SLCC

MAGAZINE 2026



BEYOND THE SKATES, BEYOND THE SKIS, BEYOND THE CLIMBS,

BEYOND THE PODIUM





“A lot of fabric went into it,” says Merlin Anderson of his fantastical fashion collection, “The Arcane Order” — and by fabric, he means both physical material and the warp and weft of storytelling. His collection was inspired by his own fantasy setting, a world of monsters, magic, and myth, and those elements are represented in his collection.

Anderson was one of 20 students featured in the SLCC Fashion Institute’s 2026 Senior Fashion Show, an annual event showcasing the work that students have done across multiple semesters at SLCC, including classes on planning, design, and even sourcing materials with a trip to LA’s fabric district.

SLCC’s Fashion Institute is unique among Utah’s colleges and universities, and the institute’s annual fashion show is also an opportunity for students from film, technical design, and other SLCC programs to demonstrate their skillsets and gain valuable experience in turning the theory of their craft into professional practice.

SLCC

SALT LAKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
MAGAZINE 2026

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ON THE COVER
Photo of Ethan Cepuran, Casey Dawson, and Emery Lehman

by Noel Stave, courtesy of US Speedskating



dialogue

START HERE, GO ANYWHERE

SLCC meets students where they are now, and our success as an institution is defined by what students do next. That next step may be successfully transferring, beginning or advancing a career, or achieving any other goal, because the stories at SLCC are as varied as the 50,000+ students who walk through its doors every year.

That variety defines SLCC, and it's represented in the wide range of options we offer. Finance or philosophy, chemistry or construction trades, literature or law enforcement — every student's pathway is unique. We accommodate them all from planning to completion, but this issue of SLCC Magazine narrows that scope to focus on the front end of the journey, recognizing some of the ways we provide access.

Access is literally in the name of the Partnership for Accessing College Education (PACE) Scholarship Program, which is celebrating 15 years of helping high school students overcome barriers to higher ed. Access is the central idea behind Beyond the Podium, a new program that gives aspiring Olympians a chance to plan for a successful life after their competitive careers end. Access is also critical to everyone upgrading their professional skills to secure economic mobility in the local economy's community of careers.

At SLCC, we meet every student where they are today to help them create the tomorrow where they want to be. They're not all here for the same reason, but every Bruin does have one thing in common: they're going somewhere.

We're just helping them get there.

Rob Ware
Managing Editor



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Awards, initiatives, policy changes, and the general news of the college. SLCC Bulletin is a snapshot of where SLCC is at — and where we're heading.

SLCC bulletin



UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITY SO EVERY BRUIN THRIVES

SLCC joins a prestigious Aspen Institute initiative examining how academic programs help students access long term opportunities.

Every year, millions of students turn to community colleges as an accessible, affordable pathway to a better life. They come seeking skills, credentials, and the promise of upward mobility, trusting that it will lead to a sustaining career or a smooth transfer into a four-year program. At SLCC, that trust is the driving force behind a transformative effort to ensure every program leads to meaningful opportunity.

Last August, SLCC was selected as one of only 55 colleges nationwide to join the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program's Unlocking Opportunity Network. Community colleges have long opened doors for learners seeking access to better careers or four-year educations, but not all programs provide equal economic opportunity. The Unlocking Opportunity Network is committed to reshaping academic programs and advising systems to ensure students get a strong return from their investment in higher ed.

"The work we are doing now as part of this three-year process is giving us a picture of the value of our programs; it will ultimately provide us with a strong, data-driven picture," says Jason Pickavance, senior associate provost of Academic Affairs at SLCC.

"This national network offers a framework that allows us to be laser focused on the post-completion value of programs," he continues. "We have individuals who are here at the college in order to move out of poverty, better their circumstances for themselves and their families, and we owe it to them to make sure the programs we offer provide a strong ROI."

The process involves classifying programs as high- or low-value using data — not assumptions — to identify which programs produce real economic mobility. High-value programs lead directly to either sustaining-wages or to successfully transferring and earning a four-year degree. Low-value programs don't, and they may require redesign, restructuring, or reinvestment.

Institutions in the network will analyze their program mix, study student movement through academic pathways, set new goals for aligning programs with labor-market value, and implement research-backed reforms that help more students reach high-value outcomes.

The momentum is already measurable. The 10 colleges in the initial Unlocking Opportunity pilot are on track to help more than 20,000 students transition into high-value programs — programs more likely to lead to well-paying jobs after graduation. With the expanded network now including 65 participating colleges, that impact is positioned to grow significantly.



"We owe it to them to make sure the programs we offer provide strong ROI."

Jason Pickavance

Senior Associate Provost of Academic Affairs



MAPPING THE IDEAL STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

A coalition from across the college includes input from students, faculty, and staff to build more effective pathways for student success.

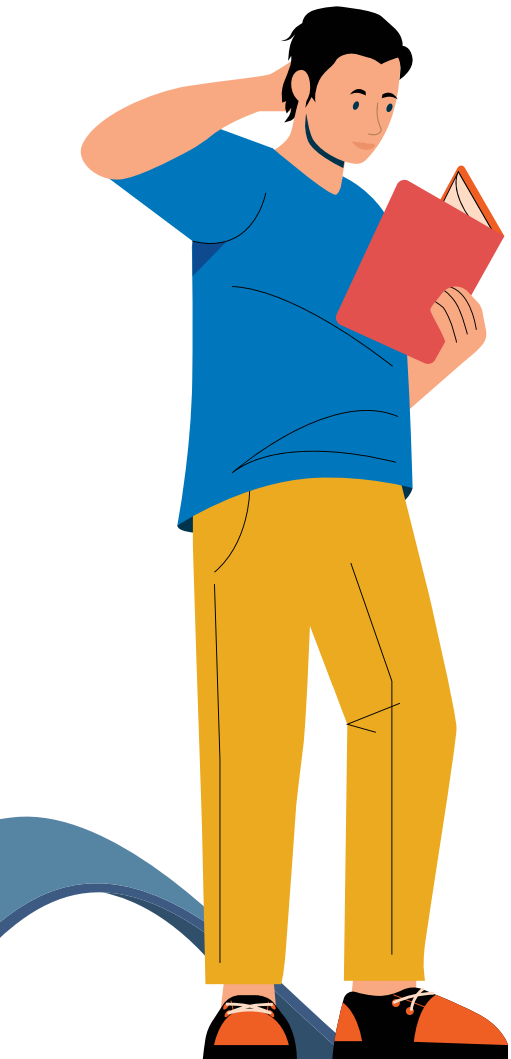
Staff and faculty of SLCC hold student success to be the fundamental goal — the north star that guides the college's mission. Regardless of program, campus or schedule, it's SLCC's role to give each student clear, supportive, engaging, and efficient guidance that's connected to real goals. The fewer snags there are along that journey, the more likely a successful outcome.

The hard question is, of course: How do we reduce those snags? To answer, SLCC asked the people who know best — faculty, staff, and students — by establishing the Ideal Student Learning Experience (ISLE) taskforce.

Assembled in September 2025, the ISLE taskforce comprised 29 members, each occupying different strata of the SLCC experience. The taskforce met bi-weekly from September to December to discuss potential barriers that students face, weighing in with perspectives spanning departments and decades. Their charge: crafting a plan to make the student experience better, from start to finish, from application to transfer or career.

Given the diverse goals and experiences of SLCC's student body, there's no one definition for Bruin "success", but they were guided by two parameters for the purposes of this taskforce:

1. Completion of an associate's degree before successfully transferring and completing a degree at a four-year institution, or
2. Completion of a workforce credential leading to employment in their field within six months of graduation.





In addition to the wealth of personal and professional experience from its members, the ISLE taskforce pulled data from pulse surveys, CampusWorks reviews, national research, and more. The group determined that unclear pathways, inconsistent advising, financial stressors, and simply not knowing where to go for help can all cause students to get lost in the system or drop out.

In light of those findings, the group drafted a roadmap framework that makes it easier for students to begin and provides clear pathways for every program, improved advising, expanded real-world learning opportunities, and more helpful progress tracking.

The results of their meetings included action items, process reviews, and next steps — all presented at 2026's college-wide SLCC360 event.

The ISLE report proposes 11 clear goals with 43 actionable steps. Goals include: providing structured program pathways and timely milestone notifications, creating an enhanced orientation and holistic new-student experience, and providing program-specific career information and personalized support throughout the student lifecycle.

In 2026-2027, the focus will be on aligning Academic & Student Affairs' operational plans to the ISLE roadmap as needed, before working to align all college unit operational plans with ISLE as appropriate in 2027-2028.

As an institution, our mission is to enable more students to be more successful at SLCC, and work toward that goal happens one program, one person, one step at a time. Improvement is a cycle, and the work is never done, but ISLE has shown us that everyone — faculty, staff, and student — has a unique perspective on the ideal student learning experience. When we combine those perspectives, we get a clear picture of how to make a lasting impact on the student journey.

Here's to continuously improving, and for always striving to find an ISLE of our own.

RAISING AWARENESS FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION

A mental health initiative reaches 1,000 SLCC community members, impacting lives across the college and throughout the Salt Lake region.

Three years ago, SLCC joined the statewide organization Live On in an initiative to help SLCC students, staff, and faculty recognize the signs of mental health distress in their peers and community members at large. The SLCC initiative creates a community more responsive to signs related to self-harm or suicide, and as of December 2025, it's already educated over 1,000 members of the Bruin family.

The initiative was launched when Christina McWhinnie, SLCC's employee wellness manager, along with Eduardo Zaragoza and Bob Lindsay from eLearning, partnered with the statewide Live On organization to create an educational Canvas course available to the SLCC community.

Originally, tallying 1,000 participants was a five-year goal; reaching it in just over three years earned state recognition for McWhinnie and the project members. But she's not interested in accolades for herself, instead hoping that the success only drives more attention to mental health awareness. "Suicide is the number one most preventable type of death," McWhinnie stresses, and that's where the focus should be.

Talking about mental health has recently become more important at SLCC, where students are dealing with a slew of stressors in their day-to-day lives. However, talking is not the only solution to de-stigmatization. "There is also the educational component that goes along with talking about mental health," McWhinnie adds, "and that is where folks get equipped with resources and tools to assist those in distress."

Recognizing that mental health challenges manifest in many forms from person to person, SLCC has made it a priority to equip its community with tools to help every Bruin cope and thrive as part of a caring community. The college provides a comprehensive list of resources for immediate support — including substance abuse counseling and 24-hour crisis hotlines for staff, faculty, and students — making it clear that help is readily accessible to all.

The groundwork laid by SLCC in promoting mental health support not only benefits the immediate Bruin community but also has the potential to reach far beyond it. By encouraging a culture of understanding and compassion within the SLCC community, the Bruin family is making strides toward a society that openly discusses mental well-being. Fostering an environment where mental health is not stigmatized creates ripples across SLCC and the Salt Lake region, educating and building a more resilient, compassionate society for all.

Scan the QR code to learn more about the Center for Health & Counseling





BUILDING THE STUDENT-TO-FACULTY PIPELINE

In a first for any community college, SLCC is honored with a prestigious award for a partnership with the U that prepares graduate students for faculty careers.

The Department of English, Linguistics, and Writing Studies at SLCC has joined its corresponding department at the University of Utah as joint recipients of the 2025 Janice M. Lauer Institutional Achievement Award in Rhetoric & Composition Doctoral Studies.

