

**Meet Morgan Scalley**

Get to know the head coach who's leading Utah Football into an exciting new era. p. 30

**Utah's Data Source**

When state leaders need reliable facts to inform decisions, they turn to the U's Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute. p. 36

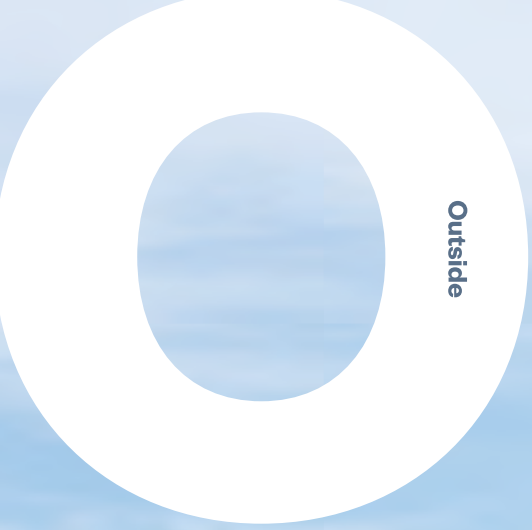
**Newfound Creature**

U scientists discover a species entirely new to science living in the Great Salt Lake. p. 10



**Legend Has It**

From magic fountains to hidden skeletons, we investigate the truth behind campus tales of the strange and supernatural. p. 22



Outside



## Lens on the Landscape

It's not often that viewing a work of art requires you to drive miles of dirt roads and bring food, water, and a full tank of gas. Nancy Holt's acclaimed 1973 land art installation *Sun Tunnels* sits in a remote stretch of Utah's West Desert so vast and silent that "it's almost otherworldly," says Emily Lawhead, associate curator of modern and contemporary art at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts.

Composed of four 18-foot-long, 9-foot-diameter concrete cylinders arranged in an X, *Sun Tunnels* focuses the landscape like a lens, Lawhead explains. At the summer and winter solstices, the tunnels perfectly center the rising and setting sun.

The University of Utah has played a proud role in the work's past and present. During the planning stages, Holt borrowed a helioscope from the U's School of Architecture and worked with U astrophysicist Les Fishbone to calculate the solstice angles. Today, UMFA partners with Dia Art Foundation (owner and steward of *Sun Tunnels*), the Holt/Smithson Foundation, and the Center for Land

Use Interpretation to preserve and champion the installation. UMFA also hosts site events and offers downloadable guides for those who want to explore on their own.

Annie Burbidge Ream BA'08 MA'25, UMFA co-director of learning and engagement, suggests visiting on a day other than the solstices. Smaller crowds mean more time and space to experience the work.

"Instead of just looking at it from afar, you get to walk in it and be a part of it," she says. "It helps you connect to art in a whole new way."

Visit [umfa.utah.edu/sun-tunnels](http://umfa.utah.edu/sun-tunnels) for more information, guides, and upcoming events.

*NANCY HOLT, SUN TUNNELS, 1973-76. GREAT BASIN DESERT, UTAH. DIA ART FOUNDATION WITH SUPPORT FROM HOLT/SMITHSON FOUNDATION. © HOLT/SMITHSON FOUNDATION AND DIA ART FOUNDATION/LICENSED BY ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK. PHOTO: VICTORIA SAMBUNARIS, COURTESY DIA ART FOUNDATION, NEW YORK*



### Web Extra

Watch a short film about Nancy Holt and her land art masterpiece at [magazine.utah.edu/suntunnels](http://magazine.utah.edu/suntunnels)

# U University of Utah Magazine

SUMMER 2026  
Volume 35, No. 2

Utah Football has a new head coach. Morgan Scalley BA'04 MBA'07—former U player, longtime defensive coordinator, and lifelong Utahn—steps into the top job with a clear vision and a fierce game plan. p. 30

## WEB EXTRAS

More available at [magazine.utah.edu](http://magazine.utah.edu)



**Join the Mouse Party!** This virtual activity developed at the U has been teaching kids how drugs affect the brain for two decades. Visit [magazine.utah.edu/mouse](http://magazine.utah.edu/mouse) to try it for yourself and explore the Stark Science Learning Center's library of educational activities.

**When artist Nancy Holt** created *Sun Tunnels* in Utah's west desert, she "was interested in getting us to think about our being in relation to the surface of the planet... and somehow harnessing the movement of the sun," explains a short film from Dia Art Foundation. Watch the film to learn about Holt and her iconic land art installation at [magazine.utah.edu/suntunnels](http://magazine.utah.edu/suntunnels).



**Daniel Mendelsohn's**

new translation of *The Odyssey* is earning praise for its rhythmically faithful rendering from the original Greek. In a conversation with U professor Jordan Johansen on the Tanner Humanities Center's podcast,

*The Virtual Jewel Box*, he reflects on how he honored Homer's poetry and musicality. Listen at [magazine.utah.edu/odyssey](http://magazine.utah.edu/odyssey).



## FEATURES

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**Legend Has It**

From enchanted fountains to spectral soldiers, the U is brimming with stories of the strange and supernatural. We investigated campus lore to separate myth from reality—and found a few surprises along the way. Discover which legends hold up... and which refuse to stay buried.

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**Built for This Moment**

Morgan Scalley steps into the role of head football coach with a clear vision: build smart, punishing ballhawks who can compete for a national championship—and grow into men of character. Get an inside look at his leadership style, deep U roots, and the culture he believes will carry the U into a new era.

36

**The U Institute Behind Utah's Biggest Decisions**

When Utah faces its most consequential deliberations—from the COVID-19 response to housing and water—leaders turn to the U's Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute as a trusted source of data. Learn how its insights are shaping the state's future, often before the rest of the country sees what's coming.



## ON THE COVER

**Illustrator Sam Kalda** evokes *The Hardy Boys* for our cover story investigating the secret of the missing Park Building statue and other campus mysteries.

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Viral Shah enrolled in the MBC program to grow HelloGM, a hotel-management software company.

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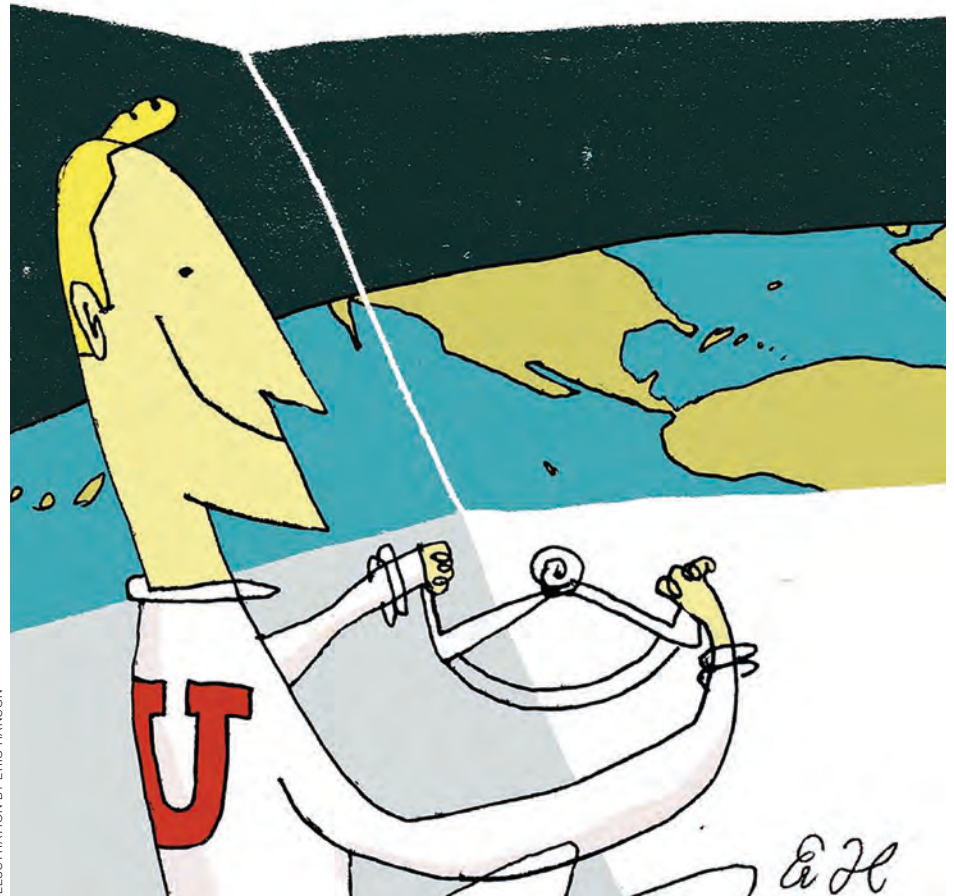


ILLUSTRATION BY ERIC HANSON

## The U Behind You, the World Before You



world of opportunity before them.

To our newest graduates: welcome. You are now part of a community more than 300,000 strong—and that community keeps growing around you long after you leave campus.

The stories in this issue of *Utah Magazine* speak to that connection.

You'll meet Morgan Scalley, the U's 24th head football coach (p. 30). Morgan is an alum himself and the son of alumni. He's spent his whole career investing in this place. His three C's—character, competence, and connection—are at the heart of how he's building the Utah Football program at one of the most conse-

quential moments in college athletics.

You'll also read about the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary (p. 36). Over the past decade, the Gardner Institute has become the trusted source of data behind nearly every major decision Utah makes—on housing, growth, water, the Great Salt Lake, and other complex issues.

As our graduates enter the world, they leave with plenty of stories—of all-nighters and hard-earned A's, hijinks with friends in the residence halls, and the campus tales passed down from one class to the next. This issue explores some of the U's most enduring legends, from the campus tunnels to the ghosts at Fort Douglas to the mysterious "Fountain of Ute" (p. 22). I hope you enjoy diving into this campus lore as much as I did.

The best stories at the U are about the experiences and accomplishments of our students and graduates. To the Class of 2026 and all our alumni: thank you for being part of the U and for sharing your unique talents with the rest of the world.

PRESIDENT TAYLOR RANDALL HBA'90



### Cause for Hope

Readers found our recent cover story uplifting [“24 Reasons to Hope,” Winter 2026].

Thank you for putting this together.... It gives us SO many reasons to feel hopeful.

ASHLEY

In a world where the negative is broadcast and forced into us like oxygen in our lungs, it is so refreshing to read about the good that the U is doing all over the world.

KIM NORMAN

Thank you for spreading hope while also highlighting some amazing achievements from our students, researchers, and staff!

STEVEN KRAMER

### Not Forgotten

You were touched by the story of Douglas Brick, a missing U student whose cold case was finally resolved after 50 years [“Bringing Douglas Home,” Winter 2026].

A beautiful story bravely shared by investigators who are wise enough to look beyond hard data for inspiration and answers.

TOM MCCANDLESS BS'78 MS'82  
NORTH VANCOUVER, BC

Glad this family could receive some form of closure after such a traumatic event.

NICK

### SOCIAL SPOTLIGHT

The U hosted its 54th annual Pow Wow in March, bringing together tribal members, students, and community members from across the Intermountain West for a celebration of culture and heritage. Participants honored Native identity through dance, music, regalia, and other traditions.



### The Crimson Crossword

Welcome to the Crimson Crossword, our mini puzzle series. Look for it in the Comments section of every issue.

		1	2	3
	4			
5				
6				
7				

#### ACROSS

- Crimson
- Surgery recovery room, briefly
- Rio \_\_\_\_\_ Center (NHMU's home)
- Building frequented by U comm majors, for short
- Credential U of U offers to become a “good guy” hacker

#### DOWN

- Taft-Nicholson Center property, or a “cool” chip flavor
- “Plasm” prefix heard in Biology 101
- Two-factor auth app used at the U
- Bristlecone or pinyon
- Special attention students might need during finals week (abbr.)

For answers or to play online, go to [magazine.utah.edu/mini2](http://magazine.utah.edu/mini2)

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# News from the U



## Home at Last

Utah Baseball now has its own stadium on campus—complete with mountain views and snow-ready turf

The ribbon-cutting for Charlie Monfort Field at America First Ballpark in January marked the end of a decade-long dream. After sharing Smith's Ballpark with the Salt Lake Bees since the program's inception, the team now has its own 3,000-seat facility on Guardsman Way.

"This is not only a milestone for University of Utah Athletics and our baseball team, but it's also a milestone day for our community," said U President Taylor Randall HBA'90 at the ceremony. "This will be a field of dreams for everyone."

"Is there a better view in college baseball—or baseball anywhere?" asked Utah Athletics Director Mark Harlan, gesturing toward the Wasatch Mountains backdrop.

The facility includes 1,200 chairback seats, standing room on the concourse and outfield berm, food trucks along the Right Field Deck, and a full press box. The synthetic turf allows for snow removal—essential for a season that starts in January and runs through May.

Players get access to batting tunnels, a pitching lab, clubhouse, weight room, and sports medicine suite.

"To have access to all these tools and resources is truly going to elevate our game and our performance so much," says infielder Cameron Gurney.

The ballpark's inaugural season got off to a roaring start on March 6. Utah swept a four-game series against Grand Canyon, with shutout victories in the first three games.

In addition to hosting Utah games, the ballpark is intended as a community asset. Over 18 months, the university held community open houses and gathered input from more than 6,400 neighbors. High school teams can play select games at the ballpark, and the venue is available for weddings and community events.

The \$38 million project came together through partnerships with America First Credit Union, which secured a 10-year naming rights agreement, and Charlie Monfort BS'82 (double major, management and marketing), owner of the Colorado Rockies, who provided major support. Layton Construction served as general contractor.

For tickets, game schedules, and rental information, visit [utahutes.com/sports/baseball](http://utahutes.com/sports/baseball).

## NEWS ROUNDUP



**Harvard professor and bestselling author Arthur C. Brooks** delivered the keynote address at the U's 2026 General Commencement on April 30. A U Impact Scholar since 2023, Brooks drew from his research on happiness and meaning to send the Class of 2026 into the world.



