

USU's Renowned Combined Clinical/Counseling Psychology Graduate Program Celebrates 50 Years

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Combined clinical/counseling graduate Marissa Donahue with mentor Dr. Michael Levin in May 2025.

Beginning in 1975, Utah State University became accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA) to launch a combined clinical/counseling doctoral program in psychology within the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services. Now celebrating its fiftieth year, the program has evolved into a nationally recognized, rigorous, highly sought after program that admits between six and eight students per year. In total, more than 350 graduate students have completed the program, impacting countless thousands of people in varying aspects of psychology.

"Our combined model truly makes the program unique. For decades, this program integrated training in clinical, counseling, and school psychology, preparing students to work in a range of settings such as academic institutions, medical centers, schools, and university counseling centers," said Renee Galliher, professor and director of clinical training in the Psychology Department. "Currently, our program is one of about 10 programs in the nation that train students across sub-disciplines of applied health services psychology."

The coursework requirements for the program are extensive, which is mostly due to the accreditation requirements of the American Psychological Association (APA). Accreditation requires that faculty provide students

with rigorous clinical and research training as well as broad exposure across the platforms of psychological science.

"In addition to the rigorous didactic schedule, students are actively engaged in supervised clinical work from their second year on, and every student engages in independent scholarship in the form of a thesis, a dissertation, publishing and presenting their work professionally," notes Galliher.

Ken Gilstein, Ph.D., one of the program's first graduates, reflected on his training in the program. "The education and training in working with children, adolescents, and their families was crucial in my work at several psychiatric hospitals who treated that population, both in terms of treating and evaluations. I have done over 12,000 psychological and neuropsychological evaluations and am known as an expert in that field," shared Gilstein.

Kurt Michael, Ph.D., is the clinical director of the Jed Foundation. He graduated from the combined clinical/counseling program in 1999. He shared why he decided to attend USU. "First, the program's emphasis on the practitioner-scholar model appealed to me greatly. Second, their faculty were some of my most preferred faculty mentor matches. Third, the location was a big deal for me. Finally, the vibe of the program conveyed by the current grad students and the faculty spoke to me. It just felt like an intuitive fit. I wanted to be part of a group of passionate scholars and practitioners devoted to the art of teaching."

There is no doubt that for the past 50 years this doctoral program has shaped the lives of the students in preparing them for a myriad of psychological careers. "The combined program's unwavering commitment to excellence and its transformational impact are both commendable and inspiring," said Scott Bates, department head and professor of the Psychology Department. "For over 50 years, our dedicated alumni and faculty have propelled the field forward through their clinical work, pioneering research, and active community service. We look forward to reuniting with old friends and colleagues, celebrating our achievements, and envisioning an even brighter future together."

Rebecca Crawford Foster, Ph.D., a native member of the Blackfeet Tribe, works as clinical psychologist for the Blackfeet Tribe at Blackfeet Behavioral Health providing therapeutic services to children, adolescents, and families on the Blackfeet reservation. "My dreams of getting an education and coming back to my tribe to provide services has come true," said Foster, who graduated from the

program in 1992. "While attending USU, I became a member of the Society of Indian Psychologists (SIP). The USU Psychology program continues to host an annual conference in collaboration with SIP, which brings together American Indian and Alaska Native psychologists, graduate students, and allies from the United States and Canada. I am honored to be a past president of SIP and continue to be active in mentoring Native graduate students."

The list of graduates from the past 50 years who have shared their gratitude for the combined clinical/counseling doctoral program continues to grow. Jesse Crosby, a grad from 2012, explained, "I chose the combined program at USU because I wanted to explore some of the different career options with a graduate degree in psychology. I knew that I wanted to work as a therapist, but I was not sure about the setting and the population I would want to work with. I also recognized the value of good research training and that was a clear strength of the program."

In early May, at the annual college convocation services, the combined clinical/counseling program awarded seven doctoral degrees. Recent graduate, Marissa Donahue, Ph.D., said, "My last year in the program was a real highlight of my experience. I was able to see the past five years come to fruition. Within all of that hard work, I demonstrated resilience, humility, professionalism, and compassion in the face of adversity. I achieved my training goals and will walk away from the program with my head held high."

Every year at the annual APA conference, the alumni from USU look forward to getting together to share research, therapeutic practices, and advancements in their field. Not only has USU created a top-notch graduate program, the alumni and faculty have cultivated a professional community of renowned clinical psychologists nationwide.

"Mentoring graduate students in the combined Ph.D. program is the most rewarding aspect of my professional life," said Galliher. "I feel grateful for the opportunity to walk alongside students as they navigate personal or professional challenges and achieve important milestones. I'm so proud of every one of our amazing alumni, and I treasure this opportunity to reconnect as we celebrate the perseverance and success of the combined program this year."

For more information on the events planned for the 50-year celebration and details about the program, please visit the [website](#).