

Ending HIV

U research spanning two decades has led to a new HIV prevention drug with the potential to save millions of lives. p. 22

Safe Haven

Look inside the U's new mental health emergency care center, which offers 24/7 help for adults in crisis. p. 34

Epic Journey

Meet the U alum whose *New York Times*-best-selling YA fantasy novel is headed for the big screen. p. 40

The U's Next Big Climb

With a bold new strategic plan, the U is ascending toward new heights in student success, research excellence, and societal impact. p. 28



Rock Solid Teaching

Some Utah teachers are stepping out of the classroom and into Capitol Reef, transforming how K-12 students learn about geology. The experience, part of a U College of Education project, made a lasting impression on Washington County middle school teacher Jessica Jones. “The field experience was like a trip to Disneyland, and learning from a professional geologist deepened our learning,” she remarks.

Funded by a three-year National Science Foundation grant, the program is led by Lauren Barth-Cohen, an associate professor of both educational psychology and physics & astronomy. It includes a semester-long online geology course followed by a field experience in Capitol Reef National Park, where teachers apply classroom concepts amid striking rock formations.

The research team is studying how teachers learn—and teach—scientific observation skills. “Knowing how this land was formed will help kids, and others in the area, appreciate and love the beauty that surrounds us,” Jones says. The team includes Lynne Zummo, an assistant professor of educational psychology and curator at the Natural History Museum of Utah; Holly Godsey, a professor of geology & geophysics and associate professor of education; and Sarah Braden, an associate professor in Utah State University’s School of Teacher Education and Leadership.

Photo by Adrian Lee Adams MS’23, Ph.D. student in learning and cognition



U University of Utah Magazine

FALL 2025
Volume 34, No. 3

No one is turned away at the Kem and Carolyn Gardner Mental Health Crisis Care Center, where patients are treated with compassion and dignity during their most vulnerable moments. p. 34



FEATURES

22

The Twice-a-Year Shot That Could End HIV A simple question from U researchers about HIV sparked a 20-year journey toward a breakthrough with the potential to save millions of lives. Discover how Wes Sundquist and colleagues laid the foundation for the HIV prevention drug that could change the course of the AIDS epidemic globally.

28

The U's Next Big Climb As higher education faces uncertain terrain, U leaders see a moment of opportunity. Learn how Impact 2030, the U's bold five-year strategic plan, is redefining how a university drives innovation, expands opportunity, and serves society—and why U leaders believe the best way forward isn't retreat, but an ambitious ascent.

34

A New Emergency Room for Mental Health Utahns experiencing a mental health crisis have a new safe haven. The Kem and Carolyn Gardner Mental Health Crisis Care Center offers 24/7 walk-in help for any adult in crisis, regardless of insurance status. Step inside to see how the U is reimagining Utah's response to mental illness.



ON THE COVER

The U's future is looking bright, thanks to the university's Impact 2030 strategic plan to reach new heights. Artist Paul Rogers captures the optimism with an illustration inspired by vintage ski tourism posters.

WEB EXTRAS

More available at magazine.utah.edu

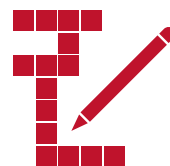


What does human bone have to do with polar ice? Why does the same color pattern recur in 400 years of art? U faculty took to the stage to explore research questions like these at RED Talks, part of the university's 175th anniversary celebrations. Watch their engaging TED Talk-style presentations at magazine.utah.edu/redtalks.



You may recognize Alex Jensen from the Majerus era of Runnin' Utes basketball. Now he's back at the U as head coach, ready to tread the same sidelines as his college hoops mentor. Get to know him with our extended interview at magazine.utah.edu/jensen, where he shares lessons from his NBA coaching career.

Utah fans, sharpen your pencils! We're debuting a new feature: U-themed crossword puzzles, starting with a full-size grid on p. 48. Put your U knowledge to the test, then check your answers at magazine.utah.edu/175crossword. Beginning Winter 2026, watch for a mini crossword in every issue.



DEPARTMENTS

- | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 08 News from the U | 18 Expert |
| 09 Humans | 40 Forever U |
| 10 Number | 41 Trending |
| 13 Imagine | 42 Voices |
| 14 Ask | 44 Class Notes |
| 16 Gallery | 48 Reflect |

Elizabeth Jeffrey enrolled in the MBC program in person to grow Breath of Life, a medical company with an innovative choking rescue device.

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ILLUSTRATION BY ERIC HANSON



The Future Is Bright Utah Red



Fall semester is one of my favorite times of year—campus is buzzing with students, energy, and new possibilities. But this year feels bigger. We just welcomed our largest incoming class ever for the sixth year in a row. It

reminds me that welcoming students is just one part of the story. The other part is the university we're building for them.

This year, that work has been front and center as Impact 2030—our ambitious five-year strategic plan to inspire students, accelerate discovery, and serve communities—has come alive (p. 28). You can see it in West Valley City, where we broke ground on the Eccles Health Campus and Eccles Hospital to bring care closer to communities. You can feel it in the new L.S. Skaggs Applied Science Building, where students now have the lab space to match their curiosity. You can sense it in our strengthened commitment to mental health with the new Kem and Carolyn Gardner Mental Health Crisis

Care Center (p. 34). And you can find it in our partnerships with tech firms such as NVIDIA and HPE to invest in artificial intelligence solutions, including AI training for students and workers (p. 12) and AI tools for understanding cancer, Alzheimer's, and other diseases.

Perhaps nothing shows our impact more than the HIV breakthrough from U researcher Wes Sundquist and colleagues (p. 22), a discovery with the potential to save millions. We're transforming lives not only here at home, but across the globe.

This summer, I traveled from Logan to St. George on my second University of Utah road trip to celebrate 175 years of the U and strengthen our community partnerships. As I met with business leaders, community members, and my fellow alumni, I saw how deeply the university shapes our state's success—and how you're a vital part of our growing impact.

As we wrap up our 175th anniversary celebrations this fall, I'm incredibly proud of our legacy. But I'm even more energized by what lies ahead. The U has never been more essential to our society—and our future has never looked brighter.

PRESIDENT TAYLOR RANDALL HBA'90

Heartfelt Farewell

Our story about the closing of the old medical school building sparked nostalgia [“Saying Goodbye to Building 521,” Winter 2025].

From '75 to '78, I would work my summers as a window washer, and one of our clients was Building 521. You had to walk from room to room through the building's corridors to reach and clean each window. Great views of the foothills and the U. Plus, all the rooms were different. Some with labs and instruments and hardware. Some for storage. And lots of different smells. I've always loved the U for the sense of adventure and learning and exploration. It has blessed my life immeasurably.

GLEN WILLIAMS BA'80

SALINAS, CA



We want to hear from you!

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



Natural Beauty

Readers were captivated with our illustrated feature on the U's role as the state arboretum [“A Tree Grows on Campus,” Summer 2025].

The cover to this magazine stopped me in my tracks. These illustrations are so beautiful! Thank you for giving a platform to all the amazing trees on campus.

ALLISON IZAKSONAS
SALT LAKE CITY, UT

An engaging cover with great information about the trees around campus. I loved it and can hardly wait to take my grandchildren on a little tour.

SUZANNE GARDNER STOTT
SALT LAKE CITY, UT

Thank you for this article. I had almost forgotten about the lower campus arboretum. I was introduced to it in 1953 when I enrolled in the College of Pharmacy, then housed on the top floor of the old girls' gymnasium. With so many changes that have taken place on lower campus, it's nice to know the trees have been preserved.

EVAN SCHELIN BPH'61
SALT LAKE CITY, UT

I love trees! This was such a fun read! I plan to take some walks to find these beautiful specimens.

HEATHER BURKHART BA'15
WEST VALLEY CITY, UT

Hockey Memories

The U's hockey program has grown immensely since its early days [“Utah's Ice Age,” Winter 2025].



I played on the university's first club team when it started in 1973. Players were recruited in *The Daily Chronicle*, and I tried out and made the team in my freshman year as the starting goalie. I came from Leominster, Massachusetts, where I played goalie for our high school's varsity team. Other players came from hockey states like Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Glad to see the program has grown, and hopefully it will be a scholarship/full-time NCAA varsity sport soon.

BILL BARLOW BS'77
OVERLAND PARK, KS

SOCIAL SPOTLIGHT

Talk about flashing the U! Speed painter Evan Struck (@evan_struck_speedpainting) entertained students with a rapid-fire rendering of the campus Block U at the 2025 Grand Kerfuffle, ASUU's annual end-of-year concert and party.



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News from the U



Southern Utah Med School Expansion

The U will open a new medical campus in St. George focused on training doctors for rural communities

A new Southern Utah Regional Medical Campus will address a stark reality facing the state. Utah ranks last among all states for its proportion of primary care physicians, with just 60.2 per 100,000 residents. Even worse, only 11 percent of those doctors work in rural areas.

“We’ve got to really start thinking about collaboration,” President Taylor Randall HBA’90 said during recent meetings with Utah Tech University leaders. “The challenge that lies before us is to enhance our partnership and combine our strengths in new ways that serve the citizens of the state.”

The Utah Legislature jumpstarted the ambitious effort with \$5.5 million in annual funding for the Spencer Fox Eccles School of Medicine to expand its student body. The program could begin with 10 rural-focused students as early as 2026, with the Southern Utah clinical training program beginning in 2029 and potential future expansion to include medical residents.

Rather than following traditional medical school structures that push specialization, the program will tap into rural students’ desire to serve their home communities. Statistics support this approach. While only 40 percent of medical students typically stay where they complete schooling, that number jumps to 70 percent for those who complete both medical school and residency in the same community.

Students in the inaugural class will spend their first year studying in Salt Lake City, then complete their second and third years of medical school in Southern Utah beginning in 2029, with residency opportunities potentially following.

University leaders are building partnerships with Utah Tech for educational spaces and health care providers for clinical training programs.

“Primary care keeps us healthy and out of hospitals,” says Michelle Hofmann HBS’94 MPH’97, interim senior associate dean of the Southern Utah Regional Medical Campus. “We’re committed to being part of solving that problem.”

NEWS ROUNDUP



The U’s East Village housing complex—home to graduate student families for over 50 years—will close in phases through 2028 as part of the U’s plan to replace aging apartments. Built in 1971-72 east of Foothill Boulevard and Sunnyside Avenue, the “cinder block palaces” have become too expensive to maintain and pose seismic safety concerns to their 765 residents.



The L. S. Skaggs Applied Science Building opened in July, completing the 275,000-square-foot Crocker Science Complex, also home to the renovated Stewart Building and Crocker Science Center. The new buildings house physics and astronomy, atmospheric science, and the Wilkes Center for Climate Science and Policy, and they expand lab space by 56 percent, providing every U science student the chance to do hands-on research.



Four U students received Fulbright scholarships for the 2025-26 academic year. The competitive program facilitates academic exchanges between the U.S. and over 140 countries. Participants engage in graduate study, research, or English teaching abroad. The cohort of U recipients is pursuing projects including poverty interventions in Mexico City and violence prevention research in Mumbai.

Dennis Menjivar BS'23

I'm a second-year medical student at the University of Utah and I have a bachelor's degree from the U in kinesiology. Growing up, it felt like becoming a doctor was almost something gate-kept. But I also knew it was what I wanted to do. I was stubborn, with a firm belief that I would get into medical school no matter what. I started to pursue concurrent enrollment and technical classes in high school such as medical assisting. I recall being told by a counselor that I had to set my sights lower, and I encountered a similar attitude whenever I tried to push my boundaries. I had to learn to not let myself be put in a box. My parents and high school teachers were very encouraging, telling me to challenge myself and have faith in my abilities.

As a first-generation college student, I had to pave the path for myself. My dream was to go to the U, and I was always looking for opportunities to do it. When I learned that university employ-

ees get 50 percent off tuition, it clicked. I qualified for a federal Pell Grant in my first year, but the rest was financed by me. I worked full time as a medical assistant throughout college, and I was able to graduate without loans.

I'm from West Valley City, and ever since I learned that the U is building a hospital and medical campus in West Valley, I've dreamed of practicing medicine there so that I can give back. I think you don't really go into health care without feeling a sense of responsibility to your community. I'm bilingual, so I'd be able to talk to many patients in their language and understand some of the cultural nuances. In my community, there's a culture of working hard and putting health off to the side, and that can lead to chronic conditions. I want to encourage residents to obtain screening tests and take other preventive measures. If we're able to address certain issues right away, we can make a big impact.

With a \$75 million gift from the George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles Foundation, U of U Health broke ground on the University of Utah Eccles Health Campus and Eccles Hospital in West Valley in June. Read more on p. 28.



