



CONNECTING  
GLOBAL  
WORK TO  
UTAH'S  
FUTURE



UNESCO CHAIR ON AI AND ENVIRONMENTAL  
STEWARDSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURES



unesco  
Chair

DEC  
2025

## A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

As the semester comes to a close, we're pleased to share this update on the remarkable work of the UNESCO Chair on AI and Environmental Stewardship for Sustainable Futures at Utah Valley University. This year has been one of extraordinary growth and global collaboration—from water quality and public health research in Peru and Cambodia, to partnerships supporting inclusive education in Cameroon, ethical AI development in the Philippines, and entrepreneurial empowerment in the Dominican Republic. Across more than a dozen countries, our Chair has helped strengthen communities, expand knowledge, and build bridges rooted in mutual respect and shared purpose.

Amid a world that often feels divided, the work of the UNESCO Chair has served as a quiet but steady reminder that kindness, unity, and collective action still have the power to create meaningful change. And importantly, these global efforts have brought tremendous benefits home to Utah: hands-on opportunities for UVU students, collaborative research for faculty, and valuable connections that enrich the broader community.

Thank you for being part of this journey. We look forward to continuing this important work together in the year ahead.

Happy Holidays,

*The UVU UNESCO Chair*

*On AI and Environmental Stewardship For Sustainable Futures*



UNESCO CHAIR ON AI AND ENVIRONMENTAL  
STEWARDSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURES



unesco  
Chair



# UNITED NATIONS HIGHLIGHTS

## UVU'S UNESCO CHAIR AS A MODEL FOR GLOBAL IMPACT

The United Nations Department of Global Communications (DGC) has formally recognized Utah Valley University for its significant contributions to global education, sustainability, and youth empowerment through its work as a UNESCO Chair on Artificial Intelligence, Environmental Stewardship, and Sustainable Futures. While the Chair itself was awarded earlier this year, this new acknowledgment from the UN highlights the expanding international impact of UVU's initiatives.

In its announcement, the UN DGC celebrated UVU as a long-standing associated institution—formally connected with the department since 2017—and commended the university's consistent commitment to advancing United Nations values. UVU's record of global engagement includes hosting the 2019 UN Civil Society Conference in Salt Lake City and leading the 2022 Academic Conference on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), both of which

strengthened partnerships between academia, civil society, and international organizations.

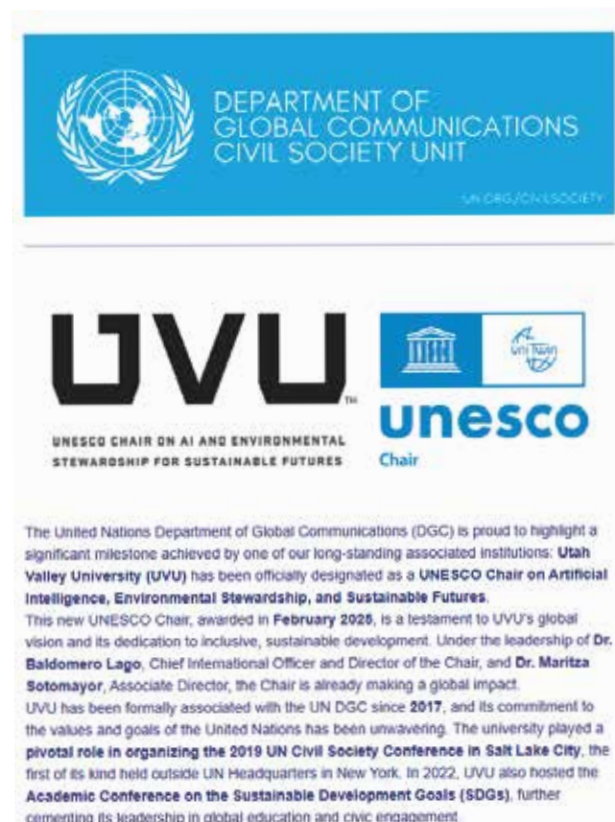
The recognition also underscores the early global influence of the UNESCO Chair, directed by Chief International Officer Dr. Baldomero Lago with Associate Director Dr. Maritza Sotomayor. Through projects spanning Peru, the Dominican Republic, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Cameroon, the Chair advances inclusive education, water quality research, AI-enabled learning systems, and much more in collaboration with Global South partners.