**The U's Master of Business Creation** program is heading to Europe. Starting in August 2026, founders from Belgium, France, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands can earn a graduate degree while running their companies full time. The expansion—a partnership with Belgian organization Aureus Ars & Scientia—follows launches in Africa and Canada in 2024.

**The U's Division of Games** opened a new 23,000-square-foot facility in downtown Salt Lake City, the first phase of a larger expansion to grow the division's research and academic offerings. The space includes computer labs, dedicated studios, and flexible collaboration areas for graduate students and faculty.



## Party Animals

If all you know about drugs and brains involves a frying pan and an egg, these mice have something to teach you. Mouse Party, an interactive online educational activity released 20 years ago, has taught a generation about the neuroscience of drugs acting on the brain in a clear, engaging way—racking up more than 1.2 million pageviews in 2025 alone. It's one of hundreds of activities produced by the Stark Science Learning Center (SSLC, formerly the Genetic Science Learning Center), in the U's Department of Biochemistry.

The concept for Mouse Party came from teachers. In 2003, with a grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the SSLC gathered a group of teachers to hear from experts on addiction and help design impactful activities for classrooms. The center's creative team turned one of the teachers' ideas into Mouse Party.

Users control an animated gloved hand to reach into a terrarium containing seven mice—each under the influence of a different drug, from marijuana to LSD—and bring each mouse

to a brain scanner. The scanner shows an animation explaining how the drugs affect brain chemistry.

Teachers liked that Mouse Party focused on the science of drug use without judgment. It also gave students a new perspective. "They really didn't understand that drugs were making changes in your brain," says Louisa Stark, director emerita of the SSLC. "Mouse Party helped students understand that concept."

It wasn't long before people from all around the world started writing to say how much they appreciated Mouse Party. The center still gets those comments today.

Molly Malone, a senior instructional designer, provided the original voiceover for Mouse Party. She says it's one of the center's most recognizable products. "Even to this day, when I'm out at conferences or giving workshops or interacting with teachers, I almost always get someone shouting out 'Mouse Party! You're the Mouse Party people!'"

PAUL GABRIELSEN



### Web Extra:

Try it yourself!  
Explore Mouse Party and the SSLC's 30-year library of educational activities at [magazine.utah.edu/mouse](http://magazine.utah.edu/mouse)





## Scientists Discover New Species in the Great Salt Lake

In the hypersaline waters of Utah's Great Salt Lake, scientists have discovered a creature so small it escaped notice for decades—and it turns out to be entirely new to science.

The microscopic roundworm, now named *Diplo-laimelloides woaabi*, likely lives nowhere else on Earth. Researchers at the University of Utah chose the species name in consultation with the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation, whose ancestral lands include the lake; woaabi means “worm” in the Indig-

enous tribe's language. The find is remarkable for what it reveals about life in one of North America's most extreme and imperiled ecosystems.

Nematodes are among the most abundant animals on the planet, yet none had ever been confirmed in the Great Salt Lake until a 2022 expedition recovered them in microbialites—rocklike mounds built by microbes on the lakebed. These forays were led by Julie Jung, then a postdoctoral researcher in the lab of U biologist Michael Werner (Jung and Werner are pictured here).

“We thought that this was probably a new species of nematode from the beginning, but it took three years of additional work to taxonomically confirm that suspicion,” says Jung, now an assistant professor at Weber State University.

How the worms got into an inland lake is a scientific whodunit, since they belong to a nematode genus normally associated with coastal areas. “That begs some more interesting, intriguing questions that you wouldn't have even known to think of until we figured out the alpha taxonomy,” Werner says. One theory suggests the lineage dates back to an ancient inland sea; another proposes birds may have transported the worms from distant saline lakes.

Whatever their origin, the nematodes may prove invaluable as sentinels for the shrinking Great Salt Lake's ecological health. Werner and his lab remain busy characterizing other nematode species they found in the lake that are likely also new to science.



# E-trash Talk

A U startup wants to dissolve your old gadgets—and that’s a very good thing

Every year, Americans toss millions of phones, laptops, and wearable devices. Most end up in landfills, leaching toxic lead, mercury, and arsenic into the ground. The circuit boards inside those discarded gadgets contain gold, silver, and other precious metals—but conventional electronics are built in ways that make recovery nearly impossible.

EnduraCure, a startup born in the U’s Price College of Engineering, is changing that. The company makes flexible polymer substrates—think of them as the structural backbone of a circuit board—that perform like conventional materials during use but dissolve in a mild chemical bath at the end of their life. That makes it possible to recover the valuable metals inside rather than burying them.

“It’s all about making these products degradable by design,” says CEO Dennis Pruzan PhD’18, a U

materials science grad. “We’re pushing toward a circular economy and reducing loads on landfills.”

The company grew out of the lab of Chen Wang, an assistant professor of materials science whose research focuses on sustainable polymers. Pruzan came back to the lab after years in industry—he helped develop carbon fiber products at DPS Skis—and eventually took the helm at EnduraCure.

The startup’s initial targets are medical sensors, smart packaging, and wearable devices, all of which demand both durability and flexibility. EnduraCure recently earned a National Science Foundation Phase I Small Business Technology Transfer award to fund continued research and commercialization, and the team is now seeking manufacturing partners to scale up.

“It’s very clear that Utah has a wealth of resources to make those connections,” Pruzan adds.

## PICTURE

**Students from the U’s Urban Art-works** class unveiled a public mural at the Murray Theatre in November. The project brought together artists V.Kim Martinez BFA’98 (U professor), Watson Stilwell, Xhantall Aguilar, Eddie Almean, Julia Hoang, Liam Loveday, Amber Oar, Pablo Ayala, and Ondraya Waters HBFA’25 to strengthen community bonds through art.



## BY THE NUMBERS

**Division I athletics** at Utah’s public universities generate far more than game-day excitement. A recent report from the University of Utah’s Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute highlights the economic, academic, and community impact of college sports across the state. In FY 2024:



**\$408.8 Million**  
Total economic output generated statewide

**\$229 Million**  
Gross domestic product contribution

**3,020**  
Jobs supported by intercollegiate athletics



**\$19 Million**  
Ticket sales across Utah’s public universities




**2,100**  
Student-athletes competing in Division I sports

**19**   
Division I programs at the U



**3.32**  
Average U student-athlete GPA

**95%**   
U student-athlete graduation rate

**\$109.8 Million**  
Total athletic revenue at the U



# One of the Team

## A nine-year-old girl finds friendship and belonging with Utah Volleyball

In August 2025, Utah Volleyball announced it had signed a special team member to the position of “Ultimate Ute.” Briar Rose, a nine-year-old girl with a rare genetic disorder called Wiedemann-Steiner syndrome (WSS), joined the team through Team IMPACT, a national nonprofit organization that matches children facing serious illness or disability with college athletic teams.

Children with WSS often have autistic tendencies while also being highly social, explains Briar Rose’s mom, Stacie Arnell. At school, Briar Rose struggled socially and experienced bullying, but after joining Utah Volleyball, “there was something magical about the way her confidence grew.”

During her two-year “contract,” Briar Rose is participating in practices, games, and other team events. When the roster is announced at matches, her name is called. She sits on the bench with the team until play begins. She even has her own bio page on the Utah Athletics website (personal details include “expert on Disney princesses” and “favorite foods are KitKats and Pringles”).

The team visits Briar Rose during her stays at Primary Children’s Hospital and has even shown up at her school for recess. Stacie says Briar Rose takes it in stride when the six-foot-tall college women arrive on the playground. “She’s like, ‘Oh, my friends are here, no big deal.’ She feels so much a part of them that she doesn’t even grasp the age difference.”

“We genuinely couldn’t have asked for a more perfect match,” says middle blocker Katelynn Field. “Briar Rose has brought our team together in so many ways. She brings so much joy into our lives.”

Head coach Alyssa D’Errico describes the partnership as a gift—“not just for our athletes, but for our entire staff. Despite carrying more hardships than most people will ever know, Briar Rose shows up with a spirit that lifts every room she walks into. Being part of her happiness has been one of the most meaningful and rewarding experiences in our program.”

Stacie says the team makes it feel like her daughter is blessing them, “but the gift they’ve given her and our family is just incredible. There aren’t words to describe the impact it’s had on her.”

### SPORTS BRIEFS



**The U delivered a medal-worthy performance** at the Milano-Cortina Winter Olympics, sending 31 athletes with U ties to the Games—more than any other U.S. university. By the Closing Ceremonies, nine Utes had climbed the podium and 27 logged top-10 finishes.

Team USA featured 28 alumni, students, and staff who competed in freestyle skiing, freeskiing, speedskating, snowboarding, ski jumping, and cross-country. Three U alumni competed internationally: skier Fayik Abdi BS’20 for Saudi Arabia, cross-country skier Joe Davies BS’25 for Great Britain, and alpine skier Madison Hoffman BS’24 for Australia.



On the slopes, aerial skiers Kaila Kuhn (above, right) and Chris Lillis (above, center) soared to gold in mixed team aerials. Jaelin Kauf carved out two silver medals in women’s moguls and women’s dual moguls. Freestyle skiing legend Alex Hall followed his 2022 Beijing gold medal with a silver in Italy. On the oval, Ethan Cepuran (top photo, left) and Casey Dawson (top photo, center) earned silver in the men’s team pursuit, while Corinne Stoddard (bottom photo) claimed bronze in the women’s 1,500-meter.

The university’s top-10 finishes included fifth place for Kaila Kuhn and sixth for Winter Vinecki in women’s aerials, a discipline where the entire U.S. women’s team hailed from the U. Novie McCabe glided to fifth place in the cross-country skiing 4 × 7.5-kilometer relay. McCabe was one of four athletes in Italy who also competed for Utah Athletics; others included Hoffman, Davies, and Keely Cashman (alpine skiing).

The U was represented on the sidelines, too. Alumni David Euler and Ryan Wyble BS’11 coached Team USA in freestyle skiing’s slopestyle and big air events. U Health physical therapist Jason Miller and U Health athletic trainer Trevor Kelsey both work with U.S. Speedskating.



At the Paralympics, the U had a small but mighty showing. Cross-country skier Sydney Peterson (above) dominated the loops, taking home three golds and a silver.

Expect to see more Utes at the French Alps Games in 2030 and here at home in 2034, when the Winter Olympics and Paralympics return to Utah.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: NOEL STAVE; US SPEEDSKATING; MARK REIS; USOPC; NOEL STAVE; US SPEEDSKATING; CHRIS RANDOUR; US SKI TEAM

## Sydney Brooksby BS'25

As I entered college, I was in renal failure and had two choices: Return home and enjoy the rest of my declining life, or make one last effort to achieve my childhood dream. I chose the latter. I received a kidney autotransplant, picked up my textbook, and asked myself this question: “How far are you willing to go?”

My disease drove me to pursue a degree in biology. It's been incredible to exercise my own ambition as a student by drafting a gene-editing research proposal to mitigate the effects of my own disease, Turner Syndrome (TS). I was born with Mosaic TS, a genetic mutation that causes one of a female's X chromosomes to be incomplete or completely missing.

Studying genomics eliminated the uncertainty of my condition. I was able to take authority over my own health care. It made every surgery, procedure, and supplemental diagnosis easier to comprehend and overcome. My favorite biology course has been Gene Expression, where I learned how to translate my excitement for genomics and genetic engineering into a research proposal. With chromosomal mutations like Turner Syndrome, recovering lost genetic information is at the core of any real solution. My proposal outlined how gene-editing technologies—such as CRISPR-Cas9, homology-directed repair (HDR), and mRNA delivery—could be used to “copy and paste” missing genetic content onto a fragmented X chromosome.

From 2018 to 2022, I competed as a member of the USA Archery RED [Regional Elite Development] Team. During college, I focused on strength training, my health, and academics. Now my goal is to qualify for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. I hope to one day attend medical school and specialize in hepatobiliary (kidney/liver) transplant surgery, with a supplemental focus in chromosomal abnormalities. What I would say to my freshman self and undergraduates beginning their journey at the U: People only get brave when they have nothing to lose. Be brave anyway.

*Sydney Brooksby is the recipient of the Academic Merit Scholarship, Science Research Initiative (SRI) Scholarship, SRI-CAP Scholarship, Homecoming Royalty 2023 Scholarship, LJBJ Finishing Fund Scholarship, and the Gary and Ann Crocker Endowed Science Scholarship.*

“One of the most fascinating questions at the center of the poem is this: Is there a part of you that remains the same despite the changes we undergo in life?”

DANIEL MENDELSON,  
AN ODYSSEY TRANSLATOR AND 2025  
OBERT C. AND GRACE A. TANNER  
HUMANITIES CENTER SPEAKER

### Why We Keep Returning to *The Odyssey*

When Hollywood heads to the Aegean Sea this summer with a blockbuster retelling of *The Odyssey*, audiences will watch a story nearly 3,000 years old sweep across IMAX screens. At the U, the epic recently surfaced in a quieter, more intimate way: through the voices of students, faculty, and neighbors who gathered for a 15-hour marathon reading hosted by the Tanner Humanities Center. Participants read Daniel Mendelsohn’s new translation aloud, letting Homer’s lines unfold the way they were first meant to be experienced: in community, spoken into the air.

Mendelsohn visited campus for a Tanner Humanities Center conversation and podcast, reflecting on the musicality of the poem and the discoveries that come only from speaking it.

Before heading to theaters, Jordan Johansen, assistant professor of Classics, suggests holding onto the heart of the poem—not the monsters or storms, but the questions that linger beneath them. “*The Odyssey* grows up with you. At 18, it’s a story about adventure,” Johansen notes. “At 35, it becomes a story about responsibility. Later in life, it becomes a meditation on memory, loss, and the longing for home. Its relevance comes from how generously it meets us—wherever we are in our own journey.”