Snowball Effect

The 2034 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games will pump an estimated \$2.4 billion in direct spending into Utah's economy, according to a report by the U's Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute. But that's just the beginning. From 2024 to 2035, the spending will snowball throughout Utah businesses, generating a total of \$6.6 billion in economic output. Utah workers will pocket \$2.5 billion in personal income along the way. If history repeats, the snowball will keep rolling long after the closing ceremonies: In the 15 years after the 2002 Winter Games, average annual leisure and hospitality sales in Utah were 66 percent higher compared with the 15 years before the Games.

\$



B



From left: Donna Garff Marriott, J.W. "Bill" Marriott, Jr., and Debbie Marriott Harrison listen to speeches at the announcement of their family's \$25 million gift to establish a hospitality institute at the U last April.

A New Home for Hospitality at the U

A landmark \$25 million gift from the Marriott family will establish a new institute at the U focused on service-based leadership

A \$25 million gift from The J. Willard and Alice S. Marriott Foundation is launching a new institute at the U that aims to embed hospitality principles into education across campus.

The J.W. Marriott, Jr. Institute, announced in April, will offer students from across disciplines hands-on programs that blend leadership training with real-world experience. Unlike traditional hospitality schools, the institute isn't just about hotels. It's about applying a hospitality frame of mind to business, health care, engineering, technology, and beyond.

"We are redefining hospitality not simply as an industry but as a mindset," says U President Taylor Randall HBA'90. "This institute will prepare students to lead in the evolving experience economy."

The initiative honors U alum J.W. "Bill" Marriott, Jr. BA'54, who helped grow Marriott International into one of the world's most recognizable service brands. Early plans include partnerships with industry leaders like The Ritz-Carlton Leadership

Center, global internships, campus-based training, and student-run projects tied to real university operations. The goal is to turn the U into a "living laboratory" for service innovation.

"My dad is proud to be a University of Utah alum, and to have a hospitality institute established in his name is a source of pride for him and our entire family," says David S. Marriott BS'99, trustee of The J. Willard and Alice S. Marriott Foundation and chairman of the board of Marriott International. "We know every student who walks through the doors will develop the mindset and the skillset to be the next generation of leaders around the world—not only in hospitality but countless other industries that also benefit from a commitment to excellence in service."

The institute builds on the U's momentum in hands-on, entrepreneurial education. And with Utah set to host the 2034 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, the U is positioning itself as a model for people-first innovation on a global stage.



A new statue of distinguished scientist Henry Eyring was unveiled by the U's Chemistry Department in his namesake building's atrium. The bronze statue, sculpted by Mark DeGraffenried and funded by the Semnani Family Foundation, honors Eyring's scientific achievements and legacy as professor of chemistry and inaugural dean of the Graduate School. The ceremony featured his son Henry B. Eyring BS'55, Second Counselor in the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, pictured in front of the statue.

PICTURE

BY THE NUMBERS

Utah's population boom isn't slowing down. New estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau from 2023-24, summarized by the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute at the U, show the state continues to climb national growth charts—both in new residents and new housing—with several cities among the fastest-growing in the country.

60,391

new residents added statewide, making Utah the 4th fastest-growing state in the nation

#2

Utah's national rank in housing growth, with a 2% increase, just below Idaho's 2.2%

24,702

new housing units in Utah

6 Cities

ranked in the top 100 fastest-growing cities nationally (population over 20,000):

Saratoga Springs (9%, #19)
American Fork (6%, #40)
Eagle Mountain (6%, #53)
Syracuse (5%, #66)
Washington (5%, #74)
Tooele (4%, #98)

36%

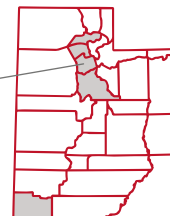
Utah County's share of statewide population growth, highest in the state, followed by Salt Lake County at 26%

9.9%

Vineyard's population growth rate, making it Utah's fastest-growing city (population over 1,000)

Top County Contributors to Utah Housing Growth:

Salt Lake (over 33% of statewide growth)
Utah (18%)
Davis (10%)
Weber (8%)
Washington (7%)



Real-Life Goblin Prince

A lizard named for a Tolkien creature adds new insight to the story of Utah's prehistoric predators

Sometimes the best discoveries are hiding in plain sight—like in a museum jar labeled “lizard.”

When researcher Hank Woolley opened an unassuming jar at the Natural History Museum of Utah (NHMU), he re-examined a specimen collected in 2005 and realized it was a new species. The creature, a raccoon-sized armored predator that roamed southern Utah 76 million years ago, was named *Bolg amondol* after the goblin prince in Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. The discovery is reshaping what scientists know about ancient lizard diversity.

“I opened this jar of bones labeled ‘lizard’ at the Natural History Museum of Utah and was like, oh wow, there’s a fragmentary skeleton here,” says Woolley, from the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County’s Dinosaur Institute. “We know very little about large-bodied lizards from the Kaiparowits Formation in Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in Utah, so I knew this was significant right away.”



ILLUSTRATION BY CULLEN TOWNSEND

The discovery, published in Royal Society Open Science, reveals that at least three types of large predatory lizards prowled the subtropical landscape alongside dinosaurs—far more diversity than scientists previously imagined.

“Discovering a new species of lizard that is an ancestor of modern Gila monsters is pretty cool in and of itself, but what’s particularly exciting is what it tells us about the unique 76-million-year-old ecosystem it lived in,” says co-author Randy Irmis, professor of geology and geophysics at the U.

At three feet long, *Bolg* would have been formidable—“something that you wouldn’t want to mess around with,” notes Woolley. Its closest relative lived in Asia’s Gobi Desert, suggesting these monster lizards traveled between continents just like their dinosaur contemporaries.

U Students Can Now Earn Credit for Military, Mission, and Volunteer Service

The U will now offer students academic credit for a range of service work—helping them save money and graduate faster.

Students can earn up to 12 hours of academic credit for prior service experience, potentially shaving an entire semester off their degree. The program covers military service, religious missions, humanitarian work, community service, Peace Corps, and AmeriCorps.

Credit is awarded based on the type and duration of experience, determined case-by-case. Students typically pay a \$50 fee for each portfolio-based assessment petition. Students may test out of courses, receive credit for military training, or demonstrate sufficient knowledge through portfolio-based assessment. Students can also receive up to 16 credit hours in foreign languages at \$40 per credit. For military service specifically, veterans who served at least 181 days and were honorably discharged receive four lower-division credits for basic training.

“There is no doubt that military service provides individuals with a wealth of practical skills, leadership experience, and technical expertise,” says Cory Pearson, deputy director, Utah Department of Veterans and Military Affairs. “Recognizing and translating these experiences into university credit not only accelerates academic progress but also validates the dedication and contributions of our veterans.”

Religious missions qualify on a similar basis. “Missionary service uniquely prepares young people to acquire new knowledge, synthesize information, and forge new relationships—all essential skills to have in college,” says Clark G. Gilbert, commissioner of church education for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The program supports broader state service initiatives. Utah ranks first nationally for volunteerism, and the Utah Legislature recently established the One Utah Service Fellowship, where young adults serve communities while receiving stipends and scholarships.

Both current and incoming students can apply for credit, even for service completed before this program launched.

Utah Teams Up with NVIDIA for AI Education Push

Utah has partnered with tech giant NVIDIA to bring artificial intelligence training to students and workers across the state’s educational institutions.

In December 2024, Gov. Spencer Cox and U President Taylor Randall HBA’90 signed the collaboration to equip universities, community colleges, and adult education programs with resources to develop generative AI skills.

Teachers can now get certified through NVIDIA’s Deep Learning Institute, gaining access to teaching materials and cloud-based workstations to help prepare the next generation.

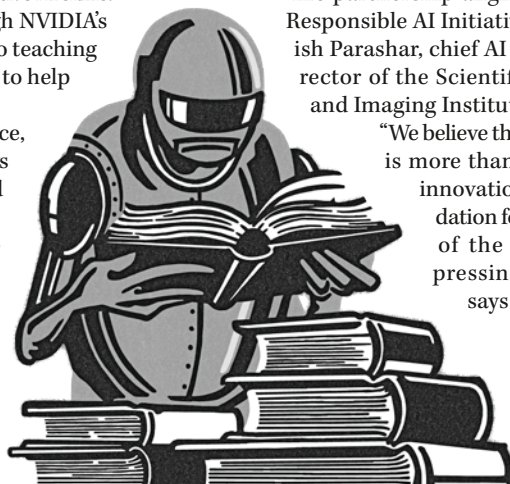
“AI will continue to grow in importance, affecting every sector of Utah’s economy,” says Cox. “We need to prepare our students and faculty for this technological revolution.”

The initiative targets both new graduates and professionals looking to up-skill beyond traditional coursework.

“Our proactive approach to equipping teachers and students with the latest resources and training they need to prepare for the workplaces of the future will boost our state’s competitive edge in technology education and development,” says Randall.

The partnership aligns with the U’s Responsible AI Initiative led by Manish Parashar, chief AI officer and director of the Scientific Computing and Imaging Institute.

“We believe that AI education is more than a pathway to innovation—it’s a foundation for solving some of the world’s most pressing challenges,” says Parashar.



A man with a beard and short brown hair, wearing a dark blue suit, white shirt, and a yellow and blue striped tie, stands in a modern office. He is leaning on a dark wooden table. Behind him is a large window offering a view of a city with green hills in the background. On the table in front of him are some coffee cups and a pitcher. The lighting is warm, suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

Military Mindset Meets Management Theory

Business scholar Wayne Johnson's path to exploring management theories didn't start in corporate boardrooms, but on Afghanistan's remote roads that were as much linear minefields as they were transportation routes.

In 2010, Johnson served a tour with the U.S. Army leading a "route-clearance" platoon whose mission was to detect and disarm the IEDs, or improvised explosive devices, that accounted for about half the U.S. combat casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan at the time.

The tactics he was taught for this job were designed for Iraq's urban landscapes and paved roads, but eastern

Afghanistan presented an entirely different challenge. The unpaved, mountainous, rural terrain resulted in a much different battle space, with metal-free, fertilizer-filled homemade bombs.

Instead of trying to detect bombs from the interior of armored vehicles, Johnson hypothesized that it would be more effective and safer to walk directly in the road, with eyes close to the ground. He looked for telltale signs of a concealed bomb: wires in the dirt, depressions in the road surface, dark spots that could indicate fresh digging—anything out of place.

"Some guys thought, 'That's really stupid.' And they had a point," Johnson says.

Under the new tactics, the platoon's find-to-detonation ratio rose to 23 bombs defused for every one that exploded. Previously, a one-to-one ratio was considered

good, with half the bombs going undetected, placing troops at far greater risk. Yet Johnson soon discovered how difficult it was to persuade others to adopt his method. It took five months to develop a new system, but five years to get that system widely taught and accepted.

That experience now animates Johnson's civilian career as a postdoctoral researcher in the David Eccles School of Business's Department of Management, where he is exploring another kind of minefield: Why do some innovations struggle to gain acceptance while others are quickly embraced? According to his research, the more novel an idea is, the more varied the response—and mixed reviews are seen as a bad sign. But, Johnson notes, "Mixed reviews are to be expected when an idea is new."

BRIAN MAFFLY

Runnin' the Utes

Nearly three decades ago, Alex Jensen BS'05 walked off the court in San Antonio after Utah's heartbreaking loss to Kentucky in the NCAA Championship Game. Now the Centerville, Utah, native is back where it all started, trading his NBA assistant coach whistle for the chance to lead his alma mater. Jensen's journey took him from team captain under Rick Majerus to 12 years coaching professional basketball—including nearly a decade with the Utah Jazz, developing stars like Rudy Gobert; a season as NBA D-League Coach of the Year; and two years as an assistant coach with the Dallas Mavericks. But home kept calling. We sat down with Jensen to talk about his remarkable path from University of Utah player to men's basketball head coach.

Back when you played for the U, did you ever imagine that you'd return as head coach?

It's surreal. A lot of memories from my time here have come back, and it's exciting. I tell recruits about how we used to fill the Huntsman Center and few teams left with a win. Being the coach here is not something I ever thought about during my playing days, which makes it even more surreal.

What's one memorable piece of wisdom from Coach Majerus that has stuck with you?

One lesson that keeps coming back to mind is that Coach Majerus did not want to be bothered with anything that didn't concern winning the next game. Everything he did was for the betterment of the team. We used to say "team together" when I played here, and we are going to do the same thing now.

How did you tackle this off season's roster rebuild, and what qualities guided your player selections?

I was very deliberate with building our roster, similar to how I filled my coaching staff. I took my time and made sure each player was the right fit for our program and that we were right for them, too. We never rushed decisions or compromised our core values. We made sure the players we recruited are competitive, smart, skilled, and have a real love for the game.