UVU's recent participation in the 2025 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development further demonstrated the university's leadership in connecting local research to global policy. UVU's delegation showcased work aligned with several SDGs under review and emphasized student-led innovation, North-South collaboration, and technology-driven approaches to sustainable development.

The UN's recognition affirms UVU's role as a model for how universities can translate the SDGs into action—empowering students, strengthening global partnerships, and driving meaningful community-based change.

*“A testament to UVU's global vision and its dedication to inclusive, sustainable development.”*

— UN Department of Global Communications

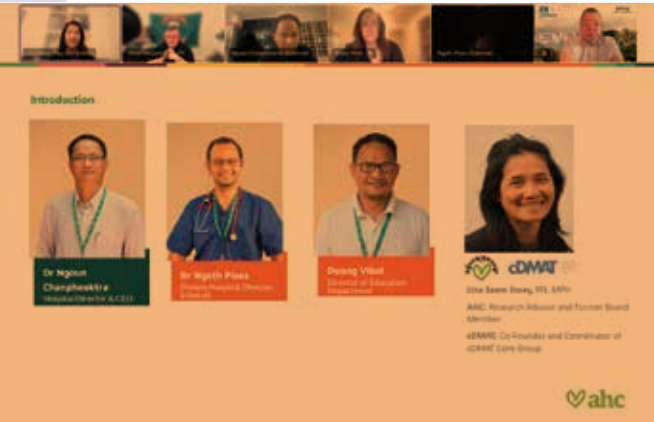




# WHAT'S HAPPENING?

## A SNAPSHOT OF OUR PROGRESS AND COLLABORATIONS THIS SEMESTER

With over 16 projects in the works all over the world, we have been busy all semester 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.



### CAMBODIA HOSPITAL ARRANGEMENTS

September 16, 2025

On September 16, the UNESCO Chair met with leaders of the Cambodia public health project to discuss involvement in the hospital. Students will have opportunities to shadow in the hospitals and learn from our global partners.

### AMITY UNIVERSITY UZBEKISTAN AI COLLABORATION

September 19, 2025

UVU and Amity University Tashkent explored opportunities for joint research, dual degree programs, and AI-focused teacher training. Discussions highlighted Uzbekistan's strong national emphasis on IT and AI, active government partnerships, and ongoing initiatives like IEEE conferences. Next steps include drafting a collaboration proposal and identifying faculty for future exchanges and joint projects.



### PERU PROJECT PRESENTATION

Aug 19, 2025

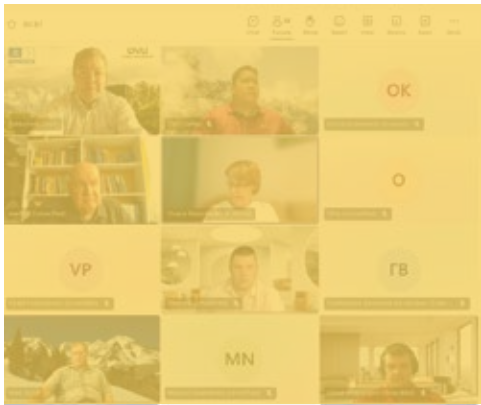
On August 19, 2025, The Bridging Waters project in Peru presented their initial research findings to Peruvian officials, college presidents, UVU faculty, and potential business collaborators. The March 2025 field campaign revealed widespread arsenic contamination across multiple regions, localized human fecal contamination, and emerging microplastic pollution in rivers and household water sources. These findings underscore urgent health risks and the need for infrastructure improvements. The project aims to expand sampling, build local testing capacity, and develop collaborative research and policy solutions to secure clean water and promote sustainability in Peru.



### UKRAINE AI COLLABORATION

Aug 21, 2025

On Aug 21, the UNESCO Chair met with Ukraine researchers to discuss collaboration on AI projects. We look forward to further collaboration with our Ukrainian colleagues.





