

Dr. Breanne K. Litts named Mentor of the Year | ITLS

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Dr. Breanne K. Litts named USU Undergraduate Research Faculty Mentor of the Year



Dr. Breanne K. Litts

Dr. Breanne K. Litts is an Assistant Professor in the Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences department and the director of the Learn Explore Design Lab at Utah State University. She was recently recognized for being an outstanding faculty mentor of undergraduate researchers by receiving the University's Undergraduate Research Mentor of the Year award. Dr. Litts began her academic journey as a first generation college student at the University of Washington, before pursuing her masters and doctoral work at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. After completing a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania she joined ITLS in 2016.

ITLS department head, Andy Walker stated, "What is particularly impressive about this award, is that it showcases how Breanne intentionally leverages her social network on behalf of her students. She embodies opportunity for those she mentors. At the awards ceremony, even before her acceptance speech, I was struck that in her bio, Dr. Litts chose to feature the faces of some of the students she is working with. They are quite literally at the center of this part of her work."

With that, Dr. Litts recognized the need to support undergraduates in their research and began to forge connections with them from her very first day at USU in January of 2016 well before ITLS offered an undergraduate program. Some of these intentional activities included recruiting undergraduates from the courses she taught as well as from her research with Native American communities such as with the Navajo Nation. Some of Dr. Litts' work was recently highlighted on the undergraduate research episode of USU's INSTEAD podcast: <https://research.usu.edu/instead/celebrating-undergraduate-research/>.

As a result of these combined efforts, Dr. Litts has personally mentored students from across colleges at the university. Her mentorship has also taken more formal roles in her work as the multimedia minor coordinator (2018-2020) and ITLS Department Honors Advisor (2018-2020). She has also had the opportunity to partner with the USU Honors Program and the Undergraduate Research office help make their application and grant processes more accessible and inclusive.

Litts goes far in mentoring students in their individualized research trajectories. This means that she not only finds meaningful roles for them on her own research projects, but she also supports students in their own independent research. It takes a substantial amount of extra time to mentor students in their independent research, yet it has made a tremendous difference in students' academic and career trajectories. "Sometimes, it takes many years to see the longer-term effects of undergraduate mentorship," Andy Walker said, "Thus, it is remarkable that we are already seeing the discernable impact that Dr. Litts is having on many students' trajectories in CEHS and USU more broadly."

The experiences that Litts offers her students allows them to catch a vision for how they can be successful in graduate school at a time when graduate enrollments are so challenging to maintain. In fact, her mentorships are a primary reason why some students are applying to (and being accepted into) graduate programs in CEHS.

One of Litts' students, Kenden Quayle, was recently accepted into one of the graduate programs in the ITLS department, and explains how Litts has influenced her from her very first course in the ITLS program, explaining that Dr. Litts "helped set me on my current educational and career trajectory" and introduced her to the world of research. "I have always been a lover of design, but it was through working on various projects with Dr. Litts that I found that I could have and do have a research identity. This was a strong driver for me applying to the Master's

program in ITLS. Throughout the past two years, Dr. Litts has been an incredible mentor, not only to me, but to so many wonderful students."

We are very proud that Dr. Litts was honored for her dedicated work supporting undergraduate research!