

UTAH VALLEY UNIVERSITY

AWARDS *of*
EXCELLENCE

2026



BOARD OF TRUSTEES AND PRESIDENTIAL AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE

The Utah Valley University (UVU) Awards of Excellence program recognizes faculty and staff who dedicate their time and talents to students, scholarship, and the advancement of higher education.

This year, UVU's Board of Trustees elected to honor six awardees for their contributions to the university's mission of student success. An additional six outstanding faculty and staff members were recognized as this year's Presidential Awards of Excellence recipients for their efforts related to UVU's values of exceptional care, exceptional accountability, and exceptional results.

SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

WELCOME

Andrea Clarke, Board of Trustees Member

BOARD OF TRUSTEES AWARDS

Presented by UVU's Board of Trustees

Rachel Arocho

Sam Atoa

Megan Densley

Tamara Jensen

Alexis Palmer

Scott Christopher Wood

PRESIDENTIAL AWARDS

Presented by President Astrid S. Tuminez

Alaa Alsarhan

Greg Jones

Jason Kennedy

Amber R. McGuire

Kari Olsen

Laurie Toro

CLOSING REMARKS

President Astrid S. Tuminez



Scott Smith

BOARD OF TRUSTEES' MESSAGE

Dear Friends of UVU and Distinguished Honorees,

We extend congratulations to our distinguished 2026 Trustee and Presidential Awards of Excellence honorees! The trustees join President Tuminez and the entire UVU Cabinet in honoring you for your commitment to the success of UVU.

These awards, being the highest of Utah Valley University, honor faculty and staff for their exemplary demonstration of the UVU core values — exceptional care, exceptional accountability, and exceptional results. Our honorees have demonstrated these values in a manner that elevates student, faculty, and staff achievement at the university.

Their commitment to an outstanding work ethic and an excellent university experience sets the standard for the aspirations of each student and professional peer.

The UVU Board of Trustees recognizes and praises you for your efforts to make UVU a place of excellence and opportunity for students, faculty, and staff to learn, teach, collaborate, and excel.

With sincerest gratitude,

Scott Smith

Chair, Board of Trustees
Utah Valley University



Astrid S. Tuminez

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the 2026 UVU Awards of Excellence. Tonight, we honor the exceptional contributions of our faculty and staff — individuals who represent the very best of Utah Valley University!

These awards remind us that the true strength of this university lies in its people. Excellence is not a single achievement but rather a pattern of choices made over time. It is found in the quiet commitment to do right. Having the courage to innovate. Expressing care to students and colleagues alike. Where others may see obstacles, you see potential. When the moment calls for your leadership, you rise to meet it.

To our award recipients: Your contributions have shaped the daily experience of students, employees, and members of our larger community. You create spaces for learning and belonging. You challenge our students and care deeply about helping them reach their full potential. You enhance UVU's relevance to the community that depends on us. Whether your impact is highly visible or largely behind the scenes, it is essential and matters greatly.

Thank you for modeling our core values of exceptional care, exceptional accountability, and exceptional results. It is a privilege to celebrate you and your contributions tonight. You have my sincere appreciation and admiration.

Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Astrid S. Tuminez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "A" and "T".

Dr. Astrid S. Tuminez

President
Utah Valley University

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE



Rachel Arocho

**ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR,
FAMILY SCIENCE
DEPARTMENT CHAIR, SOCIAL
AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES**

BOARD OF
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EXCELLENCE

Hailing from Vernal, Utah, Rachel Arocho has contributed her expertise to UVU for nearly seven years. She holds a Bachelor of Science in family, consumer, and human development from Utah State University (USU), a Master of Science in human development and family science, and a Doctor of Philosophy in the same from The Ohio State University. Arocho's academic path, which began in concurrent enrollment classes in the Uintah Basin, has been decorated with several awards, including the Cognella Innovation in Teaching Award for Family Science, the UVU CHSS Dean's Award of Excellence for Outstanding Teaching, and two first-place wins for best hybrid design and delivery for UVU's 2022 and 2023 Flexible Teaching Awards. Her favorite part of working at UVU lies in her belief in the university's mission to provide education for all. Arocho loves the opportunity she has to meet so many students who come from all walks of life to chase their dreams. Outside of UVU, she enjoys spending time with her husband of 10 years, Erik, who she says has supported her academic career since the first time she broke her research computer in 2010 and needed his IT support at USU.