Web Extra Get to know Coach Jensen even better with an extended Q&A at magazine.utah.edu/jensen



Making a splash with campus fun: Canoe battleship brings intramurals to a whole new level.

Getting In the Game

From first-timers to former MVPs, everyone is welcome in intramural sports, with a league (and a vibe) for every kind of player

Whether you're in it for the glory, the cardio, or the post-game group chat, intramural sports at the U deliver the goods. With leagues for all skill levels, folks at the U don't have to be seasoned athletes—or even know all the rules—to get in on the fun.

Former high school soccer player Rachel Vermeltfoort BS'23 thought her playing days were over until she joined college intramurals as a U student. Now she oversees the program as the U's manager of intramural and sports clubs. "For me, it was mind-blowing—I didn't know this was available, but I'm so glad it was. It was such a great way to be active, make friends, and stay connected to campus."

The program welcomes everyone—from first-time players to former high school athletes hungry for competition—and it even includes U faculty and staff. With three skill-level divisions (D1, D2, and D3), there's a place for every kind of player.

Co-ed leagues strike a balance between friendly competition and big laughs. Prefer traditional matchups? Open leagues

have you covered. The variety of sports includes traditional favorites like basketball, volleyball, and soccer, as well as unique options like canoe battleship, Ultimate Frisbee, and flag football.

What makes the program special isn't just the athletics—it's the connections. Academic cohorts often form teams together, creating bonds that extend far beyond game night. "You might come out just looking for a fun evening on the field, and you'll definitely find that," notes Blaine Spencer, U assistant director of sports. "But intramurals can also introduce you to people you'll see around campus, study with, and even network with professionally down the road."

For students living on campus, intramural sports provide that essential sense of belonging. "It's not just about winning games—it's about finding your people, staying active, and discovering how much college has to offer," remarks Spencer.

To learn more, visit campusrec.utah.edu/intramural-sports.

SPORTS BRIEFS



For the fourth year in a row, the U's climbing team won the overall title at the USA Climbing Collegiate National Championships. The student-run team also placed first in the lead, speed, and bouldering categories. Nine U athletes earned podium spots, with AJ Flynn, Lillyan Higgs, Nathan Monte, Campbell Sarinopoulos, and Anton Smolyanyy finishing first in their categories.



Utah quarterback Devon Dampier was named Big 12 Newcomer of the Year in a vote by media members who cover the league. Dampier, a junior who entered his first season with the Utes this year, began his career at New Mexico, where he played in 21 total games in 2023-24 with 13 starts. He became the first UNM quarterback to earn All-Mountain West First Team honors in 2024. Dampier led the conference in total offense by piling up 3,934 yards, including 2,768 passing yards, the league's second-highest total.

Grace McCallum BS'25 has been named to the College Sports Communicators (CSC) Academic All-America First Team for 2024-25. She also was named the Team Member of the Year for her category, the Divi-

sion I Women's At-Large, which encompasses more than 10 NCAA sports. McCallum wrapped up her illustrious undergraduate career at the U with a 4.0 GPA while also being recognized as one of the best collegiate gymnasts in the country. McCallum is slated to stay with Utah Gymnastics through the 2026 season as a graduate assistant coach.

Four additional Utah student-athletes—Joe Davies (Skiing), Jesco Helling (Swimming and Diving), Kaja Norbye (Skiing), and Elias Petersen (Swimming and Diving) were named CSC Academic All-America in 2024-25, contributing to a total of 21 Academic All-Americans in the past four years for Utah—the most in any four-year span in school history.



Built to Make a Difference

The next generation of changemakers at the U has a new place to call home—a six-story residence hall designed to house students alongside organizations working to tackle some of society's toughest problems. The 284,808-square-foot Impact & Prosperity Epicenter houses nearly 800 students as well as two David Eccles School of Business global impact organizations: the Sorenson Impact Institute and the Center for Business, Health, and Prosperity. The building features a central gathering space, a full-service café, study rooms, and more.

Anchor gifts from Jim (BS'75) and Krista (MBA'20) Sorenson and Bob (BA'76) and Lynette (honorary Doctor of Humane Letters 2016) Gay made it possible. Housing includes four- and eight-bedroom apartments, end-cap

communities (premium corner rooms with a view), and single/double rooms, all with kitchens, laundry facilities, and high-speed Internet.

The Forum, a central gathering space, hosts more than 30 events each semester, including unique programming such as speaker series, film screenings, workshops, and career fairs—not to mention chance encounters that spark big ideas.

Themed communities—Impact Capital, Global Health, Health Innovation, and Interfaith—offer students experiential learning opportunities and scholarship opportunities. Not just a traditional residence hall, the Impact & Prosperity Epicenter functions as a living-learning community built to address some of the world's greatest challenges.

1 'Donut' worry about finding a community here—social activities abound!

2 Centrally located on campus, the Impact & Prosperity Epicenter (1755 E. Student Life Way) is east of Lassonde Studios and across the street from the George S. Eccles Student Life Center.

3 End-cap communities feature private sleeping quarters, exceptional views, and roomy shared spaces.

4 Residents can cook up connections in shared kitchens and collaborative workspaces.

5 Students choose their space—from private rooms to roommate living.

6 Campus comes alive in the Forum—a gathering space designed to spark interaction, creativity, and ideas.

7 All of campus can grab a bite and a beverage at Café Epicenter, located on the first floor.

8 From study sessions to movie nights, this space makes campus living feel like home.



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Road Warriors

President Randall crisscrosses Utah to strengthen partnerships and celebrate the U's 175th anniversary

U leaders traded their campus offices for a tour bus this summer, leading two multi-day road trips across Utah as part of the U's 175th anniversary celebration. The journeys took them from Logan to St. George, with stops at partner institutions, businesses, and military facilities to strengthen collaborations and showcase the U's statewide influence.

"I want us to be a university with impact. We have a vision and a plan for the future, and it's not much different from what we said 175 years ago," U President Taylor Randall HBA'90 said during a dinner with alumni in St. George. "It's a moment of reinvention and re-anchoring ourselves on some of the basic principles of the past."

The tours highlighted Utah's interconnected higher education ecosystem, with stops at Weber State University, Utah State University, Utah Tech, Southern Utah University, and even BYU's Creamery.

"I believe there are ways for us to succeed, as well as have every other institution in the state succeed," Randall said during a breakfast meeting with Weber State President Brad Mortensen PhD'09.

Geoffrey Landward, commissioner of higher education, joined portions of the tour and praised the collaborative spirit. "We have a real opportunity to make some strategic changes to how we design and operate as a system of institutions that are unified in their vision of providing the best higher education for students," he said.

The trips also included visits to Hill Air Force Base, the Great Salt Lake research site, and various Utah businesses, demonstrating the university's commitment to partnerships across sectors and regions.

Beauty Business

When Sahana Kargi HBS'23 HBS'23 started her education at the U, she didn't foresee that by senior year she'd be making \$100K a year as a beauty influencer. She initially launched her TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube accounts to teach exotic-pet owners about caring for hedgehogs, sugar gliders, and other animals. But with her knack for numbers and business, monetizing the content came naturally.

"I thought it would be a cool way to get my pets a few extra toys," she says. "I never expected it would turn into a career."

When followers started asking about her hair and makeup routines, she switched gears. "I saw a gap in the market," says the Indian American, who had wished for more relatable beauty role models as a teen. "Growing up, I had so many questions like, 'Is it normal to have darkness under my arms or hair on my upper lip?' Talking about our insecurities can make women and girls feel so seen."

She began sharing South Asian beauty secrets—like using grapeseed oil on hair—and makeup tips for complexions like hers. To grow her platform, she studied analytics and applied insights from her dual major in applied mathematics and quantitative analysis of markets and organizations. The U's entrepreneurial culture was also a major influence. "I met so many people through the Lassonde Entrepreneur Institute who were taking very real steps to make their business goals happen," she notes.

Today, Kargi has 2.3 million followers across her social platforms, taking advantage of new analytical tools like TikTok's creator search insights to keep growing. "I can make a video that people are specifically searching for," she explains. "I know who the audience is and what need I'm fulfilling."

What's next? Kargi began a master's in cybersecurity at the U this fall, and after graduating, she'll either expand her influencer business with a product line or move on to a corporate cybersecurity career.

Expert



Another Big Investment in Entrepreneurs

The Lassonde family adds \$25 million more to the U's nationally ranked hub for student startups



Julie Lassonde and her father, Pierre Lassonde

The Lassonde Family Foundation has had a profound impact on the University of Utah for decades. Led by Pierre Lassonde MBA'73 and his children, Julie and Christian, the foundation has generously contributed over \$25 million in support of student entrepreneurship throughout the years. Last spring, the foundation announced a new \$25 million gift, setting the stage for the Lassonde Entrepreneur Institute's 25th anniversary in 2026.

The institute—ranked among the top 10 in the nation—has grown from a single program in 2001 into a powerhouse of student innovation. An interdisciplinary division of the David Eccles School of Business, it reaches more than 6,000 students each year and supports over 500 startup teams annually.

"The institute has become the destination for student entrepreneurs over the past 25 years," says Pierre Lassonde, who founded it in memory of his late wife, Claudette MacKay-Lassonde MS'73. "[The new gift] will allow the institute to continue to dream big and do incredible things for young entrepreneurs over the next 25 years and beyond."

A key symbol of that growth is Lassonde Studios, the award-winning live-work space where students build companies alongside classmates. "The student community at Lassonde Studios is beyond anything we could have imagined," says Julie Lassonde. "We are changing the world through student experiences."

U President Taylor Randall HBA'90 says the Lassonde family's support has been transformative. "They have challenged us to focus on students and their ideas, offer hands-on learning, and provide entrepreneurship education at a scale not available anywhere else," he notes.

From prototyping labs and seed grants to a master's degree designed for startup founders, the institute blends real-world experience with academic rigor. This new donation will help it grow for decades to come.

"We know we have the best entrepreneur program," says Pierre Lassonde. "We hope this gift allows the University of Utah to continue thinking big about engaging student entrepreneurs."

U Team Creates Robot to Revolutionize Retinal Surgery

When surgeons operate on the retina—a layer of cells less than one millimeter thick—they must account for patients' breathing and eye movements, and their own hand tremors. One wrong move on one of the smallest, most delicate parts of the human body can mean the difference between sight and blindness.

That's why researchers at the U's John A. Moran Eye Center and the John and Marcia Price College of Engineering have created a robotic surgery device that aims to give surgeons "superhuman" hands.

Operated by a surgeon using a haptic stylus, the robot executes movements as little as one micrometer—smaller than a single human cell. The device, which mounts directly to a patient's head using a helmet, compensates for head movements while scaling down the surgeon's hand motions and eliminating tremors.

Because the device isn't yet approved for human use, testing required a volunteer fitted with special goggles that allowed researchers to mount a pig eye just in front of their natural eye. This setup let them test the robot's precision on animal tissue while compensating for human head motion—at no risk to the volunteer.

The experiments, published in *Science Robotics*, showed higher success subretinal injection rates than some documented manual surgery rates. The research was led by engineering professor Jake Abbott MS'01 and retinal specialist Paul S. Bernstein.

"Treatments for vision disorders are rapidly advancing," Abbott says. "We need to give surgeons better ability to keep up with them."

The robot aims to improve gene therapy delivery for inherited retinal diseases, potentially allowing patients to have procedures under IV sedation rather than general anesthesia.

"These collaborations are just wonderful at the University of Utah," Bernstein says. "When I have ideas, the engineers, the chemists, and the physicists are just a few blocks away."



PICTURE

The U's robotics team

just dethroned the reigning champions of NASA's Lunabotics Challenge, taking home the prestigious Artemis Grand Prize. Their rover dominated the competition, building the largest protective berm in the event's history and moving twice as much simulated moon dust as their closest competitor. Their victories earned them \$9,000 and bragging rights over long-time powerhouses Alabama and Iowa.



Your DNA Changes Faster Than We Thought

Every person carries nearly 200 genetic changes that neither parent had—and some parts of our DNA are mutating much faster than scientists previously realized.

A team of U researchers and North American colleagues has created the most comprehensive map yet of how human DNA changes across generations, revealing “mutation hot spots” that transform almost every time they’re passed down. The findings, published in *Nature*, could help families better understand their risk for genetic diseases.

“We saw parts of our genome that are crazy mutable, almost a mutation every generation,” says Aaron Quinlan, new chair of the U’s Department of Human Genetics, who holds the Helen Lowe Bamberger Colby Presidential Endowed Chair in Human Genetics at the Spencer Fox Eccles School of Medicine.