This distinguished award is granted by the Consortium of Doctoral Programs in Rhetoric and Composition to recognize institutional initiatives that significantly advance doctoral education and student development in rhetoric and composition. SLCC and the U earned this honor for their groundbreaking Community College Professional Apprenticeship Program, a collaborative model that prepares graduate students for faculty careers at two-year colleges and access-oriented institutions.

Laura Micciche, chair of the Consortium, calls the program "a major institutional achievement for the discipline" and an important "model for training the next generation of faculty." It's also the only program of its kind in the nation, combining an apprenticeship, a recurring Modern Language Association Summer Institute, and a degree-emphasis option for graduate students and early-career faculty — a pedagogical program whose success sets SLCC apart as the only community college to have received the award.

Darin Jensen, the associate dean of English, Linguistics, and Writing Studies at SLCC, recognizes the impact and agrees with Micciche that the program is a model for other institutions. It's also critical for the ongoing success of schools like SLCC. Jensen explains that about one third of English doctoral graduates end up teaching at community colleges, so this development is key to their success as teachers and to the student experience. "Not only do students get a professor who is an expert in the discipline, but they also understand the teaching and service needs that are required to be successful in a community college classroom," he says. "They get a well-rounded professor."

Christie Toth, associate professor of Writing & Rhetoric Studies at the U, sees the apprenticeship program as part of a long line of intellectual work dating back to the 1960s, when scholars began making concerted efforts to better prepare graduate students to teach in community colleges. The award is particularly meaningful to Toth.

"It's a powerful signal to us that the message has broken through to the doctoral education community in our discipline," she says. "Sometimes you have to build something for people to really understand that it matters. The teaching in community colleges really matters — the students there matter, and their communities matter, and so do the faculty who are doing the day-in, day-out work."

The Community College Professional Apprenticeship Program demonstrates how collaborative design can foster community, enhance the profession, and create pathways for the next generation of faculty. Its success underscores the value of institutional partnerships in addressing equity and access in higher education





SUPPORTING COMMUNITY ART WITH COMMUNITY ACCESS

The annual President's Art Show showcases talent from across the Salt Lake community, providing recognition, prize money, and community access to local artists' work.

The SLCC President's Art Show is an annual juried exhibition sponsored by the college's Art Committee and open to the public. The 31st edition celebrated amateur and professional Utah artists with recognition, gallery space, a new Talk of the Town community award sponsored by Salt Lake City Weekly, and a prize pool of over $5,000.

With 516 submissions from students, staff, faculty, and community artists, this year's exhibition showcased a wide range of unique visions realized in a variety of media. The judges are also artists and residents of the Utah community, including, of course, SLCC President Greg Peterson himself — the show's named for his office, after all!

Though the exhibition has been taken down, the gallery can still be toured virtually at the QR code below.

SLCC is a community space, and its impact goes beyond education to include local events, art exhibits, and more — open and accessible to everyone in the Salt Lake community.

BEST IN SHOW

Arash Shoveiri

Absurd Euphoria, 2024

Oil on canvas

60 x 48 inches / 152.4 x 122 cm



"We came upon 'Absurd Euphoria,' and immediately we all knew that we'd found our winner. This guy is sitting there in the midst of what looks like armed police arresting someone, what looks like just all sorts of slices of life, modern life, life today. He is wearing a set of 3D goggles that are connected to a cable that goes up and disappears into the sky, and he's watching some sort of distraction. He's grinning like an idiot, and then we have to ask ourselves: Are we any better?"

Geoff Wichert, contributing editor at Artists of Utah Magazine, *15 Bytes*



2nd PLACE

Jack Hattaway

The Lady Eve, 2025

Image drawn and composed in vector software, printed, cut into strips, then woven

28 x 23 inches / 71.2 x 58.5 cm

"One of the pieces that Jeff and Luis and I all agreed upon immediately was this woven paper portrait of a woman. It's phenomenal, really thinking in terms of layering and subject matter, but pushing material as a medium. Really inspiring."

Shalee Cooper, multidisciplinary artist and director and curator at Modern West



3rd PLACE

Jessica Booth

Harbor, 2025

Paper and wire

34 x 13 x 11 inches / 86.4 x 33.1 x 28 cm

"As I stepped into this room full of this wonderful art, I was immediately drawn to Jessica Booth's 'Harbor' piece. The juxtaposition between the organic paper and the industrial wire really made the piece special for me — the way it plays together, and the way that the paper was molded and flowed into its form to create something organic."

Luis Novoa, muralist and executive director at Artes de México en Utah



PRESIDENT'S AWARD

Shelly Coleman

Converging Ripples, 2025

Oil on canvas 20 x 20 inches / 50.8 x 50.8 cm

"The ripples radiating from single points in this painting remind me how our own actions can expand to affect others and have an impact on the world around us. I also admire that, in the center of the chaos caused by the intersecting, overlapping ripples, there's an aspirational calmness to the leaf."

Greg Peterson, President of SLCC



COMMUNITY AWARD

Mercedes Nok Yi Ng

Fruit Stall at Mong Kok, 2025

Oil on canvas

24 x 24 inches / 61 x 61 cm

"It's celebrating the art of the everyday, and how people who aren't trained artists can make their everyday work beautiful. It's the small moments of joy that I try to find in my life, and I really appreciate in art."

Lizzy Karp, award-winning film and podcast producer and Utah grants manager for The Kahlert Foundation



JURY'S CHOICE AWARD

Eugene Tapahe

Eternal Legacy, 2024

Digital photograph, pigment inks on archival watercolor paper

Ed. 3/5

38 x 56 inches / 96.6 x 142.3 cm

The Jury's Choice Award is given to the piece that received the highest composite score from the selection jury.

FROM UNCERTAIN TO UNLIMITED:

CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF ACCESS TO SUCCESS



Belen Castro Ruiz, PACE student and first-generation college graduate

For 15 years, SLCC's PACE program has been helping first-generation and low- to moderate-income students achieve their education and career goals.

By Jenny Burgess

A lot can happen in 15 years. Lives change. People grow. And sometimes, dreams become reality.

Since 2011, SLCC's Partnership for Accessing College Education (PACE) Scholarship Program has gone from serving just seven students to being one of the fastest growing scholarship programs at SLCC, supporting more than 2,000 low- to moderate-income and first-generation students as they prepare to enter the workforce or transfer to a four-year institution.

Originally launched at West High School with a startup contribution from Zions Bank, PACE has since expanded to five additional high schools across Salt Lake County including Cottonwood, East, Granger, Highland, and Kearns. PACE students from those schools have access to resources like mentoring, workshops, scholarships, and one-on-one support from full-time SLCC advisors, facilitating an easy transition from high school to higher ed.

As PACE celebrates its 15th anniversary, the importance of college access, completion, and successful transition into careers or four-year institutions has never been greater.

Utah thrives when its residents have access to higher education, and — at 15 years — PACE's commitment to making college attainable and advancing economic mobility has never been more important.

When opportunity meets support, lives change. As these profiles demonstrate, that's equally true for the students who build success as for the community members who offer support.

"IT WAS TIME FOR ME TO SHOOT FOR THE STARS"

One student's pathway from uncertain to unlimited.

Today, Belen Castro Ruiz is a first-generation college graduate, but when she began high school, college didn't feel like an option. Then a flyer about the PACE Scholarship Program landed in her hands, and everything changed.

"I wasn't thinking about college at all," Castro Ruiz says. "I was barely a freshman, just trying to survive high school. I showed my mom the flyer, and she encouraged me to apply, telling me not to let an opportunity pass me by."

Castro Ruiz was the only one in her friend group who applied to PACE. Many of her friends were more focused on skipping class than succeeding in school. "Everyone around me wasn't taking school seriously," she explains, "and I slowly started falling into that same mindset. I was skipping classes, not doing my homework, lying to my mom, and getting bad grades."

However, Castro Ruiz's advisor believed in her potential and sensed something was wrong. Castro Ruiz's father had passed away from cancer just a few months before the start of her freshman year, and she was struggling.

"Losing him at such a young age broke me," she shares. "I was a teenage girl trying to process that loss while surrounded by bad influences. I definitely wasn't set up for success, but my advisor kept having those tough conversations with me and encouraging me to keep going."

Gradually, Castro Ruiz's grades improved, and she made new friends; things

were looking up. Then COVID hit.

"Like many students, I lost a lot of motivation," she says. "Everything felt uncertain again, and I started slipping back into old habits. But I remembered all the conversations with my advisor about my potential and my future, and that made me lock in. It was time for me to shoot for the stars."

In the summer of 2021, Castro Ruiz officially began her journey at SLCC. "I found a sense of belonging right away," she says. "I met new people, built meaningful friendships, and even got an on-campus job that helped me stay grounded and involved. My PACE advisors continued to check in, and it always felt like there was a team behind me, invested in my success."

With support from PACE, Castro Ruiz felt confident exploring her academic interests in fields as varied as nursing and business. She ultimately graduated with an associate's degree in education before transferring to the University of Utah, where she earned two bachelor's degrees in ethnic studies and gender studies.

"Someone believed in me before I believed in myself."

-Belen Castro Ruiz

Today, Castro Ruiz works at SLCC as an admissions advisor, guiding students through the admissions process and helping others discover pathways to success. She plans to earn a master's degree in education and expand her ability to make an even greater impact.

"Being part of PACE ended up being one of the best decisions I ever made," Castro Ruiz shares. "Someone believed in me before I believed in myself. And because of that, I want to give back and help others, too."

"ALWAYS REMEMBER TO GIVE BACK"

A community of mutual support begets generations of mutual success.

PACE demonstrates what's possible when higher education, private organizations, and public partners come together to expand opportunities. From 2011 to today, those partners have demonstrated extraordinary confidence in our students with a collective investment exceeding $8 million.

Among PACE's most committed supporters are longtime donors Marc and Debbie Bingham, whose philanthropy is rooted in the belief that education transforms lives for generations. From humble beginnings to a mission driven by unwavering hope for the future, the Binghams believe that when people are given a chance, they don't just improve their own lives; they lift everyone around them. They exercise that belief through the Marc C. & Deborah H. Bingham Foundation, actively supporting programs like PACE.

During his early years in Roosevelt and Vernal, Marc didn't always find school easy, but athletics shaped his identity and discipline. "Being an athlete made me a better person," he recalls. "It kept me out of trouble!"

His love of the outdoors led him into wildlife management, working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, as a Conservation Officer, and then with the US Bureau of Land Management. Eventually, Marc transitioned from public service to entrepreneurship, building a successful company for 37 years before selling it in 2007. Now, philanthropy is his primary mission.

"You come into this world with nothing, and you leave with nothing," Marc says simply. "We're not taking anything with us to the afterlife. We're giving it all away to what has mattered most to us."

Debbie grew up in a very different, more open Kearns, where she'd ride horses in areas now paved and developed. She graduated from Kearns High School, which is now a PACE school.

In high school, she participated in many activities, including the ski club, where she spent a lot of time on the slopes. After graduating, her focus changed to organizational management during 30 years in banking, first at First Security Bank and then at Wells Fargo.

"I was good with planning and numbers, so banking came naturally to me," she says with a smile. "And I love spreadsheets." Those skills would later become essential to shaping the foundation's long-term impact.

Using some of the proceeds from the sale of Marc's company, the Binghams founded the Marc C. & Deborah H. Bingham Foundation, which supports education, wildlife conservation, and medical research. They also started the Bingham Family Clinic,



"We're rewarded when we see our community stronger because someone was lifted up."