Sam Atoa

**HEAD COACH, WOMEN'S
VOLLEYBALL, ATHLETICS**

Sam Atoa calls Orem, Utah, home and is in his 27th season with the UVU Women's Volleyball team. After earning a Bachelor of Science in athletic training from Brigham Young University, Atoa soon accepted the position of women's volleyball assistant at UVU. Since working his way to the head coach position, Atoa has built an incredible legacy at the university. He's the recipient of several awards, including the 2022 UVU Vice President of Administration and Strategic Relations Divisional Award of Excellence, the 2021-22 Athletic Department Coach of the Year Award, the 2016 WAC Coach of the Year Award, and more. Atoa's favorite part of working at UVU is interacting with people. The women he's coached and the great support staff are among the many people he credits for his positive work experience at UVU. Atoa and his wife, Lori, have six children (Sam, Brad, Devri, Andrew, Darci, and Saini) and seven grandchildren.

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Megan Densley

**SENIOR DIRECTOR, INSTITUTIONAL
ADVANCEMENT DATA AND ANALYSIS**

Hailing from Orem, Utah, and holding a Bachelor of Science in business management with an emphasis in accounting from UVU, Megan Densley is a Wolverine through and through. Lending her talents to the university since 2018, she previously held several leadership roles at Blendtec. Densley participated in the 2022-2023 UVSELF cohort and earned the 2022 Student Affairs Partner Award of Excellence and the 2020 Division Award of Excellence for Finance and Administration, showing her commitment to exceptional care. When asked about the best part of working at UVU, she emphasized the opportunities available that allow you to learn, grow, improve, and make lives better for students, employees, and community members. Densley is the mother of four amazing children who are all Wolverines. In her spare time, Densley loves to create, organize, and optimize her swing on the golf course.

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Tamara Jensen

**DIRECTOR OF GRADUATE PROGRAMS,
WOODBURY SCHOOL OF BUSINESS**

Tamara Jensen calls Saratoga Springs home and has been with UVU for close to 23 years. She holds a Bachelor of Science in administrative information management from UVU and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Utah. Jensen's time with UVU has been anything but boring, including time spent serving students, faculty, and staff in fire science, the dean's office, and more. Her career has also included many awards and milestones, including the Provost Award of Excellence in 2024, multiple Spot Awards, and presenting on PACE during the April 2019 Talk With Tuminez. Jensen's favorite part of working at UVU is simple and poignant: making a difference in the lives of students. Outside of her fruitful career at UVU, she shares five children with Rod Logan, her husband since 2020. Jensen is also a self-proclaimed soccer mom at heart.

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Alexis Palmer

**ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT,
STUDENT LIFE**

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Hailing from Boise, Idaho, Alexis Palmer has lent her talents to UVU for almost 22 years. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in elementary education from Boise State University, a Master of Science in youth and family recreation from Brigham Young University, and a Doctorate of Education in organizational leadership and development from Grand Canyon University. Palmer has put exceptional care into a number of roles at UVU, including her current role as AVP of Student Life, and has received the Presidential Award of Excellence, the PACE Award of Excellence, and the Teaching Excellence Award. Her favorite part of working at UVU is her incredible colleagues who believe in UVU's mission. Palmer says she can devote so much time and energy to UVU because of support from her husband, Paul. They have three daughters: Aspen, a junior at UVU, Kaia, and Kinley. Palmer loves playing with dogs — she believes she must have been a dog in her past life — and loves planning trips.



Scott C. Wood

**SENIOR DIRECTOR OF BUDGET,
BUDGET OFFICE**

Scott C. Wood hails from UVU's home base of Orem, Utah. He earned a Bachelor of Science in accounting from UVU and a Master of Business Administration from Utah State University. Wood has spent most of his professional career at UVU and has held titles ranging from line server in Dining Services to his current role as senior director of budget. During his 18 years at UVU, he's earned multiple awards, including the Utah Valley State College Commitment to Excellence Award and the Division of Finance and Administration Award of Excellence. He also served as a UVSELF fellow. Wood's favorite part about working at UVU is his colleagues and the students he serves. When he isn't at UVU, he loves spending time with his wife and four children and enjoys nearly all sports, from basketball to ping pong.

