility will be the new home of the Kahlert School of Computing and its programs in artificial intelligence, fintech, cybersecurity, and others. And it will allow the College of Engineering to increase student capacity by over 500 annually.

"In the realm of computer science, there exists an intense, worldwide competition

for talent. To attract and retain the best and brightest at the University of Utah, we must provide them with a world-class environment," says John Price BS'56.

Gov. Spencer Cox noted the building's significance for the university's enrollment, research, and reputation, as well as Utah's economy. Since 2020, the state's engineering and computer science workforce has generated 238,400 jobs and \$19.1 billion in earnings. The U already graduates half of all computer science students in the Utah System of Higher Education. "This powerful collaboration among state and industry leaders along with our dedicated alumni and friends will provide a modern, high-tech environment for the leaders and innovators of tomorrow," adds President Taylor Randall HBA'90.

Located near the Warnock Engineering Building, the facility's construction is funded by private donations and \$118 million in state appropriations.



The U Breaks Ground on a New Center for Medical Innovation

The James LeVoy Sorenson Center for Medical Innovation (SCMI) won't just be another building on campus; it's a launchpad for the future of health care. The U broke ground last spring on the \$50 million innovative facility, which will rise on campus at 15 S. Mario Capecchi Drive, with doors set to open in spring 2026.

Named in honor of prolific inventor James LeVoy Sorenson, whose 50-plus patents include the disposable surgical face cover and single-use intravenous catheter, the center embodies the university's drive to advance medical science and patient care. A generous \$22 million gift from the Sorenson Legacy Foundation made this vision a reality.

"The James LeVoy Sorenson Center for Medical Innovation exemplifies our commitment to entrepreneurialism and accelerating the transfer of the U's research into practical use," says U President Taylor Randall HBA'90. "The facility will be a national leader and have influence that reaches well beyond campus, shaping the future of health care for generations to come."

Spanning 60,000 square feet over four levels, the SCMI will house advanced prototyping labs, a clinical bio-tissue surgery suite, and start-up incubators. These spaces will foster cross-campus collaboration and nurture both student and faculty-led ventures, driving university licensing opportunities as well as state economic growth.

"The Sorenson Legacy Foundation is so pleased that this wonderful building, the James LeVoy Sorenson Center for Medical Innovation, will carry on my father's incredible spirit of medical device innovation, as well as his compassionate spirit toward those who suffer," says Ann Sorenson Crocker BS'74, family representative of the Sorenson Legacy Foundation.





BELONG IN BUSINESS





Get to Know the Club

The Ken Garff University Club operates in designated spaces on all three floors of the south end zone building. Some areas of the building are closed to club members. On game days, only football season ticket holders and athletics donors can access the building.

Restaurant Level
(A) Restaurant and bar with daily specials and a seasonally rotating menu; (C) Hospitality breakfast station open M-F; (D) AV-capable boardroom for private events; (E) Patios for dining and events in warmer months

Suite Level
(F) Private suites available to work in; (G) Spaces available to rent for private events

Field Level
(H) Large central space hosts away-game watch parties, yoga in summer, and other events



WELCOME TO **THE CLUB**



FROM GOURMET BITES TO
SOCIAL DELIGHTS, **THE KEN
GARFF UNIVERSITY CLUB**
ADDS A FRESH SPARK TO OUR
EVOLVING CAMPUS SCENE.



BY **LISA ANDERSON**
ILLUSTRATION BY **ROD HUNT**



PICTURE THIS:

A SUNNY EVENING AT THE UNIVERSITY

of Utah's Rice-Eccles Stadium. You're on a terrace overlooking the emerald green of the field, cold beverage in hand. Friends surround you, laughter fills the air, and delicious bites await. This isn't game day—it's simply an evening at the Ken Garff University Club, campus's new year-round social hub.

Nestled in the stadium's chic 2021 south end zone addition, the Ken Garff Red Zone, this members-only private club and events venue bolsters efforts to inject energy and life into campus, creating what U leaders call "college town magic." With an upscale restaurant and the only liquor license on campus, it's a welcome addition to the U's dining options. Add to that a packed calendar of social events, and the club makes for an ideal gathering spot.

"The Ken Garff University Club offers a unique way to connect with the university while enjoying the premium benefits of a private club," says Melisa Griffith MBA'16, senior membership director. "Our goal is to foster connections and provide a memorable experience for every member, whether they're having dinner with friends, networking with colleagues, or celebrating the Utes."

The University Club belongs to a network of reciprocal private social establishments around the country, which includes city and country clubs and a growing "stadium club" division. As one of the latter, it strikes a balance between relaxed and refined, with a welcoming reputation. While many members are U faculty, staff, and alumni, membership is open to all—no university affiliation required. It's also family-friendly, a rarity among private social clubs in the area.

Jennifer Nelson calls the University Club her social "home base." As recent transplants to Utah, she and her husband were drawn to the club's potential for making friends. "We love coming to the monthly socials and meeting new people," she says.

The club's location might suggest a sports-centric focus, but it caters to all kinds of interests. "The events are fun and so varied," Nelson notes, from craft classes to tailgate parties to family nights and more. "You can find what appeals to you."

Here's how the club offers a little something for everyone.

FAQs

What is the club's connection to Ken Garff?

The Garffs are not directly involved in the club's management, but their name is connected to the club through the south end zone renovation project, which they helped fund.

Who can become a member?

Anyone can join. Though many members are affiliated with the U, it's not a requirement.

Do you get football tickets in the south end zone if you're a member?

No, football tickets are sold separately.

How much does it cost?

Monthly dues range from \$39 (for the U faculty and staff base membership) to \$145, depending on the membership level, and there is a \$150-200 initiation fee. All initiation fees support the Champion League scholarship fund, established with help from the Garffs to benefit students campus-wide, not just student-athletes.

Who is included in a membership?

The account owner, spouse, and dependents under 26 living at home. Members can invite guests if accompanying them.

Cont'd

FOR THE FOODIE

Just a quick glance at the University Club's menu is enough to get the mouth watering: tuna poke salad with soy-sesame vinaigrette, duck confit panini with whole grain mustard and brie, aged ribeye with parmesan truffle fries.

With gourmet offerings and stunning mountain and valley views, the club's restaurant elevates the campus dining scene. Rotating seasonal menus and daily themed specials keep things fresh for even frequent diners. There's a different taco special and margaritas and mocktails every Tuesday, for example. Thursdays are for sampling the globe, with dishes from a specific national cuisine. Each Saturday brings new beef and seafood options for the Surf & Turf dinner. The club also celebrates special occasions with themed meals, like St. Patrick's Day dinner, Mother's Day brunch, and a Father's Day barbecue with a live blues band.

"We want this to be more than a dining experience," explains Griffith. "We want this to be a destination."

FOR THE FAN

If there's anything better than cheering on your team, it's cheering them on alongside other fans. The University Club scratches that itch for Utes enthusiasts. During football season, there's a pep rally before each home game. While the south end zone building is closed to club members on game days (it's reserved for season ticket holders and athletics donors during home games), the club hosts an exclusive tailgate on Guardsman Way with food, music, and a bar. For away games, the club offers the next best thing to attending in person—watch parties, where Utah fans can eat, drink, and celebrate TDs together.

Traveling fans can take advantage of access to the network's other stadium clubs. Currently that includes Big 12 schools Baylor, Texas Tech, and the University of Arizona, with the possibility of more in the future.

The celebrations go beyond the end zone, too. The club offers an exclusive shuttle to the Huntsman Center for several gymnastics meets and men's and women's basketball games. Members can enjoy a meal, then catch a ride in time for tip-off or the start of the meet. The club also hosts special athletics events—members got to meet the Red Rocks last season, for example—as well as watch parties for major games and meets.

FOR THE PROFESSIONAL

"Connecting with people is an important part of my job," says Jacob Bastian, a development director who fundraises for scholarships at the U. That's what attracted him to the University Club. "This is a great place to network. You never know who you might meet who could help you."



▲ **See for Yourself** The University Club is hosting an open house exclusive to *University of Utah Magazine* readers on Thursday, Nov. 21. Visit magazine.utah.edu/kguc to learn more and register.



The club aims to be a haven for professionals, supplying workspaces, Wi-Fi, office supplies, and meeting venues with A/V capabilities. Members can kick off the workday at the hospitality breakfast station, then retreat to a private suite for focused work. The restaurant is a classy setting for business lunches, and professionals can expand their circles at the club's social events.

U employees enjoy special rates on individual memberships, with monthly dues starting at \$39. University departments can buy memberships for business use, provided the funding doesn't come from state-appropriated resources.

"We also have corporate memberships, and many companies use the club for various events," says Griffith. Members pay no booking fees for venues, though a minimum food and beverage purchase is required for certain spaces.



FOR THE FAMILY

Spending Easter with his entire extended family is Ben Fogel's favorite club experience so far. "The brunch spread was amazing, along with the animal petting zoo that the club brought in for the kids," he remarks.

As the area's only private social club that allows kids, the University Club works to create enjoyable experiences for all ages.

Is the club open on game day?

No, the building is only open to certain ticket holders and donors on game days, but members can attend the club's exclusive tailgate on Guardsman Way.

Is it affiliated with the Crimson Club?

No, the Ken Garff University Club is separate from the Crimson Club.

What about parking?

The club offers complimentary parking in the west stadium lot while members and their guests visit the club.