-Marc and Debbie Bingham, PACE supporters



PACE BY THE NUMBERS

6

PACE is offered at six public high schools within the Salt Lake City and Granite School districts.

92%

92% of PACE students are first-generation college students from predominantly low-income families.

2,000

PACE has helped over 2,000 students since 2011.

23%

PACE high school students are 23% more likely to graduate high school than non-PACE high school students.

80%

More than 80% of PACE high school graduates enroll in higher education, with 74% accepting the PACE scholarship to attend SLCC.

a cornerstone of their philanthropy that provides medical and dental care while serving as a training site for students from Brigham Young University and Utah Valley University.

Marc and Debbie's philosophy around higher education led to their partnership with SLCC. When the college approached them with a grant request for the PACE program, the focus on first-generation college students immediately resonated.

"When we learned that PACE is focused on first-generation students, that really aligned with how we felt about giving back," Debbie says. "If you can change the direction for one student, you can change the direction for their entire family."

The Binghams have seen this transformation firsthand with their own employees. "The pride you see in parents watching their children go to college changes the dynamic of the whole family," says Debbie.

For Marc, the impact extends even further. "I reflect on my life and remember several times when someone helped me. My life could have taken a different path. But one changed life can influence a thousand."

Despite their considerable reach, the Binghams remain intentionally private. "We don't need a pat on the back," Debbie says. "We're rewarded when we see our community stronger because someone was lifted up."

"We view philanthropy much like parenting," Marc continues. "When you watch your child succeed, you know you had a hand in giving them the opportunity. That's what makes it meaningful."

Their message to students is grounded in resilience and perspective. "Don't give up," Debbie advises. "The hardest things often become the most rewarding." Marc echoes that advice: "Find a mentor. Read books. No one succeeds alone. And always remember to give back."





GIVING DAY

YOUR COMMUNITY, YOUR COLLEGE

Thanks to the incredible generosity of our Bruin Community, we came together on February 19 to support SLCC students in a remarkable way. Not only did we surpass our 1,000-donor goal, we reached **1,381 donors!** Together, we raised **$405,346** to directly benefit SLCC students through scholarships and program support that helps remove barriers such as food insecurity, limited child care, and financial hardships.

We are also deeply grateful to SLCC's community partners, whose challenge gifts totaling more than **$260,000** enhanced the impact of Giving Day and supported even more students as they work to achieve their educational goals.

Thank you for making a difference. We look forward to celebrating with you again next year!

$405,346
TOTAL RAISED

1,381
TOTAL DONORS

$260,000
CHALLENGE GIFTS UNLOCKED



THERE'S STILL TIME TO GIVE!

Scan this QR code to become a SLCC supporter.

experiential

ABOUT PACE

The Partnership for Accessing College Education (PACE) Scholarship Program equips low-income and first-generation students with study and time management skills while providing career guidance, general mentorship, and scholarships. Since 2011, the program has expanded from one high school to six. It's not done growing. Through ongoing community investment and donor contributions, SLCC is committed to expanding PACE to serve even more students across Salt Lake County, building a brighter future for all.

"Community colleges help students make a good living and live a good life."



ALONSO R. REYNA RIVAROLA

Director, the Partnership for Accessing College Education (PACE) Scholarship Program

DEGREES

- PhD, Higher Education Leadership, Florida Atlantic University, In Progress
- MEd, Educational Leadership & Policy, University of Utah, 2016
- BS, Sociology (Honors), University of Utah, 2013

CONTINUING EDUCATION

- Young American Leaders Program, Harvard Business School, 2017

YEARS AT SLCC

My journey at SLCC began in 2016 as a PACE Scholarship Program advisor. Soon after, I left to help open the first Undocumented Student Resource Center in the state. My work with youth in a participatory action research collective on Salt Lake City's west side — along with the years I had spent studying, writing, and thinking about the educational trajectories of undocumented immigrant students — made the move to the Dream Center a natural fit.

In 2020, I returned to SLCC as an assistant director and have since held a range of roles, including middle school program director and adjunct faculty in Social & Behavioral Sciences.

Before I left PACE, my supervisor told me, "One day you are going to run PACE." That prediction stayed with me and ultimately proved true. In 2023, I came back to PACE as its director, and I could not be happier in my role.

CURRENT ROLE & CLASSES TAUGHT

As the PACE Scholarship Program director, I have the unique opportunity to set the pace (pun intended) of our program. From cultivating relationships with our PACE champions (donors) to shaping its structure and curriculum to setting our program goals and outcomes, I feel fortunate to be part of an asset-based program that is invested in seeing first-generation and low-income students thrive.

I have teaching experience across four institutions: SLCC, the University of Utah, Utah Valley University, and Florida Atlantic University. At SLCC, I have taught US-Latin American Experiences and Introduction to Ethnic Studies. Spending time in the classroom informs and strengthens my administrative practice as an educator.

CONNECTING SLCC TO THE COMMUNITY

My commitment to our community is why I am at SLCC. I spent several years at a Research 1 university and valued that experience, but just before transitioning back, I had a moment that changed how I understand community colleges.

While guest lecturing for Dr. Karen Kwan at SLCC's Jordan Campus, I witnessed a student become unresponsive. I followed emergency protocols to ensure the student received appropriate care, but what stayed with me was how quickly their peers stepped in, positioning the student, checking vitals, and acting with an immediate, collective level of care and confidence.

That moment clarified what community colleges do. It's applied learning, but it is also care, responsibility, and connection to our community in very real and meaningful ways.

GREATEST PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGE

Balancing institutional priorities with my core values as an educator. Higher education is increasingly asked to respond to workforce demands and measurable outcomes, which are important and necessary. At the same time, I believe deeply that education should also focus on developing whole individuals — people who can think critically, build meaningful relationships, and contribute to their communities in thoughtful ways.

The challenge for me is not choosing one over the other but finding ways to responsibly advance both. I align program goals with institutional expectations while also creating space for students to grow beyond purely transactional outcomes. This means designing programs, supporting students, and defining success in a way that prepares individuals not only for careers, but also for long-term engagement in their communities and lives.

GREATEST PROFESSIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENT

The relationships I have built with students. I entered this profession because I genuinely love working with students and seeing them grow as thinkers, professionals, and, more importantly, as people. There is nothing more meaningful to me than witnessing them find direction, confidence, and a sense of purpose.

Some of the moments I value most come years later. Former students reach out to reconnect, ask for guidance on graduate school, or simply share how they are doing. I have been invited to significant moments in their lives, from weddings to baby showers to funerals, which speaks to the depth of trust and connection that can grow through this work. To me, that is what education and community are all about.

THE BIGGEST LESSON YOU'VE LEARNED

To express care, gratitude, appreciation, and love — and to do it often. My mentor unexpectedly passed away in 2012, and one of my greatest regrets is not telling him more often how grateful I am for him and everything he taught me. Since then, I have tried to be more intentional about expressing these things with sincerity and conviction, because I believe everyone deserves to feel cared for, appreciated, and loved.

ADVICE FOR STUDENTS & PROFESSIONALS

I encourage students and professionals alike to think beyond their own concerns and focus on the impact they want to make in our community and on the environment. Each of us has a part to play in shaping our shared future, and it's important to remain committed to that duty.

WHAT STUDENT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

In 2026, student success lies in the balance between making a life and making a living. That means individuals who can ask thoughtful questions, engage in meaningful conversations, and remain attentive to community needs and the world around them. To describe this vision, I draw from Terry O'Banion's metaphor of bread and roses, which stipulates that community colleges help students make a good living and live a good life.

This includes developing skills that prepare them for meaningful careers that contribute to the well-being of our communities (the bread) while also engaging with art, literature, theater, and music and reflecting on deeper questions about humanity and the meaning of life (the roses).



"DON'T BE A DUCK. BE A BRUIN."

Three lessons that PACE hopes every student internalizes.

The PACE Scholarship Program is focused on the future of our students and our community. In recent years, we have worked intentionally to deliver on this promise by centering a few key lessons.

First, we remind students: "Don't be a duck. Be a Bruin." Inspired by an idea commonly attributed to Stanford University, this message challenges students to resist the pressure to appear as though everything is under control while struggling beneath the surface. Instead, we encourage them to ask questions, seek support, and care for themselves as they learn. A duck stays silent; a Bruin reaches out.

Second, we emphasize that "The world needs you." This idea shifts the focus from "What do you want to be?" to "What problem do you want to solve, and what do you need to learn to solve it?" It invites students to see themselves as contributors with a responsibility to their communities, shaping classrooms into sites where students learn to solve the issues they care most about.

Finally, we are beginning to introduce the idea of "Grow where you are planted," encouraging students to adapt, find purpose, and create meaningful impact wherever they find themselves.

magnified

COMMUNITY IMPACT, ONE STORY AT A TIME

The "Six Stories, One Future" mural project is an opportunity to zoom in on just a few of the 2,000+ students and advisors who make up PACE's 15-year history.

Over the past 15 years, the PACE Scholarship Program has supported more than 2,000 students from six high schools across the region. Despite that scope of impact, the program's focus remains extremely narrow — at least according to Nnenna Eke-Ukoh, who advises PACE students from Granger High School. To her, PACE is 100% focused on magnifying each individual student's voice and impact.

"In many educational settings," she explains, "students' voices can be limited or overlooked. PACE changes that by empowering students to share their perspectives and show up as their most authentic selves." Eke-Ukoh traces that idea's lineage to pedagogical theorists like Paulo Freire, who advocates for a collaborative, interactive dialog between instructors and students rather than a lecturer monologuing to a passive student body.

True to that collaborative pedagogical model, PACE Director Alonso R. Reyna Rivarola frames the program as an act of inquiry: "How do we support first-generation and low-income students in developing the skills to complete high school and access college in ways that benefit not only themselves and their families, but also the broader community?"

That same question informed the year-long process of the "Six Stories, One Future" project, a 15th anniversary celebration comprising a large mural and a selection of artifacts produced by — and representing the experiences of — current PACE students. The project was led by Pablo Cruz-Ayala, an SLCC alumnus whose own experience mirrors that of the PACE students he worked with.

"I came here from Mexico when I was one year old," he says, recounting the support, love, and acceptance he experienced growing up in Salt Lake as an immigrant and a first-gen student. "I saw that same love and caring for the students in this program, and so many of their thoughts, ideas, and hopes are captured here."

The mural features symbols of growth and empowerment, including butterflies metamorphosizing and a piñata motif with six radiating points connecting to each of the high schools in the PACE program. The design is inspired by the Mesoamerican thunderpot, which represents renewal and celebration, and the central sun medallion represents each student's experience, centering the individual at the heart of PACE's mission.

While Cruz-Ayala led the project, the creative impulse came from the students themselves. Eke-Ukoh highlights that aspect of the project, connecting it to PACE's student-centered ethos. "The mural reflects this philosophy by showcasing students' voices, stories, and experiences through art," she concludes. "It serves as a visual representation of the values that guide our work."



ZAHRA VARDAK

Student, Granger High School

"PACE is such a special and inspiring program that helps all students achieve their dreams. It's taught me so much about how to balance my life and achieve my dreams as a first-year college student, and also how to be a leader, how to be somebody that someone looks up to. I have been so incredibly honored to be part of such an amazing group of people. They've helped me grow and helped me achieve what I had only ever dreamed of before."