BOARD OF
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Alaa Alsarhan

**DIRECTOR OF ACADEMIC ANALYTICS,
ACADEMIC PROGRAMS
AND ASSESSMENT**

PRESIDENTIAL
AWARD OF
EXCELLENCE

Hailing from Jordan, Alaa Alsarhan has lent his expertise to UVU for over eight years. He holds a Bachelor of Science in computer science from Princess Sumaya University for Technology, a Master of Science in e-business from the University of Huddersfield, and a Ph.D. in evaluation and measurement from Brigham Young University. Alsarhan's extensive, data-focused career is decorated with fellowships, presentations, and even a patent. He served as a 2024-2025 NWCCU Mission Fulfillment Fellow and a 2023-2024 NWCCU Data-Equity Fellow and is a co-author of an engaged learning measurement and evaluation instrument patent alongside his wife and fellow Wolverine, Rasha Qudisat. Alsarhan's favorite parts of working at UVU are the day-to-day support and professional development opportunities available. He appreciates that people are quick to collaborate and back good ideas. Outside of work, he and his wife are raising three kids — Taj, Masa, and Mohammad — and share many academic and professional interests, especially anything involving data.



Greg Jones

ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL



PRESIDENTIAL
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EXCELLENCE

Greg Jones calls Littleton, Colorado, home and has been part of the Wolverine family for nearly seven years. He holds an Associate of Arts in Spanish, a Bachelor of Science in computer science with minors in political science and philosophy, and a J.D., all from nearby Brigham Young University (BYU). Jones's long career, which includes tag-team adjunct instructing at BYU Law for a technology licensing course and teaching intellectual property and cyber law at UVU, includes a President's Employee of the Year Award from Novell, where he worked for 19 years under the leadership of Ray Noorda. His favorite part of working at UVU is knowing that each day — directly or indirectly — he helps students achieve things that positively impact their lives. Outside of UVU, Jones enjoys running, rehabbing from running injuries (ouch), and reading. He is grateful for the flexibility UVU's Office of General Counsel provides as he and his siblings support his widowed mother, who is living in a Provo assisted living center with Alzheimer's-related dementia.



Jason Kennedy

**DIRECTOR OF WEB AND
INTERACTIVE DESIGN, MARKETING
AND COMMUNICATIONS**

PRESIDENTIAL
AWARD OF
EXCELLENCE

Jason Kennedy is from Orem, Utah, and has been a key orchestrator behind UVU's web design for 19 years. Holding an associate degree from Provo College, an HTML and CSS certification from W3Schools, a Pro Tools certification, and more, he has over 30 years of hands-on experience in print, web, and creative design. Kennedy frequently leads and mentors UVU design teams and focuses on blending storytelling with functionality to create user-friendly experiences for UVU students, faculty, staff, and community members. His favorite parts of working at UVU are the people and the university's mission to help students succeed. Kennedy loves collaborating with talented teams across campus and witnessing the results of creating accessible and thoughtful improvements for students, especially. He and his wife, Cori, an accomplished painter and teacher, love their lively and creative home and their two children, who attend UVU. Kennedy keeps busy and curious with numerous hobbies, including working on motorcycles, cooking, skateboarding, hiking, and collecting.



Amber R. McGuire

**DIRECTOR, CARE HUB AND
WEE CARE CENTER**

PRESIDENTIAL
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Amber R. McGuire is from Kalamazoo, Michigan, and has been a Wolverine for almost 12 years. She holds a Bachelor of Science in political science and government from Utah State University, a Master of Science in student affairs in higher education from Colorado State University, and a Doctor of Philosophy in ethical leadership from St. Thomas University. McGuire has always been focused on serving others. From serving in community-based poverty alleviation and volunteer engagement roles in Appalachia to winning the 2023 Region V Innovative Program Award, she has worked with students, colleagues, and community members in mind. McGuire's favorite part of working at UVU is witnessing her colleagues' passion for student success and support. Outside of UVU, she loves to read, spoil her dog, Milo Mayhem, and host over-the-top meals with her husband, Zeke.



Kari Olsen

**ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR,
ACCOUNTING**

PRESIDENTIAL
AWARD OF
EXCELLENCE

Kari Olsen is from Kaysville, Utah, and has been with UVU for almost eight years. He holds a Bachelor of Science in accounting and a Master of Accounting, both from Brigham Young University, and a Ph.D. in business administration from the University of Southern California. During his time at UVU, Olsen has positively impacted his students and fellow faculty. His several awards include 2021 and 2025 UVU WSB Dean's Awards for Excellence in Scholarship and 2018 and 2025 awards for Impact on Management Accounting Practice. His students have nominated him twice as the MBA Outstanding Faculty member. He enjoys working at UVU because of the university's core cultural values of self-improvement and potential. Olsen also enjoys assisting students on their journeys to become their best selves. Outside of UVU, he and his wife, Lexi, have two kids, ages 14 and 12. Olsen also coaches youth basketball and football while enjoying gardening and learning new languages.



