

Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services Invests in Graduate Students by Awarding More Than 100 Research Awards

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Graduate students collaborate with Shawn Whiteman, associate dean of research and innovation in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services

The Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services (CEHS) is investing approximately \$100,000 annually in graduate students' research with the CEHS Graduate Student Research Award program. The awards, which can total \$4,000 each, comprise matching contributions from the college's Office of Research Services and the student's declared department. More than 100 research awards have been given to graduate students in the past five years.

Shawn Whiteman, associate dean of research and innovation in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services, explains, "The College of Education and Human Services has the most graduate students on campus, and we are happy to invest resources to support their development as researchers and scholars." In 2023, the CEHS provided funding to support students' independent research projects, including 18 dissertations, 12 theses, and three projects required by their programs.

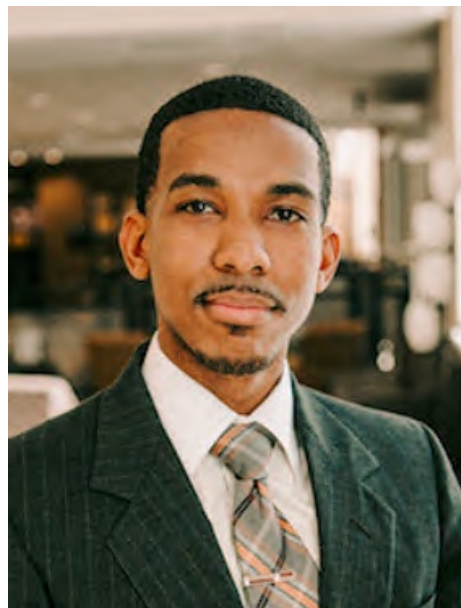
To qualify for a Graduate Student Research Award, applicants must be conducting milestone research projects—theses, second-year projects, capstone projects, plan B

masters, or dissertations. The funds may only be used for research expenses such as equipment, travel, materials, and participant incentives that directly support student projects.

"We are delighted to provide these awards to support CEHS graduate students' milestone research projects," says Whiteman. "The awards provide direct support for the research that graduate students propose and perform, enhancing both the quality and potential impact of the work."

Researchers in the College of Education and Human Services who are awarded these grants are studying a wide variety of subjects that range from understanding Black belonging in athletics and suicide prevention in high schools to mindfulness interventions in elementary schools and overcoming ADHD stigma.

Young Black Athletes' Sense of Belonging



Amand Hardiman, doctoral student in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies

Amand Hardiman, a doctoral student in the department of Human Development and Family Studies, received a Graduate Student Research Award for his dissertation research in March 2023. He is studying the perceptions of belonging in young Black teenage boys, particularly those who participate in sports.

As a Black man and longtime athlete and coach from the Midwest, Hardiman brings a personal perspective to his research. "I've seen many high school and collegiate athletes wrestle with their athletic identity, with who they

are as individuals,” he explains. “That really stuck with me. How do we help this demographic look at their identity in a more positive, nurturing way to allow them to eventually transition out of sports? I want to use my research, starting with this dissertation, to help them explore other aspects of their identity.”

Looking forward, Hardiman hopes his research will translate to the general population. “My ultimate goal is to do more community outreach programs to help adolescent Black boys reach their full potential outside of their athletic identity.”

Hardiman says the grant has had a “tremendous” impact on his research. “In my interviews, I’m asking questions that are potentially triggering because they pertain to racism and traumatizing experiences. Most importantly, this grant has allowed me to pay my participants for their time as they provide me with information about their experiences.”

Mindfulness Intervention in Elementary School Classrooms



Mary Phan, graduate student in the Department of Psychology

Mary Phan, a graduate student in the Department of Psychology, researched the effects of mindfulness to reduce teacher stress in the classroom. She was awarded a grant for her thesis project in January 2023. “I’m looking at whether practicing mindfulness will help teachers reduce their stress and whether the students who practice mindfulness will have prosocial outcomes

such as improved academic behavior, improved respectful behavior, and a decrease in destructive behavior.”

After being trained by Phan on general mindfulness principles, participating teachers were asked to practice the techniques in the mornings before school and then to read from an adapted script when the students came in from recess. The teachers applied the mindfulness techniques for 10 school days and Phan’s research assistant visited three times a week to ensure the teachers were following the requirements with fidelity.