*For more than 35 years, the Obert C. and Grace A. Tanner Humanities Center at the U has brought scholars, writers, and the public together. Visit [magazine.utah.edu/tanner](http://magazine.utah.edu/tanner) for the full slate of presenters and events for the 2026–27 year.*

# Examining Federalism, Law, and American Governance

A new U initiative brings experts to study the foundations of self-governance ahead of America's semiquincentennial



As the nation approaches its 250th birthday, the U is launching a presidential initiative on federalism, law, and American governance.

The initiative will advance scholarly work on how free societies organize authority, balance power, and sustain democratic institutions over time. It reflects the commitment of President Taylor Randall HBA'90 to addressing enduring

questions about human dignity, freedom, and civic responsibility.

"Universities exist to pursue enduring questions and to prepare students to lead in moments of uncertainty and change," Randall says. "At their best, they provide space for rigorous inquiry into the ideas, values, and institutions that have defined the American experiment and will guide its future."

The initiative will focus on public engagement, resource development, student programs, and platforms for open dialogue. Two S.J. Quinney College of Law professors, Paul Cassell and Jason Iuliano, will serve as co-directors.

E. Gordon Gee BA'68 (former president of West Virginia University, Vanderbilt, and others) and former American Enterprise Institute president Arthur C. Brooks will serve on the external advisory board. Gee will chair the committee.

"At a time of rapid technological change, global instability, and growing civic fragmentation, there is increasing demand for educational environments that foster careful reasoning, respectful discourse, and deep engagement across difference," Gee says. "This initiative aims to address that demand by fostering inquiry into classical traditions and the human values that inform individual and collective decision-making."

The effort builds on existing programs including the Honors College's Intellectual Traditions courses and the Hinckley Institute of Politics' public forums and Washington, D.C., internship programs.

## PICTURE

The Utah Museum of Fine Arts installed Robert Indiana's iconic *LOVE* sculpture (*Red Outside Blue Inside*) on its south lawn. One of the world's most recognizable artworks, the 12-by-12-by-6-foot piece now stands as a permanent cultural landmark at the University of Utah. The effort to bring the \$4.5 million sculpture to campus was initiated by university donors and state leaders in part to highlight the role UMFA plays as the State of Utah's official art museum. Bringing *LOVE* to the university was made possible through a combination of state support and private funding, ensuring that maintenance, conservation, security, and long-term stewardship were built into the acquisition from the outset, treating the sculpture as a public art investment for future generations.



## A Feast of Dining Options

Campus got a whole lot tastier for U students this year. A restructuring that consolidated all campus eateries under Housing and Dining has sparked a wave of new choices, expanded hours, and fresh meal plan options.

“Our vision is to deliver efficient, nutritious, and convenient dining options all over campus, no matter where a student is,” says Sean Grube, Housing and Dining associate vice president, adding that student feedback drove many of the changes.

Some new additions bring bold international flavors. Korean restaurant Cupbop, once a popular campus food truck, now has a dedicated spot in Gardner Commons. El Tonga Taco, a local favorite, opened shop inside the Union Building. Students can treat themselves to custard or bingsu (Korean shaved ice) thanks to a new machine at Peterson Heritage Center (PHC). And a new station at Urban Bytes in Kahlert Village called Global Eats offers rotating cuisine from around the world.

Two new breakfast locations have joined the roster. At Iron Waffle in Gardner Commons, diners can pick from sweet and savory options, like peaches and cream or bacon and egg. Seagull Sunrise in the C. Roland Christensen Center offers a cereal bar, French toast sticks, and cinnamon buns with a variety of frostings.

Other dietary options have also multiplied. Students requested more paleo and fresh foods, so the dining team debuted a station at PHC called FUEL with lean proteins, spaghetti squash and zoodles, build-your-own bowls, wraps, and salads inspired by Mediterranean flavors. And the Bok Choy station at Kahlert Village added more veggie alternatives.

The upgrades are part of the U’s push to create “college town magic” and improve the student experience. Future plans will continue to make campus dining more accessible—and more delicious.

1. Bok Choy, a Mongolian barbecue restaurant at Urban Bytes in Kahlert Village
2. A savory pork topping for an Iron Waffle rotating special
3. Beef birria tacos from El Tonga Taco in the Union Building
4. A sandwich from Absurd Bird, a Nashville hot chicken-style spot in Gardner Commons
5. Matcha and berry, a special at Iron Waffle
6. Cupbop entrees with Korean barbecue meats, rice, cabbage, and noodles



# 30

Gallery



## Brain Fog Nation

A new U study finds cognitive difficulties have nearly doubled among Americans under 40 over the past decade

Can't remember where you put your keys? Struggling to focus during meetings? You're not alone—and the problem is getting worse.

A new U study reveals that rates of self-reported cognitive disability have nearly doubled among American adults under 40 over the past decade. By 2023, almost 1 in 10 young adults reported serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions due to a physical, mental, or emotional condition.

"I was shocked at first," says Ka-Ho Wong BS'15, research associate of neuroimmunology at U of U Health and first author on the paper. "The younger population actually nearly doubled in terms of reporting cognitive disability."

The study analyzed 4.5 million survey responses from 2013 to 2023. The sharpest increases appeared among people earning less than \$35,000 per year and those with chronic health conditions.

Economic factors may be driving much of the rise, Wong suggests. "Economic stressors, like job market uncertainty and changes in work environments, could be a huge factor," he says. "They induce stress, and stress could induce cognitive disability." Decreased stigma around mental health could also make people more comfortable reporting difficulties.

The findings aren't explained by COVID, either. The trend began years before the pandemic, with rates climbing since at least 2016.

Wong's advice for anyone experiencing cognitive difficulties is straightforward. "Voice that to your health care specialist," he says, "whether it's your family doctor or anybody you see. Take it seriously."

Early interventions like cognitive exercise, dietary changes, or managing physical health issues that can impact mental health might help reverse the trend.

## A Startup Academy Built for High Schoolers

Twelve days to build a business from scratch, or grow one, and learn what it takes to be an entrepreneur. That's what the U is offering high schoolers this summer.

The new Lasonde Startup Academy puts students ages 14-18 inside Lasonde Studios—a five-story building where they'll stay on the upper floors and work in a 20,000-square-foot "maker-space" below.

The space houses 3D printers, laser cutters, and prototyping equipment—everything students need to move from concept to finished product. And they can show up with a business idea already brewing or start from scratch.

"Join the academy to get a firsthand look at every step in the startup process, from ideation and prototyping to marketing and sales," says Anne Bastien BS'05 MBA'10, staff director of the Startup Academy. "The experience will conclude with a demo day event where students can showcase and sell their products."

The inaugural session runs just under two weeks through the Lasonde Entrepreneur Institute—ranked among the top 10 university entrepreneurship programs in the country by *U.S. News & World Report* and *Princeton Review*. Days center on entrepreneurial workshops and hands-on building time. Evenings shift to social activities. The program also offers college credit.

"Students will learn by doing. They'll get their hands dirty building products and will learn what it takes to create a business," says Scott Holley BA'02, the institute's executive director.

The institute already serves everyone from college students to alumni through programs like the Master of Business Creation—which blends a graduate business degree with a business accelerator—and Lasonde for Life, which provides entrepreneurial support to all U graduates. Now, the academy extends that reach to a younger generation.

Applications are open now at [lassonde.utah.edu/academy](http://lassonde.utah.edu/academy). Scholarships are available based on merit and need.

Campus





# Supplying Critical Minerals at Home

A new institute at the U seeks to expand the sustainable critical minerals supply chain in the U.S.

As the U.S. reduces its reliance on foreign critical minerals, Utah is stepping up to rebuild the domestic supply chain—and the U’s expertise will help drive that effort forward.

This spring, the U’s Board of Trustees and the Utah Board of Higher Education voted in favor of the proposed Institute for Critical and Strategic Minerals (ICSM). Through education, workforce development, and cutting-edge research, the institute aims to expand sustainable, domestic sources and production of critical minerals and rare earth elements—the raw materials vital for advanced technologies.

“With legislative support from state leaders, Utah is taking a decisive step to lead in critical minerals,” says U president Taylor Randall HBA’90. “Working with industry and government partners, the ICSM will position Utah as the nation’s hub for critical mineral production, processing, and research.”

ICSM supports the full lifecycle of critical mineral development—from geological discovery and responsible mining to processing and recycling—while addressing broader challenges, including community impact, market analysis, and environmental regulation.

“As the only Utah institution offering the combination of geology, mining engineering, and metallurgical engineering, the U can fully integrate crucial STEM fields with environmental research, supply chain analysis, and policy to advance critical minerals research from discovery to application,” says Michael Free BS’90 MS’92 PhD’94, professor of metallurgical engineering at the U and proposed ICSM director.

The U has built a long-standing reputation for preparing graduates to meet evolving demands of the mining and minerals sector.

“For more than a century, the U’s College of Mines and Earth Sciences has trained the engineers and geologists who powered the state’s mining industry,” says Mitzi Montoya, executive vice president for Academic Affairs. “ICSM builds on that legacy, advancing a modern, interdisciplinary approach that drives innovation responsibly and will benefit Utahns in the long run.”

Over the past six years, the U’s scientists have been awarded more than \$20 million to lead critical minerals research—resources that ICSM will use to advance research, teaching, and public engagement across disciplines.

## Hair Today, Lead-Free Tomorrow

A Utah tradition of preserving family keepsakes just helped prove that environmental regulations actually work.

U researchers analyzed hair samples spanning a century and found lead concentrations have plummeted 100-fold since 1916. The key to documenting this dramatic decline? People who kept their ancestors’ hair in scrapbooks.

“We were able to show through our hair samples what the lead concentrations are before and after the establishment of regulations by the EPA,” says demographer Ken Smith, Distinguished Professor emeritus of family and consumer studies. “Back when the regulations were absent, the lead levels were about 100 times higher than they are after the regulations.”

Before the Environmental Protection Agency was established in 1970, Americans were surrounded by lead from industrial sources, paint, water pipes, and, especially, car exhaust. The neurotoxin accumulates in human tissue and causes developmental problems in children.

For the study, researchers asked families participating in the U’s Utah Population Database to provide contemporary hair samples plus any preserved samples from their youth or from ancestors. Forty-eight people obliged, some retrieving locks dating back a century.

“The Utah part of this is so interesting because of the way people keep track of their family history,” Smith says. “I don’t know that you could do this in New York or Florida.”

Hair samples revealed lead levels as high as 100 parts per million before 1970. By 1990, that dropped to 10 ppm. In 2024, levels measured less than 1 ppm.

“We should not forget the lessons of history,” says co-author Thure Cerling, Distinguished Professor of geology and biology. “Those regulations have been very important.”



The U.S. Mining and Smelting Co. plant in Midvale, Utah, 1906. Photo used by permission, Utah Historical Society.



## Healing Animals, Helping People

The terrier had been badly attacked by another dog, and his back leg was severely injured. To make matters worse, a record-breaking snowstorm had made it impossible to get him to the vet for days after he was hurt.

Major needed surgery, and serious infection had already set in, with multiple kinds of dangerous bacteria detected. It was the kind of advanced infection that's notoriously difficult to treat in both humans and nonhuman animals.

"Think of a wildfire taking off," says Nicholas Ashton BS'11 MS'15 PhD'16, research assistant professor of orthopedic surgery at U of U Health. "Once the infection takes hold, the tissue starts breaking down, the bacteria proliferate, and it just keeps getting worse." Pill-based antibiotics are often not enough to control such infections.

But Major's veterinarian had a different solution, developed by Ashton and Dustin Williams PhD'12, professor of orthopedic surgery at U of U Health—a pouch that could be filled with antibiotics, placed directly into the wound, and refilled as needed. After 10 days of treatment, Major's infection cleared.

Williams hit on the idea for the Vetlen Pouch while thinking about dialysis machines, which use permeable membranes to filter fluid. Instead of an antimicrobial coating that runs out, why not make a refillable bag?

The device has since treated dogs, cats, and horses with serious infections.

"Cats hate taking pills," Williams says. "But with the pouch, you can just empty it and refill it every day and the cat doesn't even care. And the wound heals up like a champ."

The researchers hope to move into human clinical trials soon. "I come from a military family, and I want to help heal soldiers," Williams says. "My goal is to heal people."

# Keto's Potential Long-Term Risks

A nine-month study in mice reveals the popular high-fat diet may cause fatty liver disease and impair blood sugar regulation

While the ketogenic diet was historically used to treat epilepsy, it has recently gained popularity for weight loss and management of conditions like obesity and type 2 diabetes. But new research from U of U Health raises important questions about its long-term safety and efficacy for metabolic health.

"We've seen short-term studies and those just looking at weight, but not really any studies looking at what happens over the longer term or with other facets of metabolic health," says Molly Gallop, now assistant professor of anatomy and physiology at Earlham College, who led the study as a post-doctoral fellow in nutrition and integrative physiology at U of U Health.

The ketogenic diet successfully prevented weight gain in mice compared to a high-fat Western diet. Despite this apparent benefit, mice fed the ketogenic diet developed severe metabolic complications, with some changes starting within days.

"One thing that's very clear is that if you have a really high-fat diet, the lipids have to go somewhere, and they usually end up in the blood and the liver," says Amandine Chaix, assistant professor of nutrition and integrative physiology at U of U Health and senior author on the study.

The study also revealed problems with blood sugar regulation. After two to three months on the ketogenic diet, mice had low



levels of blood sugar and insulin. But when given small amounts of carbohydrates, their blood glucose spiked.

"The problem is that when you then give these mice a little bit of carbs, their carb response is completely skewed," Chaix says. "Their blood glucose goes really high for really long, and that's quite dangerous."

