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A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

From field research to community training, UVU students are doing the work that drives global impact. As we open the first UVU UNESCO Chair newsletter of 2026, we reflect on what it means to engage with the world as responsible, connected global citizens. Across borders and cultures, meaningful progress happens when individuals are empowered with knowledge, skills, and the confidence to contribute. At the heart of our work is the belief that students are not just participants in global projects—they are partners, leaders, and changemakers.

This issue highlights how student-driven engagement creates lasting impact for both learners and communities. From EMS training in the Dominican Republic, where students help strengthen local emergency response capacity, to the documentation of the Agios Achilios of Pentalofos in Greece, where hands-on research supports cultural preservation, these projects demonstrate the power of applied learning. We also feature the Peru Water Project, following a recent student research trip to Peru that advanced water quality analysis while deepening collaboration with local partners. In each case, students gain real-world experience, cross-cultural understanding, and professional skills, while communities benefit from shared knowledge, sustainable solutions, and long-term investment. Together, these efforts reflect a model of global engagement rooted in mutual learning, respect, and empowerment.

From,
The UVU UNESCO Chair
On AI and Environmental Stewardship For Sustainable Futures



WHAT'S HAPPENING?

A SNAPSHOT OF OUR PROGRESS AND COLLABORATIONS THIS SEMESTER

With over 16 projects in the works all over the world, we are constantly busy coordinating research and meeting with our colleagues from global universities. these are just some of the many steps it takes to organize a successful UNESCO Chair. We are grateful for the dedicated work and time from our UVU faculty, student researchers, and global partners and look forward to seeing these projects unfold.

MEETING WITH ALINA KIRILLINA UNESCO PARIS

November 3, 2025

On November 3, the UVU UNESCO Chair met with Alina Kirillina of UNESCO Paris to discuss our interdisciplinary approach, the strong progress made since the Chair's launch, and opportunities for deeper collaboration moving forward. We are grateful for the recognition and continued engagement from our colleagues in Paris.



CAMBODIA MEETING

November 3, 2025

The conversation centered on the need to secure institutional and donor support to help students participate in an international program by reducing financial barriers. Participants discussed coordinating through established university channels and building on past partnerships to strengthen and expand future opportunities for student involvement.



MICROBIOLOGY PERU MEETING

November 12, 2025

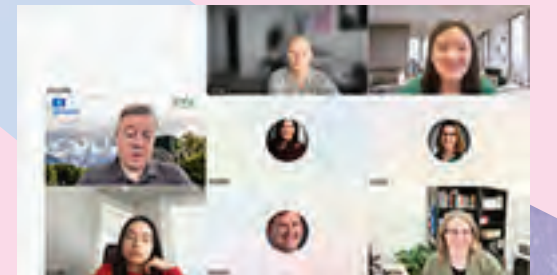
This microbiology meeting with partners in Peru laid the groundwork for our upcoming research trip, focusing on aligning sampling protocols, confirming equipment needs, and coordinating with universities and municipalities. These discussions ensure that when our team arrives, we'll be ready to collect water and fecal samples, standardize E. coli monitoring, and build capacity for long-term collaborative studies.



UNESCO CHAIR AI MEETING

November 14, 2025

Faculty discussed lessons from the AI Institute grant process, emphasizing interdisciplinary projects, sustainability, and clear assessment plans. The conversation also explored shared solutions for API tokens and highlighted upcoming opportunities through the Faculty Summer Institute with an AI focus.



CAMEROON GEOGRAPHY MEETING

November 7, 2025

Our meeting spotlighted two exciting research initiatives in Cameroon: mapping climate change vulnerability hotspots across diverse ecological zones and exploring how rapid urban growth fuels urban heat island effects. The discussions underscored innovative methods, striking maps, and practical strategies designed to boost resilience and guide sustainable development for communities and cities alike.



MICROPLASTICS PERU MEETING

November 18, 2025

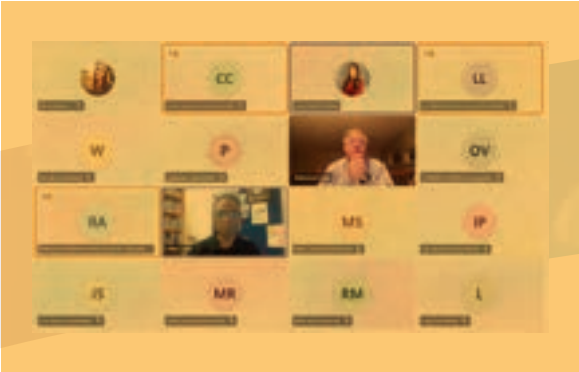
Researchers and university partners in Peru coordinated sampling plans for fish, water, and sediments across regions including Trujillo, Huancavelica, and Lake Titicaca. The team finalized protocols, preservation methods, and lab collaboration details to prepare for December’s joint research trip and hands-on student involvement.



