10 New Scholars Join CEHS Faculty for the 2025–26 Academic Year

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Faculty and staff of the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services at Utah State University are pleased to welcome the following 10 new faculty members for the 2025-26 academic year. “The expertise and passion of our new faculty will enliven our academic programs; advance research programs focused on education, health, and human services; and enhance the clinical services we provide to our communities,” says Interim Dean Shawn Whiteman. “I am confident that their contributions will create lasting impacts for the students, families, and partners we serve.”

Forrest Cooper, Professional Practice Assistant Professor, Department of Nursing

Cooper has been involved in the healthcare industry for over ten years and is passionate about nursing. Before completing his nursing coursework in 2022, he worked in memory care at several long-term care facilities. This work helped him foster a love of the medical field and launched his journey into nursing. After graduating with his nursing degree, Cooper worked on the Medical/Surgical floors of a hospital for almost two years. During his time there, he became increasingly interested in the cardiovascular system and was given the opportunity to be a cardiovascular intervention specialist in a cardiac catheterization lab. He is now transitioning into nursing education and is looking forward to being a part of the USU nursing faculty. He lives in Logan with his wife and two daughters and enjoys hiking, camping, and swimming with his family.

Brayan Díaz Michell, Assistant Professor, School of Teacher Education and Leadership

Díaz Michell earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees in science at Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María in Chile and, with the support of a Fulbright Scholarship, completed his Ph.D. in learning and teaching in STEM at North Carolina State University. Díaz Michell has worked as a researcher at the Chilean National Center for Artificial Intelligence in Santiago, Chile, and as a research associate at North Carolina State University. His research focuses on enhancing equity and opportunities in STEM, designing and evaluating transdisciplinary learning experiences, strengthening connections between universities and workplaces through work-integrated learning, and advancing theories and practices for the pedagogical use of AI in teaching and learning. Before moving into academia, Díaz Michell taught science in low-income schools in Chile, an experience that shaped his commitment to access and equity in education. Beyond academia, he enjoys both playing and watching soccer.

Katherine Graves, Assistant Professor, Special Education and Rehabilitation Counseling

Graves completed a postdoc at the University of Texas at Arlington before coming to Utah State University. Her research is centered on promoting the safety, well-being, and rights of children and adolescents with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD), with specific interests in evaluating processes and practices to support students with EBD and other challenging behaviors, interventions within the juvenile justice system, and school safety with an emphasis on restraint and seclusion. Outside of work, Graves enjoys listening to books, snuggling with her cats, and going on an airplane to just about anywhere.

Taehyun Kim, Assistant Professor, Department of Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences

Kim recently joined USU after completing a postdoctoral appointment at the University of Florida. He specializes in immersive learning technologies, artificial intelligence in education, and embodied cognition. His research focuses on how body-based interactions, particularly through VR/AR simulations and AI-supported environments, can enhance students' conceptual understanding and collaborative learning in STEM education. He also works on developing approaches that can be applied broadly across different educational contexts and settings. Outside of work, Kim enjoys camping, especially exploring new natural landscapes, and playing tennis as a way to stay active and relax.

Javi López Frías, Assistant Professor, Kinesiology and Health Science

López Frías earned his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Valencia in Spain after completing a master's in ethics and democracy and a BA in philosophy. Before joining USU, he spent nine years at Penn State where he held appointments with the Rock Ethics Institute, the Philosophy Department (courtesy), and the Bioethics Program. He has also been a visiting scholar at Oxford's Uehiro Center for Practical Ethics, the Franklin Institute in Alcalá de Henares, and the University of Rome Foro Italico. He has received the Robert Scott Kretchmar Student Essay Award and, more recently, the Warren Fraleigh Distinguished Scholar Award, both from the International Association for the Philosophy of Sport. López Frías currently serves as president of the Spanish Association for the Philosophy of Sport and as editor-in-chief of Sport, Ethics and Philosophy. He teaches undergraduate and graduate courses that examine the connections between human

movement—especially sport—and ethics. His research explores various topics related to the nature of sport and how to improve sporting practices. In his free time, López Frías enjoys cooking, traveling, and playing and watching soccer.

CoCo Massengale, Assistant Professor, Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences

Massengale received her doctorate from Stanford University in the Graduate School of Education's program in race, inequality, and language in education, with a minor in comparative studies in race and ethnicity. She spent 10 years as an educational researcher at a not-for-profit organization before returning to pursue a doctoral degree. Her work explores the racialization of literacy and sits at the intersection of literacy studies, the history of education, and Black studies. Massengale has been funded by various research bodies and institutions, including Stanford University's Vice Provost for Graduate Education, the National Academy of Education/Spencer Foundation, and the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine. When she is not reading, writing, or teaching, you can find her spectating women's sports, hiking, or hanging out with her dog Junior.

Ali Mondt, Professional Practice Assistant Professor, Kinesiology and Health Science

In her role in as a professional practice assistant professor in the KHS department, Mondt is involved in the sports management master's program where she teaches and mentors students and works with other faculty to design curriculum. She earned a Ph.D. in sport management from the University of Northern Colorado, a master's degree in post-secondary biology education, and a B.S. in biology from Northern Michigan University. Her sport industry background spans over 10 years during which she has worked in sport recreation and intercollegiate athletics at the University of Northern Colorado, Denver University, and Colorado State University. Prior to her position at USU, Mondt was an assistant professor of sport management at Idaho State University.

Thai Ray Williams, Assistant Professor, Special Education and Rehabilitation Counseling

Williams is a national board-certified teacher with 32 years of experience as a special education teacher. She hails from Lancaster, South Carolina; however, she comes to us by way of Montana, her previous home, and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, where she completed her doctoral studies. Williams' research interests include academic instruction for students with complex support needs; the integration of evidence-based practices; high leverage practices; Universal Design for Learning; indigenous pedagogy to teach community-identified, culturally sustaining skills to Native American individuals with disabilities; and the use of evidence-based practices in rural educational settings. Her most recent work focused on writing instruction for students with complex support needs in both rural and homeschool settings. In her spare time, Williams enjoys taking her converted van on random adventures and creating multimedia art. She is excited to get settled in her new home so she can explore all that Utah has to offer.

Camille Wynn, Assistant Professor, Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences

Wynn is a proud graduate of USU and is returning to Logan after working as a faculty member at the University of Houston. Wynn's research focuses on how people coordinate their communicative behaviors to make conversation meaningful and successful. She is particularly interested in understanding the conversation dynamics of autistic and neurotypical adolescents. Camille also enjoys quantitative methods and is excited to be teaching statistics courses to students throughout the college. Outside of work, Camille is an avid outdoor enthusiast and can often be found hiking, canyoneering, kayaking, or cross-country skiing.

Ezgi Yesilyurt, Assistant Professor, School of Teacher Education and Leadership

Yesilyurt earned a Ph.D. in science education with a concentration in STEM education from the University of Nevada-Las Vegas and previously worked as an assistant professor of life science education at Weber State University. Her research focuses on integrating artificial intelligence, computer science, and engineering into K-12 science education, with an emphasis on supporting linguistically diverse classrooms. She has published on engineering epistemology, teacher self-efficacy, and curriculum development, and has co-led multiple NSF-funded projects aimed at advancing inclusive STEM learning opportunities. Her work focuses on disciplinary knowledge with pedagogical practice, preparing future educators to meaningfully integrate AI, computer science, and engineering into elementary and secondary science instruction. Beyond her academic pursuits, Yesilyurt enjoys hiking, traveling, camping, and playing pickleball.