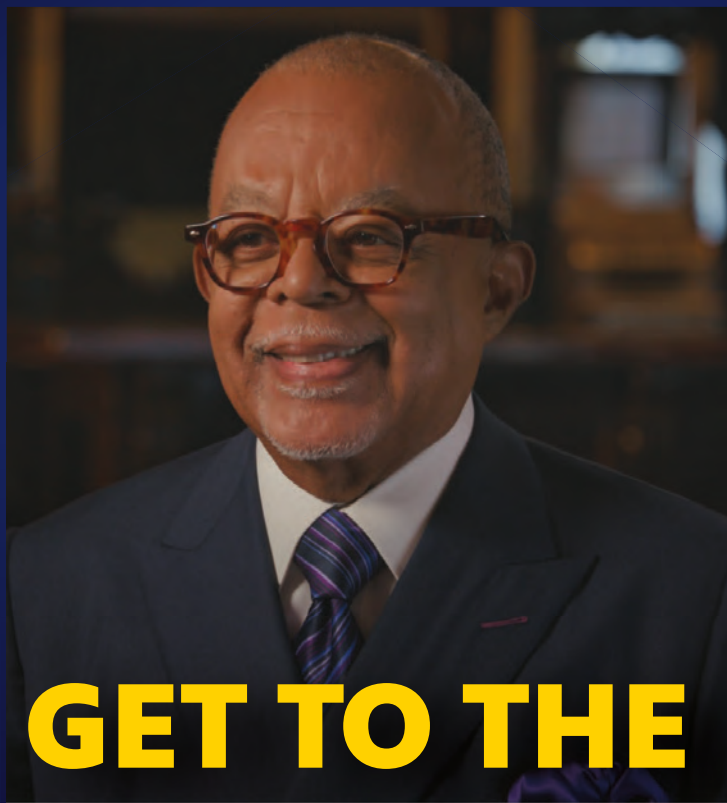
"I would urge anyone to talk to a health care provider if they're thinking about going on a ketogenic diet," Gallop says.



## PICTURE

**Honors College** students from the University of Utah Asia Campus spent the night at Musangsa Temple in Gyeryong, experiencing Korean Zen Buddhist monastic life. The visit included meditation, vegetarian meals, a 4 a.m. wake-up, 108 prostrations, a dharma talk by Abbot Tan Wol Sunim, and a reflective hike through the surrounding mountains.

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# Legend Has It



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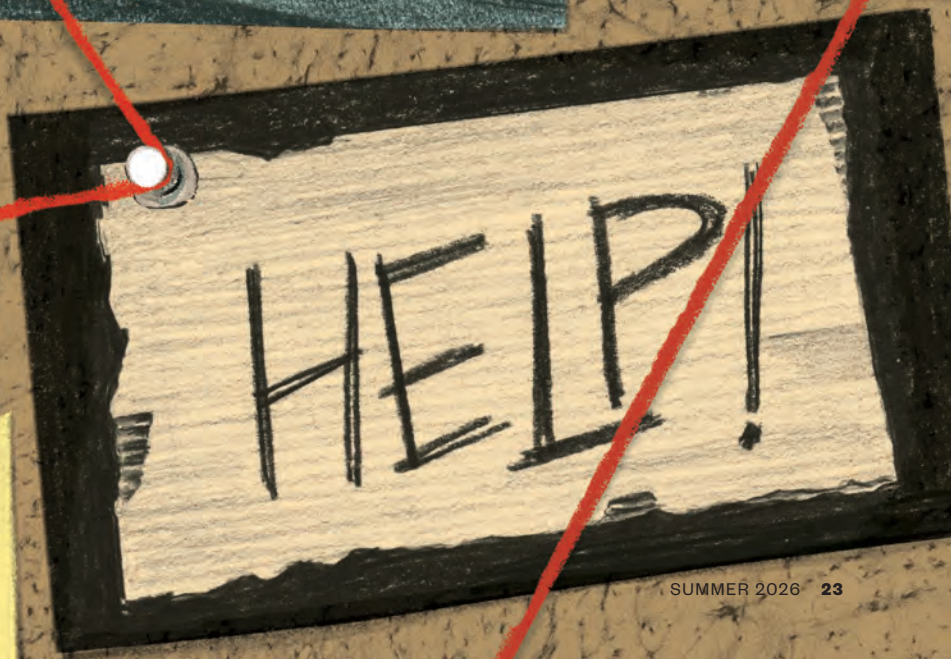
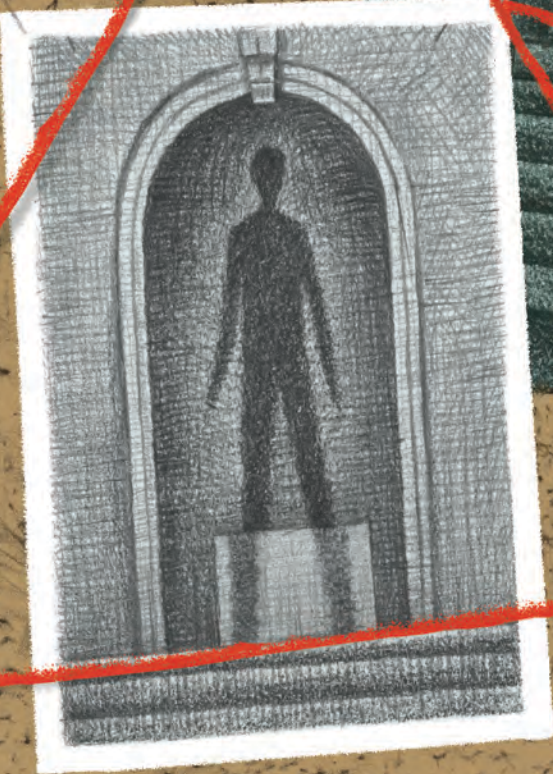
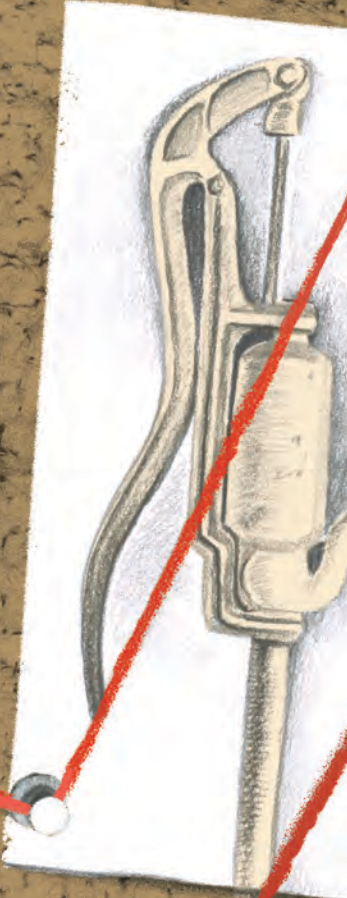
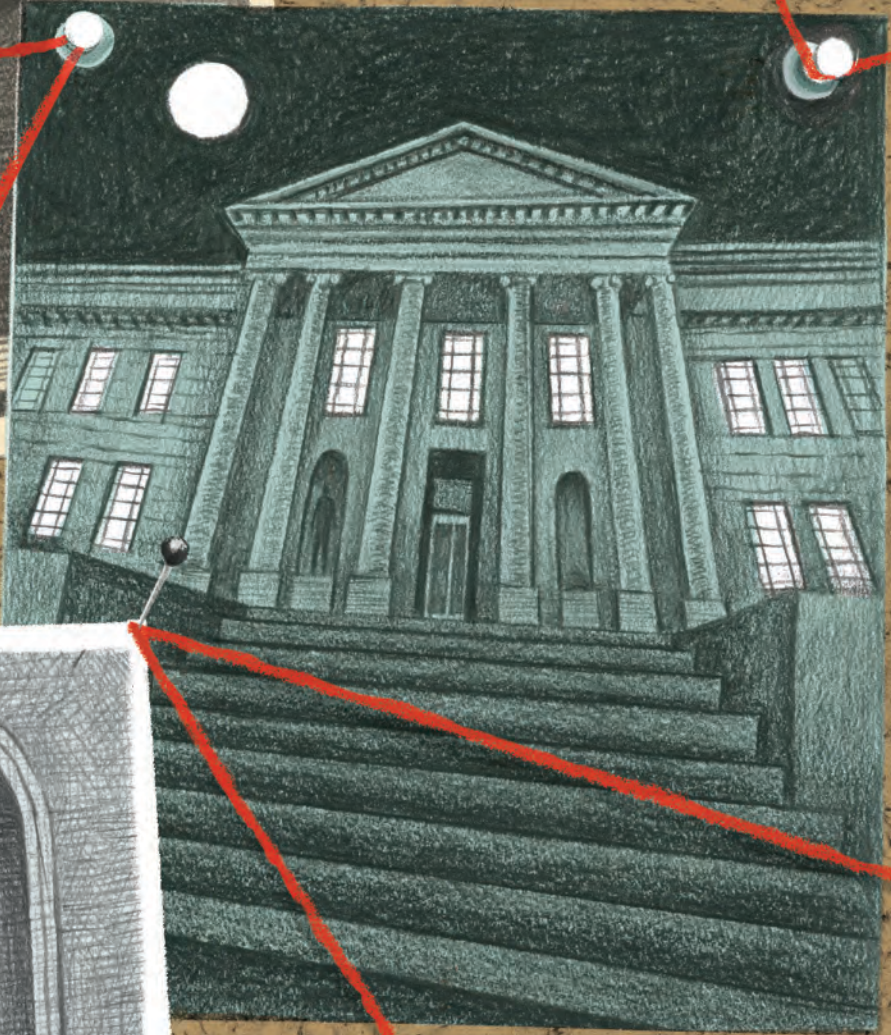
SUMMER 2026 VOLUME 35, NO. 2

From magic fountains to hidden skeletons,  
we investigate the truth behind campus  
tales of the strange and supernatural.

WRITTEN BY Lisa Anderson	
ILLUSTRATIONS BY Sam Kalda	

# SECRET







**A**TTHE University of Utah, the lore runs deeper than the rumored network of tunnels beneath campus. There's the ghostly soldier who roams Fort Douglas. The fountain that supposedly grants athletic powers. The friend of a roommate who narrowly escaped a notorious serial killer.

Like lichen spreading over headstones, tall tales and spooky stories have taken hold throughout the university's 176-year history. Some are legend. Some are fabrication. And some are very much true.

We set out to find which is which.

# A HUMAN SKULL WAS UNEARTHED AT PRESIDENTS CIRCLE.

**RATING: TRUE**

**IN APRIL 2016**, renovation work on the Crocker Science Center in the George Thomas Building came to a halt when U historical architect Charles Shepherd found something unexpected at the site.

"There was what I thought was a large cobblestone over to my left. I walked over to it...and immediately could tell that it was not just a big rock," Shepherd said in a

podcast chronicling the story. "I've never had an anatomy class in my life, but I could recognize a skull when I saw it."

The skull was one of several human bones found at the site. As U writers Paul Gabrielsen and Brooke Adams BS'91 MS'12 BS'21 reported, the state's forensic anthropologist was brought in to analyze the remains. After discovering a neatly cut section of cranium, she

determined the remains came from "anatomical specimens"—aka cadavers. More than a century ago, the building housed the U's School of Medicine, although it's unclear how the bones ended up in the soil beneath the foundation. After the investigation, the remains were given to the Anthropology Department to serve their original purpose—educating students.



# STUDENTS FAILED A MORALITY TEST AFTER IGNORING A MAN IN NEED.

## RATING: LEGEND

**THIS TALE,** fittingly, comes from the very man who coined the term “urban legend.” Professor Emeritus Jan Harold Brunvand, who taught folklore at the U for 30 years before retiring in 1996, popularized the concept of these tales that “fit in between tradition-

al folklore and modern exchanges.” Brunvand published several compilations of urban legends, some of which he heard from U students. A young man shared the following campus lore with Brunvand, who retold it in his syndicated column in May 1989.

Students in a religion class showed up for their final exam on the subject of compassion. On the chalkboard, the professor had left a note saying the test had been moved across campus. As the students headed to the new location, they saw a man begging for help but rushed past him in their haste to get to the

exam. When they arrived at the classroom, the professor asked if anyone had stopped to help the poor man outside—who, he revealed, was an actor planted to test the students’ true understanding of compassion. When he learned no one had stopped to help, the professor failed the entire class. An alternate

version tells of one student who does offer aid and therefore earns the only A.

“‘The Lesson in Compassion’ has three typical features of a campus legend: It’s unverifiable, it teaches a lesson, and it’s told with slight variations,” wrote Brunvand. “It’s likely that this one is told on campuses nationwide.”

# THERE’S A SECRET NETWORK OF TUNNELS UNDER CAMPUS.

## RATING: TRUE

**ASK AROUND** about campus rumors, and “the tunnels” comes up frequently. It seems everyone has heard about a supposed network of underground passageways.

According to a Fall 2002 *Continuum* article, the rumors are true. Ann Floor BA’85 lived near the U and explored campus growing up. In the summer of 1958, she and her brothers discovered the entrance to a tunnel in the basement of a campus building and ventured in.

“The tunnel was warm from the steam, and musty smelling, with a little water on the floor. And it was very dark.... We eventually came to a lighted intersection where four or five tunnels converged, like the spokes of a wheel. For the rest of the summer, we’d wander the tunnels.”

To a kid, it’s a secret subterranean world. But in the cold light of adulthood, the reality is pretty mundane—they’re utility tunnels for water pipes and electrical wires. And to anyone other than maintenance workers in appropriate gear, they’re potentially hazardous. Today, the tunnels are gated and accessible only with badge access.



## A U LAW STUDENT ESCAPED THE CLUTCHES OF TED BUNDY.

**RATING: TRUE**

**RANDY DRYER** BS'73JD'76 still can't believe he went to school with one of the world's most notorious serial killers. Ted Bundy "was the most gregarious, well-liked person you could ever imagine—the last person you'd suspect," says Dryer, a professor at the S.J. Quinney College of Law and Honors College.

Dryer was president of the Student Bar Association (SBA) at the time. One day,

the law school dean called Dryer into his office and told him the Salt Lake police suspected Bundy of multiple killings. He wanted Dryer to be present when the police brought an escaped victim to campus to identify Bundy. On that day, however, Bundy failed to show up for class.

But Dryer saw Bundy the next day at an SBA-hosted party. Earlier, Dryer had asked the SBA secretary to set up the party since he would be late. In

return, he would stay to clean up and she could go to the after-party at the Green Parrot nightclub.