TRACE METALS PERU MEETING

November 19, 2025

Researchers and university partners across Peru finalized logistics for December’s fieldwork, coordinating sample collection of soil, fish, and water for heavy metal analysis in Puno. The team discussed lab equipment needs, standardized protocols, and student involvement to ensure readiness for collaborative studies alongside parallel microbiology and microplastics projects in Chosica.



VISIT FROM Rectora LIDA ASCENCIOS

November 20, 2025

UVU proudly welcomed Rectora Dr. Lida Ascencios Trujillo of Peru’s Universidad Nacional de Educación, who also serves as the nation’s Superintendent of Education—the highest academic leadership position in the Peruvian government. Her visit strengthened collaboration on the Peru Water Project as she toured UVU laboratories, met with faculty and students, and was recognized for her pivotal role in advancing international research partnerships that improve water sustainability and education in both nations.



CHPS MEETING – CAMBODIA FUNDING

December 2, 2025

In a recent coordination meeting, the team discussed new funding opportunities for hospital projects, plans to request student support funding, and upcoming presentations. They also finalized next steps for donor engagement, scheduled follow-up meetings, and shared updates on logistics—all while keeping collaboration and preparation for future initiatives moving forward.



UVU RESEARCHERS VISIT PERU

December 5, 2025

UVU researchers and students traveled to Peru to collaborate with local universities, laboratories, and government partners on hands-on water quality research, studying trace metals, microplastics, and environmental health across multiple regions. The visit emphasized international collaboration, student-led field and lab work, and shared methodologies to advance sustainable water research benefiting both Peru and Utah.



UNESCO CHAIR EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

January 9, 2026

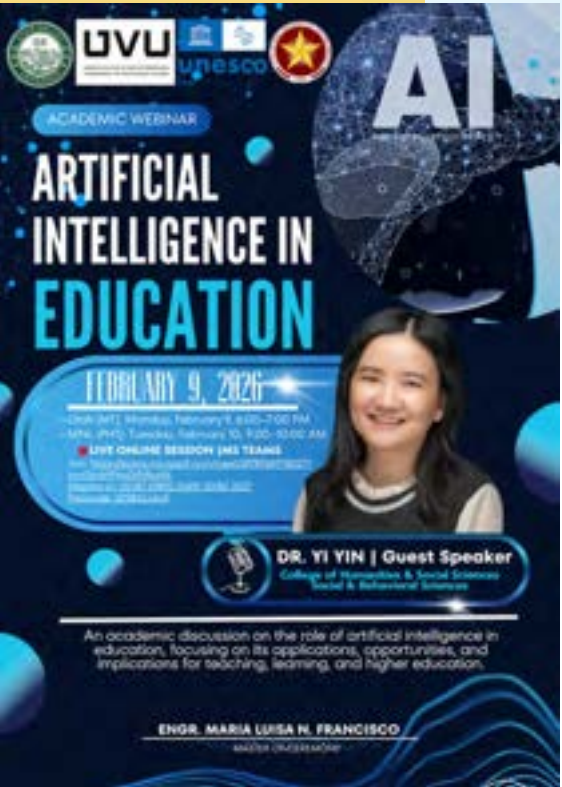
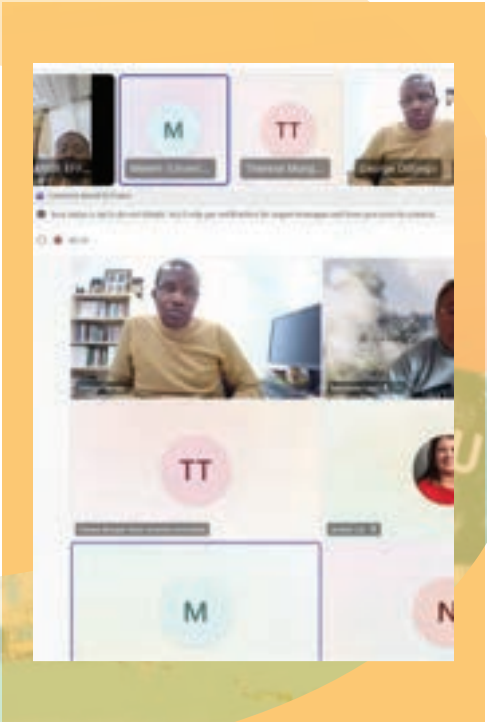
On Friday, January 9th, the UNESCO Chair Executive Board met for the first time in 2026 to go over the progress of existing projects, and approve proposals for several new projects. We look forward to sharing these new projects with you as they move forward in the coming year.



CAMEROON SPECIAL EDUCATION MEETING

January 16, 2026

Project leaders and Cameroonian collaborators met to review Phase One objectives for the inclusive education initiative, focusing on learning disabilities within Cameroon's educational context. The discussion addressed methodology, ethics, timeline, and budget, with an emphasis on ensuring screening tools, professional development, and classroom strategies are culturally appropriate and feasible.



WEBINAR WITH THE POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES

February 9, 2026

A webinar featuring UNESCO Chair member Yi Yin on AI and Education was held with a partner university in the Philippines. This was an academic discussion on the role of artificial intelligence in education, focusing on its applications, opportunities, and implications for teaching, learning, and higher education.