Every Friday night, children eat for free, and once a month, there's a family night where kids can engage in fun activities while parents enjoy an evening out. The club also hosts seasonal events, from Easter egg hunts to pumpkin carving parties, giving families plenty of opportunities to make memories.



FOR THE SOCIAL BUTTERFLY

At its core, the Ken Garff University Club is about social connection, and its calendar is packed with events: live music performances, craft nights, monthly socials, hands-on classes like flower arranging and sushi making, Saturday morning yoga followed by brunch in summer, and "Appy" hour every Thursday and Friday, to name a few.

For those who love to throw their own shindigs, the club offers a waiver to members on room rental fees for private gatherings, like parties, weddings, and reunions.

"If you need to hold events, a membership makes a lot of sense," says Griffith, noting the significant savings. "There are a lot of possibilities with the spaces," she adds. "We can make it as grand or intimate as you want. And our events team is incredible. They make magic happen." **U**

Lisa Anderson is associate editor of Utah Magazine.

START EACH DAY WITH A QUESTION: HOW CAN WE REWRITE MEDICAL BOOKS?

The Center for Medical Innovation (CMI) at University of Utah
Health makes unconventional thinking *conventional*.

That's what happens when students, faculty, and entrepreneurs work
together to solve problems and develop innovative medical solutions.

Since 2012, our Bench to Bedside competition has led to hundreds of new
medical patents – advancing what's possible in improving human health.

[Learn more about what's on our minds.](#)





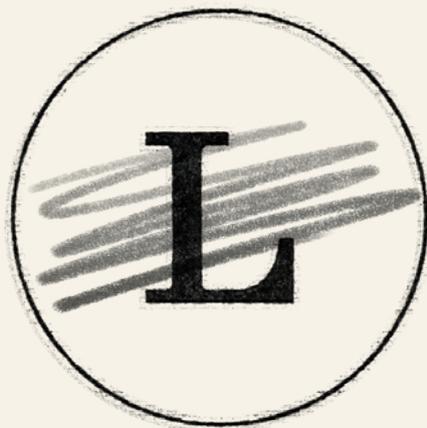
Despite
waning trust
in higher
education, the
tangible and
intangible returns
of a degree
— from career
earnings to life
satisfaction
—hold strong.

- Is
- College
- Still
- Worth It?

by
Seth
Bracken

Illustration by
Mike
McQuade





LET'S REWIND THE CLOCK BACK to the early 2010s. The Great Recession grips the economy, *Avatar* is smashing box office records, and American optimism about higher education is at a peak. A whopping 86 percent of college graduates believed their education was a good investment. Even more striking, 96 percent of Democratic parents—and outdoing them, 99 percent of Republican parents—expected their children to attend college, according to studies from Gallup and Pew Research.

Today, views on higher education have shifted dramatically—only 41 percent of young adults now see a college degree as very important, a sharp drop from 74 percent a decade ago. Similarly, confidence in higher education has waned, with just about one-third of Americans holding positive views. In a striking shift from the college-oriented mindset of parents a decade earlier, nearly half of American parents now express a preference *against* their children enrolling in a four-year college.

Skepticism around rising tuition costs and career prospects has cast a shadow over the perceived value of a college degree. Yet a deeper look at factors like median earnings, job outlooks across disciplines, and the intangible benefits of higher education paint a more nuanced picture—one where strategic planning and perseverance during those college years can pave the way for a rewarding future professionally and personally. And at the U, the path to an enriching post-graduate life is continuously being enhanced.

President Taylor Randall HBA'90 says institutions must adapt to increase the enduring value of a degree. “The data overwhelmingly show that obtaining a degree is nearly always the most effective way to enhance your career prospects and life opportunities,” he notes. “I see our students overcoming challenges every day. Their success stories are not just statistics—they are powerful reminders of how education transforms lives and builds a brighter future. And that, fundamentally, is what we commit to nurturing here at the U.”

The first in a three-part series exploring the value of higher education in the Beehive State

“

THE VALUE OF A UNIVERSITY DEGREE EXTENDS BEYOND PERSONAL BENEFIT—IT IS A KEY PILLAR OF OUR NATIONAL ECONOMY.”

— President Taylor Randall

Against the Current

Despite declining national college enrollment, the U has bucked the trend with a 24 percent increase in first-year students since 2020, reaching record highs. What's behind this success? It's multifaceted. Amid widespread skepticism that a degree is no longer worth the investment, the U has proactively improved. The revamped U Career Success center, for instance, isn't just about listing jobs—it's a launchpad for crafting impactful careers. The U is equipping students with problem-solving skills that are in high demand in today's labor market, says Katie Hoffman-Abby BS'84, the center's director. “We've transformed our approach, partnering with hundreds of leading employers locally, regionally, and nationally who know that our graduates are well prepared,” she notes. “These types of relationships and job placements are nearly impossible to replicate outside of higher ed.”

Deciding to go to college is just the start of many important decisions, notes Hoffman-Abby. And while any major can result in a successful career, it's important to make a plan. “We meet with thousands of students each semester, conduct job fairs, take headshots, help students find internships, offer a closet to borrow or keep interview clothes, and proactively recruit employers to hire our students,” Hoffman-Abby says. “No matter the major, you need to make a career plan. That's where we come in. We're here to help make one that fits each student.”

And efforts are paying off. The U boasts the highest median earnings for grads of any public institution in the state at \$64,000. Hoffman-Abby stresses, “Our motto, ‘early and often,’ underpins our strategy. Engage with us, and together, we'll pave your path to success.”

Debunking the ‘Degree to Nowhere’

It's true that starting salaries can differ across disciplines, but a close look at long-term trends reveals a complex and encouraging picture. Students who graduate in STEM fields often have higher earnings right out of school than, say, humanities majors, notes Cameron Vakilian BA'11, director of advising, outreach, and experiential learning for the College of Humanities. But that changes over time. In fact, by age 40, the average earnings of people who majored in fields like social science or history have caught up to their STEM and business counterparts, according to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey. “There is no one-size-fits-all approach to selecting a major,” says Vakilian. “The world needs engineers, scientists, and mathematicians. But we also need English majors who can articulate complex ideas and foster understanding, and communication majors who can bridge gaps and inspire change.”

As the job market evolves with new fields like artificial intelligence, having a mix of different academic backgrounds is crucial, notes Vakilian. To keep an eye on emerging market demands, Utah state agencies track which majors employers need most. Notably, more than 80 percent of degrees from the U are in

these critical areas, including 55 percent of all STEM degrees from public universities statewide.



The True Cost of Education

The sticker price of college is just a starting point. At the U, students are paying less on average now—\$5,236 in 2023, compared to \$5,337 in 2020—thanks to financial aid and scholarships. Since 2020, despite a slight tuition increase, the inflation-adjusted cost has dropped by 17 percent, and Utah leads the nation with the lowest average student debt. Moreover, Utahns with college degrees generally earn an extra \$20,000 annually over those with only a high school diploma.

There are decent-paying jobs that don't require a degree; plumbers, for instance, earn about \$60,000 annually. However, the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects fewer than 10,000 new plumbing jobs by 2031. Conversely, the most rapidly expanding job sectors for those with just a high school diploma—like home health aides and food service workers—typically offer wages that top out around \$31,000 a year.

“The rewards are clear—college graduates see a substantial in-

come boost, lower rates of poverty and unemployment, and greater confidence about the future,” points out Andrea Thomas Brandley MPP'20, a senior education analyst at the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute. Beyond the financial gains, her research uncovers another compelling reality: degree holders experience much higher measures of personal well-being. College graduates not only enjoy better economic outcomes but also report significantly higher levels of happiness, health, and optimism about their futures compared to those without degrees.

Meanwhile, the demand for college-educated talent continues to climb, rapidly outpacing the supply and further boosting the college wage premium. According to global consulting firm Korn Ferry, there could be a shortfall of up to 6.5 million degree-holding workers by the end of the decade, heralding a looming crisis in workforce readiness and economic stability.

“The value of a university degree extends beyond personal benefit—it is a key pillar of our national economy,” says Randall. “Education is more than a path to a better job. It's an indispensable asset that prepares individuals not only to contribute but to lead in an increasingly complex world.”



S COLLEGE CAMPUSES EMPTY each spring, the graduating students face a daunting reality: the job market they're entering often requires a resume already dotted with experience. It's the perennial catch-22—jobs require experience, but experience comes from jobs. How can recent graduates navigate this dilemma?

Most colleges help students get some professional exposure, but the Goff Strategic Leadership Center at the U goes a step beyond.

It offers specialized classes where students engage directly with organizations. “These opportunities often represent students' first real foray into the professional world, providing resume-building experiences under the guidance of expert faculty,” explains Ruchi Watson, managing director and CEO of the center and strategic advisor to the David Eccles School of Business dean. “Even before they graduate, our students are immersed in learning about strategy and leadership.”

For example, Carter McDaniels BS'23 and his peers at the Goff Center were challenged to create a business plan for The Other Side Academy, which provides life skills and vocational training for individuals experiencing homelessness, working to overcome substance abuse, or seeking an alternative to incarceration. The students crafted a plan for the organization to create and sell succulents—a strategy that has not only been implemented but is flourishing. “Participating in Goff was a pivotal experience for me,” says McDaniels. “This program didn't just teach me about strategic leadership—it made me a more conscientious and intentional student and leader.”

