

Melissa Tehee Joins National STEM Leadership Program for Faculty from Underrepresented Backgrounds

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Dr. Melissa Tehee is an associate professor in the Psychology department at USU.

Dr. Melissa Tehee, associate professor in the Psychology department of the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services at Utah State University, was recently named a fellow in the third cohort of the [IASpire Leadership Academy](#).

The IAspire Leadership Academy is a program aimed at helping STEM faculty from underrepresented backgrounds ascend to leadership roles at colleges and universities. The academy is part of the Aspire Alliance's Institutional Change Initiative, led by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) and the University of Georgia.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to be a fellow with the IAspire Leadership Academy," said Tehee. "I am looking forward to building a larger, more diverse network of colleagues working toward institutional change."

Tehee has been working with Aspire's Institutional Change initiative ([IChange](#)), which is nearing the end of its [first year at USU](#). The USU IChange team has been deeply engaged in self-assessment as of late, evaluating USU's recruitment, hiring, and retention of faculty from underrepresented groups. They are preparing the next steps of the action plan with an equity mindset framework.

Now as she joins the academy, Tehee looks forward to additional opportunities to learn from others doing similar work across the nation. "Academia is a 'culture' I am still learning as a first-generation college student," she said. "There are so many hidden processes and ways of interacting that I have never experienced. Being a fellow will give me another community to learn from and with which to work. Together, we can share the work, wisdom, and expertise. It takes a community to do the tough work to dismantle systems of oppression and work towards liberation."

The first year of membership in the academy is dedicated to gaining knowledge and skills, while the second year is spent developing an action project to influence institutional change. Tehee is excited to have this dedicated time to spend on leadership development so she can become a more effective advocate for minority and underrepresented students.

"As a Cherokee woman, I bring my culture everywhere I go, which has not always been welcomed or recognized in higher education," said Tehee. "I want to make sure students at USU have a place where their culture is valued and woven into the field's innovations. I want to diversify the academy, make culture and values visible, and allow us to come together for truly innovative processes."

The academy, which is targeted at mid-career individuals from traditionally underrepresented groups, is one pillar of diversity and inclusion work underway through the [Aspire Alliance](#) (formally known as the National Alliance for Inclusive & Diverse STEM Faculty). Backed by the National Science Foundation, the alliance is working across post-secondary institutions to develop more inclusive institutional cultures and create a more diverse STEM professoriate.