CAMILA SOLIS

Student, Kearns High School

"The PACE program has a positive impact on my community by bringing my peers together, embracing our creativity, and helping us learn new skills. I feel a sense of belonging when I step into the PACE room. I know that when I walk in, I'm welcomed with open arms. This program has helped me and many others prepare for college academically and financially. I'm a first-gen student. While college may seem overwhelming, I'm confident my advisors can help me get through it."

SLCC graduate Pablo Cruz-Ayala with the “Six Stories, One Future” mural



MISAEL VARGAS

Student, Granger High School

“The advisors and the other students aren’t just friends. They’re like family to us, they’re family to me. It was important to put my hand on this and support this artwork because they’re always there to help us with anything.”



IVANNA ZAMORA

Estudiante,
Cottonwood High School

“He estado en el programa de PACE durante dos años, y esta experiencia ha marcado un antes y después en mi vida. Me ha proporcionado la confianza necesaria para realizar cosas que nunca pensé que serían posibles. Lo más destacado es que no solo he crecido en lo académico, sino que también me ha ofrecido la oportunidad de forjar amistades que traen mucha alegría y momentos inolvidables.”



NNENNA EKE-UKOH

PACE Advisor,
Granger High School

“As advisors and program associates, we learn from our students just as much as they learn from us. We emphasize that students can be both learners and teachers, contributing their knowledge, experiences, and insights to the community. This reciprocal approach helps make PACE spaces across our six schools transformative and safe environments for students.”

BEYOND THE SKATES, BEYOND THE SKIS, BEYOND THE CLIMBS, BEYOND THE PODIUM

With tuition waivers, career counselling, and globally flexible education options, Beyond the Podium helps Olympic athletes plan a life that begins where the podium chase ends.

By Rob Ware



EVERY OLYMPIC EVENT IS A TEAM SPORT.

"It's not just about the individual," explains Will Gebauer, who recently retired as a US Speedskating athlete. "It's also about supporting the individuals around you."

The team element is more obvious in some events, like speedskating's team pursuit, but it's also true for events where athletes appear to be competing alone, like the mass start, which awards individuals.

At the Milan Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics, US speed skater Greta Myers spent the race covering attacks from other skaters and then bullied her way through the group to set up Mia Manganello for the final sprint. Manganello slotted into the gap Myers created, using her finishing speed to follow the winning acceleration and gap the field, winning a bronze medal.



Greta Myers
Noel Stave for US Speedskating

Though Manganello was alone on the podium step, Myers was critical during the race, and the support behind her success goes back much further. It includes years of preparation, training, and development sustained by countless coaches and consultants and buoyed by the competitive drive of fellow athletes.

That's the paradox of individual achievement in Olympic sports: It really does take a village. With the new Beyond the Podium program, SLCC has officially joined the supporting village for US athletes like Gebauer, Manganello, and Myers.

A PLATFORM FOR PODIUMS AND A PATH BEYOND

Beyond the Podium has roots in 2018, when SLCC first partnered with US Speedskating. When the program was officially founded in late-2025, the list of programs expanded to include U.S. Ski & Snowboard and USA Climbing.

In total, there have been 27 Bruin Olympians and Paralympians. That includes 15 at Milan Cortina 2026, the largest single cohort of Olympic Bruins to date. Altogether, the group earned seven medals and three top-10 finishes.

Beyond the Podium directly supports that success with flexible online learning schedules, specialized academic guidance, and tuition assistance. The college also helps these elite student-athletes with access to training facilities and training guidance from exercise science faculty. The partnerships also give SLCC students the opportunity to work with these elite athletes, providing inimitable hands-on learning experiences for exercise science majors.

All of this support is obviously valuable for competition, but Beyond the Podium's biggest impact on athletes' lives comes after their professional athletic careers, when access to education turns into access to new opportunities.

FROM AN IDENTITY CRISIS TO A GIFT OF GROWTH

Beyond the Podium was born when two Utah philanthropists, Helen and Jeff Cardon, proposed an answer to the questions athletes confront at retirement, which freestyle skier Hunter Hess frames nicely:

"Who am I? What do I do now?" He asks. "It's a big fear for most athletes."



Ethan Cepuran, Casey Dawson, and Emery Lehman
Noel Stave for US Speedskating

Though they've never been Olympians themselves, the Cardons understand and saw an opportunity to help.

"For many of these athletes, their identity is deeply tied to decades of training and performing, making the transition to new pursuits especially challenging — particularly from a mental-health perspective," says Helen.

According to the athletes, she's right.

Competition at this level is necessarily all-consuming, and that myopic focus precludes planning outside its limited scope. For speed skater Will Gebauer, that means retiring from competition was like dropping off the edge of a world that had always been continuously and unquestionably there. Until it simply wasn't.

"Retiring was incredibly weird and it was incredibly frustrating," he says. "I was on the national team and skating at World Cups and feeling like I belonged to something — and that's now taken away. It took me a long time to come to terms with my athletic retirement."

Having just joined Gebauer in retirement, Mia Manganello agrees. "Doing this for 20-plus years and seeing the end coming was a bit of an identity crisis," she confirms. Support from Beyond the Podium can help change that dynamic, though. For Manganello, retirement is no longer just a crisis; it's also possibility. "It turned into a huge gift," she says, "a chance to grow as an individual and give myself a chance at what is next."

A year into his own retirement, Gebauer confirms the program's benefits. "Education through Beyond the Podium can really broaden your perspective, you know, challenge your ideas, make you grow as a thinker and as a human," he says, explaining that life as an elite athlete was like living in a tiny, insular bubble, seeing the world through a pinhole. "It was all about speed skating, and now, as I continue to learn and grow, it's... you know, that pinhole's becoming larger and larger and larger."





Konnor Ralph
Isami Kiyooka for U.S. Ski & Snowboard

"I WAS QUITE LITERALLY LOST"

That opportunity for gradual, guided growth and adjustment to retirement hasn't always been afforded to athletes like Gebauer. Chris Needham, a former speed skater who now serves as the director for Beyond the Podium, understands that reality firsthand.

"When I finished speedskating, I was $40,000 in credit card debt," says Needham, who paid almost all expenses himself. There was some help from the national federation, and there were some sponsorship dollars, but it was never enough. "What was coming in was not what was going out," he laughs.

Staying globally competitive also meant that he wasn't even thinking about an education, because everything from planning to financing an education was entirely up to him, and he didn't have the bandwidth.

"Like today's athletes, I was so invested in what was happening in the present that there was nothing left for figuring out what would happen after," he explains. During competition, there is no future — only the next training block, the next race, the Herculean demands of an Olympian present. The classes he did take were a "hodgepodge" of random subjects from different community colleges and universities around the country.

"It wasn't really leading in any one direction. When I retired, there was nothing there. I had a resume that qualified me for virtually nothing, I had a mountain of debt, I had no health insurance, and I had no education," he continues. "I was quite literally lost."

With Beyond the Podium, his work today gives elite athletes a different way forward, one that his generation didn't have.

"It turned into a huge gift, a chance to grow as an individual and give myself a chance at what is next."

-Mia Manganello

There's no additional debt, no hodgepodge of unproductive credit hours, and no need to feel lost — Beyond the Podium lets these athletes succeed in competition without sacrificing their futures.

"KNOWING HOW MUCH TIME YOU HAVE IN THE AIR"

In addition to being all-consuming, the careers of elite athletes are also brief and electric. Those descriptors are equally apt for the big-air artistry of skiers like Hess and Konnor Ralph.

While airborne, they rely on something that Ralph refers to as "air awareness," a sense of creating rotation and staying oriented even when you can't visually confirm up from down, and "knowing how much time you have in the air."

Ralph credits air awareness for his ability to land such spectacular tricks. It's also what gives him the confidence to push the boundaries, like he did in the Winter Olympics, where he surprised the commentators, the crowd, and even himself with an extra rotation, sending a 2160 (six 360-degree rotations) to earn fifth place.

Ralph discusses his approach to education through Beyond the Podium the same way. He frames the program as an academic version of air awareness, an orienting influence that lets him gradually expand his studies. Through the program, he's working toward an educational goal with full confidence that he'll stick the figurative landing.

Greta Myers, who has won World Cup races, holds the US record in the 3,000 meters, and was instrumental in helping Manganello secure bronze, uses similar language.

"With its online options, SLCC has made it a lot more convenient for me to balance skating and school," she says. "So I've been chipping away at my generals, working toward a degree — and doing it in an affordable manner."

With the perspective of a recent retiree, Gebauer sees value in the low-cost, accessible, bit-by-bit approach that student-athletes can access through Beyond the Podium. "If your plan is for your degree," he says, "being able to chip away and not worry about, 'Hey, I have to pay $1,000 for school on top of, you know, all my training expenses' — that goes a long way for athletes."

FROM SUPPORT TO SUCCESS TO SERVICE

Beyond the Podium formalizes what many athletes see as a clear line of progression from success in competition to success later in life. That includes Casey Dawson, one of the three silver medalists in the speed skating team pursuit.

"I think being an athlete teaches you a lot of things about what you can do outside of sport," Dawson says. "You grow that discipline through sport, and it carries over into being a student," and then into a new profession beyond the podium and the classroom.

Though their journeys and endpoints will vary, there is a common throughline in the post-competition dreams of Beyond the Podium student-athletes. They're each distinctly aware of the support they've received to get where they are. Many are also interested in helping others realize their own dreams.

For Konnor Ralph, who currently engineers big-air fireworks, the drive is to someday engineer ski parks, halfpipes, and other freestyle terrain features. That infrastructure inspired him and helped him launch his own career. He sees an opportunity — and no small obligation — to ensure future generations have the same chance.

For Gebauer, giving back began immediately after retirement, when he became an athletes' advocate for the Athletes Commission of the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee, but it has roots much earlier in his life, when he volunteered at a VA hospital.

"Meeting the veterans, learning their stories, who they were — that was very enlightening to experience at an early age," he says. "It led to a core belief, a mentality of acting in service of others." He finds that mentality fulfilling in a way that his athletic career wasn't, and he's fully embraced it after a wave of injuries shortened his own racing career.

"You grow that discipline through sport, and it carries over into being a student."

-Casey Dawson

Now, Gebauer is studying material science engineering, first at SLCC and then at the University of Utah to complete his four-year degree. When asked if his engineering ambition is to build a better speed skate, he laughs. Instead, he describes the career of a different athlete, Paralympian Mike Schultz, a lower-limb amputee who built his own prosthetic to compete in snowboarding. Schultz has since won four Paralympic medals, and the company he founded supplies prosthetics tuned for athletes like himself.

That story appeals to Gebauer's mentality of service. He plans to follow suit, engineering prosthetics that help other aspiring athletes follow their dreams, establishing himself as an ongoing part of the mutual support infrastructure behind every elite athlete.

"In that way," he says, "Beyond the Podium kinda has parallel beliefs to my own." To emphasize the point, he reiterates: "Yeah, it's true. It's not about the individual. It's about supporting the individuals around you."

With this new program, SLCC ensures that support goes through — and beyond — an athlete's competitive career, giving elite student-athletes a chance to create opportunities for themselves that go far Beyond the Podium.



BEFORE THE PODIUM

Beyond the Podium helps athletes succeed after competition, but the program also supports athletes while they're still chasing medals.