Overall, the results of Phan’s case study were extremely positive. “The teachers really liked it,” she said. “One teacher applied the techniques beyond the study and continues to add time and additional mindfulness exercises in her classroom. Another teacher started implementing the script before tests because the students were anxious and riled up. She saw that the students were calmer and more focused, and their grades got better after doing the mindfulness activity before a test.”

Phan used the bulk of her grant award to pay the teachers who participated. Without the money, she would have tried other outlets that could fund the project. “It would have been so much harder, but I would have found another way to make it rewarding for the participants,” she says. “Paying the teachers for their time is very important to me.”

In the year since receiving the Graduate Student Research Award, Phan has collected and evaluated the data and completed her master’s thesis. “I’m currently working on my dissertation proposal, which will be this project 2.0. I plan to take the feedback of committee members and apply what the teachers suggested. I’ll incorporate more options for teachers and give students different mindfulness exercises. I want the teachers to have more autonomy.”

Educating Peers to Prevent Teen Suicide



Sterling Morris, doctoral student in the Department of Instructional Technology and Learning Services

Sterling Morris, a doctoral student in the Department of Instructional Technology and Learning Services, received a grant award for his research project in December 2023. His research explores how high school students who are members of a Hope Squad chapter can help other students understand and potentially prevent suicide. “The idea is that students who might be experiencing mental health issues will be more likely to disclose it to a friend or peer than to a counselor, physician, or other adult,” explains Morris. “This approach could potentially lead to more effective suicide prevention programs in schools.”

The small, qualitative study of Hope Squad members from across the nation consists of Zoom focus groups and then one-on-one interviews. “We’re meeting with students who have taught at least one lesson to other members in their chapter,” says Morris. “Then we’re asking them about their experiences. It turns out that there are a lot of positive outcomes from peers teaching peers any type of content. Peers tend to trust other peers more and in unique ways when compared to being taught the same content from an adult. Some of those themes are already coming up in the data we’re gathering.”

Morris used the grant funding to pay his participants. “From what we’ve seen, the incentive has absolutely helped and I’m very grateful for it. I feel fortunate to have been given that grant money,” says Morris. “Had I not received it, I would have paid for the expenses out of pocket to keep my research moving forward. Given how expensive research can be, I suspect many beneficiaries of this grant would need to take on additional student loans and other forms of debt to advance their work.”

Overcoming ADHD Stigma to Influence Intervention



Megan E. Golson, doctoral student in the Department of Psychology

Megan Golson, a doctoral student in the Department of Psychology, was given a Graduate Student Research Award in July 2023. Her research looked at caregiver knowledge of ADHD and how that knowledge might lead to decreased stigma, which would result in greater intervention. “There’s broad research that suggests that the more knowledge you have about a specific disorder or condition, the less stigma or negative attitudes you have toward it,” Golson explains. “But no one had looked at that research in ADHD, so I wanted to see if that trend carried over.”

The data, which she recently completed analyzing, surprised her. “What I found was not what I was anticipating,” she said. “Parents’ level of knowledge didn’t seem to affect their actual view of ADHD, but it did affect their view and interest in treatment, specifically medication. The more they know, the more likely they are to consider medication for their kids.”

Golson recognizes the impact of the grant on her research. “It was a huge blessing, especially since data collection gets more and more expensive every year,” she says. “I don’t know that I would have been able to conduct this research without the grant. I would have had to frame it as a pilot study with a tiny sample size. I got about 250 participants nationwide, and I think without it I would have had maybe 50 people.”

For future research, Golson will continue where she left off. “I really want to dive deeper into seeing why

knowledge and negative attitudes weren't related," she says. "I'd like to know if this relationship is something that I can affect by giving people training and knowledge. I'd also like to expand it to other people. Is it still true with teachers or with adults who have ADHD? There are lots of directions I want to go and I'm very excited to pursue them."

Golson is also a recent recipient of the Psi Chi/APA Edwin B. Newman Graduate Research Award, a prestigious award from the American Psychological Association that recognizes graduate student research. The award is for the work she conducted with USU faculty advisor, Maryellen Brunson McClain, and is entitled, "Influences of Student Race/Ethnicity and Gender on Autism Special Education Classification Considerations."