## PERU WATER PROJECT FINDINGS

Sept 23, 2025

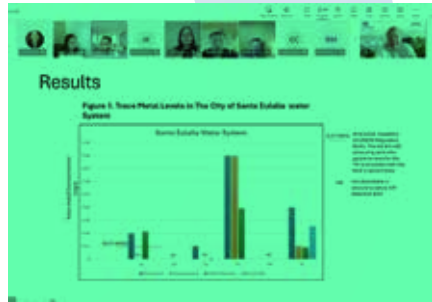
Researchers reviewed preliminary findings from the Bridging Waters Project, highlighting arsenic contamination in multiple regions, localized fecal contamination risks, and emerging microplastic pollution. The team outlined next steps for capacity building in Peru, expanded sampling, and collaborative strategies to improve water safety and inform policy.



## MICROBIOLOGY PERU MEETING

Oct 3, 2025

The team reviewed water quality findings from Chosica and the Rímac River, discussed plans for December fieldwork in Peru, and outlined priorities for E. coli monitoring, molecular source tracking, and lab equipment needs. Collaboration with Peruvian partners and resource sharing will be key to generating publishable data and advancing the Utah-Peru project.



## PERU - MICROPLASTICS MEETING

Oct 6, 2025

Researchers from UVU and partner universities across Peru met to refine the goals and methods of the Microplastics research group. Led by Dr. Sally Rocks, the team discussed upcoming analyses of over 100 water samples collected from regions including Trujillo, Lima, and Lake Titicaca, as well as expanding investigations to include freshwater fish such as trout. Participants emphasized the need to compile existing literature on microplastics in Peru, standardize sampling methods, and identify research priorities across drinking water, natural waters, and aquaculture systems.



On October 3, the UVU and Peruvian research teams met to review preliminary findings on trace metal contamination in Lake Titicaca and the Ramis River. Led by Dr. Eddy Cadet, the study identified elevated levels of arsenic and zinc, along with evidence of mining-related copper and lead pollution. The group outlined plans for a December 2025 field visit, expanded sampling to include soils, sediments, and fish, and new training initiatives to strengthen local research capacity.



## CAMEROON GEOGRAPHY MEETING

Oct 9, 2025

On October 9, the UVU UNESCO Chair met virtually with project partners in Cameroon to discuss progress on environmental and climate change research. The team reviewed the use of satellite imagery and geospatial analysis to assess climate risks and planned next steps for on-the-ground data collection. The meeting also celebrated the signing of an MOU, strengthening long-term collaboration between UVU and Cameroonian institutions.



## PERU TRACE METALS MEETING

Oct 3, 2025

On October 3, the UVU and Peruvian research teams met to review preliminary findings on trace metal contamination in Lake Titicaca and the Ramis River. Led by Dr. Eddy Cadet, the study identified elevated levels of arsenic and zinc, along with evidence of mining-related copper and lead pollution. The group outlined plans for a December 2025 field visit, expanded sampling to include soils, sediments, and fish, and new training initiatives to strengthen local research capacity.

## UNESCO PRESENTATION TO THE ACADEMIC ADVISORY LEADERS

Oct 10, 2025

On October 10, the UVU UNESCO Chair presented its global initiatives and achievements to the UVU Presidential Cabinet. Director Baldomero Lago highlighted more than 16 active projects worldwide, emphasizing how these efforts create meaningful opportunities and lasting benefits for UVU students and the broader Utah community.

## LASALLE, PHILIPPINES PRESENTATION

Oct 16, 2025

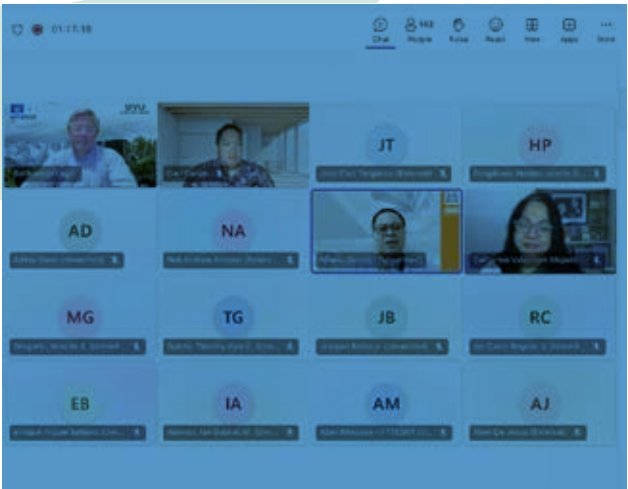
On October 16, Utah Valley University met with De La Salle University in the Philippines to discuss future collaboration in artificial intelligence and information technology. The presentation emphasized shared goals in advancing ethical AI education, supporting student-led innovation, and building global academic partnerships.