By Rob Ware

Imagine you're one of the world's most promising young speed skaters making your Olympic debut at the Beijing Winter Games. The legs feel good, you've nailed your target peak, and all signs are pointing to a podium. There's just one problem: your feet and ankles are suddenly so swollen that you can't even lace up your skates.

The 2022 US Speedskating cohort don't have to imagine. They experienced it. Fortunately for them (and for the US's 2022 gold medal count), they had Associate Professor Jen Day as team nutritionist. She realized that the difference in sodium levels between food in China and food in the US was causing the swelling, so she rounded up some NaCl (simple table salt) and added it to the athletes' food. The swelling vanished, and Bruin superstar Erin Jackson went on to win gold in the 500.

That's one of the countless anecdotes that Day has from her role as US Speedskating's nutrition expert, which involves analyzing body composition and optimizing diet for each athlete. In addition to traveling for events like Beijing 2022 and Milan Cortina 2026, she also controls the pre- and post-workout nutrition at training sites like the nearby Kearns Oval.

If Day is responsible for fueling US Speedskating's competitive engines, then her colleague, Associate Professor Carie Needham, runs the tune-up shop. US Speedskating does annual high-performance testing and biometric analysis with SLCC's Exercise Science department and lab facilities on the Taylorsville Campus. The testing is led by Needham and often supported by her students, and the results shape each athlete's bespoke training regimen, charting progress and mapping a path to the podium.

While Beyond the Podium's focus may be each athletes' post-competition success, the work of Day, Needham, and the Exercise Science students in their classes has an undeniable — and undeniably golden — impact on their athletic careers.











Noel Stave for US Speedskating

BEYOND THE PODIUM
PROVES ITS MEDALS

Taking stock of the Bruin Olympians from Milan Cortina 2026

TEAM PURSUIT | SILVER

Ethan Cepuran, Casey Dawson, and Emery Lehman secured a silver medal in the speedskating team pursuit, proving that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts by earning a podium place together.





MASS START | BRONZE

Mia Manganello's steadfast focus and consistency paid off with a bronze medal in the unpredictable speedskating mass start. Teammate (and fellow Beyond the Podium student-athlete) Greta Meyers helped Manganello get position to launch a counter move in the final 500 meters, establishing a gap with the field that led to a podium spot.

1,500 METERS | BRONZE

Corinne Stoddard displayed resilience, rising above extreme misfortune early in the games to earn a bronze medal in the short track 1,500 meters by controlling the race from the lead position into the final laps.



US Speedskating photos by Noel Stave
U.S. Ski and Snowboard photos by Isami Kiyooka

round up

OTHER RESULTS & HONORS



HUNTER HESS

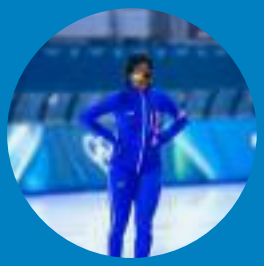
Freestyle Skiing
Halfpipe | 7th



KONNOR RALPH

Freestyle Skiing Big Air | 5th

Freestyle Skiing
Slopestyle | 9th



ERIN JACKSON

Opening Ceremony
Flagbearer

SLCC helps build the local economy by providing students access to the skills and expertise they need to establish careers and increase economic mobility.

A COMMUNITY OF CAREERS

Over the following pages, we explore just a few of the stories of the 50,000+ community members who attend SLCC every year. When those students succeed, the benefits extend far beyond campus, strengthening Utah's workforce, deepening its talent pool, and preparing more of its people to contribute to their local and statewide communities.







An industry-funded scholarship provides access for students to begin a tech-focused career after a 30-week program.

By Emily Howsley

THE **COOLER** SIDE **OF** TEMPERING **SPACES**

Aliya "Allie" Sloan grew up close to technology.

Working with computers always seemed like a natural choice for any future career, but she didn't see a clear career path until her senior year at Hunter High School, when a dedicated counselor introduced her to SLCC's Building Automation Systems (BAS) program. Around the same time, her father — who worked with facilities projects for the Federal Reserve Bank — suggested the same field. That double nudge changed everything.

"It was like divine intervention," Sloan says.

She chose SLCC's nine-month BAS program because it offered a fast, hands-on path into a growing industry, and she got there without the burden of long-term debt thanks to a scholarship sponsored by Johnson Controls, a national company specializing in self-regulating building interiors and operating three outposts in the greater Salt Lake City region.

The scholarship is funded through a four-year, $100,000 Johnson Controls Community College Partnership grant awarded in 2023. The multi-year grant helps cover tuition for 30 students in the program each year and is available to recent high school graduates, career changers, and those recently out of the military.

"For students who receive the Johnson scholarship, it means no costs for tuition or books," says BAS Program Coordinator, Paul Jones. "JCI also provides one-on-one mentorship opportunities with working professionals at Johnson for students that ask for it."

The grant includes funding for equipment and curriculum development, including new courses that focus on fire suppression, security, and water conservation. SLCC is maximizing the opportunities afforded by those funds.

"We're developing a fifth BAS course that will teach our Building Automation techs how to save water in buildings operations," said Jones. "Saving water is top of mind here in Utah and across the West."

Johnson Controls' involvement isn't simply about creating pathways for young professionals or improving a community's quality of life. It's also a direct investment in JCI's workforce, ensuring that the company has access to trained, qualified technicians capable of using data-driven solutions and new technologies to reimagine how autonomous systems maintain indoor spaces.

"The coolest part is that you get paid to learn"

As an estimated 10,000 skilled trade professionals retire nationwide each year, demand for trained BAS technicians is growing locally and across the country. The industry offers competitive pay and attractive benefits — particularly for a training program that can be completed in just 30 weeks. According to Jones, it's also fulfilling. "The work itself is an interesting mix of both brainwork and handiwork," he says.

Sloan agrees, calling the program challenging, eye-opening, and deeply rewarding. In the program, she got that mix of brainwork and handiwork by learning how to program real controllers, build logic for HVAC equipment, and understand how air handling, valves, and condensers work. She toured hospital mechanical rooms and saw industrial boilers up close, experiences that brought the "hidden world" of building systems into focus.

"People don't realize how important hidden world of HVAC and building systems really are," she says. "If a room isn't tempered right, people can't focus. Being part of what keeps a building running — it's so cool."

The experiences from the program also gave her foundational expertise to fast-track a career, and she was hired by Johnson Controls after graduation.

Entering a technical trade as a young woman, Sloan expected barriers. Instead, she found a supportive team that values her skills and gives her room to grow. Today, she commissions new BAS installations, verifies system performance, troubleshoots issues, and collaborates with senior technicians and engineers. The variety keeps her engaged.

"The coolest part is that you get paid to learn," she says. "Some days I'm at a desk, and other days I'm on a job site with beautiful views — still learning, still growing."

Sloan plans to continue learning, advancing, and growing in the BAS field. With Johnson Controls, she sees long-term opportunities ranging from higher-level technician roles to specialized positions across the country.

She also hopes more young people, especially women, realize the opportunities available in BAS tech.

"This industry needs people," she says. "If you're younger and into tech, you'll probably find this is for you."

A community partnership prepares adults on the autism spectrum for fulfilling careers in machining and materials manufacturing.

By Peta Owens-Liston

FINDING THEIR **FIT**

Surrounded by the whirring, buzzing, and clanking of machinery, Addie Morley is in her element. At Complex Fabricators, she moves confidently from task to task, shifting from a polishing tumbler to a CNC machine to a brake press where she bends parts with practiced precision.

"I think of this as a career, not as a job," says 24-year-old Morley, who is on the autism spectrum and whose previous roles included working at a pet daycare and disinfecting medical equipment. "I tried college, but it didn't work out; I wasn't sure what I was going to do."

Her trajectory changed when she discovered a new SLCC program designed for individuals on the autism spectrum — the Utah Uniquely Abled Machinist Program (UUAMP). This program — the first of its kind in Utah — is modeled after the nationwide Uniquely Abled Project and is designed to open doors to stable, meaningful careers for individuals on the autism spectrum. Morely graduated from its first cohort at SLCC last fall.



A MODEL DESIGNED FOR SUCCESS

Funded by a Return-to-Work grant from Talent Ready Utah, UUAMP equips individuals with the technical skills and confidence to pursue careers in manufacturing. The program is a partnership between SLCC, the Columbus Community Center, the Uniquely Abled Project, and the Utah Manufacturers Association.

UUAMP combines 180 hours of machining instruction with career coaching, workplace preparation, and meetings with local, ready-to-hire manufacturers. The national model boasts an 85% job placement rate. That's reflected in local results; of eight students in the first SLCC cohort, seven have already begun careers.

SLCC worked closely with local manufacturers to align the curriculum with in-demand roles, including CNC machine operators, machinist apprentices, and mill/lathe technicians. Students attend class at the Westpointe Campus, a hub for SLCC Tech programs. Lectures, activities, and discussions take place in a computer lab adjacent to a large machining bay filled with CNC and manual machines.

Salt Lake Tech faculty member and UUAMP instructor Doug Richter teaches the 12 week course. "It might sound cliché," he says, "but the biggest surprise was how much I enjoyed it and how rewarding it was. These students were super fun to interact with, and I'm optimistic about their futures."

Interaction is key to the program, and the classroom environment encourages collaboration. Students help one another as they move among machines, and Richter stays close, guiding, demonstrating, and offering individualized instruction.

When they finish, the students are prepared for well paying positions with benefits at established companies. "We're giving these individuals the chance to build careers, not just jobs," says Amy Wadsworth, program director for the Columbus Community Center's NextWork Academy for Autistic Adults. Providing those opportunities is especially important for the program participants, because unemployment and underemployment remain disproportionately high for people on the spectrum.

"Their potential is not being tapped into or utilized, and it is because of things we can absolutely work around," explains Wadsworth, illustrating the need with examples such as individuals with bachelor's degrees working as grocery baggers.

A SUPPORTIVE PATH TO LONG-TERM CAREERS

For students like Harrison Gill, who joined the spring cohort, the program has been transformative. "I've been looking for a job for a long, long time, and I really enjoy working with my hands and there are lots of different machines to work on here," he says. "I'm looking forward to a career in machining and — as my grandfather used to say — if you have a job you really enjoy, you don't have to work a day in your life."

Alyvia Hurtad, who graduated last December, confirms the program's promise of opportunity, even when starting with no prior experience. "I came in not knowing anything and ended up liking it a lot more than I expected," she says. "It's really hands on, and being able to be so precise is satisfying."

Hurtad's past work includes retail and a call center job. After graduating, she accepted a position with Complex Fabricators and now works alongside Morley. The change has been a success. "I like this type of work — it is consistent and predictable," she enthuses. "I'm absolutely excited about the career path ahead of me."

Back at Complex Fabricators, Morley finishes her day by putting tools away and sweeping her work area. Her enthusiasm for the role is palpable.

"I really love the people I work with — get this, when I walk in each morning, everybody, I mean every person, says 'Good Morning.' And remember, it is 7 am!" she says. "This is something I could see myself doing for a long time."



"We're giving these individuals the chance to build careers, not just jobs."





SLCC's Forensic Science program prepares students for in-demand careers with technical expertise, hands-on experience, and professional networking opportunities.

By Tonia Day

FROM CLASSROOM TO CSI

On a competition floor marked by latex gloves, evidence flags, and ticking clocks, three SLCC forensic science students move with deliberate calm. Each step — documenting a shoe impression, photographing trace evidence, preserving chain of custody — mirrors what they would do in a real investigation, preparing for a profession where accuracy matters and mistakes can't be undone.