The discovery came from studying four generations of a Utah family that has worked with genetics researchers since the 1980s. Using multiple advanced DNA sequencing technologies, the team could detect both tiny changes and massive DNA rearrangements that previous methods missed.

“It’s mutations that ultimately differentiate us from other species,” says fellow study author Lynn Jorde, longtime U professor of human genetics who holds the Mark and Kathie Miller Presidential Endowed Chair in Human Genetics. “We’re getting at a very basic property of what makes us human.”

The research has immediate practical applications for genetic counseling. If a child has a genetic disease caused by changes in these fast-mutating regions, if it’s from a mutation hot spot, siblings may have a lower risk.

“A large family with this breadth and depth is an incredibly unique and valuable resource,” says Deborah Neklason PhD’99, an author on the study and a U research associate professor of internal medicine. The team plans to expand its work to see if mutation rates vary between families.



Breaking Ground

A new comprehensive Huntsman Cancer Institute facility will open fall 2028 in Utah County

Huntsman Cancer Institute at the University of Utah broke ground in April on a second Comprehensive Cancer Center that will bring world-class care an hour closer to thousands of patients across Utah.

The 272,000-square-foot facility in the Utah County city of Vineyard represents the largest single investment in Huntsman Cancer Institute’s history at \$400 million. When it opens in fall 2028, the center will offer the same caliber of care as the Salt Lake City location, with multidisciplinary cancer clinics, radiation oncology, comprehensive imaging, infusion therapy, and wellness programs.

For the more than 40,000 patients from Utah County and surrounding areas who visited Huntsman Cancer Institute last year, the new location eliminates a two-hour round trip to Salt Lake City.

“The new Huntsman Cancer Institute in Vineyard represents a bold step toward realizing a future where cancer will be a thing of the past,” says U President Taylor Randall HBA’90. “By expanding access to cutting-edge cancer care and research, especially for patients in Utah’s rural and frontier communities, we’re delivering

on our promise to improve lives across the state and beyond.”

The Vineyard site will also advance research and innovation, offering access to clinical trials and computational science programs that harness artificial intelligence in cancer discovery. Partnerships with Utah Valley University and Brigham Young University will provide new training opportunities for future health care professionals.

The project was catalyzed thanks to a \$75 million lead matching gift from the Huntsman Family Foundation in June 2023, followed by major contributions from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the State of Utah, and other donors. As of the groundbreaking, 75 percent of funding has been secured.

“Today, we make the investment that will shape the next generation of care and research and hopefully bring an end to cancer,” says Peter Huntsman, chairman and CEO of the Huntsman Cancer Foundation.

Huntsman Cancer Institute is the only National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center in the Mountain West, serving patients from Utah, Nevada, Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho.

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE UTAH MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS



PICTURE

The Utah Museum of Fine Arts opened its new Portrait Hall in March, transforming the second-floor hallway into a gallery dedicated to the art of portraiture. The collection showcases five centuries of works, from Renaissance paintings to contemporary pieces, highlighting how artists have captured identity, status, and personality throughout history.



HEALTH INSURANCE

(yeah, we do that too)



INDIVIDUAL & FAMILY OPEN ENROLLMENT
STARTS NOV 1, 2025

One simple question from U researchers about HIV sparked a 20-year journey that just produced a breakthrough with the potential to save millions of lives.

ENDING

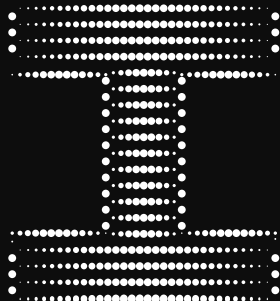
THE TWICE-A-YEAR PREVENTION SHOT THAT COULD

SAVE

BY SOPHIA FRIESEN

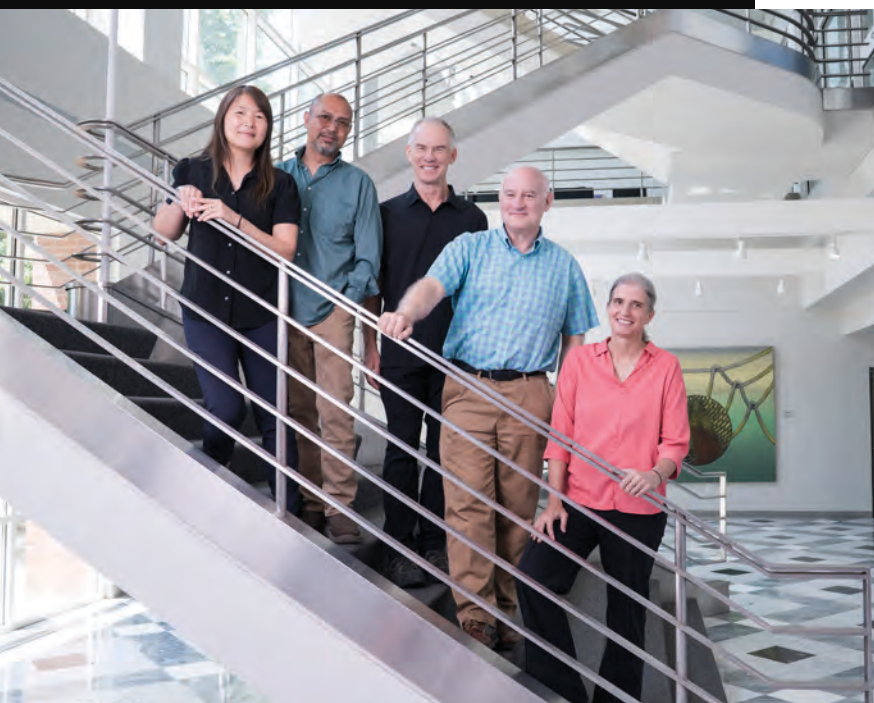
PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVE TITENSOR





In the past year, Wesley Sundquist has walked red carpets with the likes of Snoop Dogg and Simone Biles as one of TIME's 100 most influential people in the world. He's received accolades for his research ranging from *Science* magazine's breakthrough of the year to the Horwitz Prize—as of 2024, 51 of the 118 prizes awarded have also received a Nobel Prize—and has become known as one of the key minds that laid the foundation for an HIV prevention drug that could change the course of the AIDS epidemic globally.

But if you ask Sundquist, his work started with something much humbler: the microscopic architecture of a single part of the HIV virus.



SPARKED BY CURIOSITY

One side of Sundquist's office is a rainbow panorama of watercolor art, each panel depicting a different phase of the HIV life cycle. The virus can be deadly, its impact on human life inarguably devastating, but in this office, its complexity is inspirational.

"When you see a molecule in action, it's not so different from seeing a waterfall, in that there's natural beauty there," says Sundquist, a Distinguished Professor and department chair of biochemistry and the Dr. Leo T. Samuels and Barbara K. Samuels Presidential Endowed Chair in the Spencer Fox Eccles School of Medicine.

For more than two decades since starting his lab, Sundquist has been driven to understand that beauty. "That a virus can complete an entire replication cycle is rather magical," he says. "We want to understand how this works, not just because it might help medicine, but also because it's a fascinating and beautiful process."

Many viruses are simple spheres, but the HIV capsid—the protein shell that surrounds the virus's genetic material—is a cone: more complicated, and much rarer. "It's not a typical biological assembly," Sundquist notes. "We knew it was going to be some unique assembly that wasn't understood."

From the start of his quest to understand HIV's structure, Sundquist found a natural collaborator with fellow biochemist Chris Hill, who also joined the U in 1992. The two immediately clicked. "We challenged each other," Hill remarks. "We became friends and scientific buddies."

Sundquist and Hill couldn't see how a single protein building block could assemble into an asymmetric cone. But Hill, now Distinguished Professor of biochemistry and the Spencer Fox Eccles School of Medicine vice dean for research, had a breakthrough after reading a paper on a carbon compound that can form sheets or spheres, depending on how its subunits link together. He suspected the capsid protein might form a cone via a similar mechanism.

The cone's mathematical angles confirmed Hill's suspicions. It was a major advance in understanding how the virus was built, but at the time, it seemed purely academic. "We had this insight, and I thought it was quite beautiful," Hill recalls, "but it wasn't clear how it was going to be useful for anything."

Genetic analysis of the capsid revealed the first hints of translational applications. When the late Uta von Schwedler in Sundquist's lab made mutations in different parts of the capsid gene, she found that the shell was extremely sensitive to change. Small tweaks to the protein's code stopped the virus from replicating quickly, leaving it incapable of robust infection.

It raised the question: If a mutation could stop HIV in its tracks, could a drug that targeted the capsid do the same?

FROM DISCOVERY TO DRUG

Outside the lab, others took notice. Tomas Cihlar, then principal scientist at pharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences, came across von Schwedler's results and was struck by how critical the capsid seemed for viral function. He started investigating the capsid further. "Wes's name was on most papers related to the HIV capsid," he recalls.

In late 2005, the two met for the first time to discuss the capsid's potential as a new drug target. "I was not sure how it would go, because Wes was already prominent in the HIV field and a very well recognized biochemist. But it turned out that he's a really nice guy," says Cihlar, now senior vice president of virology research at Gilead. That conversation launched a decades-long scientific partnership, with Sundquist acting as a basic science consultant on the structure of the capsid while Gilead worked to design a drug.

Academic labs like Sundquist's are critical to drug development, Cihlar says. "Without investing in basic research, we in industry

would not have the foundational information about biological functions and systems.”

Even with that foundation, developing a capsid-targeting drug wasn't easy. Unlike for more conventional targets, no known compounds interacted with the capsid, and there was no roadmap to find them. The screening process demanded 50 grams of capsid protein—the equivalent of 400 million billion viral particles. And after four years, the initial screen failed. “We had to make our decision,” Cihlar reflects: “Are we going to walk away, or are we going to keep trying?”

They kept trying.

Starting from a new molecule that interacted very weakly with the capsid and was very unstable, Gilead researchers spent six years painstakingly synthesizing new molecules, making improvements over the course of more than 4,000 compounds made and tested individually. Finally, they arrived at a compound that bound the capsid protein and interfered sufficiently with viral replication. In addition, it was also incredibly stable, affording long dosing intervals.

In cells in a dish, in animal models, in pilot studies, the compound's efficacy exceeded expectations. “There were multiple moments when I felt like: this is working better than we could ever imagine,” Cihlar recalls.

THE TRIALS

HIV infects 1.3 million people every year. Despite treatment advances turning HIV infection from a death sentence into a largely manageable chronic condition for those with access to high-quality health care, over 600,000 people die from HIV/AIDS worldwide every year, many in southern and eastern Africa, where stigma and reduced access to health care can limit treatment options.

So that's where lenacapavir was tested. The first large clinical trial recruited over 2,000 women in Uganda and South Africa, among the countries with the highest rates of HIV infection and death. Advocates like Yvette Raphael, co-founder and executive director of Advocacy for Prevention of HIV in Africa, were key to the study's success. As chair of the advisory board, Raphael helped ensure that the most affected populations—young women, including those pregnant and breastfeeding—would be a focus.

Women came into the clinic for an injection every six months, and by the end of a year, not one of the trial participants had contracted HIV.

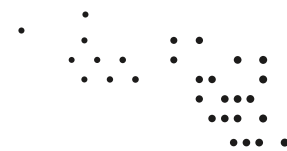
Follow-up trials in other populations, including men and non-binary people, confirmed the drug's efficacy. “Lenacapavir almost completely prevents the transmission of HIV into at-risk populations,” Sundquist says. “This is just an amazing result.” In June 2025, lenacapavir received FDA approval for HIV prevention.

“It's one of those things that we've waited for,” Raphael says. “To get an injection twice a year that prevents you from contracting HIV, in places where HIV prevalence amongst young people is still so very high—it's groundbreaking, and it's almost likened to a miracle.”

The remarkable impact of the drug depends not only on how strongly it inhibits the virus, but also on how long it lasts. In regions where taking a daily pill might be difficult, a twice-a-year preventive injection could make a huge difference.

Future work must prioritize disseminating information on lenacapavir, as well as the drug itself, to help at-risk communities make informed choices, Raphael says. But she's hopeful that lenacapavir could dramatically change the course of, and eventually end, the HIV epidemic. “We'd like to see the rate of new infections drop to almost zero. And lenacapavir has shown that it has the possibility of getting us there much quicker.”

(Opposite) Some of the U's all-star HIV researchers (from left): **Janet Iwasa**, assistant professor of biochemistry, **Owen Pornillos** PhD'02, professor of biochemistry, **Chris Hill**, Distinguished Professor of biochemistry, **Wes Sundquist**, Distinguished Professor and department chair of biochemistry, **Barbie Ganser-Pornillos** PhD'03, research associate



“Lenacapavir almost completely prevents the transmission of HIV into at-risk populations.”