AI PRESENTATION TO  
POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY OF  
PHILIPPINES

Oct 14, 2025

On October 14, Utah Valley University delivered a presentation to the Polytechnic University of the Philippines focused on the growing role of artificial intelligence in education and industry. The session explored ways to prepare students for an AI-driven future through collaborative research, ethical training, and hands-on project opportunities.



"THINK TANK"

Oct 29, 2025

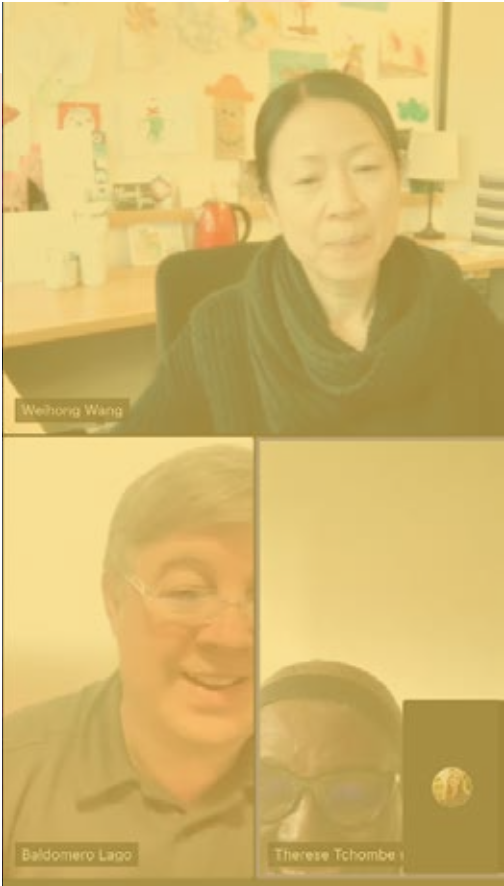
On October 29th, the UNESCO Chair participated in a "Think Tank" hosted by Maria Blevins, Director of the Research Institute. The group discussed ideas and research projects concerning environmental stewardship and sustainability, covering everything from environmental literary dialog in the Caribbean, to classical architecture preservation in Bolivia using drones footage. We were grateful to be a part of these discussions with several faculty and explore potential collaboration under the UNESCHO Chair program.



FIRST MEETING ON UTAH AND KENYA  
PROJECT ON MENTAL HEALTH

Oct 30, 2025

The meeting brought together representatives from the University of Maseno and Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology in Kenya, along with faculty from Utah Valley University and the UNESCO Chair team. Participants discussed cultural, social, and economic factors influencing mental health in Kenya, including stigma, generational differences, and limited access to mental health care. The group explored collaborative goals focused on reframing mental health as a legitimate medical issue and developing a mobile app to provide accessible, anonymous mental health support for students.



SPECIAL EDUCATION PROJECT MEETING  
WITH CAMEROON

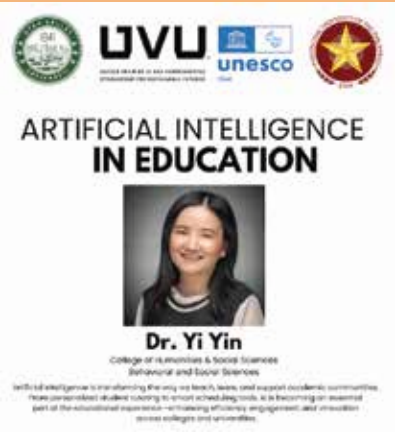
Oct 31, 2025

Faculty from Utah Valley University and the University of Bamenda, Cameroon, met to advance a joint UNESCO Chair initiative aimed at strengthening inclusive and special education through international collaboration. The partnership seeks to build research capacity, share best practices, and promote equitable access to quality education across regions.

PHILIPPINES POLYTECHNIC  
EXCHANGE

Oct 21, 2025

On October 21, Utah Valley University and the Polytechnic University of the Philippines met virtually to discuss collaborative opportunities in Information Systems and IT education. The meeting highlighted shared goals to strengthen research partnerships and support student-led AI initiatives.