Although housed in the business school, the Goff Center's programs are open to all U students, serving those from their first year through graduate level. Since 2020, more than 3,500 students—including undergraduates from 57 different majors—

have taken part in its offerings. The center fosters relationships with hundreds of organizations, tackling projects ranging from an AI initiative with consulting firm Korn Ferry to collaborations with the Sugar House Chamber of Commerce to mitigate construction impacts. Activities vary from short-term to semester-long, with additional events for the center's national alumni network.

Strategic thinking and leadership in the workplace are critical, says Watson, who has a robust background in management consulting and corporate strategy. “But we've got to get to a point where we no longer see these skills as something that come only later in the career;” she says. “It's vital to let students apply these concepts in real, often ambiguous, situations.”

The Goff Center was started in 2017 thanks to a generous gift from Greg Goff BS'78 MBA'81, former CEO of Andeavor (previously Tesoro Corporation). “I firmly believe we need to help young people be more successful faster;” says Goff. “Anyone can become a strategic leader—we just need to give them opportunities and experiences.” For example, the Goff Center didn't just help Rylie Halliday BS'21 land a job as a wealth analyst at Crewe Advisors—her experience led her to step into the role of director of operations a few short months after graduation.

“Education is a critical component of our society;” remarks Goff. “And Utah is uniquely positioned to create innovative educational strategies that prepare our students not just for jobs, but to be leaders in every sector.”

To host a project or apply, visit eccles.utah.edu/goff. **U**

Seth Bracken is editor of Utah Magazine.

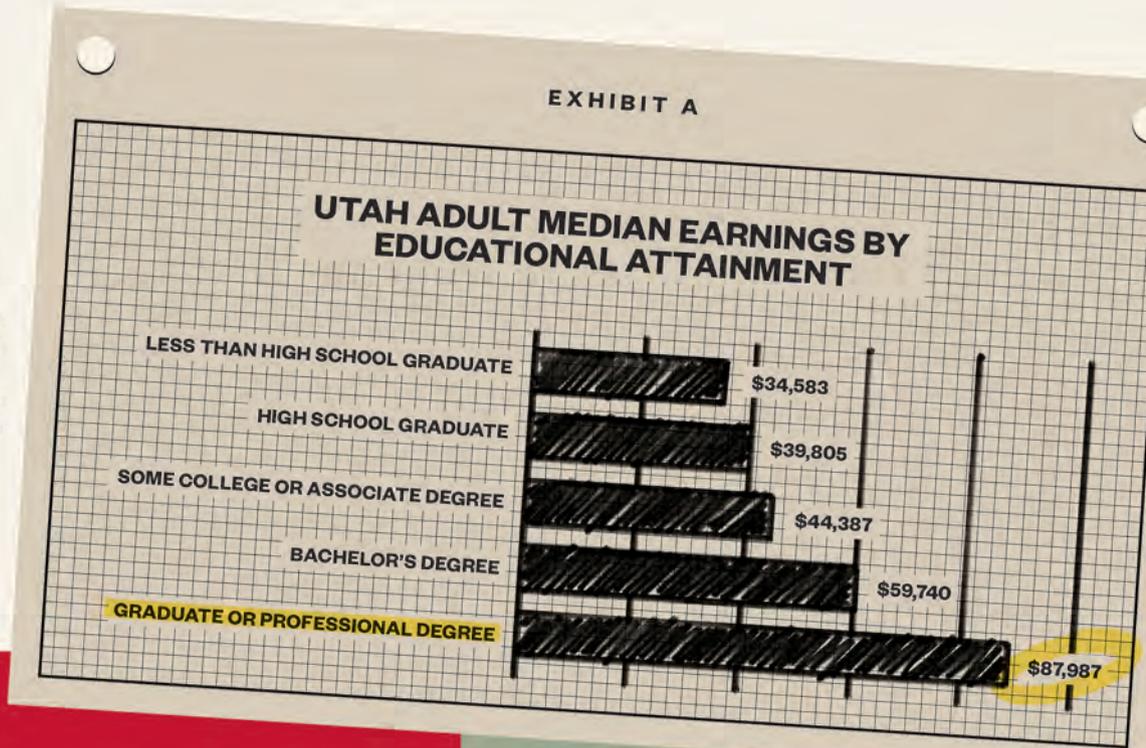
1.

MYTH

College isn't worth the money.

FACT

Graduates see a substantial return on investment through increased earnings. On average, Utahns with bachelor's degrees make **\$20,000** more each year than those with just a high school education.



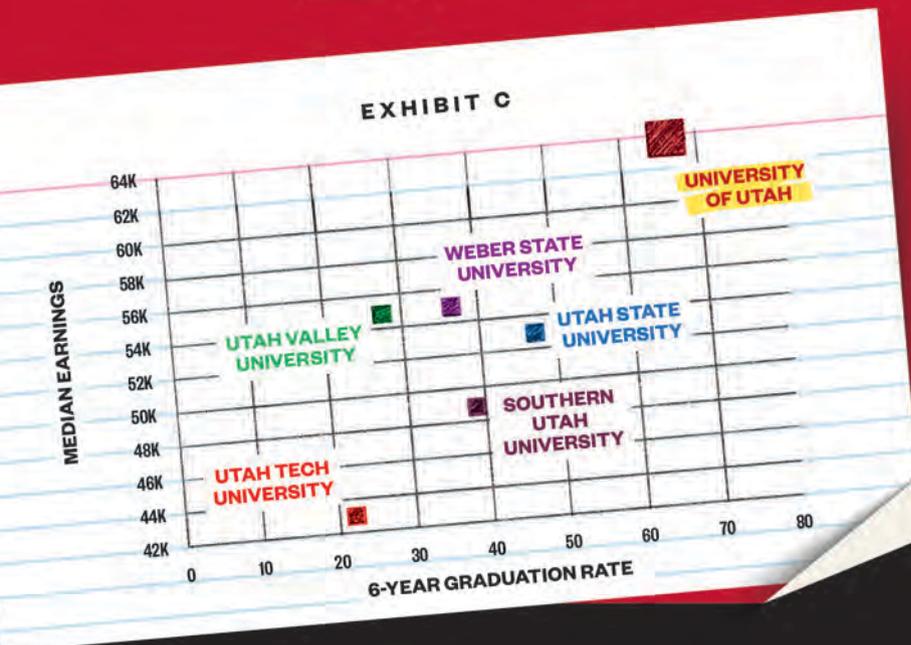
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MYTH

A degree from the U isn't worth it. Other schools have better outcomes for less cost.

FACT

The U has the highest median earnings and six-year graduation rate among all public schools in Utah.



5.

MYTH

Tuition keeps rising, and student debt is through the roof.

FACT

The listed price in higher education is often very different than what's actually paid.

Sources: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute February 2024 Policy Brief; U.S. Census Bureau, 2022; University of Utah Office of Budget and Institutional Analysis; Institute for College Access and Success

2.

MYTH

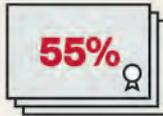
There are too many “degrees to nowhere” that don’t result in good jobs.

FACT

Degrees from across campus open doors to many in-demand jobs, aligning with market needs.



of degrees awarded by the U are in programs related to high-demand jobs, as defined by the Utah System of Higher Education.

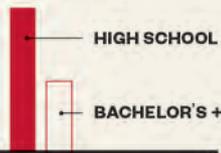


The U awards 55% of all STEM degrees from public universities in Utah.

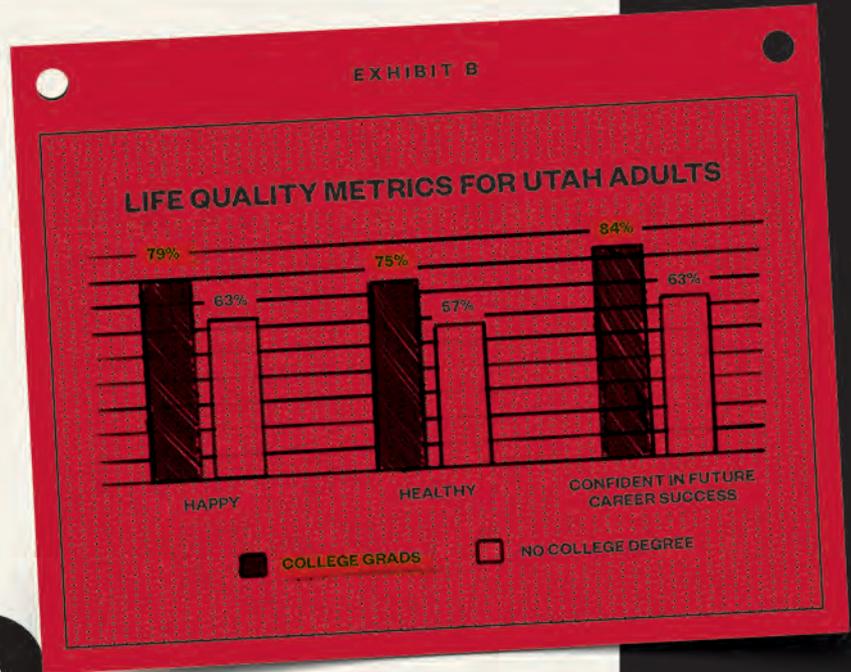
8,856

career coaching appointments last year at the U.

Utah’s unemployment rate is nearly **twice as high** for those with only a high school education compared to individuals with bachelor’s degrees or higher.