As the SBA party wound down, Dryer and the secretary were talking when Bundy walked up and offered her a ride to the bar. Alarm bells went off—but the police had sworn Dryer to secrecy. "So I said to her, 'I really need you to help me clean up.'" She protested. Hadn't he promised she could leave? But

Dryer convinced her to stay, and Bundy drove off alone.

Soon afterward, Bundy was arrested and charged. "No one could believe it," says Dryer. Many students assumed their likable classmate had been mistaken for the actual perpetrator. "But as the facts came out, it was obviously not a case of mistaken identity. He was a true Jekyll and Hyde."

## A STATUE AT THE PARK BUILDING ENTRANCE WAS STOLEN.

**RATING: FALSE**

**THE ALCOVE** to the right of the Park Building entrance has been conspicuously empty for decades. Only photo-taking grads at commencement occupy the spot opposite the statue of first university president John R. Park. Are the rumors true that BYU students snuck onto campus and absconded with a bronze figure of Brigham Young? Alas, we can't blame this one on the Cougs. According to a 2008 *Daily Chronicle* article, the U simply ran out of funds after installing Park's statue in 1941. Subsequent renovations have come and gone, with "no concrete plans for the empty pedestal on the right—seemingly a riddle with no answer."

## THE "FOUNTAIN OF UTE" BESTOWS ATHLETIC GIFTS.

**RATING: LEGEND**

**YOU MAY HAVE** driven past the padlocked brick structure at the south end of the Rice-Eccles parking lot and never given it a thought. But legend says a secret lies within: a fountain that grants athletic prowess to anyone who drinks its waters.

The tale begins with a fact—a culinary well drilled in 1931 that earned the name "Fountain of Ute," according to photos of a bygone sign—then gets murkier. Per a 2009 U blog post, a group of biochem students known as the "Rad Scientists" claimed the well building for their lab sometime in the 1950s. These athletic students would tote their own water to competitions and "went on an intramural sports run that has yet to be rivaled at the U." In 2004, football coach Urban Meyer supposedly gained access to the building. Had he found the literal key that explains the team's undefeated, BCS-busting season? Most likely, it's just an Urban legend.





# CAMPUS IS HAUNTED.



**BEFORE THE OLD School of Medicine building** was torn down, it had earned a reputation for eerie phenomena, like elevator doors opening on their own. “This would happen only during graveyard shifts. Everybody who works graves can attest to it,” says Matt Turner, a U of U Health Security supervisor. “Every single time you’d go to the C elevator, as you were turning the corner—ding. It opened.”

The **Life Sciences building** housed the medical school after the end of World War I, so maybe the ghosts of cadavers caused the alleged paranormal activity. U Facilities employees have reported voices, strange noises, and lab gurneys moving on their own.

During the years he worked in Special Collections at **Marriott Library**, Walter Jones heard several reports of a

spectral soldier around the rare books room. “An employee came to me one time and told me he had just seen a ghost. The person was wearing a Civil War-era army uniform,” Jones recounts. Another time, a janitor, pale and shaking, told Jones an entity had shoved her. Later, a library visitor who’d heard about the ghost asked Jones where it had been sighted. “I took her down to the room, and she got this weird look on her face,” says Jones. “Finally, she said, ‘There was a ghost here, but it’s gone.’”

And then there’s **Fort Douglas**, home to some of Salt Lake’s oldest buildings—and, some say, its most restless spirits. “It can get weird sometimes,” says Fiona Robinson, administrative manager of the Fort Douglas Military Museum.

One night, Robinson was working late. “I heard a woman talking, almost

like a whisper,” she recalls. Assuming it was a wayward visitor, she walked through the rooms, announcing the museum was closed. “But still, she kept whispering.” That is, until Robinson approached a display case containing a World War II parachute dress. The gown possibly belonged to the sweetheart of a soldier who’d sent the precious silk back home. A paranormal expert who later toured the museum told Robinson, “The woman who owned this dress is still here. And she’s upset.”

On another occasion, Robinson was awaiting a donation of vehicles from the National Guard. “I heard the back door slam shut and the sound of footsteps,” she says. It must be a Guard member, she thought. She followed the sound of footsteps throughout the museum but no one appeared. An hour later, the Guard showed up.

Fort Douglas’s most frequent spectral sighting is the full-body apparition of a Civil War soldier named Clem. The name, according to a 2014 *Daily Chronicle* article, comes from a Boy Scout troop who spent the night in the museum. “The boys claimed to feel the breath of Clem, hear his footsteps, and see objects move,” the article reports. Robinson believes Clem is just one of many ghostly soldiers who like to unsettle visitors. “When you’re least expecting it,” she says, “that’s when they like to have their fun.” **U**

*Lisa Anderson is associate editor of Utah Magazine.*





## EXCELLENCE IN THE AIR

### ELEVATING CARE FOR UTAH'S SMALLEST PATIENTS

Families across Utah and the Mountain West depend on fast, specialized care during the most critical moments of pregnancy and newborn health. University of Utah Health's AirMed Perinatal Team is the region's only NICU/OB specialized team—recognized nationally—for transforming neonatal and maternal patient transport care.

- The integrated model combines the AirMed Perinatal flight program with University of Utah Health's TeleNICU virtual care system, enabling real-time visual assessments and neonatologist-guided support—even from miles away.
- With a dedicated aircraft and highly trained NICU/OB flight crew, the team delivers faster response times and advanced clinical expertise, serving as a lifeline for rural hospitals and families who may otherwise lack access to the highest levels of neonatal care.
- Team members train regularly in the Level 3 NICU at University of Utah Hospital, ensuring they remain prepared for the most complex cases.

When families face the unimaginable, the AirMed Perinatal Team brings hope—arriving swiftly, providing expert care, and supporting patients with compassion. **Their mission is clear: bring world-class care wherever it's needed.**

# BUILT

# FOR THIS



×

New  
head coach  
**MORGAN SCALLEY**  
is ready to lead Utah  
Football into a new era of  
college athletics.

by Amy Choate-Nielsen

# Moment



# Morgan Scalley

*is not afraid  
to cry.*



**HE FEELS DEEPLY.** It's part of who he is and how he coaches. He's a fierce competitor. Strict, but sometimes silly. Loves his family. Is wildly dedicated. And he believes the Utah football program can win a national championship.

The three C's he lives by—character, competence, and connection—are echoed by his staff and could help him get that coveted title. But for the three C's to work, he can't hold back the tears when he talks about God, or gratitude, or even regret.

Fifteen seconds after he took the microphone at the January press conference where he was officially named the 24th head coach of University of Utah football, Scalley's voice cracked with emotion. Then just as quickly, it switched to a growl.

"I'm a baby," Scalley said. "But man, our team's going to rip your face off."

It was a fitting introduction to Ford Morgan Scalley BA'04 MBA'07, fearless, and full of heart. At a time when college sports are increasingly scrutinized and under pressure to adapt, perform, find funding, and uphold their academic mission, Scalley is all in, with a vision.

He is taking the helm of a team that has won multiple conference titles, including the Pac-12 Championship twice. In 2024, it suffered a 5-7 losing record. But in 2025, Utah Football finished the year ranked 14th in the nation by the AP poll, winning Scalley's first game as head coach:

the Las Vegas Bowl. Demands to keep the momentum going are high, but Scalley is up for the challenge.

"Morgan shares our values. He shares our history," President Taylor Randall HBA'90 said at Scalley's press conference. "Even more importantly, he's got the brains and know-how to succeed in this new era of college athletics. I am confident that we have the right man for the right job at the right time."

At the center of Scalley's vision is another set of words that are his trademark: Relentless, Smart, Nasty Ballhawks—RSNB.

## Relentless

Scalley opens the door of his home to welcome visitors, and his dog, Red, bursts through. He's called Red because of the color of his coat, but also because Scalley is a die-hard Utah fan (and his backyard neighbor—who roots for a rival school—has a dog named Blue). The Scalley household is approachable enough to receive neighborhood trick-or-treaters and the occasional roll of toilet paper thrown into their trees by boys who have crushes on the Scalley daughters. (Although after the third time, Scalley was not amused.)

This is what it looks like to be as rooted in the community as Scalley is: one of those toilet-papering boys actually ended up on Scalley's roster and fessed up in front of all the other players that he got caught. The team thought it was hilarious. Even Scalley chuckles about it now, saying it's connection. A step on the path to knowing someone sincerely.

Scalley's connections in Utah have history. People don't just know him, they know his family. His dad played football at the U in the '60s, and his siblings were competitive athletes. Coaches and fans cheered him on from when he was a teenage football star at Highland High School, to a stand-out college athlete at the U, to when he first became a full-time football coach at the U in 2008. His support from the community runs deep, earned by decades of relentless work.



Morgan Scalley's dad, Ford "Bud" Scalley JD'67, appears in a 1961 *Deseret News/Salt Lake Telegram* sports story. Bud Scalley played halfback at Utah from 1960-62.

That will help with the headwinds he now steps into. He takes the reins from Kyle Whittingham, who was head coach for 21 seasons, less than two years after the U realigned to the Big 12. In July 2025, the U began operating under new terms of the House v. NCAA settlement, which allows institutions to pay student-athletes up to \$20.5 million annually through revenue-sharing agreements, with an increase of four percent over the next 10 years.

The U is competing against programs in conferences that bring in more revenue to fund those payments. To help close the gap, the Board of Trustees approved the creation of Utah





**SCALLEY,  
BY THE NUMBERS**

**As a Player**

**12-0**

Captained the U's Fiesta Bowl team to an undefeated season and No. 4 final ranking

**2X**

Academic all-American

**Pat Tillman Award**

Won the inaugural East-West Shrine Game award, which recognizes character, intelligence, sportsmanship, and service.



Scalley and teammates celebrate a 35-7 Fiesta Bowl win over Pittsburgh, capping a standout 2004-05 season that made Utah the first non-BCS team to reach a BCS bowl.

PREVIOUS PAGE PHOTO BY SOPHIA KUDER/UTAH ATHLETICS; FIESTA BOWL PHOTO BY JEFFREY D. ALLRED/DESERET NEWS

Brand Initiatives (UBI), a for-profit company that will manage the business side of athletics, likely in partnership with a private equity group. All of that change has created a lot of movement that is hard to ignore.

"Normally, in January, I walk into the football team room, I introduce myself to newcomers, and there's usually 11 or 12, maybe sometimes 13 or 14," University Athletics Director Mark Harlan said at the announcement of the new company. "This last year, I walked in front of our football team in January and there were 53 new faces on a roster that's approximately 90-100."

That said, Scalley is undaunted. More than that, ask him about the challenges facing football today and he seems genuinely energized. In March, he and his wife, Liz BS'04, donated \$2 million to the football program to show it's not just Scalley's blood, sweat, and tears they're investing.

"I still see such a great opportunity to show that culture still matters and that you can still win at a high level without losing the ability to create relationships that matter," Scalley says. "Guys will stick around for the right experience."

For Scalley's athletes, that experience includes RSNB—a unifying mentality that conjures tenacity and persistence in pursuit of everything from grades to goals. It represents mental toughness, situational intelligence, awareness, and treating your body well. It's how they end practice; it's their hashtag.

The right experience also includes intelligent coaching from a guy with a photographic memory and an athletic

record that includes Mountain West Scholar-Athlete of the Year and two-time first-team Academic All-American. Way back in high school, he played with a verve that earned the Highland High rugby team third place in the 1998 world championship, which made legendary coach Larry Gelwix reminisce, "I have never had a player with the drive to win like Morgan Scalley," as Gelwix was inducted into the U.S. Rugby Hall of Fame in 2024.

At the U, he's been defensive coordinator, recruiting coordinator, special teams coordinator, and safeties coach, all while building the three C's and RSNB. He has been waiting for this moment, investing in this community, and building his life around the U for this long. And he wants to rip your team's face off.

"It's hard to imagine somebody as uniquely equipped and suited for this role as Morgan Scalley," Harlan said. "He has proven over and over again that he is not only ready to lead, but he will excel in taking over our storied football program. Head coach is more than a job for Morgan, it is personal."

**Smart**

On a Sunday evening in February, Scalley dons the same gray suit and red tie he wore at his introductory press conference and arrives at a local church. He has come, on his own time, to talk to hundreds of teenagers and their parents about self-worth and the seven things he wished he knew while growing up.

"I'm in a position, with my title and the things that I do as a coach, where a lot of people want to tell me how to do my job," Scalley says. "A lot of people have opinions about me, and that's okay, as long as I understand whose opinion matters the most. After a while, you learn to ignore the names people call you and just trust who you are. Until we come to truly value and love ourselves, we will be prone to live lives based on what we believe other people value and love."

Scalley is banking on this idea to set Utah apart. In a day when retention is the name of the game, he is looking at building a program that keeps athletes for reasons beyond just money.

"If you have a good culture, which Morgan will have, then you don't lose your guys as much," says Bill Busch, longtime college football coach and DB coach for Scalley as an undergrad at the U.

Scalley started his team's culture with a focus on trust. To get results, you need trust, and to build trust, you must demonstrate character, competence, and connection, Scalley says. Competence means a coach imbues athletes with their knowledge in a way that elevates their performance. Connection is the key to knowing how to support athletes in the way they need it most. Character is being authentic and trustworthy.

Scalley expects his coaches to abide by the three C's, and he is the example. He shouts on the sidelines, he sings in the video room. He shows the good and the bad and that being vulnerable is a strength. He and his coaches are developing a culture where their players know they are valued, and that the knowledge and skills and training they receive is valuable.