REP DOMINICAN BUSINESS MEETING WITH MONSENIOR FROM THE DR

Oct 15, 2025

On October 15, a meeting was held to discuss the beginning of a new project in the DR, Learn and Launch Program. This free Spanish-language course empowers low-income individuals with essential financial and entrepreneurial skills, including budgeting, market analysis, and business creation. Participants will also learn about accessing capital, managing expenses, and marketing strategies. The program will be offered at the local community center to help aspiring entrepreneurs build sustainable businesses.



## 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 Aliko 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 February 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.

## VIETNAM

The Vietnam MBA Global Impact Catalyst Project embeds UVU MBA students in active UNDP and UNESCO initiatives, where they support local startups and creative enterprises through small catalytic grants and real-world consulting. The project strengthens UN partnerships while giving students hands-on global experience in innovation, sustainability, and cultural heritage.

## 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





OCT 29, 2025

Utah Valley University's Emergency Medical Services (EMS) faculty are playing a central role in strengthening Morocco's developing prehospital care system, thanks to a decades-long partnership between the Utah National Guard and the Kingdom of Morocco through the State Partnership Program.

UVU's involvement began in 2022 at the request of the Utah National Guard and the U.S. Embassy in Morocco. Since then, UVU EMS faculty have been working closely with the Moroccan Civil Protectorate—the nation's primary emergency response agency—to train firefighters, nurses, and physicians in modern prehospital emergency care. The program not only equips participants with lifesaving clinical skills but also prepares them to serve as instructors, enabling Morocco to build its own sustainable and scalable emergency medical training infrastructure.

Kevin McCarthy, Chair of UVU's EMS Department, has helped lead the initiative since its early

## UVU EMS AND MOROCCO PREHOSPITAL CARE TRAINING PARTNERSHIP



*(Left) - Moroccan firefighters' leadership at the Casablanca Civil Protectorate, (Right) - Ceremony Graduation of new Emergency Response Instructors at the Civil Protectorate, (Bottom) - Moroccan firefighter instructor practicing with UVU EMS Director Dexter Schiers*

**“ The program not only equips participants with lifesaving clinical skills but also prepares them to serve as instructors. ”**





*(Left & Right) - Demonstration ceremony at the Civil Protectorate, Casablanca, Morocco, (Bottom) - Lt. Col Garry Wellish (Utah National Guard), Kevin McCarthy and a new Moroccan Firefighter instructor receiving training.*



***“The strides they’ve [Morocco] made will, without a doubt, have a generational impact on their country’s future.”***

*- Kevin McCarthy, UVU EMS Faculty*



stages. “This opportunity to train their firefighters, doctors, and nurses as providers and instructors allows Morocco to develop and advance its own prehospital care system,” McCarthy explained. “Their progress is still early, but the strides they’ve made will, without a doubt, have a generational impact on their country’s future.”

Recent training engagements in Casablanca included instructor certification courses and hands-on demonstrations with Moroccan emergency responders. UVU EMS faculty worked alongside leadership from the Civil Protectorate, including Col. Kaml Benyaich, Civil Protectorate Director; Col. Jamal Jazouli, Deputy Director; and Capt. Yassir Bouchti. Representatives from the Utah National Guard, including Lt. Col. Garry Wellish, also joined the collaboration.

Graduation ceremonies at the Civil Protectorate highlighted the success of the latest cohort of emergency response instructor candidates—Moroccan firefighters and medical personnel who will now train others throughout the country. UVU EMS Director Dexter Schiers and his team provided advanced scenario-based training, reinforcing clinical decision-making, teamwork, and instructional leadership.

The initiative reflects UVU’s ongoing commitment to global engagement, capacity building, and international collaboration. As Morocco continues developing its prehospital care system, UVU’s partnership—rooted in years of trust and shared purpose—continues to contribute to a safer, more resilient future for communities across the country.