UNEMPLOYMENT RATE



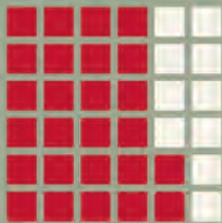
3.

MYTH

A college education doesn’t have a significant impact on overall quality of life.

FACT

People with college degrees are happier, healthier, and more confident in future career success.



of first-time U students receive scholarships and/or grants.



After accounting for financial aid and scholarships, students, on average, pay less now (\$5,236 per year in 2023) than they did in 2020 (\$5,337).

KEEPING AN EYE ON STUDENT COSTS

AVERAGE DEBT

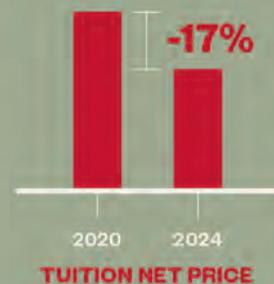


The average debt for graduating students in Utah is the lowest in the country at \$18,350 (the highest is New Hampshire at \$39,950).

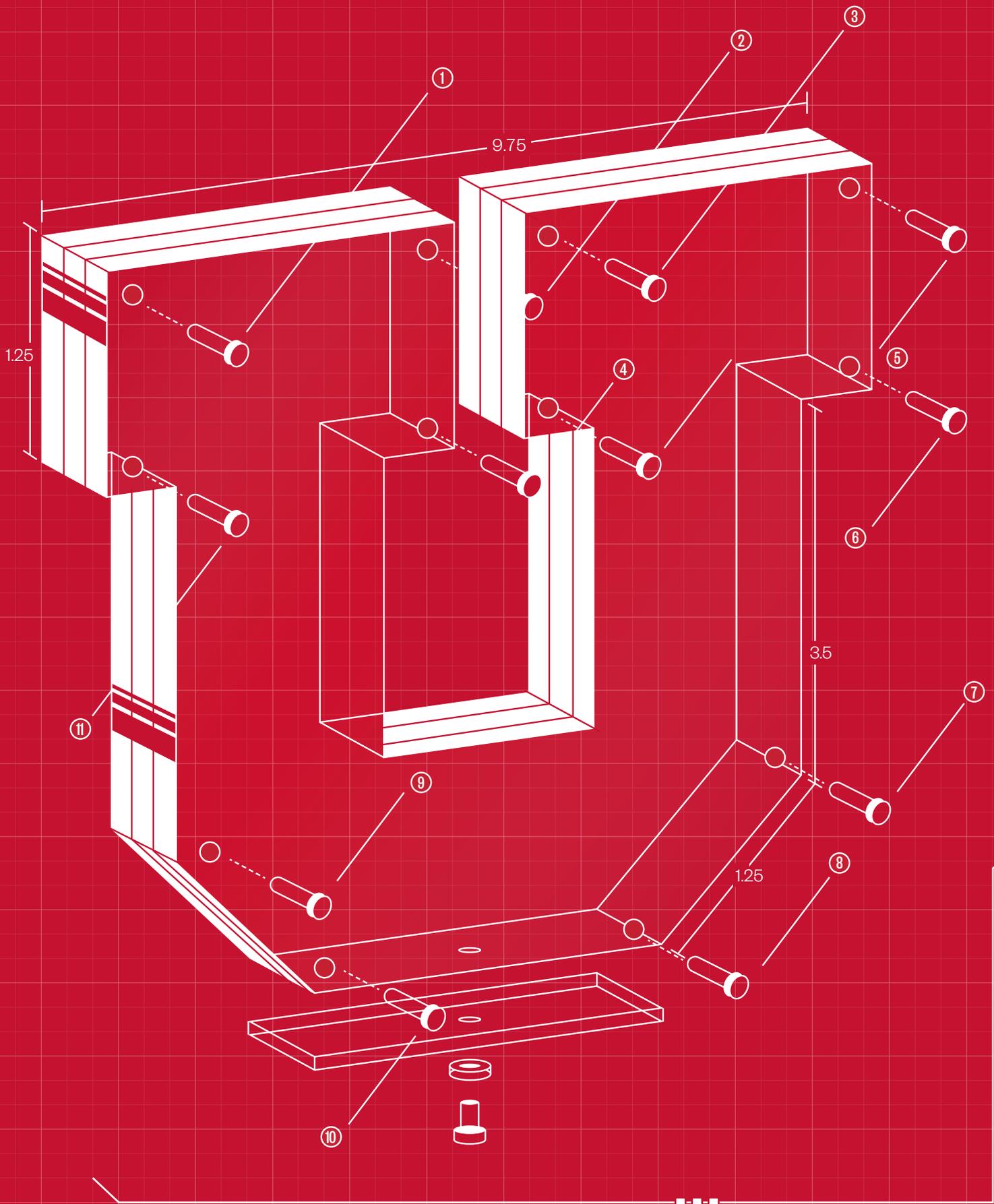


received by U students in the 2022-23 academic year

Tuition costs are increasing at a lower rate than inflation. Since 2020, the inflation-adjusted tuition net price has dropped 17%.



TUITION NET PRICE



INNOVATION

UNIVERSITY

DARING VISIONARIES FROM THE U HAVE OPENED

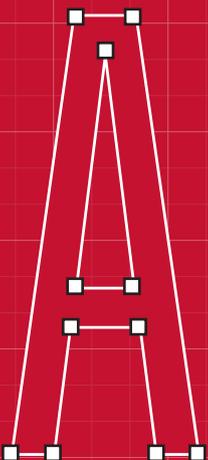
NEW FRONTIERS IN HEALTH, TECH, AND HUMANITY'S FUTURE.

LET'S COUNT DOWN 10 OF THE MOST

JAW-DROPPING INVENTIONS AND DISCOVERIES.

BY

BENJAMIN GLEISSER



BIONIC PROSTHETIC THAT HELPS wounded soldiers readjust to a normal life. A genetic test to detect breast cancer in women who haven't yet developed symptoms. The algorithmic animation that made sheriff badges and space suits spring to life.

What do all these inventions have in common? They are some of the hundreds of influential developments that have grown out of the minds of U students, faculty, and alumni who continue to come up with new ways to reshape society

and move us into, well, "infinity and beyond"!

The U community's creativity doesn't surprise Erin Rothwell, vice president of research.

"We have an amazing group of scientists and scholars that represent the best and brightest minds in the country," she says. "And we have exceptional setups on campus to foster their creativity."

The U.S. Department of Defense, the Department of Energy, and the National Institutes of Health are

some of the agencies that provided \$750 million in research funding in 2023, a year that saw 143 patents issued to members of the U community.

If we were to list all the breakthroughs that originated in every lab across campus, we could fill this magazine. So, to keep things manageable, we present just a handful of landmark discoveries—plus a few intriguing developments our people are now working on.

BIONIC

THE

LEG

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MAGINE A WORLD where amputees can walk, run, and even dance with the same ease and grace as those

with natural limbs. For over a decade, Tommaso Lenzi, associate professor of mechanical engineering, has been working tirelessly to make this vision a reality through his groundbreaking research on robotic prosthetic legs. “Prosthetics is a fascinating field because it gives me the chance to help people regain their independence,” Lenzi says. “I’ve always been driven by the potential to make a real difference in people’s lives.”

With funding from the Department of Defense, National Science Foundation, and the National Institutes of Health, Lenzi has developed a robotic prosthesis that amputees can intuitively control, just by thinking about the movement, thanks to sensors on the user’s muscles. This enables them to walk up stairs, cross obstacles, squat, and lunge—activities difficult or impossible with current prostheses.

Last year, the Utah Bionic Leg was named one of *Time Magazine’s* Best Inventions, a success Lenzi attributes to the U’s culture of innovation and collaboration with graduate students, the VA, and local hospitals. “The university environment fosters ingenuity so researchers can envision a future where disabilities are no longer a barrier,” Lenzi emphasizes. He’s now focused on demonstrating the significant advantages of the robotic prosthesis over current options. Ottobock, a world leader in prosthetics and orthotics, has licensed the technology from the U

and aims to bring this novel prosthesis to amputees worldwide.

Lenzi’s work builds upon the U’s legacy of advancing prosthesis technology. Engineers at the U have also created the “Luke Skywalker” arm and a brain-computer interface called the Utah Electrode Array.



HEART

BEATS

How do you mend a broken heart? By replacing it with an artificial heart, pioneered by Professor Willem Kolff, his medical student Robert Jarvik MD’76, and fellow researchers at the U. In the mid-1970s, the team designed and developed an air-driven artificial heart, which later became the first of its kind to successfully prolong the life of a patient suffering from end-stage heart failure. In 1982, an artificial heart was transplanted into a 61-year-old patient named Barney Clark

by surgeons at the U. The device, which came to be known as the Jarvik-7 heart, kept Clark alive for 113 days. Though Clark died from organ failure, the Jarvik-7 was still beating when he passed away. Since then, many Jarvik devices have been implanted to sustain patients waiting for transplants. Today, Jarvik is chairman and CEO of Jarvik Heart, a New York-based company where research is ongoing to develop an artificial heart that provides a more permanent option for survival.



Alec McMorris test drives the Utah Bionic Leg. This AI-powered prosthetic tackles obstacles with ease, giving amputees a high-tech spring in their step.