THE FINAL HURDLE

You never know where basic research will lead, Sundquist muses. A question founded in curiosity about the natural world can lead to a breakthrough that could change the trajectory of infections worldwide.

But Sundquist says the future of lenacapavir is still up in the air. After two decades of basic science, industry collaboration, and clinical trials, changes to federal funding priorities mean that the programs that would have helped pay for the distribution of the drug to those who need it most are now in question. It's uncertain how lenacapavir will make it past this final implementation step.

“The potential for treating or preventing infections relatively cheaply is there,” Sundquist emphasizes. “It would be a human tragedy if we don't roll it out.”

A FUTURE OF COLLABORATION

Meanwhile, Sundquist continues to uncover basic biology and expand new networks of scientific collaboration.

Since 2007, Sundquist has run CHEETAH, an NIH-funded program that connects HIV-focused labs at the U and nationwide to build the foundations for further breakthroughs in HIV treatment and prevention. The 20-lab coalition helps researchers build partnerships and tackle broader challenges.

As lenacapavir rolls out, the Sundquist lab's more recent discoveries are setting the stage for future medicines. Sundquist and his “science buddy” Hill are uncovering features of the ESCRT pathway, a fundamental process that helps sort molecules inside cells, that suggest targets for broad-acting anticancer therapies.

In other cases, their work has revealed the intricate beauty of natural processes, with the translational impact unknown... for now. “We don't know what we don't know,” Hill underscores, “but we do know there's a lot of it. Even if you don't quite know how it might become useful, you've got to find it out, because some of it will be transformative.”

“We're driven by curiosity to discover things that we don't understand,” Sundquist adds. “It's not so different from other kinds of adventures. The same thing that drives people to climb mountains drives us to discover how molecular machines work.” **U**

Sophia Friesen is a research communications manager for University of Utah Health.

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BY LISA ANDERSON

ILLUSTRATIONS BY PAUL ROGERS

THE U'S NEXT BIG CLIMB

THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH'S FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN CHARTS AMBITIOUS ROUTES FOR HOW HIGHER EDUCATION CAN INSPIRE STUDENTS, ADVANCE RESEARCH, AND DELIVER SOCIETAL IMPACT.

ON A HOT JUNE day in West Valley City, Utah, Liliana Martinez BS'14 BS'14 MPH'19 stood at a podium, visibly emotional before the crowd gathered at a ceremonial groundbreaking for a new University of Utah hospital. A health partnership manager with University Neighborhood Partners, Martinez is working closely with fellow residents and community advocates to ensure the Eccles Health Campus and Eccles Hospital addresses the community's most pressing needs. To her, this is more than just another construction project.

"I see it as an investment for the future," she said. "This facility is the beginning of new partnerships, economic opportunities, and opportunities for people from our community to grow their skills and knowledge."

Martinez's words capture the vision behind Impact 2030, the university's five-year strategic plan announced this spring. The plan reimagines what a university can be—not just a place that confers degrees or provides patient care, but one that creates lasting, meaningful change. At the U, "societal impact" means just that: measurable

progress in the university's priority areas, from individual student outcomes to statewide economic mobility to breakthrough research that changes lives.

It's an ambitious vision—especially at a time when the value of higher education is being questioned more loudly than ever. Across the country, public confidence in higher education is faltering, tuition costs are under scrutiny, and universities face increasing pressure from shrinking budgets and shifting expectations. But where other institutions see a time for caution, U leaders see opportunity.

"This is a moment of reinvention, for us, and for universities in general," President Taylor Randall HBA'90 told university leaders at a meeting to discuss the strategic planning process. "The ones that respond to external forces quicker, the ones that match and meet the needs of their community and also the national audience, are the ones that are going to lead."

U leaders say the strategy—developed in partnership with more than 10,000 campus and

community stakeholders—represents the university's commitment to improve the life of every Utahn and to advance a new model for how higher education can positively impact society. Impact 2030 crystallizes concepts Randall has championed since his inauguration: inspiring students and supporting their success, growing research and innovation efforts, and serving communities in Utah and beyond. The plan distills those areas into three pillars, bringing together existing initiatives and introducing new ones, and accompanies a physical development framework that will usher campus into the future.

Despite the uncertainty facing higher education, leaders say the U is well equipped to keep climbing toward its goal of becoming a top 10 public institution with unsurpassed societal impact.

"There's momentum behind the University of Utah," says Chief Strategy Officer Brett Graham BS'96 MPA'01. "The headwinds are going to impact us less than others because we're focused, we have clear strength of purpose, and we're aligning our efforts across the entire university."



EQUIP STUDENTS TO SUCCEED

MILEPOSTS

- ◆ Enroll 40,000 students
- ◆ Improve rate of returning students
- ◆ Reach 80% six-year graduation rate
- ◆ See 90% of graduates launch careers, grad school, or military service within six months
- ◆ Improve students' "thriving rate" (their belief in their ability to succeed)



USTUDENT Maya Bourland started her academic journey in mechanical engineering before recognizing it wasn't the right fit. The Navigate Hub for Exploring Students pointed her to a major exploration course, where she identified her core values.

"I realized, 'Maybe I don't want to build other people's designs. Maybe I want to make the designs myself.'"

An academic advisor helped Bourland shift to a multidisciplinary design major, highlighting which requirements she'd already fulfilled and mapping out a plan for the remaining courses. Now? "I can't imagine doing anything else," says the senior, who hopes to intern at Honda and design automotive products someday.

Research demonstrates that support services like academic advising play a crucial role in student success. As costs of college (and everything else) rise, so does the urgency to deliver a clear return on investment. Impact 2030 sets a goal of enrolling 40,000 students by the end of the decade, with targeted growth in areas like graduate programs to help the university boost its research output. The plan also focuses on raising retention, graduation, and job placement rates.

"Our six-year graduation rate stands at 65 percent, slightly above the national average but lower than we would like," says Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs Mitzi Montoya. "That means too many students face barriers that delay or prevent them from earning a degree. Our responsibility is to identify and remove those obstacles."

That work is already underway through initiatives such as the U's revamped Career Success Center, with more offerings to support students at every stage of their professional journey, and Navigate U, a comprehensive student success agenda that leverages student data along with staff and faculty expertise to identify gaps and anticipate barriers through preemptive, personalized support.



“We’ve been working to identify and close historic gaps in student services,” says T. Chase Hagood, vice provost for student success. “Our research indicates many students don’t know where or how to access support networks and programs. Even the best-designed resources mean nothing if students are unable to access them.”

Academic advising, for example, was previously run through individual schools and colleges, each with its own procedures. Bourland says it wasn’t always clear who her appointed advisor was. Now, under Navigate U, advising is part of a shared approach of proactive academic advising, with a user-friendly app and data-sharing platform that helps students and advisors manage advising appointments and stay on track.

Navigate U is also implementing a centralized success coaching program to



**BETWEEN FALL 2022
AND FALL 2023,
STUDENT RETENTION
RATES IMPROVED
MORE FOR ALL
COACHED STUDENTS
THAN THEIR
NON-COACHED PEERS.**

improve student retention rates, especially among those most vulnerable to incompleteness. The effort is already producing results. Between fall 2022 and fall 2023, retention rates improved for all coached students when compared to their non-coached peers, with the biggest impact on low-GPA (26 percent), Pell-eligible (21 percent), and first-generation students (9 percent).

Other Navigate U initiatives include a project that addresses classes with higher-than-average failure/incomplete/withdrawal rates and assessments of whether degree programs can realistically be completed in four years given current course offerings.

“The U is hitting its stride with these projects,” remarks Hagood, “and we’re seeing impact.”



TAKING CAMPUS LIFE AT THE U TO NEW HEIGHTS

Imagine finishing your last class of the day and walking to nearby shops, grabbing groceries, then meeting friends for dinner—all without leaving campus. That's the vision behind the Campus Physical Development Framework, which guides campus planning efforts to support Impact 2030's goals.

The framework guides the location of future facilities, shaping campus's different areas into more defined "districts." That includes a lively, round-the-clock student district that will help the U keep shedding its commuter-campus reputation. More housing and new retail, dining, and recreational spaces will create a "college town magic" vibe that U leaders say is vital in attracting and retaining students.

The plan also includes key investments in research and innovation infrastructure—ensuring that as the campus grows, it continues to support world-class discovery. That includes future growth at Research Park and better connections between academic, clinical, and entrepreneurial spaces.

What about parking and transportation for this growing campus? The framework maps out a more efficient and sustainable system, with strategically located parking, better shuttle routes, and enhanced bike and pedestrian paths. The improvements will coincide with expanded UTA service, including a new airport-to-Research Park TRAX line set to begin operation in 2032.

CHART NEW ROUTES FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

MILEPOSTS

- ◆ Reach research expenditures of \$1 billion annually
- ◆ Increase creative scholarship, publications, and awards
- ◆ Create interdisciplinary centers of excellence
- ◆ Accelerate commercialization

WHEN IT COMES TO research and innovation, the University of Utah has already scaled impressive heights. Recognized as an R1 institution for very high research activity, the U has spawned more than 330 startups and hit a record high of \$782 million in annual research funding this year. But U leaders want to climb faster and aim higher.

Impact 2030 accelerates the university's innovation efforts. At its core, the work isn't just about numbers—it's about delivering new technologies, therapies, and ideas that shape public policy and improve the quality of life in Utah and beyond.

A centerpiece of that effort is University of Utah Ventures, Powered by EPIC, a \$200 million fund that pairs U discoveries with the venture capital expertise to launch and scale companies. The U and EPIC have collaborated before, partnering to invest in Recursion Pharmaceuticals, now a \$2 billion publicly traded company.

"We're just getting started with the venture fund, and we've already had several startups from early investments," says Erin Rothwell PhD'04, U vice president for research. More U faculty are proposing ideas for commercialization than ever before, she adds, and the university reached a new all-time record for proposal submissions, with over \$3.2 billion this year.

The terrain is shifting, however. Federal funding cuts—especially those targeting facilities and administrative (F&A) support—pose serious challenges. "If F&A funding gets cut, we simply won't be able to do as much research," Rothwell warns. But she emphasizes that it's critical to forge ahead, even in the face of uncertainty, to ensure the U.S. remains a global science leader with a high quality of life.

Alongside commercialization, the U is investing in interdisciplinary research hubs focused on challenges like energy, health, data science, and debate/conflict, and expanding grant-writing support through the Large Infrastructure Funding Team (LIFT). To shape future research efforts, Rothwell's office is identifying university strengths—like geothermal energy, biomedical devices, and genomics—as well as federal priority areas for growth, such as AI, wireless, and national security.

"This is a strategic moment, not just to grow research, but to align it and shape its relevance for the decade ahead," Rothwell says. "This is our time to push forward and lead."

EXPAND THE RANGE OF IMPACT



MILEPOSTS

- ◆ Finish the Eccles Health Campus and Eccles Hospital in West Valley
- ◆ Increase mental health programs and policies
- ◆ Increase availability of research expertise and advanced cyberinfrastructure to support responsible AI research and innovation
- ◆ Engage community partners in responsible AI research and innovation

IN 2028, PHASE 1 of the University of Utah Eccles Health Campus and Eccles Hospital in West Valley City will open its doors. The first off-campus hospital in the U's 175-year history will expand health care access in Utah's second-largest city, where 725,000 residents are currently served by just 386 hospital beds. That's about one-quarter of the national hospital bed average for a community that size. Each year, more than 85,000 West Valley residents make 600,000 outpatient visits to U of U Health, collectively driving more than 12 million miles to access care.

The facility will feature 130 patient beds and 206 outpatient exam rooms, offering primary care, emergency medicine, and

specialties such as heart care, orthopedics, and women's health. But it represents far more than infrastructure expansion—it's a model for meaningful partnership.

"We're not building this hospital *for* the community, we're building it *with* the community," says Liliana Martinez, who serves on the planning committee alongside West Valley residents, leaders, and organizations. The group offers insight into community needs, such as employment and education opportunities. The project is expected to create up to 2,000 jobs and open new education and career pathways for westside residents.

"Our hope is that this hospital and health campus will become an indispensable community resource, a hub for superior health care, education, and training, and expanded economic opportunity," says Spencer F. Eccles BS'56, chairman and CEO of the George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles Foundation, whose landmark \$75 million gift helped launch the project.

"This new campus is exciting because it will expand access to comprehensive, top-tier health care," adds Bob Carter, CEO of University of Utah Health. "We also see this project as key to expanding educational opportunities and helping to address our shortage of nurses, allied health professionals, and doctors."