SMITH COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY
"Advancing AI Education"
PHILIPPINES

COLLEGE OF SCIENCE
"Building Bridges"
PERU

SMITH COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY
"Capturing the Agios Achilios of Pentalofos"
GREECE

COLLEGE OF HEALTH AND PUBLIC SERVICES
"Public Health Project"
CAMBODIA

"We're there not just to do research, but to **build relationships** and keep **collaborating in the future.**"

-Stone Smith, Peru Project

"This project pushed me to apply my technical skills in a **real-world environment**, helping me understand how classroom knowledge **transforms into practical, impactful work.**"

-Reese Nelson, Greece Project

"I just felt so **lucky** to be a part of UVU... I think the best way to find that **passion** within any field is to see it **firsthand.**"

- Ella Desmarais, Cambodia Project

COLLEGE OF HEALTH AND PUBLIC SERVICES
"EMS Training"
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

"For me, it's really **opened my eyes** in regards to what patient care can look like in other places... **being able to step into someone else's shoes.**"

- Daryl Petersen, DR EMS Project

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
"Aprender Y Emprender"
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

"I learned that research isn't just about data collection. It's about **responsibility**...Scientific research must be both **rigorous** and **compassionate.**"

-Carol Bejar, Peru Project

EMPOWERING STUDENTS GLOBAL FIELDWORK



COLLEGE OF SCIENCE
"Geography and Climate Risks"
CAMEROON

COLLEGE OF SCIENCE
"Sacred Forests"
BENIN

"The added prestige and pressure of the **UNESCO** label was welcomed and **motivates me to deliver great results.**"

-Michael Bailey, Greece Project

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
"Collaboration with Atlantic Education"
THAILAND

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
"Mental Health and AI"
KENYA

"To get to experience both EMS and hospital work in a different country, to see how they operate... has been super beneficial for me"

-Gavin Payte, DR EMS Project

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
"Special Education and AI"
CAMEROON

COLLEGE OF HEALTH AND PUBLIC SERVICES
"Supporting Families and Children with Disabilities"
INDONESIA

READY WHEN IT MATTERS:

EMS STUDENTS FIND PURPOSE AND PERSPECTIVE IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

JANUARY 2026

After four years of planning and partnership-building, Utah Valley University's Dominican Republic EMS Project became a powerful learning experience that transformed classroom training into real-world impact. Developed in collaboration with Universidad Católica Santo Domingo (UCSD), local hospitals, and parish partners, the initiative focused on emergency medical services (EMS) education, community training, and cultural exchange. For the students who participated, the experience affirmed not only what they have learned—but who they are becoming as EMS professionals.

"I thought it was a unique opportunity because they have a different healthcare system in the Dominican Republic," said Donovan Bloom. "Being able to go and to lend some knowledge was a lot of fun because it gives us the opportunity to re-review the things we've been taught and then being able to teach that allowed us to re-solidify the things we were taught in class."

"Just having that perspective of their healthcare system—we can take things from what they do, and then they can take things from what we do, and then altogether just become better at what we do."

-Allison Holmberg





“Being able to go and to lend some knowledge was a lot of fun because it gives us the opportunity to re-review the things we’ve been taught”

-Donovan Bloom

LEARNING BY TEACHING

Working alongside UCSD and the local parish, students stepped into educator roles, providing hands-on classes in airway management and bleeding control to a broad range of learners, from entry-level trainees to healthcare professionals. Teaching quickly became one of the most empowering parts of the experience.

“It was cool to see how grateful everybody was for the teaching because for us sometimes I think we take it for granted for all the awesome instructors we have at UUVU,” Donovan reflected. “We kind of just assume that if anybody goes to EMT school or paramedic school that they’re going to have this knowledge, but it’s not that way— It was cool to be able to show a little bit of the hard work we put in.” That level of preparation did not go unnoticed. Observing the students teach, faculty member Steve Allred emphasized the depth of their expertise: “These guys are all very smart. So when they mentioned that they were the teachers, they truly were—and the audience

was as broad as you can imagine, from entry-level individuals all the way to physicians.” For the students, that recognition reinforced what the experience had already shown them—that their education had prepared them not just to participate, but to lead. Allison Holmberg described how stepping into that role initially felt unexpected. “We’re brand new paramedics. I don’t really feel like I’m in any position to teach,” she shared. “But it was really cool that everyone was so open to learning from us. And then I also learned a bunch from them. Just having that perspective of their healthcare system being so different from ours—we can take things from what they do, and then they can take things from what we do, and then altogether just become better at what we do.” Participants of the classes were awarded an official certification for the UUVU UNESCO Chair upon completion of the course.



“The audience was as broad as you can imagine, from entry-level individuals all the way to physicians.”