For SLCC students Haylie Ramirez, Kylee Hermeling, and Kennedi Leon, learning forensic science often looks like this: hands-on, pressure-tested, and evaluated by professionals who already do the work. It's an approach designed to prepare students not just to graduate, but to step into a growing and increasingly specialized workforce — one Utah urgently needs.

MEETING UTAH'S NEEDS

The demand for trained forensic professionals continues to grow, yet the workforce responsible for collecting and analyzing that evidence remains relatively small and highly specialized. Educational pathways into the profession are also relatively narrow. Only a small number of institutions offer specialized forensic coursework, and access to nationally accredited bachelor programs is competitive. Community colleges play a critical role in filling that gap.

At SLCC, forensic science coursework is grounded in practical skills and designed as an affordable, accessible bridge to further education and professional opportunities. Students gain early exposure to crime scene processing, forensic photography, and evidence handling while building the academic foundation needed to transfer into bachelor's programs or pursue specialized training.

EDUCATION ROOTED IN REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE

SLCC forensic science students don't just learn procedures; they practice them under conditions meant to reflect professional expectations, creating real-life experience in the classroom and the lab. Mock crime scenes require detailed documentation, careful evidence preservation, and written justification of every decision made.

The emphasis on realism is driven by faculty leadership deeply connected to the forensic profession. Stephanie Hoffman, an associate professor of Criminal Justice and Forensics and the Forensics Lab Program Coordinator at SLCC, emphasizes that the program's rigor is intentional, designed to expose students early to the demanding realities, standards, and responsibilities of professional forensic work.

"Our goal is to bridge the gap between the classroom and crime scenes and labs," says Hoffman. "By providing students with access to the same technology used by professionals, we ensure they graduate with the confidence and competence to excel from day one of their careers."

"The classes are intense, but that's what prepares us," Ramirez confirms. "The work is detailed and demanding, and we're expected to perform at a professional level."

LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

For forensic science students, learning does not stop at the edge of the classroom. Competitions, conferences, and research projects are not treated as extras, but as extensions of the curriculum, places where theory is tested against professional expectations.

Forensic professional Lesley Hammer, who has spent more than 30 years working in state crime laboratories, private practice, and national professional organizations, says connections like these are no longer optional. As centralized federal training structures have faded, professional

associations now play a critical role in setting standards and advancing best practices. Early exposure, Hammer notes, helps future practitioners understand not only how evidence is processed, but why precision and consistency matter so deeply.

To maximize early exposure, SLCC students participate in conferences such as the International Association for Identification, where they present research, attend technical workshops, and interact directly with working practitioners from across the country. SLCC students also compete in annual SkillsUSA forensic science events, where their work is judged by practicing forensic professionals like Hammer. "The feedback really shows you what the field expects," Leon says.

This exposure also helps SLCC students recognize how their experience compares to peers elsewhere, giving them an advantage over those at other schools. "I have friends at four-year schools who haven't had the opportunities we've had here, like competing nationally or attending professional conferences," adds Ramirez.

"Going to a professional conference changed everything," she continues. "We weren't just observing, we were presenting, talking with professionals, and being taken seriously."

PREPARATION, STANDARDS, AND JUSTICE

As the forensic science field has evolved, expectations for education and training have grown sharper. Few understand that shift better than Hammer. Her career, spanning laboratory work, teaching, and national forensic leadership, underscores why rigor matters.

"The best way to achieve justice is for it to be based on facts, and the most reliable facts come from physical evidence that is collected, analyzed, and interpreted by people who are properly trained and working with clear professional standards," Hammer said.



"The work they are preparing for underpins the integrity of the justice system."

From the floor of the forensics competition, Hermeling echoes that sentiment. "What drew me to forensics is that it's evidence-based," she says. "You have to be unbiased, letting the evidence explain what happened."

That principle runs throughout SLCC's forensic science program. Students learn that forensic work is always consequential. Evidence that is missed, mishandled, or misunderstood cannot simply be recovered later, and the work they are preparing for underpins the integrity of the justice system.

AN INVESTMENT WITH IMPACT

For alumni and supporters, SLCC's forensic science program offers a clear example of how community colleges contribute to Utah's workforce and public good. Through accessible education, hands-on training, and strong professional connections, students are prepared to enter a field where accuracy matters and trust is earned.

"People sometimes underestimate what community college students can do," Ramirez says. "But because of donor support, we're competing nationally, doing research, and preparing for real careers."

In a justice system increasingly shaped by science, SLCC is helping ensure that the next generation of forensic professionals enters the field prepared — not just to do the work, but to do it right.



diagrammatic

VISUALIZING A COMMUNITY OF CAREERS





FROM LEARNING TO EARNING

SLCC connects aspiring professionals with employers, bolstering the local economy and empowering economic mobility in careers like the ones depicted here, with median salaries included.

For some of these careers, SLCC is a first step, and students will transfer to continue their educational journey. For others — like respiratory therapy, aviation maintenance, and telecommunications infrastructure — students can leave SLCC and immediately enter a stable, lucrative career.

In both cases, this is just a small sample of the meaningful, lasting impact SLCC has on students' lives, families, and communities.



THE LOOMING WAVE

"We are facing an AI tsunami," says SLCC President Greg Peterson. "We can either build a wall or learn to surf."

That wave is no longer theoretical. It is a lived reality, reflected in a regional labor market where entry-level roles are disappearing and expectations are accelerating. The change is felt acutely at SLCC, long a primary engine of workforce mobility for Utah's Silicon Slopes. For an institution grounded in access and opportunity, the stakes are immediate.

But for Peterson, the goal is not to outpace the machines. It's to anchor the college in what cannot be automated — the human element of thoughtful engagement.

THE VANISHING ENTRY-LEVEL ROLE

For students at SLCC's Gail Miller Business School, the impact of AI is most visible in what economists call the entry-level gap.

As generative tools automate routine tasks like code debugging, first drafts, and basic design work, the professional on-ramp is shifting. The early work that once helped students build skill is now often completed by machines.

Lon Schiffbauer, associate professor of business management, sees that shift clearly. "What academia calls cheating, business calls increased productivity," he says. His concern is not that students will use AI, but that they will enter the workforce without the ability to use it well.

For recent graduates like Hayden Dattage, that reality is already here.

"The bar for success isn't just higher; it's moving faster than we can run," Dattage says. The focus is shifting from producing content to supervising it — evaluating, correcting, and guiding machine output with human judgment.

James Jackson III, a personal finance instructor, embraces that shift. In his classroom, AI is treated as a baseline tool. He refers to it as the "new calculator." Rather than banning it, Jackson integrates it directly into coursework, using AI to accelerate production while reclaiming class time for traditional lecture time, discussion, and real-world analysis.

"The bar for success isn't just higher; it's moving faster than we can run,"

Students, he believes, must not compete with the machine. They must learn to supervise it, and that skill is imperative. "Ignoring it is an economic death sentence," he says.

THE WRESTLE FOR INTEGRITY

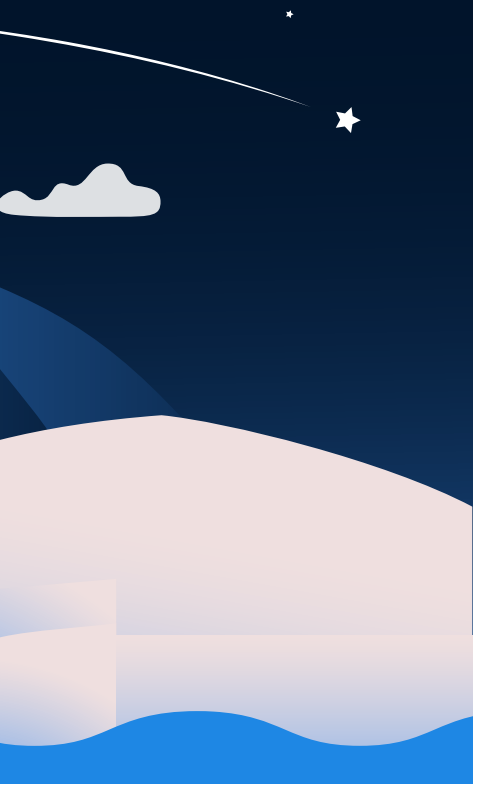
If the workforce demands adaptation, the classroom reveals a deeper tension in an emerging pattern: while institutions move toward efficiency, many students remain committed to learning itself. Jonathan Lou, a history and diplomacy student preparing to transfer to the University of Utah, sees that struggle as the point.

"You're not here as a monkey," he says. "Over-reliance on these tools leads to a kind of cognitive regression." For Lou, refusing AI is not resistance; it is preservation of the skills he entered higher education to develop.

Megan Bartholomew, a forensic science student, views AI through a lens of ethical tension, pointing to deepfakes and intellectual property concerns. Yet she also uses AI-powered transcription tools to support a learning disability during long lectures. Bartholomew's boundary is clear: AI can support access, but it cannot replace authorship, and it is problematic in use cases like deep fakes.

To support students navigating that boundary, SLCC is focusing on using AI to reinforce trust. Corey Stevens, associate director of Teaching and Learning Technology, emphasizes that his team prioritizes data security, FERPA compliance, and a human-in-the-loop approach.

More importantly, they frame that work around responsibility. The goal is not simply to detect misuse, but to ensure students remain accountable for what they create, reinforcing that the value of an SLCC education lies in the authenticity of student effort, not the polish of machine-generated output.



THE HUMAN ANCHOR: SURFING THE AI TSUNAMI



Students, faculty, and administrators across SLCC are implementing AI to supplement — not replace — learning, critical thinking, and the human touch.

By Tonia Day

For Stevens, conversations between administrators, teachers, and students are critical. "You have to have that human element. You really have to think through it and have those discussions," he advocates.

"You have to have that human element. You really have to think through it and have those discussions."

THE HUMAN DIFFERENTIATOR

If machines can generate information, what remains for the human? Across SLCC, a clear answer is forming: judgment. As technical tasks become easier to automate, the value of human judgment and relational understanding only increases.

The Faculty Teaching and Learning Center helps instructors examine how AI is shaping student work and encourages them to consider how it is used, whether that use supports meaningful learning, and how assignments prepare students for the world beyond graduation.

Kristin S. Morley, assistant director of the center, frames the work directly. "The skill of thinking critically about how to use, and not misuse, AI-generated information will set individuals apart as they enter the workforce," she says.

In this context, critical thinking is not diminished. It's expanded. Students are asked not only to produce answers, but to question outputs, verify assumptions, and apply human judgment to information that machines can generate instantly. The emphasis shifts away from AI output as a finished product and toward the organic processes of critical thinking, revision, and discovery, where understanding is demonstrated not just in what students produce, but in how they arrive there.

TESTING THE BOUNDARY: HEALTH SCIENCES

In Health Sciences, where decisions carry immediate human consequences, the stakes are even higher.

Matt Harris, associate dean in the Division of Health Professions, sees AI not as something institutions can prevent, but something they must learn to navigate deliberately. For him, the challenge is not resisting the technology but helping faculty and students engage it thoughtfully as it evolves.

In programs where outcomes affect patient care, that responsibility carries additional weight. Students are not only learning to perform tasks but to make decisions in real time that must balance data, context, and human need. Harris doesn't position AI as a replacement for care; rather, it's something students must learn to manage. Graduates, he argues, will need to oversee emerging tools while protecting the human connection that underpins effective practice.