The West Valley initiative is just one example of how the U is climbing toward Impact 2030's "Service to Our Community" goals. Other efforts include expanded mental health care through services like the Kem C. and Carolyn Gardner Crisis Care Center (see p. 34); a statewide network of extension campuses and clinics—including a comprehensive Huntsman Cancer Institute facility in Utah County (see p. 20); and a \$100 million push to advance responsible AI research. The overarching goal: improving life for all 3.5 million Utahns.

Impact 2030 makes one thing clear: the climb must happen alongside the communities the U serves. That's what moved Martinez at the groundbreaking—the partnership with her community and the validation that it's worth investing in. "What you are saying in this moment," she remarked, "is that you see the potential and drive of our young people and community leaders and you're saying, 'We believe in you. We want to grow with you.'"

Lisa Anderson BA'02 is associate editor of Utah Magazine.



A New Emergency Room For Mental Health

The **Kem and Carolyn Gardner Mental Health Crisis Care Center** offers 24/7 help for any adult, transforming how communities respond to mental health emergencies.

NANCY STILL REMEMBERS the moment she made the call. Her 19-year-old son Steve was in the middle of a sudden mental health crisis—disoriented, spiraling, and unrecognizable. She dialed 911.

“I didn’t know what else to do. But I knew he needed help,” says Nancy. Police arrived and took Steve to jail. “He wasn’t a criminal,” she adds. “He was sick. And there was no place to go that could actually help.”

Now, families in Utah have a new option.

The Kem and Carolyn Gardner Mental Health Crisis Care Center, which opened in March, offers 24/7 walk-in help for any adult experiencing a mental health crisis, regardless of insurance status, no appointment needed. Part of Huntsman Mental Health Institute, which was dedicated in 2021 following a historic \$150 million gift from the Huntsman family to the University Neuropsychiatric Institute, the Crisis Care Center is the latest step in reimagining how Utah responds to mental illness.

Today, Steve is doing better. With support from the institute, he’s back on his feet. But Nancy hasn’t stopped thinking about how differently things could have gone. “If this new center had existed back then, we might

have avoided so much trauma—for him, and for us,” she says.

Funded in part by a significant gift from Kem BA’67 JD’70 and Carolyn Gardner BS’69, the center embraces a philosophy that people deserve compassion in deeply vulnerable moments, says Kem Gardner, who also received an honorary doctorate of business from the U in 2016. “This isn’t just a building,” he reflects. “It’s a turning point and lifeline for so many. We saw the example of the Huntsman family and chose to support this center to say that mental health matters, and so do the people who struggle with it.”

The staff was hand-selected to foster a culture of dignity, kindness, and hope, adds Dave Eldredge BS’94, the institute’s executive director. “Two barriers have haunted behavioral health my entire career: stigma and access. The Crisis Care Center takes direct aim at both,” he notes. “This wouldn’t be possible without the Gardner and Huntsman families, as well as key stakeholders in our community. Their vision turned an urgent need into a lasting resource for our community.”

Take a look inside the center to see how it operates, who it serves, and how it’s reshaping mental health crisis care.

BY
Seth Bracken

ILLUSTRATION BY
Eleanor Davis

Who can access Crisis Care Center services?

Everyone—regardless of insurance coverage, background, or housing situation. If you're experiencing a mental health crisis, you're welcome here.

Located at 955 West on 3300 South in South Salt Lake, the center is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. No appointment or referral is needed, and no one is turned away.



How do I know if I should come to the Crisis Care Center?

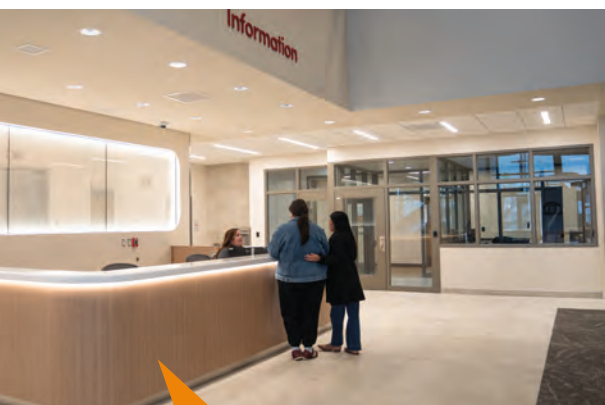
Come in if you're having thoughts of self-harm, extreme anxiety, suicidal thoughts, or emotional distress that makes it hard to function.

"A mental health crisis can mean a lot of things to different people," says Chris Adams BA'13 MSW'16, the center's behavioral health supervisor. For some people, it's their first panic attack or first episode of depression. For others with lifelong mental illness, it could be psychosis, mania, a relapse into substances, or an acute episode of suicidality. "Mental illness feels isolating, but you're not alone here," adds Adams. "Most of our staff has been personally touched by it, and that shows in how we treat people."

What if I'm not nearby or can't make it in but still need support?

Call or text 988—Utah's statewide crisis helpline.

The institute operates a statewide mental health network, and the free, confidential helpline offers 24/7 support from trained crisis workers and mobile response teams.



What happens when I walk through the doors?

You're greeted at the front desk before entering the patient area. Next, you undergo a medical screening to address any urgent physical health needs. From there, some guests meet with a provider and go home the same day with medication or connections for next steps. Others stay in the 23-hour observation unit for more intensive support. Those who need longer-term care are connected to inpatient psychiatric services.

What if I don't have insurance or don't know what my insurance covers?

You can still be seen. No one is turned away, and emergency mental health stabilization services are provided regardless of insurance status or ability to pay.

Other outpatient and inpatient services at the center operate on standard insurance billing models. On-site financial counseling helps guests connect to applicable insurance coverage and navigate payment plans when needed. "The goal is care first, always," notes Kevin Curtis, the institute's director of hospital crisis services. Once guests are stabilized, the team will help coordinate follow-up based on individual situations.

What if I need more than one night of help?

At the Crisis Care Center, stabilization is just the starting point. Every guest receives a personalized care plan, connecting them to on-site services or longer-term help from Huntsman Mental Health Institute, University of Utah Health, or other facilities, says Curtis. "We can walk guests down the hall to a surprising number of resources—legal help, dental care, and transitional outpatient services, with medical care, benefits applications, and employment support soon to come in the next phase of development," he notes. Additionally, guests can be connected to other community organizations like Fourth Street Clinic, Volunteers of America, The Road Home, and Valley Behavioral Health.

How does the center support me after I leave?

Staff will call you in the days following your visit. Often, guests are quickly connected to primary care providers, who can facilitate ongoing mental health care and coordinate specialist referrals.

The center also offers specialized programs including opioid addiction treatment, intensive outpatient services for other substance use disorders, and additional mental health intensive outpatient care for those needing more support than traditional therapy.

What if English isn't my first language?

You'll still be understood—and cared for.

The center has bilingual staff fluent in several languages, particularly Spanish. And as part of U of U Health, the center can access 24/7 translation services for dozens of languages.

How is this building special?

It was purpose-built for healing.

The center features soft lighting, open spaces, and private rooms that feel like a warm blanket. Even the lighting syncs with natural circadian rhythms to support sleep. The building includes 24 beds for short-term crisis stabilization and 30 beds for patients who need up to 23-hour care. A patient and family advisory council weighed in on every aspect—from furniture to layout to programming and culture—to ensure the space was truly person-centered and welcoming.

It's also strategically located at a major transportation hub near the county jail complex, offering law enforcement another option and bringing care into the community.

▲ Purpose-built for healing, the Gardner Crisis Care Center features calming spaces and immediate support, connecting guests with medical, legal, and community resources for recovery.



Web Extra Go inside the new Crisis Care Center with a video tour at magazine.utah.edu/crisis

Who Does This Center Help?

The Crisis Care Center serves people from all walks of life, often in their most vulnerable moments. These examples illustrate who might walk through its doors and what happens next. These hypothetical scenarios reflect real patterns of care and have been reviewed by clinicians.

Tasha, 29

New mom overwhelmed by postpartum anxiety and intrusive thoughts

What happens: Welcomed into a safe, stigma-free space, she meets with a clinician trained in perinatal mental health. Concerned about being separated from her child, she's referred to a maternal mental health intensive outpatient program, with family engaged in building a safety plan.

Ashley, 51

Recently laid off, experiencing a depressive episode and expressing passive suicidal thoughts

What happens: Stabilized on-site, then referred to a community mental health provider and to Workforce Services for help applying for unemployment and SNAP benefits through an on-site care navigator.

Malik, 19

College student experiencing a manic episode for the first time

What happens: Assessed by the clinical team, started on medication, and referred for inpatient care. Family receives support and education. At discharge, he's referred to a young adult outpatient program with psychiatric care and peer support. Once he's safely back on campus, a Mental Health First Responder team makes contact and helps him establish a safety plan.

Bill, 45

Facing eviction while managing severe anxiety and unable to navigate the court system on his own

What happens: Stabilized at the center and referred to the on-site legal clinic. Receives support from a legal advocate in filing paperwork and negotiating a resolution, reducing his stress and allowing him to focus on recovery.



Maria, 21

Experiences a panic attack at 3 a.m. after weeks of insomnia

What happens: Greeted and stabilized in a private room, evaluated for medication needs, connected to outpatient therapy, and given behavioral health strategies for sleep. Leaves with a plan and a follow-up appointment.

James, 46

Struggles with alcohol withdrawal and depression, recently evicted

What happens: Evaluated for withdrawal risk, started on medication, and connected with a social worker to plan next steps. Ready to engage in treatment, he's referred to a residential detox program.



Danielle, 38

Is brought in by police instead of being booked into jail after a psychotic episode

What happens: Assessed by clinicians, who determine she needs additional support and connect her to inpatient care. Referral made for legal support to resolve outstanding fines and prevent re-incarceration.

Leo, 21

Arrives overwhelmed by panic and insomnia, with persistent tooth pain

What happens: Referred to the on-site dental clinic, where resolving his physical pain helps ease his anxiety. After indicating he's no longer in crisis, he's connected with ongoing outpatient mental health support.



Eddie, 63

Veteran, unhoused, dealing with untreated PTSD

What happens: Assessed, stabilized, and provided with a warm meal, connected with a VA caseworker, and assisted with obtaining benefits and long-term care resources.

► Stories of hope unfold here—guests arrive in crisis and leave with treatment options and renewed stability. The center is setting a national standard for compassionate, dignified mental health crisis care.

Why does this place exist now?

Because a group of Utahns believed we could—and must—do better.

Led by the Huntsman Mental Health Foundation, the institute, and the Gardner family, this center represents a unique partnership among the U, Salt Lake County, the State of Utah, and dedicated philanthropists. For Christena Huntsman Durham, who lost a sister to a mental health-related crisis, this mission is deeply personal. “We built this center because we believe that mental health care should be as immediate and compassionate as any other form of emergency care,” says Huntsman Durham, chair of the board of the Huntsman Mental Health Foundation. “No one should suffer in silence or be turned away due to stigma or lack of resources. Our hope is that this becomes a model for communities everywhere—a place where healing begins with dignity and understanding.”

Is this approach making a difference?

Yes. The center is setting the standard for compassionate mental health crisis care nationwide.

Demand has been significant, reaching near 100 percent capacity almost immediately after opening. “This is what crisis care should look like everywhere,” says Bob Carter, senior vice president for Health Sciences and CEO for U of U Health. It’s also training tomorrow’s mental health leaders and advancing research-backed innovations that improve outcomes for guests and families.



What’s next?

In July, a new Youth Crisis Care Program opened at the Huntsman Mental Health Institute facility near the U campus (501 Chipeta Way) for youth ages 5-17. Walk-in care is available 24/7.

Visit hmf.org to support this work and healthcare.utah.edu/hmhi to learn more. **U**

Seth Bracken is editor of Utah Magazine.

Experiencing a Mental Health Crisis?

Call or text **988** anytime for free, confidential support. Or walk into the Crisis Care Center, open **24/7** at **955 W. 3300 South, South Salt Lake.**

No one is turned away, and no appointment is needed.



A Fantastic Success

After hitting *The New York Times* bestseller list, a middle school teacher's YA fantasy novel is now headed to the big screen

Marc Gregson BA'17 was in the middle of teaching seventh period when he got the email that a publisher wanted to acquire his novel.

"I said, 'Oh my gosh,' and my students turned to look at me. Then I started crying," says the middle school English teacher. "When I told them, they all cheered."

The emotional moment capped off years of Gregson's efforts to get published. "I was trying to write things that I thought would be popular," he explains of his earlier rejected novels. Then he had a lightbulb moment: "I thought, 'I'm just going to write a book that I'm passionate about.'"

The result was a YA fantasy, *Sky's End*, the first in what would become a trilogy. Called *Above the Black*, the series takes place in the "Skylands"—a world of islands floating above toxic black clouds, with monsters, a cutthroat meritocracy system, and dangerous duels for status and fortune.