# RECTORA DR. LIDA ASENCIOS TRUJILLO

## VISITS UVU

Utah Valley University was honored to receive a visit from Rectora Dr. Lida Ascencios Trujillo of the Universidad Nacional de Educación (UNE), Peru. In addition to serving as Rectora, Dr. Ascencios was recently elected as a Cabinet-level official in the Government of Peru, becoming the nation's first female Superintendent of Education—one of the highest academic leadership roles in the country. Dr. Ascencios has played a pivotal role in the success of UVU's UNESCO Chair project, Building Bridges: Collaborative Solutions for Water Sustainability Between Peru and Utah. Her relationships within the Peruvian Congress and the academic sector have opened doors, provided essential resources, and supported UVU researchers throughout the project. From organizing forums with the Congress of Peru to coordinating housing and laboratory support for visiting faculty and students, Dr. Ascencios has helped advance life-changing research and opportunities for both nations.

The purpose of her visit from November 18–23 was to strengthen international collaboration, explore research partnerships, assess equipment needs for the Peru Water Project, learn about ongoing progress, and exchange best practices in higher education and scientific research. UVU expresses its gratitude for the support of SUNEDU, the UVU UNESCO Chair leadership, and especially Dr. Ascencios for her gracious visit.

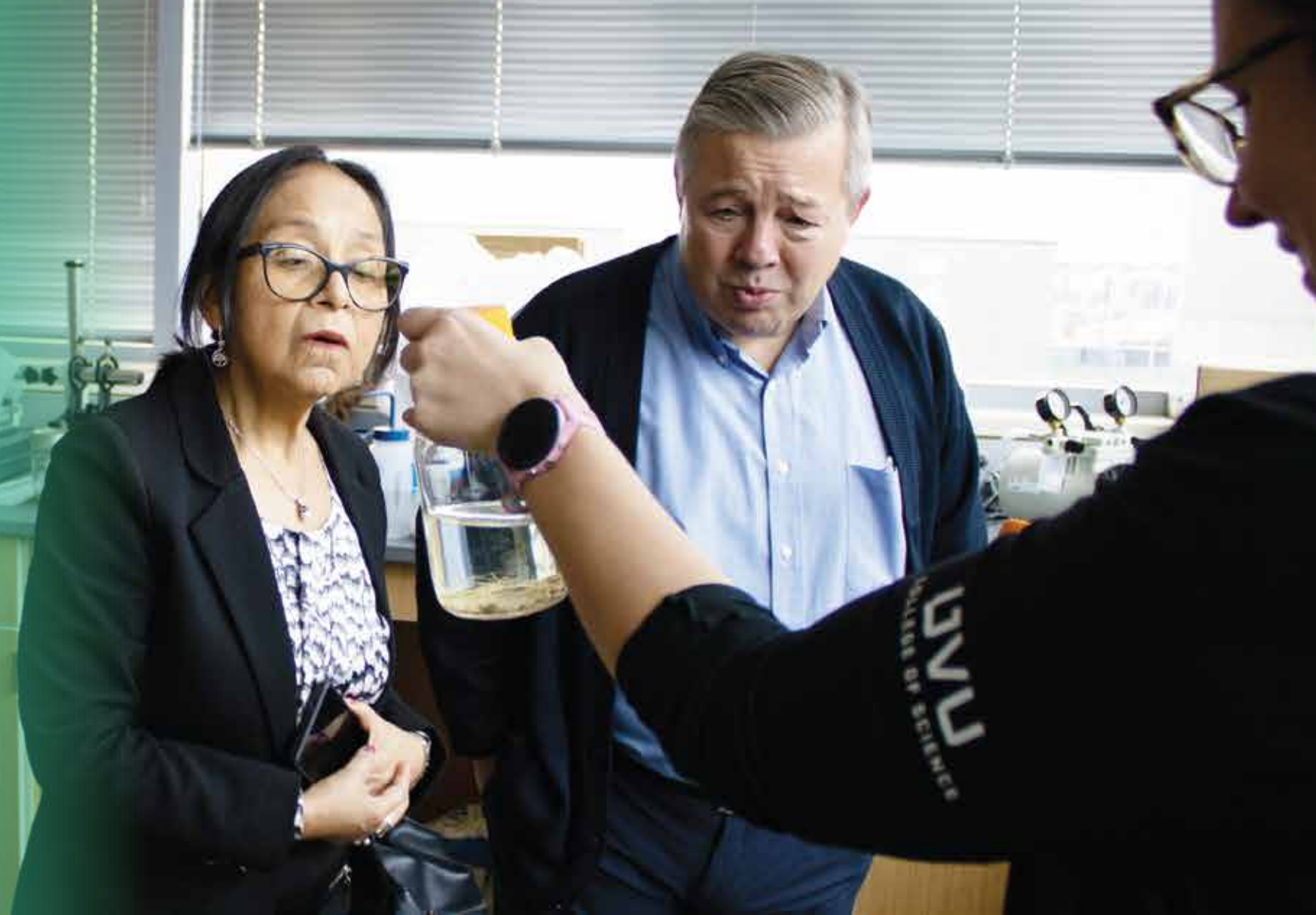


# MICROBIOLOGY RESEARCH AT UVU

On Wednesday, November 19, Dr. Ascencios began her visit with a tour of Dr. Lauren Brooks' Microbiology classroom and laboratories. Dr. Brooks leads the microbiology component of the water project, specifically focusing on fecal contamination in Peruvian water sources. Dr. Ascencios met with UVU students, learned about their research, and expressed admiration for their expertise, dedication, and the extensive resources available within UVU's state-of-the-art laboratories.

Dr. Brooks also described the microbiological testing process used on water samples collected in Peru earlier this year, including the strengths and limitations of different methods and materials. The tour concluded with a presentation of laboratory materials that UVU will donate to Peruvian research labs during the December visit—resources for which Dr. Ascencios shared heartfelt appreciation on behalf of her university and collaborators.

Following the microbiology tour, Dr. Ascencios met with Dr. Danny Horns, Dean of the College of Science, to discuss ongoing collaboration and to express mutual gratitude for the significant contributions of UVU faculty and students participating in the project.