GRAPHIC

AND

TOYS



PDF

AND

POSTSCRIPT

Speaking of Adobe Systems, John Warnock BS'61 MS'64 PhD'69, who passed away last year, co-founded the pioneering software firm in 1982 and was CEO of the company until he retired in 2010. But that's not the only reason he left an indelible mark on the computer industry. While at Adobe, Warnock helped develop PostScript, Illustrator, and the PDF format, a way to keep a document's

original integrity, no matter where or how it's opened. "The thing I really enjoy is the invention process," Warnock was quoted as saying in a 2023 *New York Times* article that marked his passing. "I enjoy figuring out how to do things other people don't know how to do." He also has "the dubious distinction of having written the shortest doctoral thesis in University of Utah history," he told *Continuum* magazine in 2013. His 1969 thesis described a method to render solid objects at a time when most computer renderings were only line drawings.

▼ Warnock in 1968. His algorithm removing hidden lines in computer graphics enabled realistic digital images.



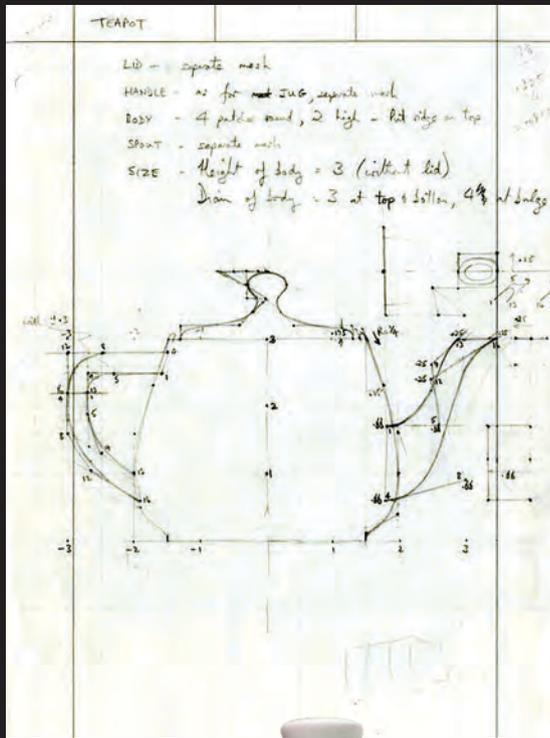
TEA IGNITED MORE THAN one revolt. The Boston Tea Party sparked an uprising that led to the American Revolution. And a simple department store teapot helped the U's fledgling computer science department revolutionize the computer graphics industry.

While working on his doctorate, Martin Newell PhD'75 was looking for a simple object to use as a template for future computer graphics models. His wife suggested using their tea set, as they were sitting down for a cup. He sketched their teapot by hand.

The teapot, chosen for its geometric simplicity and recognizability, has since become a beloved symbol within the computer graphics community, representing the innovative spirit that heralded the technical evolution of CG.

Newell founded Ashlar, a computer-aided design software company, in 1988. In 2007, he was elected a member of the National Academy of Engineering for contributions to computer-graphics modeling, rendering, and printing. He recently retired as an Adobe Fellow at Adobe Systems.

And that revolutionary teapot? It's enshrined at the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, California, where it sits among a collection of objects including the Apple-1 and the first Radio Shack catalog.



THE UTAH TEAPOT

CS

Ed Catmull BS'69 PhD'74 made us believe toys could talk. But before Woody and Buzz Lightyear came to be, Catmull and Jim Clark PhD'74, working under computer science department founder David Evans BS'49 PhD'53, created the Catmull-Rom

splines, a program that fused 3D realism to 2D computer graphics and opened the world's eyes to the power of computer animation. While earning his doctorate, Catmull made *Computer Animated Hand*, a one-minute animated version of

his left appendage. The film intrigued George Lucas, who in 1979 asked Catmull to create a digital model of a Star Wars X-wing fighter. Lucas then named him vice president of Industrial Light & Magic, Lucas' computer graphics division. Catmull

later co-founded Pixar and was one of the driving forces behind *Toy Story*. Clark took the entrepreneurial route after graduation, founding several Silicon Valley companies, including Silicon Graphics and Netscape (famous for the popular web browser that later

spawned Firefox). *Computer Animated Hand* was inducted into the National Film Registry. Library of Congress scholars wrote, "In creating the film, Catmull worked out concepts that [became] the foundation for computer graphics."

GENE-

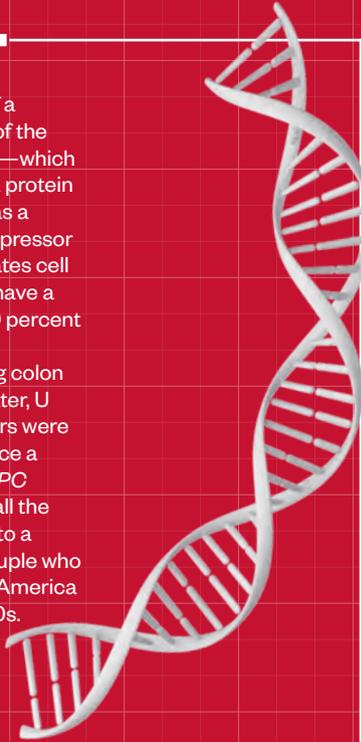
IUSES

U researchers have discovered 50 genes involved in inherited disease risk. And the list keeps growing. In 1991, U geneticist Mark Skolnick helped build the Utah Genealogy Resource (now known as the Utah Population Database) and co-founded Myriad Genetics with Peter Meldrum BS'70 MBA'74 to search for cancer susceptibility genes. The team

they led, which included Myriad scientists and U genetic epidemiologists like Lisa Cannon-Albright MS'82 PhD'88, successfully located the major cancer susceptibility genes *BRCA1*, *BRCA2*, and *CDKN2A*, and Myriad later introduced the first genetic tests for mutations in *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* to assess risk of hereditary breast cancer. Today,

Myriad has more than 2,600 employees and has performed more than a million genetic tests for hereditary cancers, reproductive health, mental health, and other diseases. Meanwhile, Ray White, who would later be named founding director of Huntsman Cancer Institute, began to create a genetic linkage map of the human genome. White's findings:

carriers of a mutation of the *APC* gene—which encodes a protein that acts as a tumor suppressor and regulates cell growth—have a nearly 100 percent chance of developing colon cancer. Later, U researchers were able to trace a specific *APC* mutation all the way back to a Pilgrim couple who arrived in America in the 1630s.



SAFETY

NET

The U has played a great role in keeping America safe—and in making sure you can read this article online. During the Cold War, military leaders feared a Russian nuclear strike could knock out a centralized location, thereby disabling American defense capabilities with one blow. This led to the creation in the late 1960s of the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET), a computer communication network linking multiple spots across the country. The University of Utah School of Computing was

one of the first four hosts of this new system, joining this early version of the Internet in 1969 under the direction of computer science professor Ivan Sutherland. At its height, ARPANET had more than

360

MIGHTY

MOLISE

I

IMAGINE THE RELIEF of a couple when they hear that a medical treatment could eradicate a potential genetic

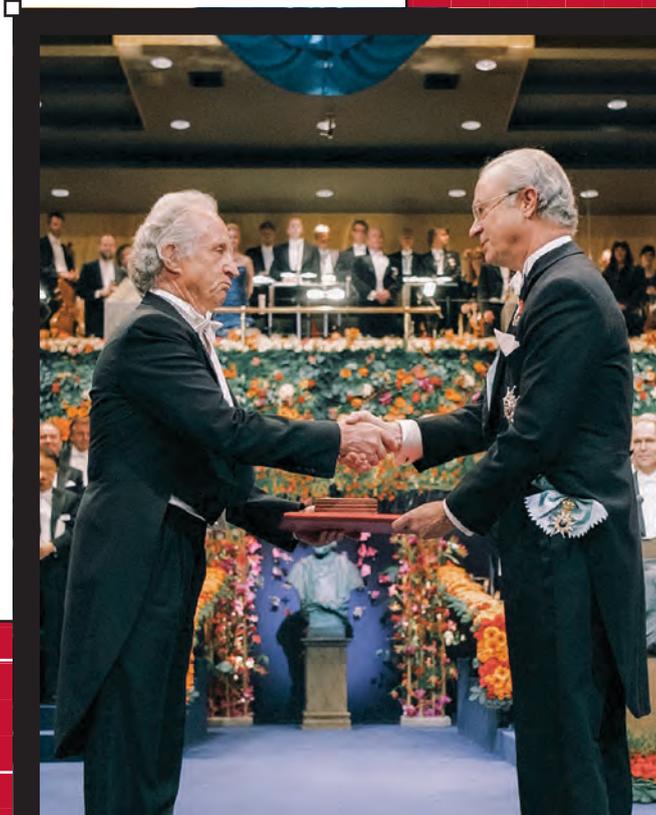
defect that one parent might pass to their children. That type of breakthrough, once the realm of science fiction writers, is now a future possibility, thanks to research done by Mario Capecchi, Distinguished Professor of human genetics and biology at the U. In 2007, Capecchi won the Nobel Prize in Medicine for developing a technique to selectively disable genes in mice. These “knockout mice” allow scientists to study the effects of specific genes by observing what happens when they’re “turned off.”

The work opened a new way to research genetics, and the novel gene-targeting technique Capecchi spearheaded is now widely used.

“I am a very gene-centric guy,” Capecchi said in a 2008 interview with the National Institutes of Health.

“Not because genes do everything, but because genes are the easiest place to be able to dissect complex biological phenomena with great precision.”

Mario Capecchi receives the Nobel Prize in 2007 for his gene-targeting breakthrough, which reshaped the fight against genetic diseases.