Gregson, who dabbled in the U's game design program before getting the teaching bug, says the fantastical worlds of video games influenced his writing.

"I had always been interested in a civilization set in the clouds," he says. "I also wanted to explore how young people would be shaped by an extreme meritocracy system where mercy and compassion are considered weaknesses."

Released in January 2024, *Sky's End* became a *New York Times* bestseller, earning rave reviews and awards including a Kirkus Reviews Best Teen & YA Fantasy Books honor. The second volume, *Among Serpents*, followed a year later. Then came even more exciting news—a movie deal, which Gregson announced to ecstatic students in a video that went viral.

Gregson is serving as a consulting producer on the film, which is now in development with Antoine Fuqua's Hill District Media. A release date has yet to be announced, but Gregson hopes it will hit theaters in the next few years. In the meantime, *Above the Black Book Three*, *Downfall*, will come out in January 2026 to waiting fans—his students included.



Attention, Anglophiles and theater buffs:

Go Learn and U Alumni are partnering on a trip to the heart of British theater and culture March 5-14, 2026. London On Stage: Alumni Edition is available exclusively to U alumni and their family or friends. Travelers will attend six plays and visit museums and historic sites like Stonehenge and Westminster Abbey. Learn more at alumni.utah.edu.



Does your organization need a jolt of fresh ideas?

The Goff Strategic Leadership Institute can help. U alumni are invited to partner with Goff and present a complex strategic challenge to students, who receive leadership training and expert guidance as they work to find solutions and drive your mission forward. Learn more at goff.utah.edu/work-with-goff-students.



Around 14,000 U alumni shared their campus memories for the U's 175th Anniversary Oral History Project, and now those stories are becoming a commemorative book. From professors who changed perspectives to unforgettable traditions and lifelong friendships forged on campus, the collection captures some experiences that unite the U community across generations, and it will preserve these alumni voices as a lasting tribute to the U's impact. Keep an eye out as we share these stories on alumni.utah.edu.



U Across America

On May 17, more than 75 U alumni across the country rolled up their sleeves and stepped up to help their communities during the first-ever national U Alumni Day of Service. Part of the U's 175th anniversary celebrations, the event spread the university's spirit of service from SLC to NYC, San Diego to Seattle, and Dallas to D.C. U Alumni chapters partnered with local nonprofits to conduct projects at donation centers, beaches, neighborhoods, nature preserves, and even the National Mall. If you missed out, don't fret—the Day of Service is planned to be an annual tradition. Watch for updates at alumni.utah.edu or @UtahAlumni.

Red Carpet Research

Pluck six random examples of research happening at the U and you may come up with topics as varied as drug safety, color theory, and the Lewis & Clark Expedition. Those, in fact, were just some of the subjects at the U's inaugural RED Talks. Part of the university's 175th anniversary celebrations, this evening of faculty lectures honored the U's legacy of discovery and knowledge-sharing since 1850. Hosted by the Office of Alumni Relations, the event featured presentations by six U professors, who explained their research in the accessible, entertaining style of TED Talks. Check out these excerpts from each presentation.



“‘But where did York sleep?’ This question asked by my then 10-year-old son has changed the way I research and think about American history. York, an enslaved black man owned by William Clark, was a member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, yet his presence is either completely erased or grossly misrepresented in historical accounts. ‘Where did York sleep?’ isn’t simply rhetorical—it’s a question about who counts and who matters in American history.”

Wanda Pillow BS’86 MS’90, Dean of the College of Humanities and School for Cultural & Social Transformation, Professor of Gender Studies

“Our minds love contrast so much that they enhance it when different colors are placed next to each other. Complementary colors—opposites on the color wheel—have the most contrast. I’ve looked at 400 years of art and found consistent patterns of complementary colors. This isn’t just an art rule; it’s the way our minds work.”

Edward Bateman BFA’85 MFA’03, Associate Professor of Art & Art History



“Over 90% of drug interaction warnings given to physicians are overridden because the alerts are so common, and they consider all medications in the same class to have the same risk. We must do better. At the University of Utah, we’ve developed a dynamic tool that changes the paradigm on drug safety.”

Dan Malone, Research Professor of Pharmacotherapy



"The porous microstructure of sea ice is very similar to the porous microstructure of human bone. We're using the mathematics that we developed for understanding how electromagnetic waves travel through sea ice to develop a totally new method of monitoring the onset and progress of osteoporosis."

Ken Golden, Distinguished Professor of Mathematics,
Adjunct Professor of Biomedical Engineering



"People increasingly see those with opposing views not just as political rivals, but as enemies. Yet we all hold misperceptions about the other side that largely cloud our judgments and affect how we see other people. When we truly engage with the other side, we begin to see that we care about many of the same things."

Samantha Moore-Berg,
Assistant Professor of Psychology



"We should be able to architect video game worlds like we architect bridges. We rely on scientific principles to predict how the bridge will withstand loads, behavioral principles to understand how the bridge will shape traffic, and aesthetic principles to make judgments about the beauty of these edifices. At the University of Utah, we are committed to using similar principles when we architect virtual worlds."

Rogelio E. Cardona-Rivera,
Assistant Professor of Games



REDTALKS



Web Extra See the RED Talks for yourself. Find the link to the recordings at magazine.utah.edu/redtalks

Class Notes

'50s

Spencer F. Eccles BS'56 (master's, Columbia) was recently honored with MountainWest Capital Network's Entrepreneur of the Year award. Eccles served for nearly two decades as chairman and CEO of First Security Corporation, the first and oldest multi-bank holding company in the U.S. He is widely recognized for his business acumen and his wisdom and generosity in giving back to Utah for the betterment of the state. U President Taylor Randall HBA'90 personally thanked him for his mentorship and his immeasurable impact on the U.

'80s

Orson Scott Card MA'81 is featured on the College Consensus list of the "Best-Educated Sci-Fi and Fantasy Authors." Card is best known for *Ender's Game* (1985), which won both the Hugo and Nebula awards, the two foremost sci-fi awards in America. He is the only writer to win both the Hugo and the Nebula two years in a row; his second of each honor came for *Ender's* sequel, *Speaker for the Dead*.

Jeff Battcher ex'84 is giving back to his hometown of Macon, Georgia, by creating the Nike Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities (RBI) Program. The initiative provides baseball opportunities for underserved youth, helping students earn scholarships. Battcher attended the U on a football scholarship and hopes his work inspires others to contribute to their communities.

'60s

SPOTLIGHT



Julia M. Watkins BS'63 MSW'65 PhD'70 this year received the Distinguished Service Award from the American University in Bulgaria (AUBG), where she was president for 10 formative years (1993-2003). Watkins was also recognized for her contributions with an honorary degree from the Bulgarian Ministry of Education this May. She previously received an honorary doctorate from the University of Maine, where she had been a professor, dean, and vice president before being asked to serve with AUBG. She was also a fellow of the American Council on Education Leadership Program and completed a three-year term as an international scholar working on organizational and curriculum development with the Department of Social Work at the University of Sarajevo. Following her AUBG presidency, Watkins returned to the U.S. to serve for nearly a decade as the executive director of the Council on Social Work Education, the accrediting body for all schools of social work across the country. Watkins then co-founded the Southeast European Women's Leadership Initiative in 2013 with the goal of developing leadership within early career academic women in social work from the countries of Southeast Europe.



David Kracke BA'84 is a leader in protecting the vulnerable, with groundbreaking work in laws to protect both brain injury survivors and endangered species. Kracke was instrumental in passing "Max's Law," the nation's first enacted law establishing Return to Play protocols for concussed student-athletes, and "Jenna's Law," a companion law that provides statewide concussion protocols for all youth athletes in Oregon. Brain injury policy coordinator with the Center on Brain Injury Research and Training, Kracke has served as an author and legislative advocate for other stakeholder-informed efforts to pass concussion/brain injury laws including SB 420 (2023), the landmark bill to establish a statewide Brain Injury Resource Navigation program. Kracke is also passionate about environmental issues, including endangered species protection, and is on the international advisory board for WildAid. He has worked on anti-poaching laws, the law banning shark fin soup in Oregon, and a post-COVID law focused on zoonotic disease and the banning of live animal markets. Kracke studied international environmental law at Lewis and Clark Law School in Portland and at the University of Nairobi Law School in Kenya.



Brian Leahy Doyle

The 2025 Don McCann Playwriting Showcase featured *Maybe Tomorrow* by **Brian Leahy Doyle** MFA'87. While at the U, Doyle was the first resident dramaturge of the Pioneer Theatre Company and was largely responsible for initiating the position. He later staged the New York premiere of composer Aaron Jay Kernitz's *The Four Seasons of Futurist Cuisine* at Carnegie Hall. His latest one-act play, *And We Danced*, premiered in KNOW Theatre's Playwrights Festival, where it won the Best Artistic Merit Award. He currently teaches at Mercy College.

'90s

Shaun Berrett BA'94 has been appointed commissioner of the Utah Department of Financial Institutions. With over 25 years of experience in bank supervision, including roles at DFI and the Federal Reserve, Berrett is committed to strengthening Utah's banking system. Throughout his career, he has participated in a range

of regulatory activities, including bank and credit union examinations, information technology examinations, and leading regulatory reviews at several large and complex institutions.



Kim Shelley

Kim Shelley BML'96 is the new director of Salt Lake City's Department of Public Lands. The former executive director of Utah's Department of Environmental Quality, where she served in a variety of environmental management roles for more than 20 years, Shelley is known for her collaborative leadership and commitment to enhancing and protecting Utah's parks, trails, and green spaces for future generations.

David S. Marriott BS'99, chairman of Marriott International, has joined the National Geographic Society's board of trustees. With 25 years of leadership in the hospitality industry, he brings valuable global insights to the board. Marriott is only the third chair in the 98-year history of his company, the world's largest hospitality organization, preceded by his father, J.W. "Bill" Marriott, Jr. BA'54, and grandfather, J. Willard Marriott.

'00s



Craig Bernardini

Craig Bernardini PhD'03 has published *12 Oxen Under the Sea*, winner of the New American Fiction Prize. The story collection delves into questions of spectatorship, alienation, and trauma as "rehearsals for the apocalypse." Bernardini's stories and essays have appeared in *Conjunctions* online, *The Gettysburg Review*, *AGNI*, *New Ohio Review*, and elsewhere. He teaches at Hostos Community College, a City University of New York school in the Bronx, and occasionally blogs about music at Helldriver's Pit Stop on the CUNY Academic Commons.



Michelle Everill

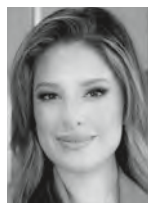
Michelle Everill BS'07 was recently named one of the Top 50 Women Leaders of Pennsylvania. Everill is vice president of global trial optimization at Alnylam Pharmaceuticals. Previously, she was senior director and head of clinical business operations at Bristol Myers Squibb. She has also held senior positions at Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer and is the owner and CEO of Michelle Everill Coaching.

'10s



Michael Beltran

Michael Beltran BS'11, a firefighter with American Fork Fire & Rescue, was honored with the department's "Always Ready" Award for his exceptional readiness, teamwork, and contributions to the community and the department. Beltran has been a firefighter for 12 years and says, "I love the camaraderie that comes with the job and the challenge of being presented with a difficult situation or call and having to critically think to solve it."



Silvana Effio

Silvana Effio BA'12 was recently named co-host of Telemundo 52 Los Angeles' "Acceso Total," a lifestyle and entertainment show that airs from coast to coast in the U.S. on Telemundo.

Effio is an eight-time Emmy-winning journalist and former news anchor at Telemundo Colorado and news director at Telemundo Utah. As a news director, Silvana orchestrated the first Hispanic newscast to go live in the state of Utah.



Alex Mejia

Alex Mejia MS'13 (Ph.D., Utah State) is the new head of the University of Cincinnati's Department of Engineering and Computing Education. Previously, Mejia was an associate professor in the University of Texas at San Antonio's Department of Biomedical Engineering and Chemical Engineering and in the Department of Bicultural-Bilingual Studies. He has also worked as a project engineer for the Department of Defense, Rio Tinto, and FLSmith Minerals. Mejia is a 2024 recipient of The Collaborative Network for Engineering and Diversity's Rising Star Award.

Nathan Royal BMU'14 and **James Martak** BMU'14 MPA'23 founded Hot House West Swing Orchestra, a nonprofit that gives musicians of all levels the opportunity to play acoustic music. The orchestra returned to Kingsbury Hall early this year as part of the new Jazz at Kingsbury Hall series. Royal and Martak met at the U in a Jazz Improv I class and organized the group through the U shortly after.