**-Steve Allred
UUVU FACULTY**

WHEN TRAINING BECAME REAL

Midway through the experience, the students encountered a moment that would stay with them long after the trip ended. “We ended up witnessing a traffic accident where a minibus had lost its brakes and plowed through a couple different cars and then ran over two people on a motorcycle,” Donovan recounted. “What are the chances that three kids in paramedic school happened to be in a place where we could render some aid?” Without hesitation, the students responded. “We were able to get the people who were trapped under the bus out from underneath the bus and do the best we could with just our hands,” he said. “We weren’t expecting to bust out the things we had learned in school, but we were grateful to be there. It was a rough experience, but we were grateful that we were there to help pull them out.”

For Braxton Zirker, the incident brought everything into focus. “This happened about seven days in, so we had a chance to see their hospital system and what their physicians were capable of, but we hadn’t yet gotten the chance to experience what their first responders did,” he explained. “It was very eye-opening to see through this experience just how different their first response system is.” “There were five or six police officers on scene right from the get-go, but we were the ones that actually pulled the lady and the other guy out from the bus,” Braxton said. “To actually see what’s going on firsthand, the different areas where we could teach classes in the future was very apparent. That was important experience to go through.”



“What are the chances that three kids in paramedic school happened to be in a place where we could render some aid? ”
-Donovan Bloom



“To be able to give back a little bit and help teach and help other people that are on a similar journey—that was really beneficial ”
-Braxton Zirker

LOOKING FORWARD WITH PURPOSE

As the experience came to a close, students reflected on how deeply it shaped their future goals. “For so long up to this point, I’ve been the student,” Braxton shared. “So to be able to give back a little bit and help teach and help other people that are on a similar journey—that was really beneficial and something I hadn’t realized before. That’s something in the future that I’d like to pursue.”

“I can definitely re-solidify my desire to continue education and continue to learn,” Donovan added. “Everybody who was on the trip are firefighter EMTs or advanced EMTs, and we’re going to paramedic school to continue our education—obviously to be able to provide better care to the patients we respond to.”

For Allison, the experience reinforced the value of global perspective. “Continuing to travel and gain perspective will help my career,” she reflected. “We’re very privileged here, and that’s something we forget sometimes. It’s cool to go places where what we see is surprising to us and we have to really be grateful for what we do have.”

Through teaching, service, and real-world response, the Dominican Republic EMS Project empowered students to step confidently into their future as providers, educators, and leaders. What they gained was more than experience—it was clarity, confidence, and a deeper understanding of what it means to be ready when it matters most.

CAPTURING THE AGIOS ACHILIOS OF PENTALOFOS

UVU DIGITAL MEDIA AND ARCHITECTURE STUDENTS WORK ON UNESCO SITE IN GREECE

Back in January, a team of Utah Valley University faculty and students traveled to the remote mountain village of Pentalofos, Greece, to carry out an intensive cultural-preservation project focused on Agios Achilios, a centuries-old Byzantine chapel at risk of further deterioration. What began as a spontaneous stop during a previous UVU visit became a major project. The conservation and documentation efforts drew the attention of UNESCO, which requested formal documentation of the site before additional damage could occur.

The 2026 research visit was led by Dr. Aliki Milioti of UVU's Architecture Program and Michael Harper from Digital Media, alongside digital media students Michael Bailey, Reese Nelson, and Robert Lewis, and architecture student Will Newby. From January 14–25, the team documented Agios Achilios and several other historic sites across northern and central Greece using a combination of advanced digital technologies and traditional architectural methods.

At Agios Achilios, the digital media team employed drone flights, LiDAR scanning, high-resolution photography, and detailed fresco imagery capture. Each day required adaptability and problem-solving in the field. For Robert Lewis, the experience reinforced the value of hands-on learning: "There are some things that you just can't learn unless you experience it for yourself." Encountering unforeseen challenges, he explained, meant that "you develop the skills needed to overcome these problems, and learn how to troubleshoot while also moving forward." Reflecting on the cultural impact of the work, Lewis added, "The people there were full of excitement and gratitude as we worked hard to preserve hundreds of years of their culture."



DIGITAL IMAGING IN ACTION:

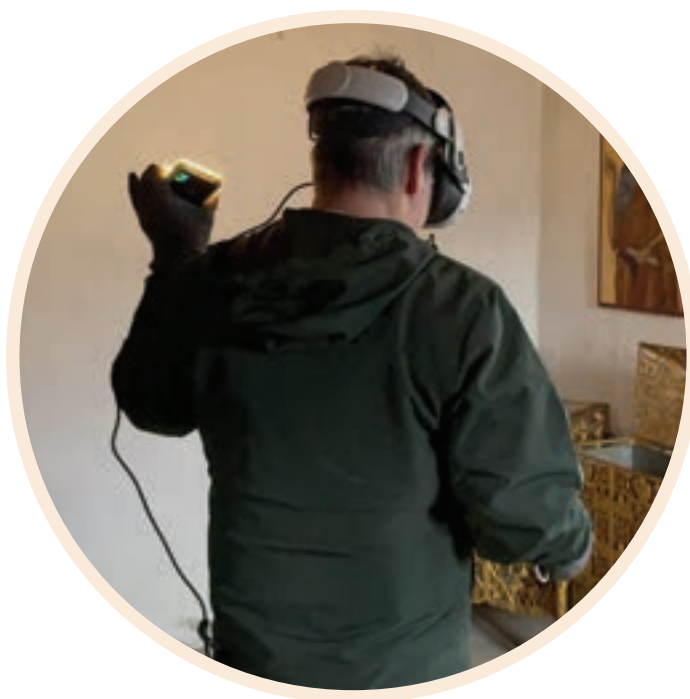
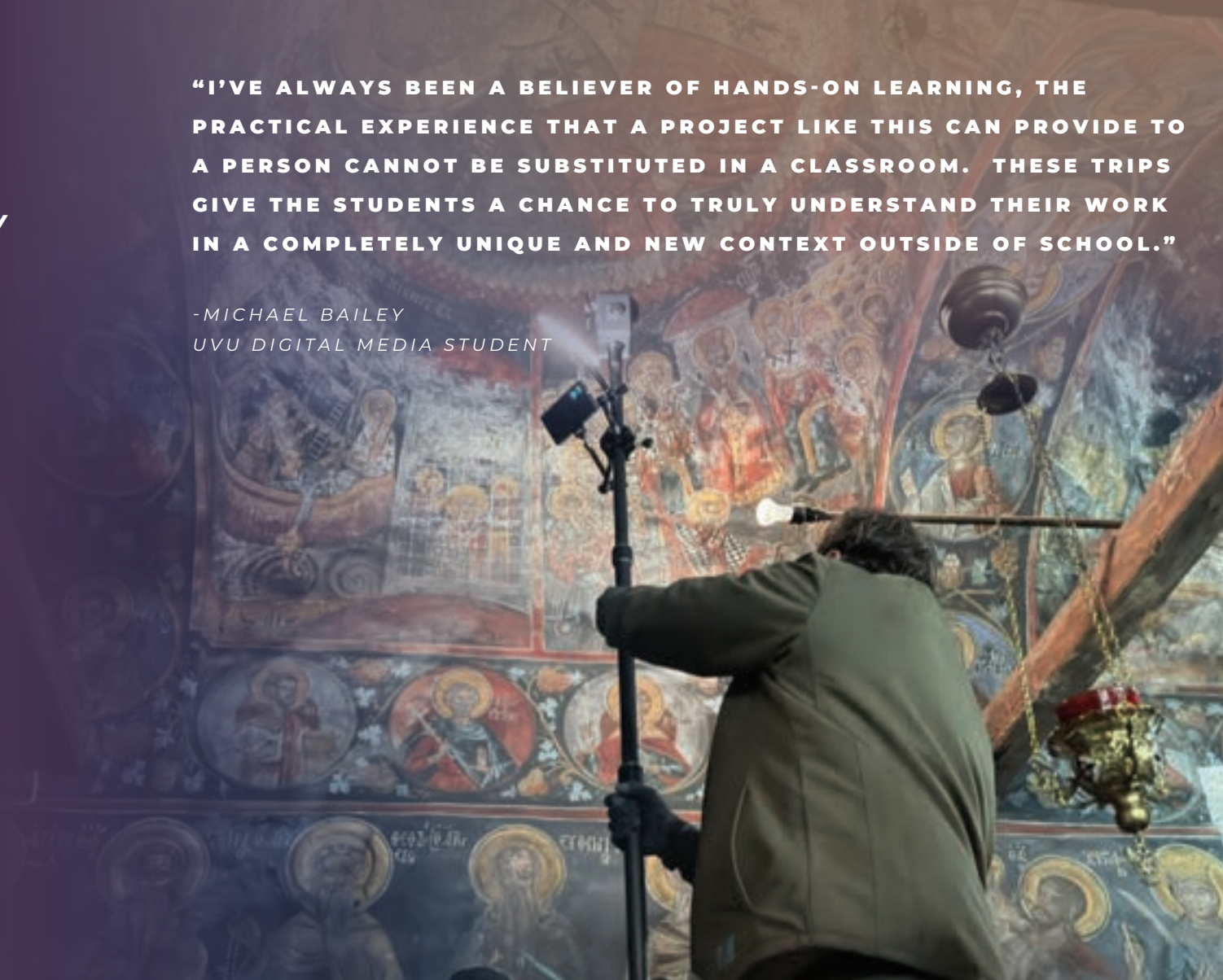
HANDS-ON PRESERVATION THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

Michael Bailey approached the project as his senior capstone, gaining real-world experience with LiDAR technology in an international preservation setting. “Having the opportunity to travel to another country and learn even small or specific things about another culture and/or country is incredibly enriching to my perspective and experience as a student,” he said. He emphasized that “the practical experience that a project like this can provide to a person cannot be substituted in a classroom.” Learning about the stonemasonry traditions of Pentalofos, Bailey noted, “I learned some of the history of the stonemasonry of Pentalofos and what it means to Greece as a country and its cultural heritage.”