# TRACE METALS ANALYSIS, EQUIPMENT, AND PREPARATION

Later, Dr. Ascencios visited Dr. Eddy Cadet's laboratory, where she observed the trace metals research being conducted on Peruvian water samples. Dr. Cadet, who leads the trace metals component, demonstrated analytical tools and testing processes. He and student researcher Carol Bejar Orellana, who will join the team in Peru in December, identified essential equipment that would enhance Peruvian laboratories, including the MARS6 Microwave Digester and Teflon tubes. That evening, Dr. Ascencios participated in a virtual coordination meeting with Peruvian researchers to finalize logistics for the upcoming fieldwork.





# MICROPLASTICS RESEARCH LABS

Thursday marked Dr. Ascencios' final day on the UVU campus. She visited Dr. Sally Rocks' microplastics laboratory, where she viewed microplastic particulates from a water sample collected at her own university. Dr. Rocks, along with student researcher Stone Smith—who will also join the field team in December—demonstrated fluorescence techniques used to identify microplastics within complex samples.

## A STRENGTHENED PARTNERSHIP FOR THE FUTURE

Her campus visit concluded with a special luncheon hosted by the UVU Vice Provost team and academic deans, where Dr. Ascencios was formally recognized for her extraordinary support of the project. UVU UNESCO Chair Director Dr. Baldomero Lago highlighted the significance of her visit, noting that as Peru's Superintendent of Education, "Dr. Ascencios is the highest-ranked government officer in academia to visit UVU. It is an honor to have her here with us today." Dr. Ascencios then addressed UVU faculty, expressing gratitude and reinforcing the importance of the collaboration. "We have never seen a project like this in Peru and it is the most important one," she shared. "With these findings, we are able to improve the quality of life in Peru because of the contributions of UVU."

Dr. Ascencios' visit represents a significant milestone in the expanding partnership between UVU and Peru. Her leadership, vision, and steadfast commitment to advancing scientific and educational progress continue to shape the impact of the Peru Water Project. As UVU prepares for the next phase of research and international collaboration, the university is honored to work alongside Dr. Ascencios and its Peruvian partners in pursuing innovative, sustainable solutions that uplift communities. Her time on campus strengthened not only institutional ties, but also a shared belief that collaborative, student-centered research can transform lives—both in Peru and in Utah.

"WITH THESE  
FINDINGS, WE  
ARE ABLE TO  
IMPROVE THE  
QUALITY OF LIFE  
IN PERU  
BECAUSE OF THE  
CONTRIBUTIONS  
OF UVU."

- Rectora, Dr. Lida  
Ascencios, Peru