That distinction shapes classroom experience. Stacey Romney, associate professor of physical therapy and 2026 Teaching Excellence Award winner, uses AI to simulate clinical scenarios and support decision-making exercises, but the student remains central.

"We will always have a human in the system," she says.

Across Health Sciences, training is shifting toward live evaluation: interviews, observed practice, and real-time decision-making where judgment, communication, and empathy cannot be automated.

Kadee Worley, an instructor in Exercise Science and Wellness, draws another boundary.

"The machine can process data, but it cannot replicate the physical, emotional, or spiritual connection required in somatic practice," she says.

For her, AI's value lies in reducing administrative strain so human connection remains central.

THE PRAGMATIC ACCELERATOR

While some resist AI's encroachment, others embrace it as a tool for clearing obstacles. For Goldi, a mechanical engineering student from France, AI serves as a linguistic and conceptual bridge.

"The tool doesn't do the math for me," he says. "It helps me understand what I'm being asked to do."

In this sense, AI becomes an equalizer. This concept of "co-intelligence" is being

cultivated through SLCC's AI Institute, led by Alia Criddle and Anjali Pai, where faculty and staff are encouraged to experiment in low-stakes environments to help the AI-curious learn how to incorporate it in their work.

As Pai puts it, the institute offers "permission to fail," a sandbox to test tools, refine workflows, and build confidence. Alongside her, Criddle focuses on helping faculty move from hesitation to fluency, reframing AI from something to avoid into something to explore.

For many employees, that shift begins with fear, but IT trainer Tami Anderson is there to meet staff where that anxiety lives. Her work centers on practical literacy. She's demystifying the technology and helping employees see AI not as an abstract threat but as a tool they can understand and control.

For Agustin Bautista Silva, a student success advocate, that translates directly into student impact. Bautista uses AI as a logistical assistant.

"The machine handles the paperwork," he says, "so I'm free to focus on students."

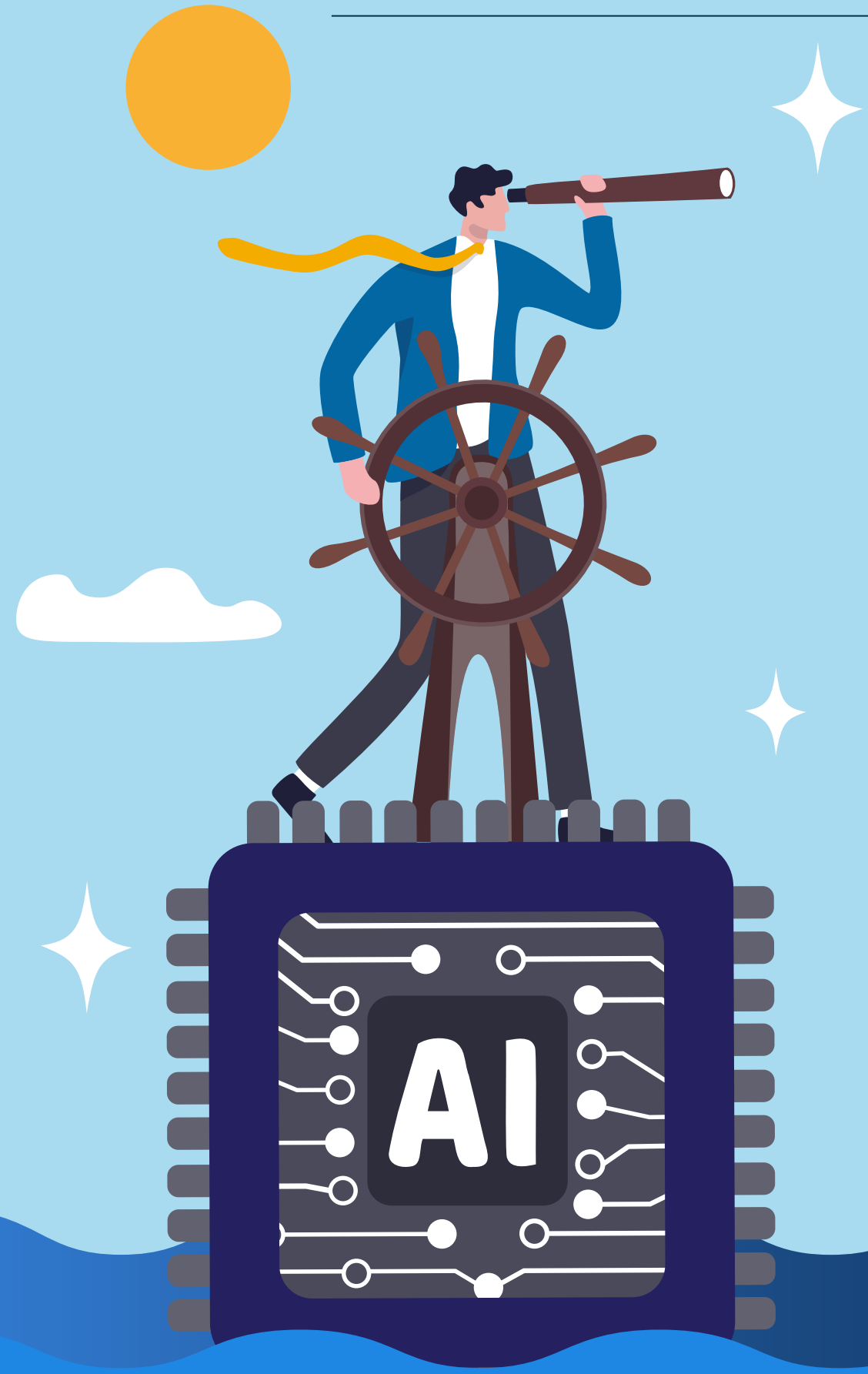
By absorbing repetitive tasks, AI allows people like Bautista Silva to invest more deeply in listening and mentoring — the human work that supports individual student journeys.

THE MEANING-MAKERS

Even as AI expands capacity, it sharpens a central question: what does it mean to learn? For Andrew Riley, a student and fierce intellectual purist, the answer is rooted in effort. "If you shortcut the manual, messy struggle," he says, "you aren't actually learning."

"The machine can process data, but it cannot replicate the physical, emotional, or spiritual connection required in somatic practice."





To Riley, that struggle isn't an obstacle, it's evidence that learning has taken place, and that tension between efficiency and effort is something higher education should preserve, not eliminate.

Sarah Reale, a professor who's also a member of the Utah State Board of Education, also sees that balance as essential and thinks that AI implementation can maintain it if it's implemented with thoughtful care to help level the learning process.

"We must ensure these tools improve access, rather than widening divides," she says.

In her view, education's role is not to compete with technology, but to ensure students emerge as interpreters, decision-makers, and creators of meaning.

RIDING THE WAVE

The AI tsunami is here, and it will continue to reshape the workforce and the classroom. But across SLCC, a consistent pattern is emerging: the goal is not to resist the wave or surrender to it; it is to ride it with intentional control. The machine may handle the data, but humans define the meaning.

This is where the anchor holds: not in resisting change, but in preserving the capacity to think, to question, and to connect. In that distinction, SLCC will not just survive the wave — it will teach others how to surf.

commencement







GRADUATION BY THE NUMBERS

4,157
TOTAL GRADUATES

4,765
AWARDS

1,421
HIGH HONORS
(Cumulative GPA 3.8 or higher)

1,118
HONORS
(Cumulative GPA 3.5 – 3.79)

625
SLCC TECH GRADUATES

34
PRISON EDUCATION PROGRAM GRADUATES



SPANNING DEMOGRAPHICS

2,424 FEMALE

1,682 MALE

1,027 HISPANIC

1,890 FIRST-GENERATION

176 VETERAN

SPANNING GEOGRAPHIES

46 COUNTRIES

39 STATES

20 UTAH COUNTIES

SPANNING GENERATIONS

16 AGE OF YOUNGEST GRADUATE

70 AGE OF OLDEST GRADUATE

CONGRATULATIONS CLASS OF

2026



PROVOST'S GRADUATES OF EXCELLENCE

A Provost's Graduate of Excellence award is a prestigious distinction that acknowledges students for their hard work, commitment, and talents. One student is chosen from each school within the College and General Studies. These students have excellent GPAs and typically receive scholarships and awards for their academic achievements. They also demonstrate leadership skills and a dedication to serving others in addition to achievements related to the creative arts, athletic excellence, or involvement in SLCC or beyond the classroom.



CAROLINA LOZANO-ASHTON

Schools of Arts, Communication and Media

This is my second time attending SLCC. I previously graduated with my associate's degree while still in high school. My path has not been linear, but each step has been intentional, guided by resilience, gratitude, and a deep respect for education. My academic journey began in a small town in my native Colombia, and then I moved to the United States to continue my studies. At SLCC, I've had the opportunity to become a student leader and mentor, and after graduating I plan to attend the University of Utah to study Mechanical Engineering and Mathematics, focusing on researching wearable robotics and prosthetic apparel.

MARIAH ESPINAL

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

My higher education journey began with a deep sense of ambition, but it was soon interrupted by a chronic illness. This illness took control of my life, leading to instability, hospitalizations, and a gradual erosion of the dreams I once believed were attainable. For years, I carried guilt and shame from my academic failures that were due to this illness. However, with a friend's encouragement, I decided to return to college. SLCC welcomed me with compassion, challenged me with rigorous academics, and equipped me with the tools I needed to succeed. In spring 2025, I participated in SLCC's first-ever trip to the United Nations, an opportunity that profoundly shaped my academic direction. I now carry with me a commitment to excellence, service, and dignity that will guide every step of my future. SLCC has given me more than just a second chance; it has taught me to believe in my future again.





JAMINE SMITH

General Studies

My experience at SLCC has been life changing. This institution has allowed me to prove to myself, semester after semester, that I am capable, intelligent, and not defined by my past. In high school, I struggled academically due to challenges with self-image, depression, and anxiety. Thanks to SLCC, I've gained confidence in myself and earned several honors, including three President's List awards. I am truly grateful for my professors' compassion, love of teaching, and belief in their students. I also want to express my gratitude to my grandpa, with whom I have grown closer since starting my academic journey at SLCC. I plan to continue my education at SLCC, and I hope to be accepted into nursing school.



ANGELA MENCL

School of Health Sciences

My life has two main parts: before September 2018 and after. Before that, I focused on supporting my family, helping my late husband in dental school, and raising our children. In September 2018, I lost both my sister and husband just one day apart, making me the sole parent of four children under the age of seven. I had to adjust to this new reality and provide stability for them while grieving. These experiences taught me that I don't just have to be here; I get to be here. I approach my education and clinical work with gratitude and professionalism. I also volunteer at a grief support center for families. I could not have reached this point in my education without the support of my children and family and the faculty at SLCC.

CARLOS SALINAS

School of Science, Mathematics and Engineering

In high school, I never thought about going to college because I believed I wasn't as smart as my peers. My enrollment at SLCC happened by chance – I was allowed to skip class if I attended an SLCC presentation. I went to the presentation, but for most of it, I wasn't paying attention because I was dismissing the programs and opportunities, thinking I wasn't good enough to take part. That all changed when they started talking about incentives, and suddenly, I became interested. My time at SLCC has helped change my mindset, and I've become the person I always admired. SLCC led me to discover a passion for electrical engineering, even though I thought I was bad at math. I have proven myself wrong time and again. As my journey at SLCC ends, I am thankful for how much I've personally grown. To my high school self, who felt unsure about college, I am doing this for you.