Reese Nelson worked with advanced imaging tools, including the X-Grid camera, in challenging indoor environments that demanded constant technical adjustment. She reflected, “Being part of the Agios Achilios project has expanded my educational experience far beyond what I normally encounter in the classroom.” Applying her skills in the field reshaped her understanding of hands-on learning: “At the university, we practice with technology in controlled environments, but applying that knowledge to a real project in another country is entirely different.” She also emphasized the importance of adaptability, noting that “no matter how much you prepare, real-world fieldwork always brings unexpected challenges.”

“I’VE ALWAYS BEEN A BELIEVER OF HANDS-ON LEARNING, THE PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE THAT A PROJECT LIKE THIS CAN PROVIDE TO A PERSON CANNOT BE SUBSTITUTED IN A CLASSROOM. THESE TRIPS GIVE THE STUDENTS A CHANCE TO TRULY UNDERSTAND THEIR WORK IN A COMPLETELY UNIQUE AND NEW CONTEXT OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL.”

-MICHAEL BAILEY
UVU DIGITAL MEDIA STUDENT



“THERE IS SO MUCH TO LEARN ABOUT A CULTURE, A PLACE, A PEOPLE, AND THEIR ARCHITECTURE WHEN YOU ACTUALLY HAVE YOUR BOOTS ON THE GROUND.”

-WILL NEWBY,
UVU ARCHITECTURE STUDENT

CLASSICAL MEETS CONTEMPORARY: REVIVING HISTORIC TECHNOLOGY

While the digital media team focused on advanced scanning and imaging, architecture student Will Newby worked closely with Dr. Milioti to apply classic architecture documentation techniques. Using hand tools, sketching materials, and triangulation methods, they recorded architectural details—stone patterns, proportions, curvatures, and structural systems—that digital tools alone cannot fully capture. For Newby, the experience reshaped his view of the profession. “This project expanded my understanding of what an architect can do,” he said. “Being in the place and on the site provided incredible learning that you can’t get sitting in an office.” Reflecting on the cultural and personal impact of the work, Newby emphasized, “Nothing can replace being in the place with the people. Nothing.”

The team also documented additional historic sites, including the Agia Triada chapel, the Church of Saint John in Lagkadia, the Church of the Holy Apostles, the Blossoming Stones House, and the Church of Saint Constantine, expanding the project’s scope and reinforcing the interconnectedness of Greece’s architectural heritage.

Working alongside the Digital Media team demonstrated the power of interdisciplinary collaboration. Hand-drawn measurements helped verify LiDAR data, while 3D scans provided broader spatial relationships that strengthened the accuracy of the drawings. Combining these approaches created a more complete and trustworthy record of the chapel—one that was both technically precise and deeply informed by physical experience



UNESCO RECOGNITION:

A LONG-LASTING IMPACT

Just before departing for Greece, the project received formal UNESCO recognition, elevating the work from an academic exercise to a professional responsibility. Lewis described the designation as bringing “a sense of professionalism, responsibility, and accountability,” while Nelson noted that “it reinforced that this wasn’t just a student project.” For Bailey, “the added prestige and pressure of the UNESCO label was welcomed and motivates me to deliver great results.”

As the team returned home, the extensive data collected—LiDAR scans, photographs, drone imagery, drawings, and architectural analyses—will continue to inform research, student projects, and UVU curriculum. More importantly, the project created a permanent digital and architectural record of Agios Achilios and other vulnerable sites, helping ensure that these cultural treasures endure. In preserving Agios Achilios, students gained an education that could only happen in the field—while leaving behind a record that will protect the site long after the project ended.

**NOT MANY STUDENTS GET THE CHANCE TO
WORK ON SOMETHING OF THIS CULTURAL
AND HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE, AND IT GAVE
ME CONFIDENCE AND EXPERIENCE THAT I’LL
CARRY INTO MY FUTURE CAREER.**