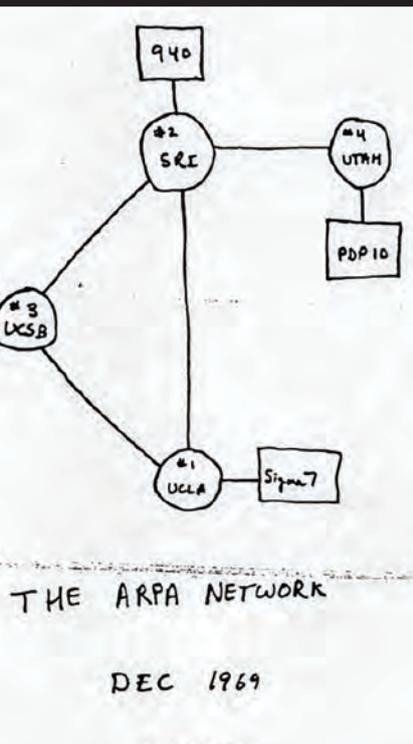
MAN

OF

TITAN

HOT

ROCKS



▲ A diagram of the Internet's precursor, which linked researchers nationwide. The U was one its first four connections.

230 linked computer stations in the United States. Improvements in defense communications led

to ARPANET being decommissioned in 1990, but its progeny—the Internet—lives on.

FORGING AHEAD TO FIND green ways to create energy, a major geothermal research project in Utah achieved a crucial breakthrough in April of this year. Sure to be a game-changer in the future, the process involves circulating water through hot rock formations a mile and a half beneath a drill site, then bringing heated water to the surface.

The successful test of the \$218 million Utah Frontier Observatory for Research in Geothermal Energy

(FORGE) project, funded by the Department of Energy, suggests that enhanced geothermal technologies could be a viable source of clean energy. John McLennan, U professor of chemical engineering, called the test a “significant” accomplishment.

By injecting water into man-made fractures in hot rocks under the Utah desert, the FORGE tests produced water hot enough to generate electricity. The process could produce geothermal energy virtually anywhere and offer a potentially limitless and flexible energy source.

▼ This U geothermal project heats water in underground rock formations, opening the door to a new era in renewable power generation.



TiUM

Titanium is as strong as steel—yet it's only half the weight. So, using titanium in airplane construction, for example, would reduce fuel consumption and make flying more sustainable. Unfortunately, producing titanium is very expensive. But that is changing: Zhigang Zak Fang, U professor of metallurgical engineering, has found a way to produce high-quality

titanium powder relatively inexpensively. Fang developed the hydrogen-assisted metallothermic reduction (HAMR) process, which uses hydrogen and magnesium synergistically to produce the precious metal. Fang's method also cuts carbon emissions, which creates a greener process. For that effort, and other innovations over his career—including

60 patents—Fang won the Humboldt Research Award and R&D 100 Award in 2023. “In the past, using only magnesium to create titanium didn't work as well,” Fang says of his project, funded by the Department of Energy's Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy. Under another DOE-funded venture, Fang and his colleague Pei Sun PhD'15 are looking for a new way to

produce iron and steel that will use less energy and release fewer emissions. “The goal is to decarbonize the steelmaking industry,” Fang says. **U**

Benjamin Gleisser is a Toronto-based freelance writer.



Forever U



Survey Says!

Uncover what 3,500 U alumni had to say about the U in a recent poll

U alumni are proud to bleed crimson, as revealed by one of the most extensive U alumni feedback initiatives ever conducted by the Office of Alumni Relations. An overwhelming 90 percent of alumni laud their time at the U, echoing a deep-seated affection for their alma mater. “We’re thrilled by the wealth of valuable feedback,” beams Chief Alumni Relations Officer Kris Bosman BS’99. “Alumni wear their U pride like a badge of honor. However, they also pointed out areas where we can do better, and we’re listening.”

With more than 3,500 respondents, here are some of the findings from the 2024 U Alumni Survey—and how we plan to improve.

Takeaway No. 1

Alumni take pride in the high-quality education they received.

Your degree is more valuable than ever. And we’re going to double down on efforts to showcase how the U—with the help of your fellow alumni—is raising its perception. We’ll share accomplishments of students, faculty, and alums, along with school rankings and other items such as scholarship availability.

Takeaway No. 2

Alumni want to be involved in the student experience.

Alums recognize the role the U—particularly through transformative mentors and courses—played in not just helping prepare them for their careers, but in all aspects of life. And many want to pay it forward. Survey respondents emphasized the importance of networking, lifelong relationships, and social engagement. The Forever Utah

Network (forever.utah.edu), our networking and mentorship platform, now boasts over 7,000 members—and counting. It’s an ever-expanding community dedicated to fostering meaningful connections among students and alumni alike.

Takeaway No. 3

Alumni want to stay connected with the university.

We’re breathing new life into event options for alumni across the country. From tailgating to regional gatherings, there’s likely something coming up in your neck of the woods. But in-person events aren’t the only way to stay connected—consider serving on a committee, recruiting or mentoring students, or volunteering on campus.

Takeaway No. 4

Alumni love stories about the U.

You’ve shared your favorite topics with us—the latest U news (especially updates from your college), cutting-edge research, upcoming events, and notable alumni achievements. Rest assured, we’ll keep these interests front and center in the forthcoming issues of *Utah Magazine*. You can also stay connected through U Alumni’s bi-monthly e-newsletter, *Alumni Connection*, and by following our social channels (@UtahAlumni).

We’re using your feedback to shape our future plans to build stronger alumni connections, foster a spirit of giving, prepare students for lifelong engagement, and strengthen pride in our university. We’re always working to improve, and we welcome your thoughts throughout the year.

ELENA GARDNER

BY THE NUMBERS

Check out a smattering of highlights from the recent U Alumni survey.

95%

promote the U occasionally, regularly, or all the time

94%

say they have a good or excellent opinion of the U

94%

say it was a good or great decision to attend the U

93%

describe their experience as a student as good or excellent

87%

say the U gave them good or excellent preparation for their careers

86%

say they read *University of Utah Magazine*

Why U?

Think back to when you were standing at the crossroads of your higher ed journey, facing multiple college options. What finally led you to embark on the University of Utah path? We posed this question on social media and received an avalanche of replies. From programs to people to powder, here's what sealed the deal for some of our readers.



I chose the U because of its premed program. While I enjoyed my premed courses, I eventually changed my major to accounting. The university offers excellent accounting and business programs. Additionally, its proximity to numerous ski resorts allowed me to practice skiing when I was not studying.

CUONG CHAU BS'96



Both my grandfather and father graduated from the U. I had to go to the U since the tradition was so deeply ingrained in me. After a lack of dedication in my first year at the U and a couple of years of working construction labor, skiing, and hiking full time, I decided higher education might be a good thing to pursue. Just happened to change the whole course of my career and arguably my life.

JAKE GARN BA'85 MBA'86

Proximity to the slopes!

KELLI VLAHOS BS'81



THE FILM AND ANIMATION PROGRAMS WERE SAID TO BE GOOD, AND THE TUITION WAS MORE AFFORDABLE THAN OTHER SCHOOLS I WAS CONSIDERING. I REALLY ENJOYED THE CREATIVE COMMUNITY ON CAMPUS. I GOT A DIVERSE SET OF SKILLS, FROM STORYBOARDING TO SCREENWRITING TO COLLABORATING WITH A LARGE TEAM OF ANIMATORS.

ERIC SKYER BA'23



The idea of going to college was so intimidating, but when I toured Utah, I felt so at home.

SAVANNA HEARN (INCOMING FIRST-YEAR)

Being able to go to the U Asia Campus.

SARAH HIGASHI BS'23



Sweet Success

Meet a few notable alumni of a U honor society that celebrates exceptional leadership, scholarship, and service

What do a NASA scientist, Rhodes Scholar, stage actress, sports agent, and Utah senator have in common? They're all inductees in the University of Utah's Beehive Honor Society, established in 1913 to honor graduating senior students for leadership, scholarship, and service. The illustrious society's 1,500-plus members—a few of whom are highlighted here—are a veritable who's who of U alumni.

"The Beehive Honor Society is the most prestigious honor society of the university," says Kris Bosman BS'99, chief alumni relations officer at U Alumni, which sponsors the society. "Induction is among the highest honors a U student can receive from the university."

Seniors can apply for the Beehive Honor Society each spring at alumni.utah.edu.



Lila Eccles Brimhall
BA'1914

Brimhall's portrait now graces the lobby of Pioneer Memorial Theatre, which she helped establish, but she once graced the stage itself. The actress, director, and U theater professor began acting as a U student and went on to perform in and direct several productions throughout her decades-long career.



Frank Edward "Ted" Moss
BA'33

Before rubbing shoulders with JFK, Moss was a U.S. Army Air Corps judge during WWII, Salt Lake County attorney, and SEC lawyer. Moss represented Utah in the U.S. Senate from 1959 to 1977 and is known for legislation that banned cigarette ads on radio and TV.



Diego E. Bentz BS'92

This former Utes line-backer now scores big off the field as a high-profile sports agent. With a client list that includes David Ortiz, Pedro Martinez, Miguel Cabrera, and other MLB All-Stars, Bentz has negotiated over \$1.8 billion in contracts. He and Ortiz also co-founded electric vehicle charging company ChargeFast Power.