Laurie Toro

**DIRECTOR, FACULTY
DEVELOPMENT**

PRESIDENTIAL
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EXCELLENCE

Laurie Toro has called many places home, but is most fond of Northern California. Part of the UVU family for almost 13 years, she holds a Bachelor of Arts in English from UVU, a Master of Business Administration from Western Governors University, and a Master of Arts in community leadership from Westminster University. Toro also holds an AI and Digital Transformation in Government Certificate from Saïd Business School, University of Oxford, in partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Her career includes several presentation opportunities and awards, including the 2025 UVU Academic Affairs Distinguished Employee Award and the Watermark 2024 Impact Award. Toro's favorite part of working at UVU is being surrounded by people who believe in the phrase "come as you are." Toro is part of a proud Wolverine family: Her daughter Makenzy graduated from UVU, her mother served as the Woodbury School of Business assistant dean for nearly three decades, and her son Hozkar is a UVU physics student. Outside UVU, Toro is an avid reader — she reads 80-100 books a year — and enjoys her Sunday tradition of "movie church."

DISTINGUISHED EMPLOYEE PROVOST AWARDS

Jason Slack

Associate Dean, College of Science

Bryan Eldredge

Professor, ASL & Deaf Studies

Thomas Sturtevant

Associate Professor, Public Health

DISTINGUISHED EMPLOYEE FACULTY SENATE AWARDS

COLLEGE OF HEALTH AND PUBLIC SERVICE

Mykin Higbee

Associate Professor, Nursing

Matti Smith

Assistant Professor, Nursing

Roberto Flores

Assistant Professor, National Security Studies

Rick Los

Professional in Residence, Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement

Enoch Irvine

Adjunct Instructor, Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Dana Comi