-REESE NELSON,
UVU DIGITAL MEDIA STUDENT



APRENDER Y EMPREENDER



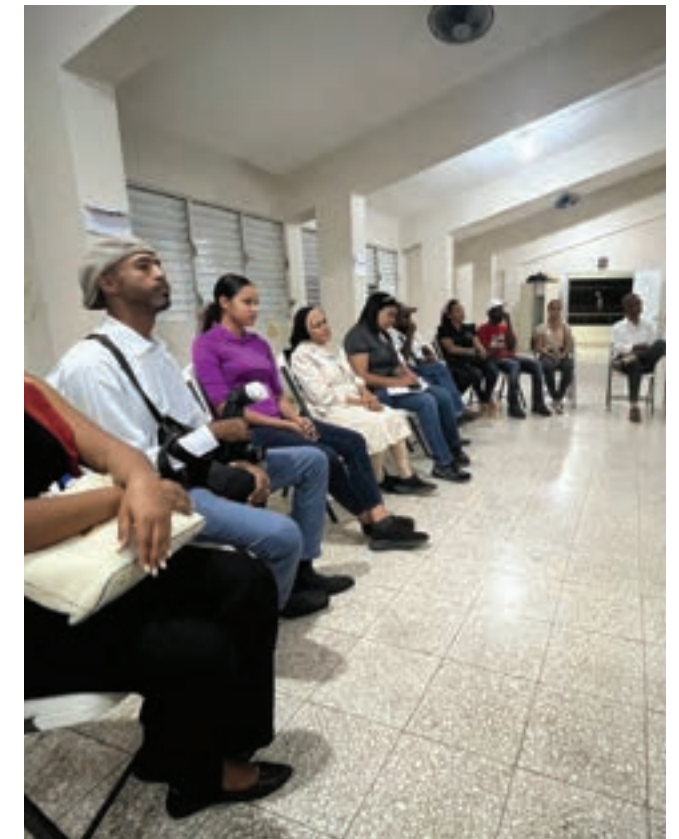
The Spanish Business class at Utah Valley University is launching an exciting new initiative this March to teach entrepreneurial skills in Bayaguana, Dominican Republic. Through a free, virtual course held each Tuesday, community members will learn key topics in business planning, finance, marketing, social media, and sales strategies — all delivered in Spanish by UVU's own students: Anna Moore, Raúl Freire del Tío, and Kade Van Ry, under the leadership of faculty member Mari De Dios.



removes language barriers and makes the content more accessible to low-income residents who stand to benefit most. At the same time, UVU students gain invaluable real-world experience — applying classroom knowledge in an international context, sharpening cross-cultural communication skills, and contributing meaningfully to community development. Through this engagement, students become empowered global citizens while supporting sustainable growth in Bayaguana's local economy.

The curriculum was developed in close collaboration with local partners during a recent trip where the team met with representatives from CEZOPAS, local parishes, and the Bayaguana city council to tailor the program to community needs and ensure broad participation.

This program promises real, lasting impact for both the Bayaguana community and the UVU students involved. For participants in the Dominican Republic, the course offers practical tools to build and grow their own ventures, helping to strengthen economic opportunities and foster local entrepreneurship. Learning these skills in Spanish





A SHARED COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABLE SCIENCE

One of the defining features of the second visit was its emphasis on long-term capacity-building. Rather than conducting research in isolation, UVU students worked side by side with Peruvian faculty and students, sharing protocols, troubleshooting challenges, and strengthening systems that would allow the work to continue locally.

**SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
MUST BE BOTH RIGOROUS
AND COMPASSIONATE.”**

*-Carol Bejar, Trace
Metals Researcher*

STUDENT REFLECTIONS FROM THE FIELD

DECEMBER 2025

In December 2025, a team of Utah Valley University faculty and student researchers returned to Peru for the second phase of a multi-institutional environmental research collaboration focused on water quality. Following an initial field sampling trip in the spring and months of laboratory analysis and coordination, this visit centered on deepening collaboration with Peruvian university partners while advancing research on microplastics, trace metals, and microbiology.

For the students involved, the experience was not only about scientific data—it was about people, partnership, and responsibility.



Chemistry student Stone Smith, who worked with Dr. Sally Rocks on microplastics, described the collaboration as the most meaningful part of the trip. “The best part was definitely working with all the people who were there and getting to meet so many new and amazing people,” Smith said. “Anytime I got to work in the lab with the students, it was really fun to show them the process, explain why we do what we do, and help set them up so they can keep doing this work.”

That sustainability became tangible when essential lab materials—often difficult for national universities to access—were shared with partner institutions. “They were so excited—it was like Christmas Day,” Smith recalled. “It was cool to think that we’re there not just to do research, but to build relationships and keep collaborating in the future.”

“WE’RE THERE NOT JUST TO DO RESEARCH, BUT TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND KEEP COLLABORATING IN THE FUTURE.”

-Stone Smith, Microplastics Researcher



UNDERSTANDING ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES ON THE GROUND

“IT WASN’T JUST ABOUT COLLECTING SAMPLES...IT WAS ABOUT WORKING IN UNITY AND AS A TEAM, AND HELPING STUDENTS UNDERSTAND”

-Carol Bejar, Trace Metals Researcher

For Carol Bejar, an environmental science student working with Dr. Eddy Cadet on trace metals, the project carried both professional and personal meaning. As a native of Peru, returning home as a researcher offered a powerful perspective. “Participating in this project was a very meaningful and transformative experience for me,” Bejar said.

Her work focused on water and sediment sampling, lab preparation, and coordinating data across institutions in Chosica, Huancavelica, Trujillo, and Puno. Conducting research in high-altitude regions and resource-limited laboratories required adaptability and creativity. “These are national universities, and sometimes



they don't have the budget for specialized instruments," Bejar explained. "So we had to be creative—designing equipment, adjusting protocols, and figuring out how to work safely and accurately with what we had."

Beyond the technical challenges, Bejar emphasized the importance of teamwork. "It wasn't just about collecting samples," she said. "It was about working in unity and as a team, and helping students understand how to analyze water and soil issues that directly affect their communities."



"CHILDREN WERE DYING BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T HAVE ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER—IT WAS HEARTBREAKING. I KNEW THAT WHAT WE WERE DOING WAS IMPORTANT."