Chelsea Sturkie BS'15 is a contributing writer for Bonus Action—a collaboration of creatives bringing critical thought to pop culture discourse—where she shares her passion for books, gaming, and storytelling. A lifelong reader with a love for all things nerdy, Sturkie also enjoys playing and podcasting about Pokémon.



Taylor Schweitzer

Taylor Schweitzer BS'17 MS'20 mentors others as the speech language pathology representative on the College of Health Alumni Board and as a member of the Forever Utah Network. "I have learned that the learning process never ends. Every day is a new opportunity to learn from my clients and to be a better clinician," she says. "I have the College of Health to thank for fostering an educational community that seeks to be at the forefront of mentorship, research, and innovation."



Keegan Stanton

Keegan Stanton MCP'19 is the new planning director for Pea Ridge, Arkansas. Stanton was previously a city planner for Joplin, Missouri, and senior planner for

Bentonville, Arkansas, his hometown, and says that seeing changes there led him to gain interest in the field. "Watching the city grow so quickly and transform in such a short period of time really drew my attention to development and the built environment," Stanton says. He plans to apply his experience to helping Pea Ridge forge its own path and identity as it grows.

'20s

Cooper Wilson BS'20 celebrated his first PGA Tour win early this year, caddying for Brian Campbell at the Mexico Open. After switching careers from busi-



Cooper Wilson

ness to caddying, Wilson's sailing background helped him excel in his new role, where his ability to read the wind has been a key strength. His guidance on the final

hole secured Campbell's victory, earning Campbell spots in the Masters for the next two years and setting him up for additional opportunities.



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SPOTLIGHT



Three former Utah athletes signed this year with the new professional Athletes Unlimited Softball League (AUSL) that debuted this summer with four touring teams, the Bandits, Volts, Talons, and Blaze.

Mariah Lopez BS'24 (at left) is now on the roster with the Talons. The lefty hurler helped lead Utah to the 2023 Women's College World Series, was a three-time All-Pac-12 Conference selection, and was the first Ute to post consecutive 20-win seasons. Lopez is currently a graduate assistant softball coach at the University of Arkansas. She previously competed professionally with the New York Rise of the Association of Fastpitch Professionals.

Hannah Flippen BS'17 (right) also joined the Talons, becoming 2025 AUSL Defensive Player of the Year. Flippen was a two-time Pac-12 Conference Player of the Year and Defensive Player of the Year with the Utes, and she helped U.S. Softball earn silver at the Tokyo Olympics. She has previously played professionally with teams including the Scrap Yard Dawgs of the National Pro Fastpitch League and the Hitachi Sundivas of Japan, and she coaches youth and high school teams.

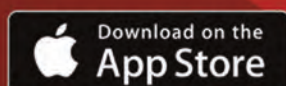
Anissa Urtez BS'17 (center), who also previously played professionally for the Scrap Yard Dawgs, is now with the Blaze. The shortstop, a three-time All-Pac-12 honoree with the Utes who is in her ninth year playing pro, represented Mexico at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021. Previously an assistant coach at Utah Valley University, Urtez has said this is likely to be her last pro season, though she hopes to continue offering clinics and private instruction.

Urtez, former teammate Flippen, and Lopez competed against each other this July at the U's Dumke Family Softball Stadium, the same field where they played college softball. "For me to step on this field one more time—it feels so surreal and full circle," Urtez said.



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—Phyllis Haskell Tims, MFA'71



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*Limitations apply. The information presented is not intended as legal or financial advice.

175 Years and Still Climbing

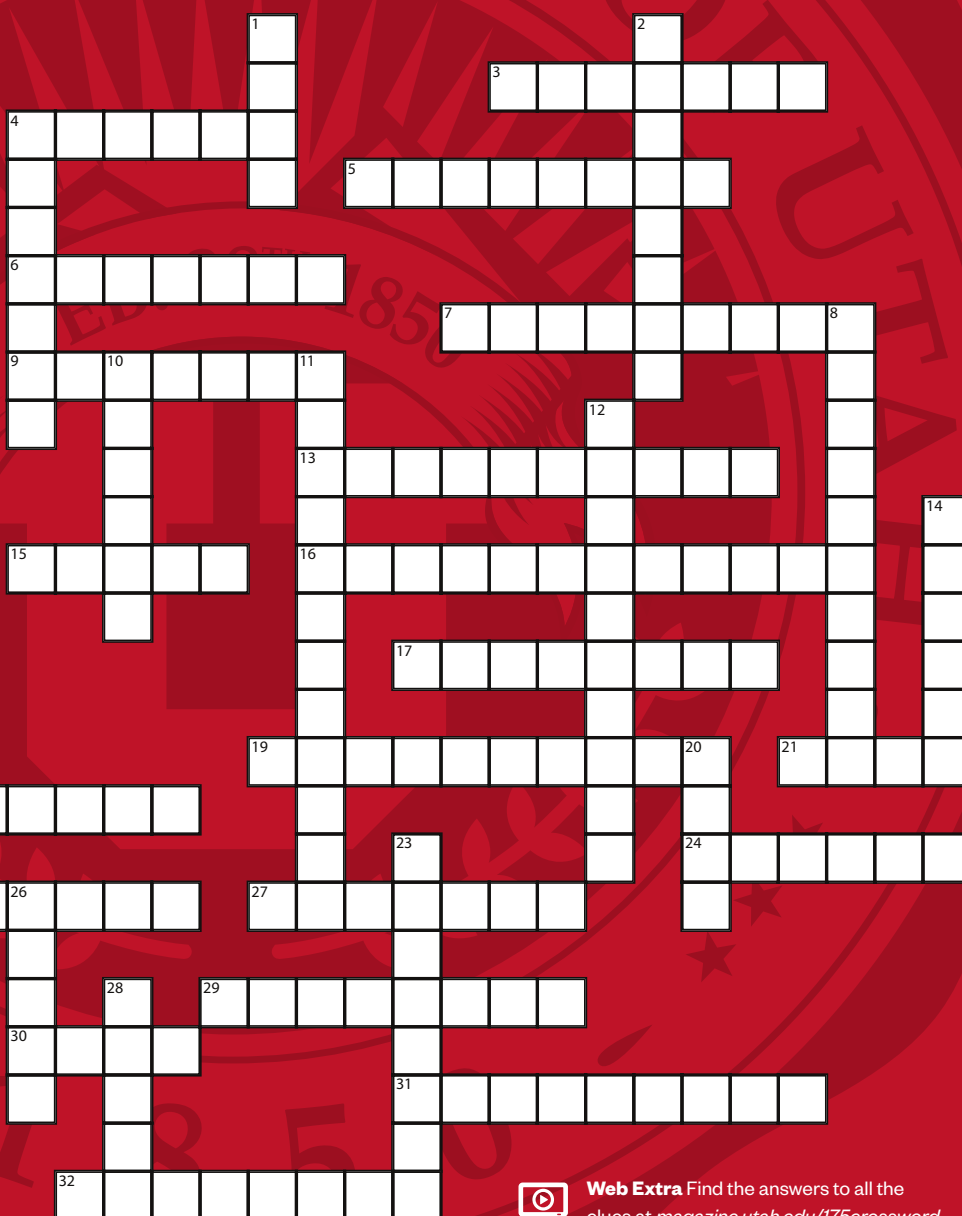
As the University of Utah wraps up its 175th anniversary, we're putting your campus smarts to the test. Dive into this special-edition crossword, packed with clues from the U's past and present. And stay sharp—starting next issue, we'll feature a new U-themed mini puzzle in every edition.

ACROSS

3. The OG Internet that the U helped launch
4. U alum Nintendo CEO or Mario's foe
5. U president and NASA administrator
6. "We'll fight for dear old _____."
7. Hand sign you might see in your Friday feed
9. U alum Ed who walked so Buzz Lightyear could fly
13. Top-ranked U area of study where the work is play
15. Where students spend their spare time and have a ball?
16. U alum's pizza parlor where rodents run the show
17. Well-balanced women's team
19. Hike with views and no cushions
21. Where UT digs history
22. Campus mount and former dorm
24. Chilly sport where the U is on a hot streak
25. Where main campus's Seoul sister resides
27. The U's first name
29. Event that the Utes stopped to smell twice
30. U alum sports siren Holly
31. Moment when the football crowd gets loud
32. U-hosted 2020 event that had the U.S. buzzing

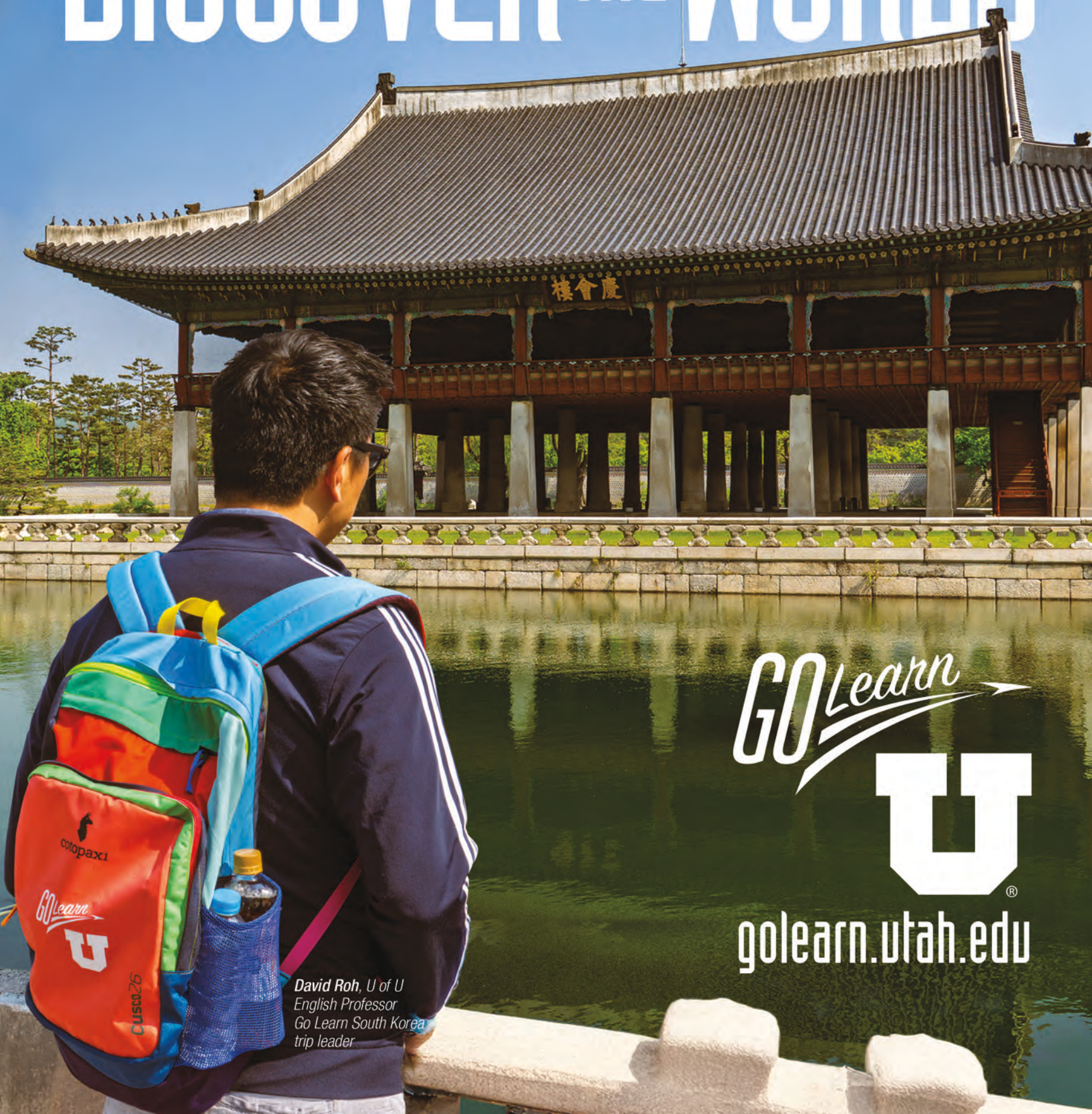
DOWN

1. First U president or campus building that bears his name
2. Last name of a Nobel roadway
4. Subterranean student stage
8. Where Utahns can get an MRI or MD
10. Graffiti, cheesy, kinda speakeasy
11. Medal-worthy campus connector
12. Major that thinks about thoughts
14. If it's alight, we won the fight
18. U alum PDF pioneer John
20. No one dare meet us there (with "The")
23. Where beats meet blooms
26. Jarvik's tell-tale co-creation
28. Reddest-tailed hawk



Web Extra Find the answers to all the clues at magazine.utah.edu/175crossword

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