SCALLEY,  
BY THE NUMBERS ✓

# As a Coach



**19** YEARS  
on Utah's  
coaching  
staff

**10** Seasons as  
defensive  
coordinator

**33** Players  
developed  
into the NFL

**14** All-Americans  
coached  
(4 consensus/  
unanimous)

**36** GAMES  
holding opponents  
to 15 points or fewer  
(since 2019)

**No. 2**  
National total defense  
ranking (2019)

**5X** Led  
conference in  
rushing  
**DEFENSE**

**3X** Led  
conference  
in sacks and  
tackles  
for loss

**2<sup>nd</sup>**  
Utah's rushing  
defense among  
Power Conference  
teams since 2016—  
trailing only Georgia

**53** GAMES  
allowing 100  
rushing yards or  
fewer since 2016

**Top 3**  
Conference scoring  
defense every season  
since 2017





^
  
 Morgan Scalley poses with his wife, Liz Scalley BS'04 (center); daughter Emma (left); daughter Maddie (right); and son, Andrew (right).

o
  
 “He is a ferocious personality, but his heart is so kind.”

“Yes, we have discipline. Yes, we give feedback,” Scalley says, acknowledging that sometimes the feedback might be difficult to receive, and sometimes it involves extra burpees. “But ultimately it’s the education process and helping them understand what’s going to make them become elite at the football level, but also at life level.”

The walls in the Spence and Cleone Eccles Football Center are in the process of being remodeled to reflect Scalley’s culture-building, but a glimpse at the defensive team meeting room gives a sense of where it’s headed. On the wall, a sign says, “Building a skill takes time and effort. I will invest the time and be tenaciously persistent. I understand that discomfort is part of the process. If I avoid discomfort, I prevent learning. I will make mistakes. And they will teach me. I want feedback and coaching.”

Scalley has all of the teenagers in the church building repeat this mantra word for word. After, he greets every person standing in line to meet him like a friend. Big smile, handshakes, hugs. He turns no one away.

“He yells all the time. He is a ferocious personality, but his heart is so kind,” says Sharrieff Shah, a longtime U assistant coach (and new associate head coach). “That kindness and love are two of the greatest attributes that can help the team become not just great football players but great men. They will put their cleats down and I will ask myself, ‘Did I make them better men?’ And I am glad that Coach Scalley will make us better coaches so we can make our players better men.”

## Nasty Ballhawks

At 6 a.m. in February, the team is running through plays in the fieldhouse. It’s conditioning season, which hurts. A lot of times, the yard sprints and drills end with players puking outside, but today, they’re taking it light.

Scalley stands on the sidelines then moves around the field, calling out directions.

His own coaches from over the years are cheering him on still, remembering how they saw him grow, and how he managed his own occasional defeat. They know what it’s like to harness talent and build potential from a quintessential ballhawk. Coaching is a close metaphor to life.

“At the end of the day, no matter how many times you get knocked down, you keep getting up one more time,” says Larry Wilson, Scalley’s high school football coach who has been in the game for 52 years. “That is how Morgan is. A lot of people are afraid of failure, but Morgan is not. He will make mistakes, like everybody does, but he will make them while doing his very best. And he will learn from them, and he will find ways to be successful.”

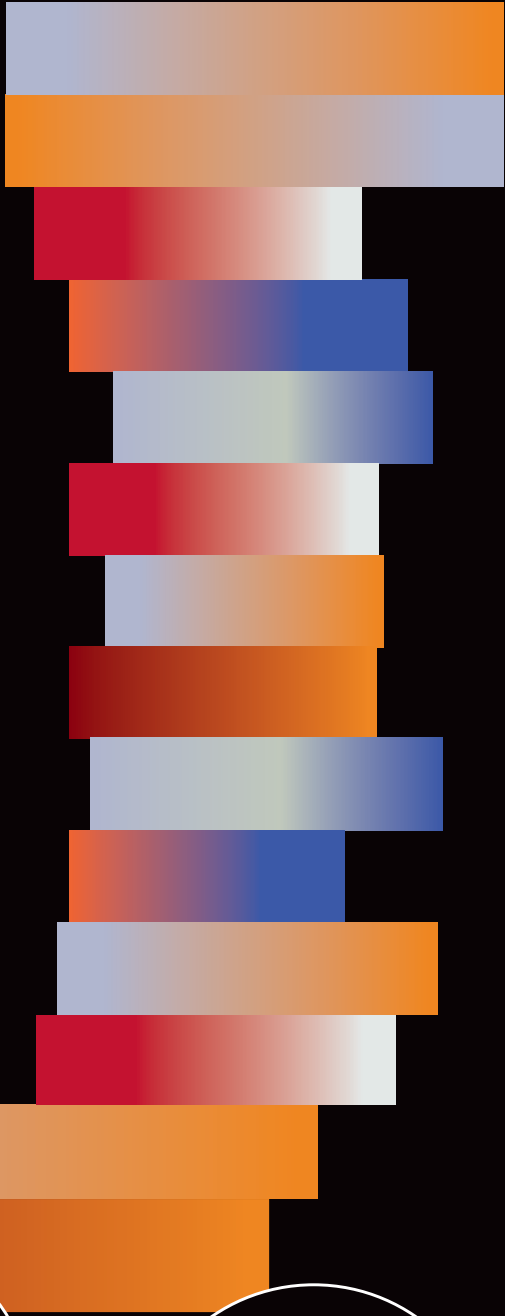
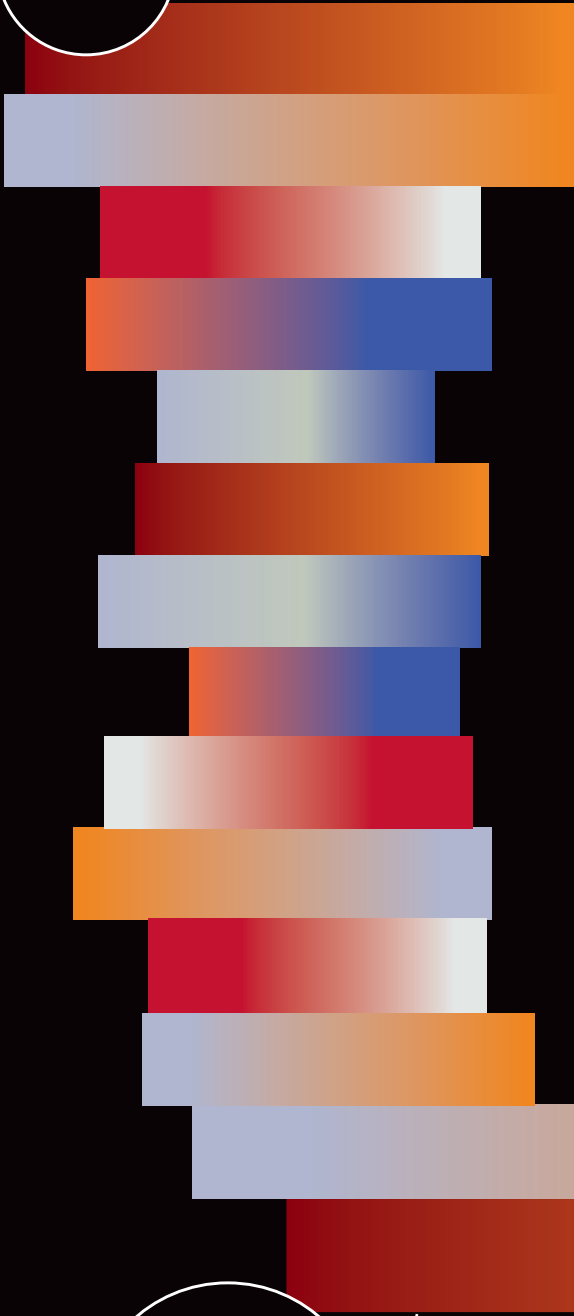
When it’s time to break for the morning, Scalley gathers the coaches and tired players into a circle, and he shouts to be heard.

“We will not start slow. We will not be outmatched in energy,” Scalley says. “There is the pain of regret, and the pain of doing it, and we aren’t going to have the pain of regret.”

The players put in their hands. Together, they shout, “RSNB: **u**”

*Amy Choate-Nielsen is associate director of strategic communications for University Marketing and Communications.*

The



A decade after its founding, the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute continues to illuminate Utah's toughest challenges—and the decisions that shape its future.

BY SETH BRACKEN

Institute

Behind

Utah's

Biggest Decisions

## UTAH SNAPSHOT

The Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute tracks hundreds of data points across dozens of indicators. Here are some of the numbers that capture where Utah stands—and where it's headed.

**O**N THE NIGHT of March 11, 2020, Rudy Gobert of the Utah Jazz tested positive for COVID-19. Within hours, the NBA suspended its season, and the pandemic snapped into focus for millions of Americans.

Thirteen days later—while much of the country was still scrambling to understand what came next—Utah released an economic recovery plan.

Natalie Gochnour BS'84 MS'88, director of the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute at the University of Utah, remembers the call that set the work in motion. Clark Ivory BA'88, a prominent home builder and civic leader, didn't waste time.

"Natalie, we just need a plan," he told her. "It doesn't have to be perfect. We just need a plan."

With a small team of economists and policy analysts, including representatives from the governor's office, the Utah Economic Response Task Force delivered *Utah Leads Together*, a data-driven framework. Over the course of the pandemic, Utah ranked second in the nation in job growth and third-lowest in the nation in death rates, a health and economic success story among states.

Much of the data and modeling behind the plan came from the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, which had been built for exactly this kind of moment. "Policymakers were hungry for this," Gochnour says. "Our role wasn't to make decisions. It was to provide the data and the framework so leaders could."

## The Founding Story

Before the Gardner Institute's founding, when Utah's civic and business leaders sat down to make a big decision—about housing, transportation, water, growth—the same problem kept derailing them: no shared, trusted source of data to build from. "We had smart people in the room, but not

a shared set of facts," says Ivory, who was instrumental in launching the Gardner Institute. "Everyone came in with their own numbers. That makes it really hard to plan for the long term."

The idea for a solution took shape in 2013, when a small group of university and community leaders traveled to the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research conference. They watched the Hoover Institution guide California through a difficult economic moment—sharing data and expertise to inform decisions. "We said to each other, this is the kind of thing we need," Ivory recalls.

"We weren't trying to build an advocacy shop," he adds. "We wanted a place people across the spectrum could trust—a place that did the work once, did it well, and gave decision-makers the data they needed to make informed choices."

They also recognized that the U already had much of what they needed. Top demographers, economists, and policy analysts were distributed across campus—talented but siloed, each tucked into their own department. Part of the founding vision was pulling them together, betting that proximity would unlock something greater than the sum of its parts.

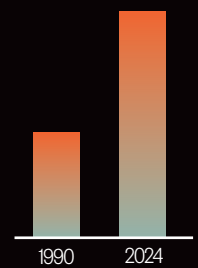
In 2015, that idea became the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, housed in the David Eccles School of Business at the U and named for Kem Gardner BA'67 JD'70, a Wyoming-raised real estate developer who became a principal financial supporter and champion. "There are a lot of needs around us, and Utah has big decisions ahead," Gardner said at the time. "I love this state and want to make a difference. I look at the Gardner Institute and know it will help our community and business leaders make better-informed decisions."

As the lead entity for the U.S. Census Bureau in Utah, the Gardner Institute now produces Utah's official population estimates and projections—50-year forecasts of residents, households, and economic indicators that serve as the foundation for every major infrastructure decision in the state.

## Growth & Change

### Population doubled

in just over one generation  
From 1.7 million (1990) to 3.55 million (2024)



### 671,000

more people moved in than out



34 out of the past 36 years of net in-migration 1990-2024

### 255,770

Est. employment growth by 2035  
a 10.2% increase from 2025

Still America's youngest state  
Median age 32.5 years (vs. 39.2 nationally)

### #1

economy in the nation  
Utah led all states in GDP growth in 2024

Nearly 500,000 new residents coming  
Utah projected to surpass 4 million by 2035

## The Challenges

Housing crisis deepens

Median home price hit

### \$559,400

in 2024 (9th highest nationally)

### \$40 Billion



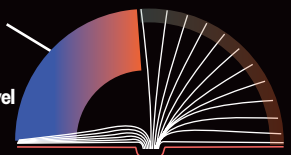
in unfunded water infrastructure  
To meet future demand



in unfunded transportation needs  
From Utah's long-range plan

### 47%

of third graders read at grade level  
A persistent literacy gap



Mental health provider shortage

Utah has 220 providers per 100,000 people vs. an avg. of 300 nationally



Fertility rate dropped below replacement level

Since 2018; now ranks 10th nationally (down from 1st in 2015)

## Housing as a Test Case

Over the past decade, the Gardner Institute has tackled everything from transportation to education. It doesn't just study growth; it defines the baseline numbers that determine where schools get built, which roads get widened, and how water gets allocated. The housing crisis shows the model at full strength.

In 2018, the Gardner Institute released the first in a series of housing studies that showed what many Utahns already felt—they were being priced out. Between 2011 and 2017, the state issued 50,833 fewer housing permits than new households formed. Apartment vacancy rates hit historic lows. Single-family homes sold in an average of 15 days.

The report gave policymakers a baseline. Later, Utah Gov. Spencer Cox launched the Utah First Homes program, aiming to build 35,000 starter homes by 2028. More than 20 bills followed—zoning reform, infrastructure investment, and other incentives for more compact development.

For organizations on the ground, the research became a tool. “The information helps us demonstrate the need and guides us where our services are needed,” says Sharlene Wilde, executive director of NeighborWorks Mountain Country Home Solutions.

The problem hasn't been solved. By 2024, Utah ranked as the ninth most expensive housing market in the nation, with a median home price of \$559,400. But its annual housing reports continue to frame the debate, providing metrics to track whether interventions are working.

## The Trust Factor

What distinguishes the Gardner Institute isn't just the data—it's the delivery. Utah Lt. Gov. Deidre Henderson called it “shedding light, not heat” in a recent video celebrating the Gardner Institute's 10th anniversary.

