

USU Professor and Vice Provost David Feldon Named as Prestigious AERA Fellow

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David Feldon, Ph.D., vice provost of graduate studies and professor in the Department of Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services, has been named an AERA Fellow—a high honor awarded by the American Educational Research Association for sustained achievements in education research.

Feldon is the first faculty member at Utah State University to receive the distinction and only the third from a Utah university. Fellows are selected based on significant scholarly contributions or substantial and innovative work in education research and practice.

“I’ve been a member since I was a graduate student,” Feldon said. “I presented my first paper at the AERA conference in 2004. It’s the largest organization and conference for educational research. My research has consistently been presented there, and it’s helped me build long-term professional relationships.”

Feldon’s research focuses on the mechanisms of learning in postsecondary education. He examines how knowledge, motivation, identity, and culture interact with training opportunities and institutional supports to shape pathways to student success, particularly in STEM disciplines. He has served as principal investigator on multiple grants

from the National Science Foundation and the Institute of Education Sciences.

“Achieving AERA Fellow status is a particularly meaningful honor for education researchers,” said Al Smith, endowed dean of the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services. “We are proud to see David recognized for his exemplary accomplishments. He is a scholar of impact who inspires colleagues and students in our college and beyond.”

In 2025, Feldon was selected as a Fulbright Scholar and participated in an academic exchange in Australia. His research there examined how participation in oral dissertation defenses affects students and how they can best prepare. He spent three months working with faculty at the University of Newcastle, observing Australia’s academic culture surrounding oral dissertation defenses.

“My goal was to learn how doctoral education is conducted in different contexts and with different populations,” Feldon said. “The Fulbright is an exchange program designed to build mutual understanding and shared perspectives, and I was honored to participate.”

Feldon is also the principal investigator on a National Science Foundation grant to create an innovative postdoctoral training program focused on access and accessibility in STEM. The three-year project is designed to transition three postdoctoral researchers with interdisciplinary expertise into tenure-track positions within the college.

Typically, postdoctoral appointments are temporary, full-time research positions lasting one to three years. “The downside of a postdoctoral position is that it’s temporary,” Feldon said. “If you have a one-year postdoc, you spend the first few months focused on the job and then begin applying for the next one. That uncertainty is a challenge.”

The program is now in its second year and includes three postdoctoral researchers. “If they meet their performance benchmarks over the two-year period, they will automatically receive an offer for a tenure-track position,” Feldon said. “That’s how we remove uncertainty. They know that if they do well, they can stay. This allows them to be more productive and fully focused on their research and training.”

Reflecting on the AERA Fellowship, Feldon shared he plans to continue expanding opportunities for graduate programs and students across the institution while advancing his research.

“The three areas of research impact that I am most proud of are doctoral student skill development, cognitive load and motivation, and methodological work on measurement and human experience,” concluded Feldon.