Assistant Professor, English & Literature

Todd Spencer

Associate Professor, Social & Behavioral Science

Yi Yin

Assistant Professor, Social & Behavioral Science

Eric Stencil

Professor, Philosophy

Catherine Goodman

Adjunct Instructor, English & Literature

COLLEGE OF SCIENCE

Jessica Cusick

Assistant Professor, Biology

Eunmi Joung

Assistant Professor, Mathematical and Quantitative Reasoning

Maureen Hintz

Lecturer, Physics

Fernando Otalora-Luna

Adjunct Instructor, Biology

SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

Jennifer Delac

Assistant Professor, Theatre Arts

Amanda Crabb

Associate Professor, Theatre Arts

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Malynda Tolbert

Assistant Professor, Graduate Education

Darin Eckton

Associate Professor, Student Leadership and Success Studies

Bing Han

Assistant Professor, Elementary Education

Sandi Bennet

Adjunct Instructor, Student Leadership and Success Studies

SMITH COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY

David Frame

Associate Professor, Mechatronics

Larry Zeng

Professor, Computer Science

Imtiaz Parvez

Assistant Professor, Computer Science

Jason Gill

Lecturer, Information Systems and Technology

Corey Strange

Adjunct Instructor, Engineering Design Technology

WOODBURY SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

Adam Welker

Associate Professor, Finance

Nathaniel Evans

Adjunct Instructor, Finance and Economics

DISTINGUISHED EMPLOYEE DEAN'S AWARDS

COLLEGE OF HEALTH AND PUBLIC SERVICE

FACULTY

Bobbi Kassel

Associate Professor, Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement

Raiden Gaul

Associate Professor, Nursing

STAFF

Brandon Amacher

Program Director, Emerging Tech Policy Lab

Donna Cotterell

Program Coordinator, RCA

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

FACULTY

Alan Misbach

Associate Professor, Social Work

Melissa Hirschi

Associate Professor, Social Work

Rob Carney

Professor, English and Literature

STAFF

James Krause

Teaching Lab Manager, Languages and Cultures

COLLEGE OF SCIENCE

FACULTY

Nicolas Barcellos Dias Clark

Assistant Professor, Exercise Science

Kathryn Dispennette

Assistant Professor, Exercise Science

Roxanne Brinkerhoff

Professor, Developmental Mathematics

STAFF

Brittany Bugg

Student Employee, Biology

Kellie Hancock

Admin Support III, Physical Sciences

Kinzie Greer

Academic Advisor II

SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

FACULTY

Tyler Schnese

Assistant Professor, Dance

STAFF

Jennifer McCole

Sr Admin Support, School of the Arts

Heidi Vick

Student Employee, Art & Design

Mark Johnson

Theatrical Arts Accompanist, Theatre Arts

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

FACULTY

Caleb Stanley

Associate Professor, Applied Behavior Analysis

Krista Ruggles

Interim Dean, School of Education

STAFF

Madelyn Brooks

Coordinator II, School Counseling

SMITH COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY

FACULTY

Kodey Crandell

Assistant Professor, Cybersecurity

Tyson Riskas

Assistant Professor, Information Systems

Rawan Al-Nsour

Associate Professor, Mechatronics

STAFF

Chris Karbakhsh

Teaching Lab Manager, Electrical & Computer Engineering

Emily Demke

Admin Support III, Mechanical & Civil Engineering

WOODBURY SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

FACULTY

Matt Warner

Adjunct Instructor, Organizational Leadership

Mason Snow

Assistant Professor, Accounting

Dustin Harding

Associate Professor, Marketing

Bret Skousen

Professional in Residence, Marketing

Mark Cherrington

Professional in Residence, Finance

Jeff Singer

Professional in Residence, Finance

Jessica Ballard

Professional in Residence, Hospitality Management

Griffin Walker

Adjunct Instructor, Accounting

STAFF

Tracey Wilson

Program Coordinator, Scheduling and Grad Programs

Kelly Prue

Academic Advisor II

DIVISIONAL AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Laura Ricaldi

Associate Professor, Personal Financial Planning

Janet Colvin

Associate Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Douglas Miller

Adjunct Instructor, Strategic Management and Operations

Alex Brockbank

Assistant Professor, Personal Financial Planning

Brent Austin

Lecturer, Applied Communication

Colleen Hough

Associate Professor, Biology

Katie Bagley

Associate Professor, Nursing

ADMINISTRATION AND STRATEGIC RELATIONS

Rick Chappell

Director, Campus Services

Stephanie Albach

Sr Admin Support, University Relations

Marr Casale

Assistant Coach, Strength and Conditioning

Russ Morin

Assistant Director, Athletic Compliance

Mery Leon

Custodian, Custodial Services

Christine Nelson

Sr Admin Support, UVU Police Department

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Jermey Mecham

Sr Area Technician, End-User Technology Support

Violet Provost

Software Developer III, Tech Partnership

Landrey Hawkins

Sr Data Platform Administrator, Business Intelligence & Data Platform

FINANCE AND AUXILIARY SERVICES

Addison Lindstrom

Sr Technician, Accounts Receivable

Victoria Utley

Manager, Continuing Education

DeLayna Crockett

Program Manager, Community Education

INSTITUTIONAL ADVANCEMENT

Jordan King

BI Analyst I, Advancement Reporting & Analysis

Halen Hubbard

Sr Content Specialist, IA Marketing and Communications

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Kellie Seow

Marketing Manager, Social Media Marketing

Tyler Mower

Marketing Manager, SEO

Paul Lingenbrink

Designer I, Creative Services

Josh Berndt

Director, Internal Communications

PEOPLE AND CULTURE

Jenny Pena

Specialist II, Benefits

Emily Burr

Program Manager, Workplace Culture

Lori Harris

Executive Assistant, VP People and Culture

STUDENT AFFAIRS

Colton Simons

Director, First Generation Student Success

Jamie Muhlestein

Director, Student Success Center

Laurel Riding

Admin Support III, Student Leadership & Involvement

Ezra Mintz-Fernandez

Assistant Director, First Year Advising Center

Tressa Atkinson

Academic Advisor I, Talent Search

Heather Kroeber

Admin Support II, Military-Affiliated Student Hub

Cali Berlin

Events Assistant II, Scheduling

PACE DISTINGUISHED EMPLOYEE AWARDS

Samantha Morgan-Smart

Director, Employee Benefits

Hannah Davis

Director, Editorial Content

Erick Van Uitert

Admin Support III, Facilities

Hally Gontes

Lead Childcare Instructor, Wee Care Center

Julia Escobar

Executive Assistant, Engagement and Effectiveness

Alison Jensen

Director, Enrollment Services

Erin Wilkins

Manager, Purchasing Card

Taylor Lovell

Associate Director, Data Collection and Research

Shalece Nuttall

Director, Academic Advising, College of Health and Public Service

Tiffany Dayton

Manager, Event Center Guest Experience

Kim Wright

Academic Advisor II, Woodbury School of Business

Grace Stokes

Coordinator, Student Athletic Insurance

Luciene da Paxioa

Site Facilitator, Executive Education

Rachel Saunders

*Program Manager, Concurrent Enrollment
Program Outreach and Strategy*

Meredith Campbell

Admin Support II, TYE Center

Cesar Espinoza

Web App Developer I, Digital Experience & Accessible Technology