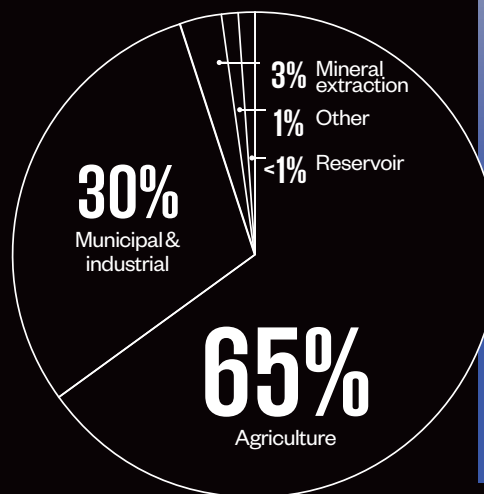
“The data they provide allows us to make much better decisions,” Henderson says.

The distinction matters. Report the number of children projected to be in a district, and leaders can plan for schools and infrastructure. Report that a region has the lowest per-pupil funding in the nation, and you've shifted the conversation from planning to politics, adds Gochnour.

“Some of the best public policy work comes from being a good listener,” Gochnour says. “We support decision-makers—we're

# Great Salt Lake Strike Team

When the Great Salt Lake hit historic lows in 2022, Utah's research universities and state agencies formed the Great Salt Lake Strike Team—an eight-member partnership to provide common data and expert analysis to decision-makers. Natalie Gochnour co-chairs the effort alongside scientists from Utah State, the University of Utah, and heads of three state agencies. The strike team's role is to provide data, and the Gardner Institute helps translate complex research into accessible formats for policymakers.



## CRISIS POINT (2022)



### Salinity

**178.9** g/L  
(September, more than double the 1989 level)



### Basin population

**3.02** MILLION  
(up from 1.49 million in 1989)



### Human water depletion

**~2,346**  
thousand acre-feet annually

## Where Does Utah Water Go?

### Agriculture

**1,529,000** acre-feet

### Municipal & industrial

**694,000** acre-feet

### Mineral extraction

**78,000** acre-feet

### Reservoir

**14,000** acre-feet

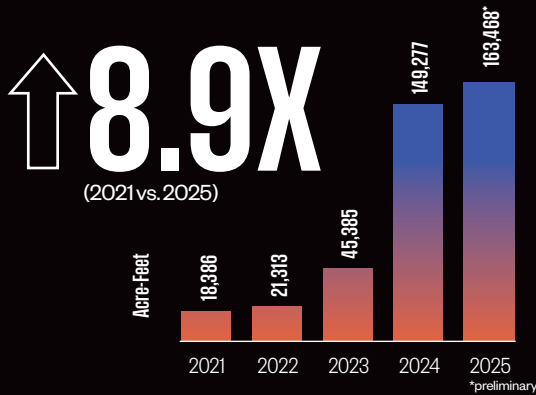
### Other

**31,000** acre-feet

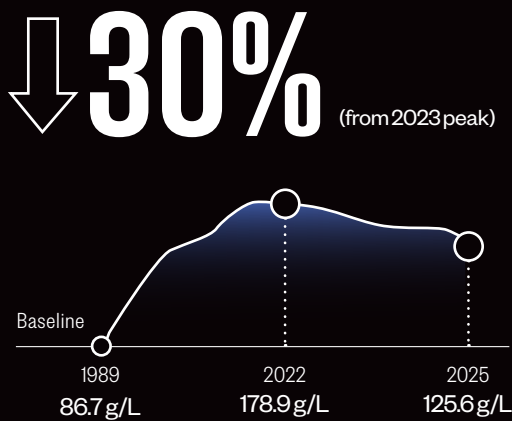
## RESPONSE (2023-25)

The GSL Strike Team released a policy assessment evaluating 11 options with costs, benefits, and timelines.

### Water dedicated to the lake



### Salinity



### Other metrics

Brine shrimp populations up

**50%**  
(2023-24)

Per capita residential water use down

**18%**  
since 1989

Invasive wetland grass removed

**15.6k Acres**  
(2024)

**\$50 Million**  
in federal funding



The Thomas S. Monson Center serves as the Gardner Institute's downtown home and a gathering place for lawmakers, business leaders, and scholars working through Utah's biggest questions.

not here to hold anyone's feet to the fire. We are here to light the fire."

That philosophy has shaped how the Gardner Institute operates. The Thomas S. Monson Center downtown—a historic mansion donated by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 2014—has become a gathering place where business and community leaders, legislators, and advocates meet around shared facts. Monthly Newsmaker Breakfasts draw figures like Sen. Mike Lee and Gov. Cox. The institute also brings national scholars and authors—Arthur Brooks, Raj Chetty, Thomas Friedman, and others—to engage with Utah policymakers and students. The Utah Senate president has held the majority-party retreat there. Regularly scheduled meetings—the Utah Economic Council, the Utah Population Committee, and others—bring stakeholders together on neutral ground.

"Our role is to help policymakers see around corners," Gochnour says. "They have to look at the whole decision tree and think through unintended consequences. We're trying to give them the information that helps them get it right."

### Looking Ahead

Over the past decade, the Gardner Institute has documented what it calls the "Magnificent Seven"—the achievements that set Utah apart: economic dynamism, high household income with low poverty, upward mobility, widespread prosperity, a well-trained workforce, a young and growing population, and strong social cohesion.

Alongside them are the Gardner Institute's "Troubling Seven": housing afford-

ability and homelessness, traffic congestion, third-grade reading proficiency, college completion, water and the future of the Great Salt Lake, energy supply, and behavioral health. These are where Utah's rapid growth tests its limits—and the margin for error narrows.

"The hardest part," Gochnour says, "is growing and changing as fast as we are without losing the things that made Utah great in the first place." The Gardner Institute projects the state will add roughly 2 million more people over the next 40 years—about the current population of Idaho.

The 2034 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, returning to Salt Lake City, could serve as a forcing mechanism—a deadline that accelerates decisions on transportation, housing, and infrastructure that might otherwise stall. The Gardner Institute has already begun modeling scenarios, tracking what investments may make sense and at what cost.

Kurt Dirks, dean of the David Eccles School of Business, says the U's commitment to the Gardner Institute has never been stronger. "Utah's next decade will bring challenges, but even greater opportunity," Dirks says. "The Gardner Institute provides policymakers and business leaders with the insights they need to drive a strong economy and a prosperous future."

The choices Utah makes now—about housing density, water policy, school funding, and transit—will shape not just the state that hosts the Olympics, but the one that comes after, adds U President Taylor Randall HBA'90. "Good outcomes don't happen by accident," Randall says. "They happen when people are willing to face the data early—and act on it before the decisions get harder." **U**

Seth Bracken is editor of Utah Magazine.



## A Legacy of Learning

When Ellen Christina Steffensen Cannon received her diploma in June 1895, she was one of just 48 graduates—22 of them women—to earn a degree from the University of Utah. The daughter of Norwegian immigrants who trekked across the Great Plains in the 1860s, Ellen grew up in the Salt Lake Valley, where hardship bred grit and where self-reliance and individual purpose became her hallmark.

As the second wife of George M. Cannon, Ellen raised 10 children largely on her own, instilling in them an unshakable sense of purpose and self-reliance. At her core, she was an educator—first as a primary school teacher, then as a mother determined that each of her nine surviving children earn a college degree.

“Grandmother was in the ‘potential business,’” recalled her grandson Tony Cannon Jr. in a university retrospective. “It was important that all of her boys and girls fulfill their potential, and she would say, ‘Be your best. Work your hardest. Help the most.’”

That ethos still echoes through the generations. In 1989, Tony’s uncle, Hugh Steffensen Cannon, hon-

ored Ellen’s legacy with a \$3 million gift to establish the Ellen Christina Steffensen Cannon Endowed Scholarship Fund—then one of the largest scholarship endowments in the U’s history. To date, the fund has supported more than 600 undergraduate and graduate students pursuing degrees in education and the humanities.

At last year’s Steffensen Cannon Scholarship Luncheon, recipient Megan McCormick, a junior studying educational psychology and ethnic studies, reflected on the family’s continued generosity. “The family made me feel like they are genuinely invested in my success,” she said.

Ellen’s life—and the enduring scholarship in her name—demonstrate how one family’s commitment to education can leave a lasting mark. Today, more than 1,800 endowments across the U carry that commitment forward.

 **Web Extra** Visit [magazine.utah.edu/cannon](http://magazine.utah.edu/cannon) to watch a video about this lasting legacy

### ALUMNI NEWS ROUNDUP



#### U Giving Days

U alumni showed up for U Giving Days on March 24-25 this year, raising more than \$30,000 in 48 hours for U Alumni Legacy Scholarships. Thanks to the generosity of 100-plus donors, Utah Alumni surpassed both their dollar and donor goals. This generosity changes lives, ensuring future U students will get the chance to achieve their dreams.

#### FALL EVENTS



#### Swoop Sprint 5K

September 26

Lace up your sneakers to help raise money for scholarships.



#### Fall Football Tailgates

September 3–November 27

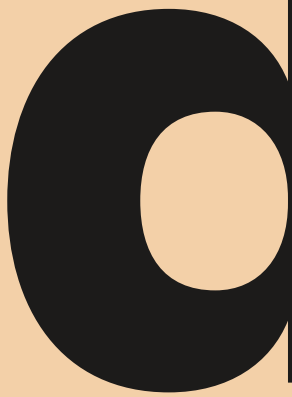
Join parties across the country, as well as pre-game festivities at home and select away games.

#### Homecoming Week

October 19–25

Enjoy a full lineup of activities, ending with the Utah vs. Houston football game.

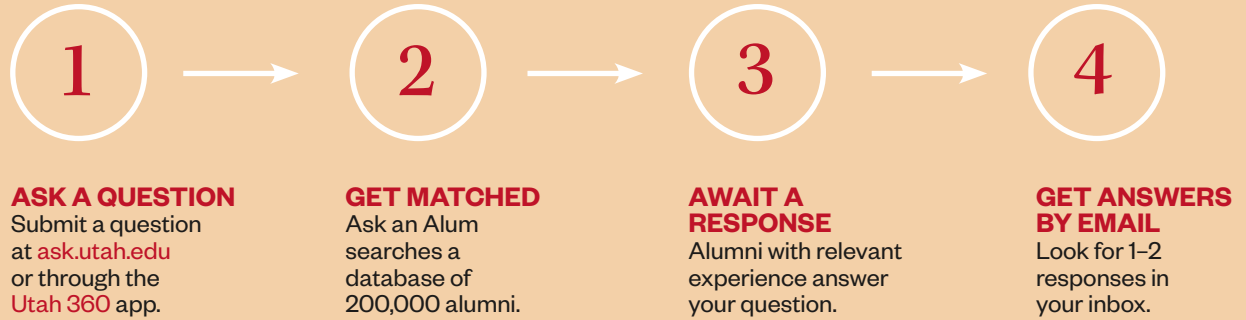
Visit [alumni.utah.edu](http://alumni.utah.edu) for more details.



## Just Ask

Ever wish you had a network of 200,000 people invested in your success? As a graduate of the U, you do. The university's alumni community spans industries, generations, and continents—and it's full of people eager to share what they've learned with U students and fellow alumni. Ask an Alum, a new email-based micro-mentoring tool from U Alumni, makes it simpler than ever. If you're considering a career move, weighing graduate school, or seeking input from someone in your field, submit a question at [ask.utah.edu](http://ask.utah.edu) or through the Ask an Alum icon in the Utah 360 app. Your question is routed to alumni whose experience aligns with your interests. Want to share advice? Make sure U Alumni has your most recent contact and employment info by updating your record at [alumni.utah.edu](http://alumni.utah.edu). Then watch for questions in your inbox and be part of this supportive network.

## HOW IT WORKS



# 200,000

U alumni  
worldwide  
matched by  
expertise

## Link Up with Us

“The University of Utah has been celebrating 175 years of reaching new heights—and we’re still climbing,” says the inaugural edition of the *U Impact* newsletter on LinkedIn. The newsletter itself is gaining altitude. Since its launch in September 2025, more than 42,000 readers—and

climbing—have signed up to hear how the U is shaping a better world. Each issue highlights the university’s latest top stories, from research breakthroughs to athletics announcements to campus transformations that advance the U’s mission. Sign up at [magazine.utah.edu/newsletter](https://magazine.utah.edu/newsletter) or on the University of Utah’s LinkedIn page.



*The Founders Day honors are among the highest given annually by the U.*



# A Tradition of Impact

Founders Day honors alumni and friends whose leadership and generosity continue to shape the University of Utah

Each year, the University of Utah pauses to reflect on its beginnings—and on the people who have carried its mission forward. Founders Day recognizes alumni and friends whose professional achievements, service, and philanthropy have left a lasting mark on the U and on communities far beyond campus. These honors represent some of the highest distinctions the university can bestow. Meet the 2026 Founders Day honorees.

## Distinguished Alumni Award Recipients



### Patricia Child BS'62

A dedicated philanthropist and lifelong supporter of the U, Pat Child has helped transform the university through decades of service and giving. The first in her family to earn a college degree, she built a career in health care and later served on numerous university advisory councils. Through the Child Family Foundation, Pat and her husband, Bill BS'54, have supported scholarships, research, and facilities across campus, including the Patricia W. Child Health and Wellness Tower.



### Khosrow Semnani MS'75

An Iranian-American industrialist and philanthropist, Khosrow Semnani pairs entrepreneurial success with civic engagement. Founder of Envirocare of Utah—now EnergySolutions—he has advanced education and health care through the Semnani Family Foundation, including establishing the Maliheh Free Clinic for uninsured patients. A committed supporter of the U, Semnani has funded scholarships and projects across campus and recently commissioned the statue honoring his mentor Henry Eyring. He also champions compassion through his “One Kind Act a Day” initiative.



### Jeff Cardon BS'80

A business leader and philanthropist, Jeff Cardon is president, portfolio manager, and CEO of Wasatch Global Advisors, one of Utah's leading financial firms. His leadership has helped foster statewide economic growth while supporting student access to higher education. In 2015, Jeff and his wife, Helen, established the First Ascent Scholars Program, which supports underserved students on their path to college graduation and continued connection to the university.