Janice R. Ugaki HBA'92
HBS'92

Before receiving the internationally prestigious Rhodes Scholarship, Ugaki was U senior class president, homecoming queen, and a Truman Scholar. She went on to earn a JD from Harvard Law and taught in the U's Honors College. Ugaki is now president and co-founder of Firmseek, a strategic marketing and technology company.



Jamie Rankin BMU'11
HBS'11

With degrees in both physics and music, Rankin chose to reach for the stars in her career. She is an astrophysicist at Princeton and deputy project scientist for NASA's Voyager mission—one of the youngest researchers to ever hold that title.

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ALUMNI NEWS ROUNDUP



Lederhosen and campus memories collided as University of Utah alumni gathered in Munich for a weekend of Bavarian excitement this past summer. The event featured a BMW Factory tour, historic city exploration, and a dinner where the university president shared campus updates. From Hofbräuhaus to Neuschwanstein Castle, the gathering celebrated Utah connections amid German culture, strengthening the global U Alumni community.



Mark your calendars for U Alumni meetups coming this fall and winter. Upcoming occasions to network, connect with old friends, and forge new connections include:

An Evening with Deans of the U

Thursday, Oct. 24

Join us in Houston, Texas, for an evening panel discussion with four U deans.

Washington, DC, Alumni Social

Tuesday, Oct. 29

Join U Alumni and Utah Rep. Blake Moore BS'05 at the Hinckley Institute's DC home, the Orrin G. Hatch Center.

BYU Game Watch Party in St. George

Saturday, Nov. 9

Bring the whole family to watch our Utah football team tackle the Cougars in the new Big 12 era.

An Evening with Deans of the U

Tuesday, Nov. 12

Four U deans will host an evening panel discussion in San Francisco, California.

Veterans' Chapter Blood Drive

Thursday, Nov. 14

Help us honor our veterans by donating blood.

For more details and to join your chapter, visit alumni.utah.edu. And follow U Alumni on social media (@UtahAlumni) for updates.



Alumni Adventures

Somewhere along the journey from orientation to commencement, between Presidents Circle and the Bonneville Shoreline Trail, U of U students forge an unmistakable bond. U Alumni keeps that connection strong in the post-graduation years with year-round gatherings so you can catch up with your fellow alums, relive the glory days, and make new memories.

U Alumni events span the country and globe, from tailgates at home and away to regional chapter parties to trips abroad (Cuba, anyone?). Your little ones can even join in on the action with family activities like Easter egg hunts at Rice-Eccles Stadium. Here are some of our favorite snapshots of the fun. Don't miss out—visit alumni.utah.edu and follow @utahalumni on social media to learn about upcoming events.



Web Extra See a full list of upcoming U Alumni events at alumni.utah.edu

Class Notes

SPOTLIGHT



Michelle Plouffe

Six University of Utah alumni appeared in the 2024 Summer Olympic Games in Paris. Three alumna represented Canada in a sport that debuted in the 2020 Tokyo Games—3×3 Basketball. **Michelle Plouffe** BS'14 (who played for Utah Women's Basketball from 2010-14) and **Paige Crozon** BS'17 BS'17 (2012-16 roster) made up half the four-member roster. This was Plouffe's third Olympic Games, having previously played on Canada's Women's Basketball team in the 2012 and 2016 Summer Olympics. Crozon is one of the top-ranked 3×3 players in the world.

The Canadians were led by coach **Kim Gaucher** (née Smith) BS'06, who starred at the U from 2002-06 and was the first female athlete to have her jersey retired in the Jon M. Huntsman Center. She won conference player of the year awards in all her four seasons and was selected No. 13 overall in the 2006 WNBA Draft. Gaucher has pre-



Kim Gaucher

viously participated as a player in three Olympic Games for Canada, including the 2012 Games in London, when she led the Canucks in scoring. In the end, Team USA beat Canada for the bronze in this year's Summer Games. **Simone Plourde** BS'23, a standout middle-distance runner, represented Canada in the 1500m track event. Plourde ran for the U's track team, as well as its cross-country team, from 2021-23 and holds five school records. In 2023, she won the Pac-12 title in the 1500m, and she recorded the second-fastest NCAA time in the 5000m event. She placed sixth in her heat of the women's 1500m repechage round in these Games. **Josefine Eriksen** BS'24 competed in the 4x400m track relay for Norway. Eriksen set U records in four individual races and was part

of three relay-team record runs. She finished the 2024 Games with a 52.30 split, which was fourth fastest among the lead runners. And finally, Team USA's **Alexis Lagan** BS'17 came all fired up for her second Olympics, where she competed in the 10m air pistol event. Lagan graduated from the U with a degree in pre-law physics. At the collegiate level, she won a handful of national titles in women's and mixed team events and earned a spot on several All-American teams. She competed in qualifying rounds at the Summer Games but missed the eight-person cut to move on to the final.



Josefine Eriksen

of three relay-team record runs. She finished the 2024 Games with a 52.30 split, which was fourth fastest among the lead runners. And finally, Team USA's **Alexis Lagan** BS'17 came all fired up for her second Olympics, where she competed in the 10m air pistol event. Lagan graduated from the U with a degree in pre-law physics. At the collegiate level, she won a handful of national titles in women's and mixed team events and earned a spot on several All-American teams. She competed in qualifying rounds at the Summer Games but missed the eight-person cut to move on to the final.



Paige Crozon



Simone Plourde



Alexis Lagan

nearly \$3 billion in aggregate lifetime savings and an estimated 70% reduction in operational failures.

'00s

Jess E. Jones BA'01 (MD and MBA, Columbia University) is the head of Health & Healthcare Industry for the World Economic Forum, helping facilitate public-private partnerships for equitable, affordable, and high-quality access to care. With 20 years of experience in health care, Jones previously served as a business strategy consultant for Fortune 500 companies and as a director of health care investments for

an investment fund, and he has sat on multiple boards of biotech companies.



Lee Isaac Chung

Lee Isaac Chung MFA'04 directed the summer blockbuster *Twisters*. He previously wrote and directed the award-winning semiautobiographical film *Minari*. (Read our feature article online in the Winter 2021 issue.) Chung also directed an episode of the hit TV series *The Mandalorian* in 2023. He taught film courses at the U's Asia Campus in Incheon, South Korea, during the 2018-19 academic year.

'10s



Karleton Munn

Karleton Munn MED'11 (PhD, The Ohio State University) was recognized with the Maya Angelou Award of Innovation at the U Black Cultural Center's 2024 Black Faculty and Staff Awards. Munn is associate director of advising at the Honors College. The awards spotlight individuals who exhibit excellence in their university positions and provide outstanding service and support to the campus community.

Clifford Sondrup BS'15 DDS'21 runs his own dental practice in Salt Lake, SunDrop Dental Clinic. He also works with elementary schools across the state to bring essential care to disadvantaged children. During his time at the U, he received the Lassonde Entrepreneurial award for student innovation for a device he made to help dentists work more efficiently with face shields during COVID-19.



Grayson Murphy

Grayson Murphy BS'18 is a two-time world champion and five-time U.S. champion in mountain running, most recently winning in July, when her finish earned her a Team USA spot for the next world championships in October. Murphy was recognized as Professional Female Athlete of the Year in the 2024 Utah State of Sport Awards. She was a five-time All-American in cross-country and track at the U, then began mountain running after graduation.

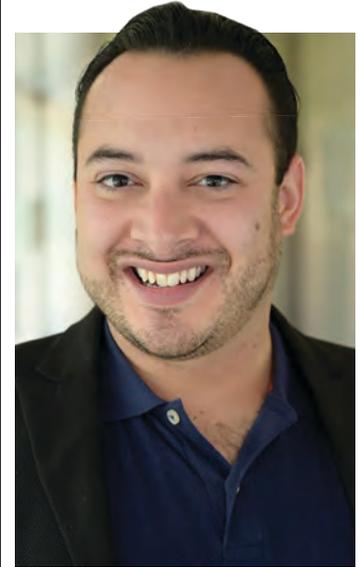


Iasia Beh

Iasia Beh BS'19 (along with a doctor of law degree and certificates in dispute resolution and criminal law from Pepperdine University) is now a staff attorney with Los

Angeles Dependency Lawyers, defending parents in child abuse or negligence cases. As a court-appointed attorney in the largest child welfare system in the

SPOTLIGHT



Edgar Zúñiga Jr. BA'09 BA'09 is program director for KUUB (formerly KCPW), the new bilingual radio station owned by the University of Utah along with sister stations PBS Utah and KUER. Zúñiga recently finished an 18-month assignment in Europe as the Ukraine Communications Delegate for the American Red Cross. He worked as a journalist for NBCUniversal for 11 years, at both NBC News and Telemundo, before returning to Utah in 2020. Born in New York City to Colombian immigrants, Zúñiga moved to Utah as a child and grew up in a bilingual household. After earning degrees in mass communication and international studies at the U, he returned to New York to work for NBCUniversal. A two-time Emmy Award-winning journalist, Zúñiga speaks eight languages, four of them with professional proficiency. He has served on the board of West View Media, a journalism nonprofit that covers the majority-minority neighborhoods of Salt Lake City's West Side, and on the advisory board of PBS Utah, where he provided a voice for the state's Latino communities.