-Amanda Lee, Microbiology Researcher



WHEN RESEARCH BECOMES URGENTLY IMPACTFUL

"WE ALL SHARED THE LOVE OF SCIENCE AND THE DESIRE TO HELP GET CLEAN, SAFE WATER TO PEOPLE WHO DIDN'T HAVE IT."

-Amanda Lee, Microbiology Researcher

For Amanda Lee, who worked alongside Dr. Lauren Brooks on microbiology, the significance of the project became clear almost immediately. "I think when the importance of this trip clicked for me was arriving at the labs the first day and seeing everything they had built and put together for us to be able to do this work," Lee said.

The realities surrounding water access in Peru reframed the research as an urgent public health effort. "We had to get our water from bottles and boxes," Lee recalled. "Just hearing the stories from the mayors about how sick people were getting and how many children were dying because they didn't have access to clean water—it was heartbreaking. I knew that what we were doing was important."

A major goal of the microbiology work was establishing local capacity. "The main goal for Dr. Brooks and I was to help establish this lab and then to teach the students there what we were doing and how to do it," Lee explained. "They were so interested in learning, and some came from very far away. We all shared the love of science and the desire to help get clean, safe water to people who didn't have it."

SHAPING FUTURE SCIENTISTS AND GLOBAL CITIZENS

Across all three research areas, students gained a clearer understanding of how environmental data informs policy and public health decisions. Smith's work on microplastics focused on identifying sources and pathways rather than quick solutions. "Our main role is helping them learn where they are and why they're there," he said, emphasizing the importance of baseline data for long-term mitigation.

For Lee, that connection reached the highest levels of leadership. "I have never had the experience of seeing how my research can help save lives and make changes with policy in government," she said. "It was such an unforgettable experience to go into the board room of the President of Peru and his cabinet members and discuss what we have found. It was life changing for me."

Bejar similarly reflected on the ethical responsibility of environmental science. "Working in real-world field conditions reshaped how I think about research," she said. "It's not only about data collection—it's about responsibility. Scientific research must be both rigorous and compassionate."

"THE WORK HAS REAL POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE—AND LEARNING HOW TO TEACH THAT WORK TO OTHERS—THAT'S SOMETHING I'LL CARRY FORWARD."

-Stone Smith, Microplastics Researcher

"WATER QUALITY IS NO LONGER ABSTRACT... LIFE AND HEALTH ARE DIRECTLY CONNECTED TO WATER."

-Carol Bejar, Trace Metals Researcher



While each student brought a different disciplinary focus, all three described the experience as transformative. Smith noted that the most valuable lesson was learning how to communicate science effectively. "Understanding that the work has real power to make a difference—and learning how to teach that work to others—that's something I'll carry forward," he said. For Bejar, the project reinforced the human

dimension of environmental research. "Water quality is no longer abstract," she explained. "Life and health are directly connected to water, and that understanding has deepened my commitment to this work." Lee echoed that sentiment. "This trip has honestly changed my life," she said. "I felt like I was doing some scrappy science that meant so much to the sweet, caring people who were helping us. I felt so fulfilled doing what I love and making a difference."

As the Peru Water Research Project continues, the collaboration stands as a model for student-led international research rooted in partnership, sustainability, and shared purpose—demonstrating how science, when done together, can build lasting impact across borders.



BENIN

Living Landscapes examines how sacred forests in Benin are preserved amid climate change and development pressures. Led by Dr. Hilary Hungerford through the UVU UNESCO Chair on AI and Environmental Stewardship, the project blends geospatial mapping with community research to show how local traditions sustain biodiversity and cultural heritage, while connecting UVU students with global sustainability work.

GREECE

Our Greece Project, Capturing the Agios Achilios of Pentalofos through Architectural Surveying, LiDAR, Photogrammetry, and Extended Reality Technologies for Immersive Experiences, works with UVU architecture professors Aliki Milioti and Michael Harper on an Architectural Engineering and preservation of a Byzantine Church, using classic methods, AI and modern technology.

KENYA

The Kenya Mental Health and Technology Project uses digital tools and UVU-Kenya partnerships to improve student well-being by raising mental-health awareness, reducing stigma, and developing an app that connects students to clear, accessible support.

DR BUSINESS

Aprender y Emprender is a free Spanish-language virtual course launching in March 2026 to help participants build practical budgeting and entrepreneurship skills. The program covers market demand, capital resources, credit-free personal loans, short-term microloans, working with suppliers, managing expenses and payments, and basic marketing, profits, and investments.

UKRAINE

"An Evening for Ukraine" : Peter Sirotin, Ukrainian concertmaster of the Harrisburg Symphony, has agreed to come perform with the UVU Symphony on April 13, 2026. The event, "An Evening for Ukraine" will be a powerful tribute to the vibrant country, culture, and resiliency in the face of hardship.

PROJECTS IN THE PIPELINE



 uvu.edu/unesco

 lagoba@uvu.edu

 [UNESCO Chair @ UVU](#)

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