## Honorary Alumni Award Recipients



### Helen Cardon

For more than 30 years, Helen Cardon has focused on education, social equity, and the well-being of children and families. She has held leadership roles with organizations including the Children's Center and Neighborhood House and is a longtime civic volunteer. Together with her husband, Jeff, she continues to support the university through philanthropy rooted in access, mentorship, and community impact.



### Mayra Sanchez Gomez

A certified doula and founder of Comunidad Materna en Utah, Mayra Sanchez Gomez is a leading advocate for equitable maternal and child health care. Since immigrating to the U.S., she has served hundreds of families, led community workshops, and trained dozens of doulas. Her partnership with University of Utah Health helped shape the vision for the Eccles Health Campus and Eccles Hospital in West Valley, ensuring it reflects and serves the surrounding community.

## GOLD (Graduate of the Last Decade) Alumni Award



### Curtis Pierce HBS'17

Curtis Pierce is a co-founder and managing partner of Weisburd Capital and producer of the top-ranked *How I Invest* podcast. After a career in investment banking, he has remained closely connected to the university. As a student, Pierce was a campus leader who helped raise more than \$100,000 for the Rape Recovery Center. He now serves as president of the U's New York Alumni Chapter and on the David Eccles School of Business Young Alumni Council.

 **Web Extra** Visit [magazine.utah.edu/founders2026](https://magazine.utah.edu/founders2026) to watch video profiles of each honoree

# Class Notes

## '80s



Mickey Ibarra

**Mickey Ibarra** MEd'80 co-edited *Latino Leaders Speak: Personal Stories of Struggle & Triumph, Vol II*, which includes highlights of his life story from growing up in Utah foster care to serving as a White House official. Ibarra is founder and chairman of the Latino Leaders Network and president of the Ibarra Strategy Group.

**Wendy Thompson** BFA'83 MFA'91 was named 2025 Dance Educator of the Year by the Dance Educators Association of Washington. After completing her BFA, Thompson performed with a variety of companies, then began a part-time job teaching dance at Murray High that led to a full-time position at Granite, where she taught dance, drill team, PE, and health. She says her top-notch training, the stellar modern dance faculty, and the rigorous study at the U prepared her for teaching technique classes and choreographing several productions a year.

## '90s

**John Pearce** BS'92 has returned to Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati as a partner in its litigation practice. Pearce is a former associate chief justice of the Utah Supreme Court, with more than 16 years of public service across Utah's judicial and executive branches, including more than a decade on the state Supreme Court. He is also an adjunct professor at the S.J. Quinney College of Law.

## '00s



Kimberly Richardson

**Kimberly Richardson** BFA'00 returned to Children's Theatre Company in Minneapolis for the bilingual musical *Go, Dog. Go! • Ve Perro ¡Ve!*, playing MC Dog. In her 25-year career,

Richardson has worked as a dancer, choreographer, actor, teaching artist, and theater-maker with companies including

Upstream Arts, Ten Thousand Things, Guthrie Theater, and Sod House Theater.



Kathryn Cowles

**Kathryn Cowles** BA'01 BA'01 MA'03 PhD'09 recently published *The Strange Wondrous Works of Eleanor Eleanor*, which won the 2025 Fence Books Modern Poets Prize and the Poetry Society of America's Alice Fay Di Castagnola Award for a Manuscript in Progress. The book features several "monstrous women" collages alongside ekphrastic poems about art pieces by the titular hero.

**Denee Hayes** BS'02 is a senior fellow in the College of Science, advising the college on issues relating to energy and the environment. Now a private consultant in the mining industry and other sectors, Hayes is a former University of Utah Alumni Board of Governors member and was previously the first woman chair of the Mining Engineering Department's Industrial Advisory Board. She is also a member of the *Utah Business* Editorial Advisory Board.



Stephen Tuttle

**Stephen Tuttle** MFA'02 PhD'06 has published the short story collection *We Should Be Somewhere by Now*, exploring "what it means to be a stranger in familiar places and among familiar people." A writer of fiction and poetry, Tuttle's work has appeared in *The Nation*, *The Southern Review*, *Ploughshares*, and other venues. He teaches at Brigham Young University.



Julie Ewing

**Julie Ewing** JD'03 has been appointed director of Utah Medicaid at the Department of Health and Human Services. Previously, Ewing worked as director of compliance at the U and as director of the Bureau of Managed Health Care at Utah Medicaid. She was Utah's assistant attorney general for a decade.

**John Deeds** BS'05 BS'05 JD'10 is commissioner of the Utah State Tax Commission. As a student, Deeds was heavily involved with the Hinckley Institute, where he interned with the Utah Legislature. He later went on to practice tax

law for over a decade in several roles, including with the Utah Attorney General's Office Tax and Revenue division.



Geoffrey Babbitt

**Geoffrey Babbitt** MFA'05 PhD'10 has published his second book, *A Grain of Sand in Lambeth*, winner of the 2023 Betsy Joiner Flanagan Award for Poetry. The collection is a poetic and philosophical engagement with William Blake—his visionary life, radical beliefs, and utterly original art. Babbitt's poems and essays have previously appeared in *North American Review*, *Pleiades*, *Colorado Review*, *LIT*, and elsewhere.



Lindsey Blake

**Lindsey Blake** JD'07 returned to her hometown of St. Anthony, Idaho, to accept a position as Fremont County's prosecutor—in particular, to lead what became the infamous Vallow-Daybell multiple murder case. Blake had most recently worked in the Major Crimes Unit at the Salt Lake District Attorney's Office and has previous experience in Idaho, includ-

ing as a deputy public defender, and in Wyoming as a prosecutor.

**Spencer Ricks** BS'08 JD'13 is an attorney at Carr Woodall, based in South Jordan, Utah. He specializes in family law cases and emphasizes child advocacy throughout the process. Having gone through extensive training, Ricks is a court-certified and approved Guardian ad Litem, which is an attorney who represents children. As court can be costly, sometimes the most effective approach to helping a family through their case is in mediation, and Ricks is often appointed by the Court to represent the best interests of children.



Finau Rabuka-Conklin

**Finau Rabuka-Conklin** MSW'08, a third-year doctoral student in the U's College of Social Work, received the 2025 Partners in Advancing International Education Student Award from the Council on Social Work Education. With more than a decade teaching Indigenous Fijian language and social work in higher education, she has held both direct practice and leadership roles, including mentoring undergraduates and serving as director of Early Head Start.

## SPOTLIGHT



**Riley Peck** BS'09, a longtime conservationist and seasoned wildlife management professional, is director of the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources. Along with an undergraduate degree in biology and a master's in plant and wildlife science, Peck has 20 years of experience at the DWR, where he started as a native aquatics technician. He transitioned to working as a wildlife biologist before eventually being promoted to Central Region wildlife manager in 2016 and species coordinator in 2019. In his current role, he aims to enhance wildlife management through data-driven strategies. DWR is under Utah's Department of Natural Resources, and Peck was recognized as the 2024 DNR employee of the year. In leading the wildlife division, he strives to balance the growing demands on Utah's natural resources while preserving the state's outdoor heritage. A native Utahn and avid hunter, angler, and camper, Peck spends his free time exploring Utah's landscapes.

SPOTLIGHT



**Adison Rice** BA'15 and his team will compete in the World's Toughest Row Pacific Race in June 2027, rowing 2,800 miles unassisted from Monterey, California, to Kauai, Hawaii, with a goal to uplift new and existing marine stewards. Team Rising Tide aims to raise \$500,000 to support the race and donate to its partners working to preserve and protect our oceans. Rice first scuba dived as an exchange student in Japan, then set out for Hawaii to be a scuba instructor, meeting his future wife while diving. Rice later moved across the world to be with her in Finland and worked with sled dogs in the Santa Claus Village while she pursued her doctorate. Now, they live in northern Norway, three degrees above the Arctic Circle, where the mountains meet the ocean.

'10s



Anna Edelman

**Anna Edelman** BA'13 MPA'15 was deeply shaped by her experiences with the U's Hinckley Institute of Politics, including a local internship supporting international students on campus and a global internship in Cajamarca, Peru. The work helped her discover a deep love for nonprofit organizations, and today, she works as the associate director of Annual Giving and Stewardship at the U.

**Krista Derington** MFA'15, studio owner/director of Premier Ballroom and Dance Academy in Utah, coached and accompanied 13 of her students to the 2025 China International Folk Arts Festival in Foshan, China, as part of the non-

profit Celebrating Arts' U.S. delegation. Derington's studio also has a class for older students with special needs, and groups have now participated in three Special Olympics.

**Tom Wallisch** BS'18, a professional freestyle skier and X Games gold medalist, returned to the U last winter for the ASUU Rail Jam. Wallisch earned his business administration degree over a 12-year journey balancing academics with international competition. "Those first few years, I was learning in class and applying it in real time," he says. In addition to being a decorated athlete, Wallisch is now a filmmaker, commentator, and entrepreneur who has built a personal brand recognized throughout the ski world.

'20s

**Michael Bandru** BS'22 published *The Queen in Time*, a science fiction novel about an ancient being, reborn and made immortal, on her quest to stop the slow decay of entropy by remaking the universe in her own image. Bandru studied game design and development at the U but was able to use literature to tell the story he'd been creating in his head for a decade.

**Jaren Kump** BS'23, a second-year master's student in health and kinesiology and team captain for the U football team, was named a semifinalist for the William V. Campbell Trophy, honoring the nation's top football scholar-athlete, and earned a spot on the Rimington Trophy Watchlist. Kump is completing a thesis on why former athletes experience higher rates of obesity and depression, with the aim of improving physical and mental health support for athletes after retirement.



Kellie St. Pierre

**Kellie St. Pierre** MFA'23 won the Grand Prize Award at the Palm Desert Choreography Festival in November 2025 for her work *The Rate We Change*, a piece she describes as inspired by the effect of ongoingness within a changing world. St. Pierre is an adjunct assistant professor at the U, as well as a choreographer, performer, and filmmaker.

**Kay Jimenez** BS'25 is the medication assistance program coordinator at Maliheh Free Clinic, where she connects patients with medication support and advocates for equitable access to care, and is a master's level intern therapist

at Odyssey House of Utah. A first-generation Latina graduate student in social work, Jimenez is passionate about empowering underserved communities through culturally responsive advocacy and community-based services.



Suraksha Bhandari

**Suraksha Bhandari** MCP'25 is the new professional planner for the Office of Planning and Economic Development in Springfield, Illinois. While completing her master's in city and metropolitan planning at the U, she led research on land use, resilience, and housing strategies. Before this role, Bhandari aided in urban planning projects elsewhere in the United States and in Nepal.



Jessica Lopez Lugo

**Jessica Lopez Lugo** BS'25 is an associate mechanical engineer at Northrop Grumman. Lopez first interned at the company as a student. She is a first-generation Latina graduate

from the U, where she was a mentor in the First-Generation Scholars program and was involved with the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers.



Tracie Yellowman Tséyíniitso

**Tracie Yellowman Tséyíniitso** (Tso for short) BS'25 currently works in social media marketing for the Utah Division of Indian Affairs and is running for political office in her southern Utah House district. Tso, who is Diné (Navajo), was the 2025 student speaker at the U, likely the first Native speaker at U graduation. A longtime pipe welder and mother of three, Tso graduated with a degree in community health education and promotion and is working on ways to unite and strengthen rural Utah communities.

**Claire Wulfman** MPH'25 is the first student from the U's Division of Public Health to receive the prestigious Fulbright Award. The globally recognized program supports international education and cultural exchange, enabling recipients to study, teach, or conduct research. Wulfman is doing research in India in partnership with DY Patil University in Mumbai and five local NGOs.



**What's new with U?**  
Send updates to [classnotes@utah.edu](mailto:classnotes@utah.edu)

SPOTLIGHT



PHOTO COURTESY OF STEPHANIE GARCIA

**Stephanie Garcia** MFA'23 was named to The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation's centennial class of Guggenheim Fellows as a fellow in choreography. Garcia, an associate instructor in the U's School of Dance, is an artist, producer, arts administrator, and independent curator. She is co-founder and co-director of Punto de Inflexión contemporary interdisciplinary performance company and PROArtes México, which facilitates international cultural exchange. She has also founded, curated, and participated in various video dance projects, most recently founding the live arts platform Corriente Alterna in 2025, in partnership with loveDANCEmore and the Consulate of Mexico in Salt Lake City. Garcia holds degrees in contemporary dance from the National Fine Arts Institute in Mexico and has studied cultural and arts administration at Guadalajara University, the Organization of American States, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, and the National Arts Center.



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How much Utah Red flows through your veins? Prove your “Utah fan am I” status with this bingo card of time-honored U traditions and quintessential campus experiences. Mark off your memories and see if you can hit five in a row—or even a blackout. Flex your U pride on social media with a photo of your card and the hashtag #UofUbingo.

**B**

Ate at The Pie  
(or Bimbo’s,  
pre-1980)

Went to a  
BYU-Utah  
game

Learned  
the entire  
fight song

Cheered  
from the  
MUSS at  
Rice-Eccles

Visited the  
Alumni  
House

**I**

Skipped  
school  
to ski

Played pool or  
bowled at  
the Union

Saw a  
performance  
at Kingsbury  
Hall

Hiked the  
Living Room  
trail

Swam at  
HPER or  
Crimson  
Lagoon

**N**

Hiked the  
Block U

Saw dino  
bones at the  
NHMU



Volunteered  
at the Bennion  
Center

Strolled  
through  
Red Butte  
Garden

**G**

Worked out  
at the Student  
Life Center or  
Field House

Walked  
through  
Cottam’s  
Gulch

Visited the  
Fort Douglas  
Museum

Saw a  
play at  
Pioneer  
Theatre

Stargazed  
at the  
observatory

**O**

Ran uphill  
to class

Fell asleep  
studying at  
the Marriott  
Library

Went to a Red  
Rocks meet at  
the Huntsman  
Center

Attended  
Grand  
Kerfuffle  
or Mayfest

Went to a  
tailgate on  
Guardsman





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