'90s



Chad Hogan

Chad Hogan BS'93 was a recent finalist for the Society of Professional Engineers Federal Engineer of the Year Award for his research on protective coatings of landing gear components. A lead principal engineer at Hill Air Force Base, Hogan estimates that his career efforts redesigning aircraft braking systems and landing gear structures have helped save the Air Force—and the American taxpayer—

country, most of Beh's clients are disenfranchised by poverty, race, and gender identity. She recently published a paper aimed at addressing issues with the policing system. Her mission is to advocate for the best interests of children and families and to promote justice and dignity for all.

'20s

Monet Iheanacho MBA'20 was recognized with the James McCune Smith Award of Veneration at the U Black Cultural Center's 2024 Black Faculty and Staff Awards, spotlighting individuals who exhibit excellence in their university positions and provide outstanding service and support to the campus community. Iheanacho helps manage critical care data for the National Emergency Medicine Services Information System and is a past co-chair of Utah's Black Affairs Summit.

In the wake of COVID-19 disruptions

and facing the new threats of AI, writer and actor strikes, and other industry uncertainties, **Rahul Barkley** BA'21 BA'21 and **Cayden Turnbow** BA'23 created Post Credits, a film festival showcasing the work of recent U of U film school graduates. This year's debut event featured screenings of five eclectic films (one feature and four shorts), a panel discussion with the directors and producers, and a networking session designed to facilitate connections between alumni, current U students, and industry professionals.



Kristen Santos-Griswold

Since her first Winter Olympics appearance in 2022, when a crash left her just off the podium, speed skater **Kristen Santos-Griswold** BS'21 has medaled at every World Cup and set several new U.S. records. She was named to the 2024-25 Short Track National Team, giving her

the opportunity to train with the full support of high-performance staff and resources, including access to Olympic-quality ice throughout the summer training season. Santos-Griswold was honored as the Olympic Female Athlete of the Year in the 2024 Utah State of Sport Awards.



Merinda Christensen

Merinda Christensen BMU'22 supports arts and culture in downtown Salt Lake as the program manager at The Blocks Arts District, working directly with artists and arts organizations to create visibility and grow our creative community. Christensen is also pursuing her own passion in music as a professional harpist, performing locally and nationally and teaching up-and-coming new harpists.



Branden Carlson

As a fifth-year senior in 2023-24, **Branden Carlson** BS'23 set multiple U records, helped lead the Utah Men's Basketball team to the NIT Semifinals, and was a finalist for the Kareem Abdul-Jabbar Award. The 7-foot center now plays for the Toronto Raptors with fellow alum **Jakob Poeltl** ex'16. Carlson was named the Collegiate Male Athlete of the Year in the 2024 Utah State of Sport Awards.



Courtney Brown

Courtney Brown (née Talbot) MS'23 was drafted early this year by the Washington Spirit, a National Women's League soccer team. Brown played soccer for the U for five years and was team captain for her last three seasons. She scored her first professional goal to help defeat NJ/NY Gotham FC 2-0 in June.



Kate Lunnen

Kate Lunnen BA'24 BA'24 is a community-based activist and scholar with primary areas of focus including college access, LGBTQIA+ rights, and immigration policy reform. She is currently using her skill set as an admissions counselor at the U and as an advocate for LGBTQIA+ BYU alumni and transfer students through her volunteer position at the OUT Foundation.

SPOTLIGHT



River Murdock BS'21 founded Kawa Designs, a handmade bag brand based in Salt Lake City. Kawa Designs grew out of Murdock's passion for crafting durable, outdoor-ready gear, which began during his high school years in Moab, Utah. Inspired by his experiences biking, canyoneering, and backpacking in rugged terrain, Murdock learned his craft using industrial sewing machines at a friend's gear company. While at the U, he honed his sewing skills on the machines at the Lassonde Entrepreneur Institute, where he was able to collaborate with other students to learn more about marketing. Named after the Japanese word for "river," Kawa Designs' current lineup includes custom-sized sling bags, panniers, backpacks, and more.



Alissa Pili

The eighth overall pick in the first round of the WNBA draft, **Alissa Pili** BS'24 now plays for the Minnesota Lynx. The All-American helped the U claim its first-ever share of the Pac-12 regular season title and make a run to the Sweet 16 in this year's NCAA Tournament. The 6-foot-2-inch forward was recognized as Collegiate Female Athlete of the Year in the 2024 Utah State of Sport Awards.



What's up with U?

Send updates to classnotes@utah.edu

SPOTLIGHT

KRISTIN V. REHDER



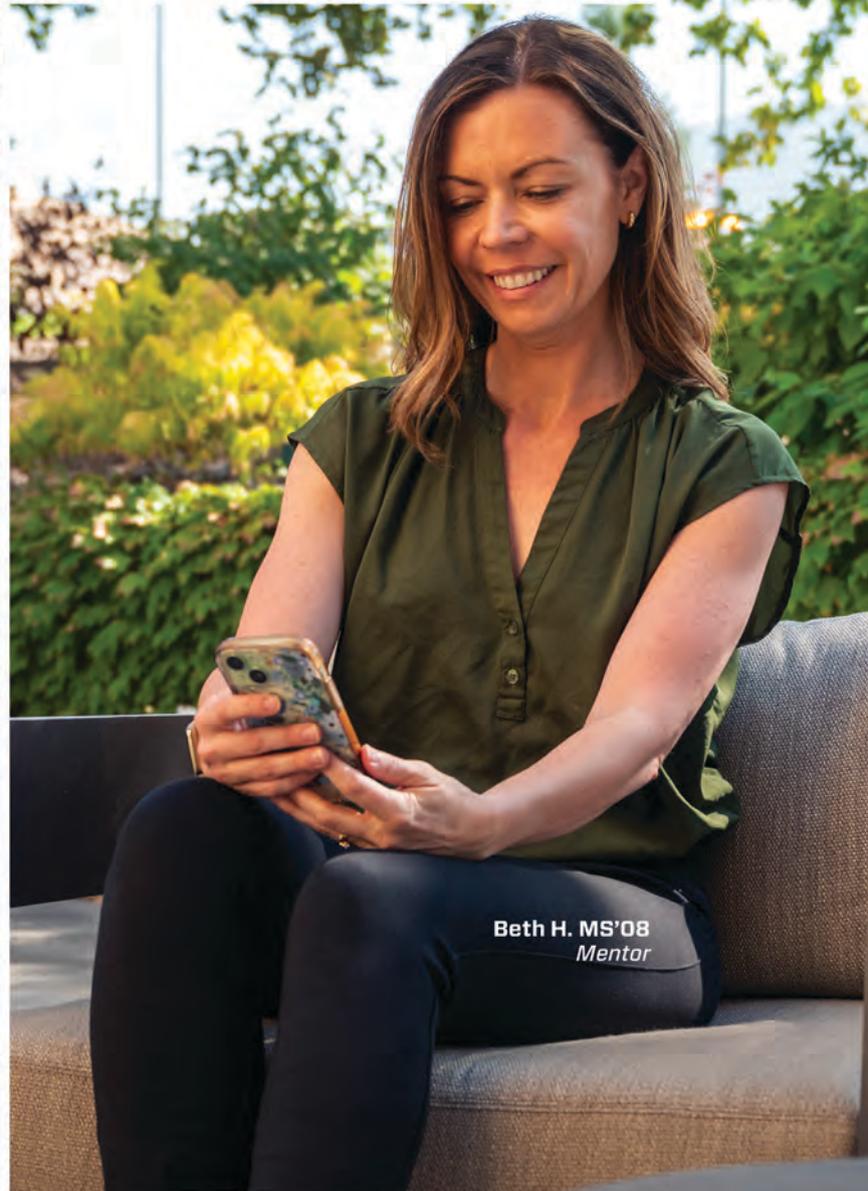
Meg Day PhD'15 is the 2024 Poet-in-Residence for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, in collaboration with the Academy of American Poets. In their new role, Day (who uses they/them pronouns) is presenting All Ears, a project highlighting Deaf poetry as visual art. All Ears will include readings by Deaf poets, responses in American Sign Language to works of art in the museum, and activations that capture the echoes, vibrations, and movement of the Guggenheim's architecture. Day's project aims to highlight Deaf poets as visual artists by welcoming them into the museum space in new ways; encourage the hearing-majority public to engage with ASL and Deaf sonics through unexpected encounters; and reorient visitors' understanding of language and fluency as visible just as much as it is aural. Day is the author of *Last Psalm at Sea Level*, which received the Publishing Triangle's Audre Lorde Award. They are a recipient of the Amy Lowell Poetry Travelling Scholarship and an NEA fellowship in poetry, and their recent work can be found in *Best American Poetry* and *The New York Times*. Day is an assistant professor of English and creative writing at North Carolina State University, Raleigh.

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Student



Beth H. MS'08
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ALREADY HAVE A
LEGACY GIFT?

Vintage Verticals

They were the original rock stars of Utah's climbing scene. In the early 1960s, the daring members of the Alpenbock Climbing Club—including former Salt Lake City Mayor Ted Wilson BS'64, who passed away in April and is pictured here circa 1963—were conquering now-iconic routes in the Wasatch and beyond before climbing culture became mainstream. Now, their incredible homemade scrapbooks—containing vintage photographs, hand-drawn maps, and sometimes-hilarious trip reports—are available online, offering a window on the forerunners who helped shape Utah's climbing heritage. From putting up audacious first ascents to pulling off heroic rescues to championing environmental ethics, the Alpenbocks were ahead of their time. Delve into these artifacts to get inspired by some of Utah's boldest outdoor adventurers at magazine.utah.edu/climbingclub.



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