JACEE PAGE

School of Technical and Professional Specialties

My journey at SLCC has been shaped not only by my academic experiences but by my courage, creativity, and personal growth. I often found myself as one of the few, if not the only, women in my program, which led to feelings of anxiety and a sense of not belonging. Despite my fears, I was able to build a supportive community with my professors and peers, who strengthened my confidence and enriched my experience at SLCC both inside and outside the classroom. Balancing school, work, family responsibilities, and grief taught me that excellence is not achieved alone; it is supported by a strong community. After graduating from SLCC, I plan to continue my education at Weber State University and pursue a bachelor's degree in product design development. My ultimate goal is to engage in work that challenges me intellectually, fulfills me creatively, and makes a meaningful impact on my community.



WENDY MEMMOTT

Gail Miller Business School



In high school, I always dreamed of becoming a paralegal, but life took me in a different direction. After getting married, I focused on raising my family and building a career with a job that, while stable, never fulfilled my passion. Now, more than 30 years later, I find myself at SLCC pursuing that very dream in paralegal studies, filled with the same passion as before. As my time at SLCC comes to an end, I cannot help but reflect on my journey here. While part of me wishes I had attended the college sooner, I am grateful that I did, because going back to school has been one of the greatest experiences of my life. The biggest lesson I've learned through my academic experience is that a person is never too old to set a new goal or chase a dream.



MARYLYN DIAZ

SLCC TECH

My life has been full of many ups and downs. In 2025, I made the decision to attend SLCC, and shortly after, I lost my father to cancer, a loss that has been incredibly difficult to overcome. Despite my grief, I kept working toward my educational goals, as my father was a huge supporter of my return to school. I am grateful to my peers and professors who supported me throughout this process. They helped with everything from making funeral arrangements to ensuring I didn't fall behind in my studies. Without their assistance, I wouldn't have been able to maintain my 4.0 GPA. Looking back on my SLCC experience, I feel immense gratitude for a college community that was willing to help me in every possible way. I will always remember the kindness that was shown to me during this challenging time.



HONORARY DOCTOR OF HUMANE LETTERS

SLCC has been awarding Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degrees to deserving individuals since 1955. The Board of Trustees selects outstanding individuals in the community who have achieved distinction, made extraordinary contributions to their professional fields, and made a meaningful impact in their communities and/or to higher education to receive this honor.

CRYSTAL CALL MAGGELET

CEO & Chair of FJ Management, CEO and Chief Adventure Guide of Maverik

For Crystal Maggelet, success was never about having a perfectly mapped-out plan. As a teenager, she didn't know exactly what she wanted to do, but she did know how she wanted to approach life. Do the best you can. Work hard. Keep doors open. It was a simple philosophy, shaped early by conversations with adults she admired and questions about what they might do differently if given another chance.

"There's no downside to doing your best," Maggelet says. "That's really the way I've approached my life."

That mindset would eventually guide her through a career defined not only by opportunity, but by responsibility. As CEO and Chair of FJ Management Inc. and CEO of Maverik, Maggelet has led organizations through periods of significant change and moments that demanded resilience, clarity, and trust. For her, leadership has never been about ego. It's about confidence: believing in yourself enough to face hard things honestly and move forward.

That belief was tested early in her tenure as CEO of Flying J, when the company was navigating bankruptcy. Faced with intense scrutiny and high-stakes decisions, Maggelet learned that integrity and honesty were not optional — they were essential. "The only way through was to be completely honest," she says. "That's how you build credibility and trust."

Those lessons now shape not only how she leads, but how she gives back.

Education has long been central to Maggelet's philanthropic work, particularly when it comes to expanding access for students who might otherwise be left behind. She worries about the talented, driven students who are willing to work hard but lack the financial means to pursue education.

"How tragic is it if a capable, first-generation student is doing everything right and simply can't afford college?" she asks. "Our world would be a better place if more people had access to education."

As graduates prepare to take their next steps, Maggelet encourages them to stay open to opportunity and to act when it appears. "You can put things off forever," she says. "Sometimes you have to jump in with both feet. Mistakes are inevitable, but what matters is how you respond. Learn, take responsibility, and keep moving forward.



CANDICE PIERUCCI

Utah House of Representatives, District 49

Since her election to the Utah House of Representatives in 2018, Representative Candice Pierucci has been a dedicated advocate for education and a strong champion for Salt Lake Community College. As the youngest woman ever elected to the Utah Legislature, she has focused her work on expanding opportunity and strengthening pathways for students across the state.

Early in her legislative service, Representative Pierucci was appointed to the House Education Committee, which helps shape policy for Utah's education system. In 2023, she was named chair of the committee, and in 2025, she was elected by her colleagues to serve in House leadership as Majority Whip. She also serves on the Executive Appropriations Committee, the Public Education Appropriations Subcommittee, and the House Government Operations Committee.

Representative Pierucci has developed a strong and sustained connection with SLCC. Early in her tenure, she visited campus to better understand the college's priorities and the needs of its students, and she continues to regularly engage with college leadership. She consistently advocates for funding and policies that support SLCC's mission and was instrumental in securing funding for the Herriman Campus, which began serving students in August 2024.

In recognition of her leadership, Representative Pierucci has received several honors over the years, including the Council of State Governments' 20 Under 40 Award, the Americans for Prosperity Legislator of the Year Award, and the Utah National Guard's Minuteman Award. She has also served as a board member for the Utah Honor Flight program.

Representative Pierucci earned a bachelor's degree in political science from Utah Valley University and a master's degree in public administration from the University of Utah. In addition to her legislative duties, she teaches American Government as an adjunct professor at Utah Valley University. She and her husband are the parents of two children, Benjamin and Quincy.

LEGISLATIVE CHAMPION

The Legislative Champion Award honors state legislators who demonstrate a commitment to advancing and improving higher education in Utah. SLCC's Legislative Champion is selected at the conclusion of every legislative session.





DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI

SLCC's prestigious Distinguished Alumni Award honors graduates and former students for professional excellence and exemplary service to their communities in their professional or academic fields. It's the highest award the college bestows upon alumni. Traditionally, one female alumna and one male alumnus are selected as honorees each year.

AARON STARKS

AA, Political Science and Government, 2013

President & CEO, 47G

Aaron Starks will tell you that life is about people — and that no one is truly self made. Instead, it's the individuals who take an interest in you and offer support along the way who help shape your path. He found those people at SLCC, along with a college experience he could successfully navigate.

"I felt nervous being on campus at first, unsure of myself," recalls Starks, a first generation student. "But then it felt right because it was affordable and it allowed me to build school around everything else happening in my life." Starks had recently returned from an LDS mission to a difficult job market and had started a window-washing business to support himself. Looking back, he describes attending SLCC as one of the most important decisions he has made.

"I truly believe that if you do your best with the opportunities in front of you — whatever your circumstances — you will create the next opportunity," says Starks.

While at the college, Starks served as the student body president, providing early exposure to leadership and public service. During his tenure, he focused on practical ways to support students, including establishing a scholarship for single parents — an effort inspired by his own mom.

His interest in political science grew alongside these experiences. As president of the Utah Student Association, a council comprising of each student body president from Utah higher education institutions, he worked with leaders such as former Governor Gary Herbert and collaborated with student leaders across the country.

Starks went on to earn a degree in political science from the University of Utah and later an MBA from Duke University. These experiences helped shape his approach to working at the intersection of policy, business, and economic development.

Professionally, Starks has built a reputation for bringing people and organizations together. As the leader of 47G, he has focused on aligning industry, government, and community partners to support growth in the aerospace, space, defense, and energy fields. Under his leadership, Utah has developed one of the country's first coordinated Advanced Air Mobility ecosystems, helping position the state as a leader in emerging aviation technologies.

DISTINGUISHED FACULTY LECTURER

The Distinguished Faculty Lecturer is a recognition of quality work by one of SLCC's full-time faculty and a charge to develop that work over an academic year into a public presentation. A committee chosen by the Associate Provost for Learning Advancement selects the faculty lecturer each year. The lecture takes place the following spring.

Fernanda Böhme Birkeland's resourcefulness, work ethic, and drive can be traced back to her childhood. At eight years old, she and her family moved from Rio de Janeiro to Provo, where, to make ends meet, she, her two siblings, and her parents cleaned office buildings most nights from 4 p.m. to midnight.

"We lived below the poverty line. If I wanted anything, I had to be creative and figure it out on my own — that mindset has stuck with me," says Birkeland, who picked up English quicker than her parents, and began navigating the adult world by translating for them.

As she grew up, Birkeland's love of fashion grew with her. By age 14, she was sewing her own clothes, collecting Vogue magazines, and teaching herself how to recreate the styles she admired. Her dream was to attend fashion school in New York City — until she discovered the Fashion Institute at SLCC, a far more realistic option financially.

"I was surprised initially by how incredibly qualified the teachers were and their industry experience. I realized I didn't need to be in a big city to get what I wanted," recalls Birkeland, who cherished the individualized attention and small-class environment she found at the college. "I would not have found that in Los Angeles or NYC."

In 2006, she and her sister, Vivien, co-founded Böhme, a women's lifestyle clothing brand. Vivien served as the CEO and Birkeland as the creative director. "My sister was the left brain, I was the right brain, and our startup funding was a credit card," says Birkeland.

Today, the brand has expanded to over 25 locations across 7 states, supported by a strong online presence and a team of more than 300 women. Böhme has been named one of the Top Women-Run Businesses on the Inc. 500 Fastest-Growing Companies list and was awarded the 2019 SBA Business of the Year for Utah.

Her advice to graduates is to not shy away from taking on difficult things and to not be afraid of failure. "Failure is an opportunity to evolve," says Birkeland. "Think of it this way: The most valuable person in a mine isn't the one who's never seen it collapse — it's the engineer who has survived it."



FERNANDA BÖHME BIRKELAND

AAS, Fashion Design, 2004

Co-Founder, Böhme

ANN B. FILLMORE

Professor
Department of English, Linguistics, and Writing Studies
Beyond Spanglish: Spanish and Bilingualism in the American West



What does it mean to speak Spanish in the United States?

This question is at the center of my research. At SLCC, where many students come from bilingual and Spanish-speaking communities, it is both personal and academic. It is also central to my Spring 2027 lecture, which will explore the history, development, and significance of Spanish in the western United States.

Nearly one third of students at SLCC identify as Latinx or Hispanic, yet Spanish spoken in the US is still widely misunderstood and often treated as less legitimate than other varieties, with some claiming it has been "corrupted" by English. Linguistic research shows otherwise. Spanish in the US has developed through a long history of migration, cultural exchange, and language contact, and it continues to evolve today. In this lecture, I will trace this history, and I will examine the social and political contexts surrounding Spanish in the US, including bilingual identity, language attitudes, and language policy.

I also plan to discuss certain language features that are common in the region, often labeled "Spanglish," and reframe them as evidence of linguistic creativity and bilingual competence rather than decline.

TEACHING EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Teaching Excellence Awards, presented by the Salt Lake Community College Foundation Board, recognize excellence in professional education over the span of careers. Full-time and adjunct faculty are both eligible.

AIMEE WORTHEN BIRDSALL



Department Coordinator
Associate Professor
School of Science,
Mathematics and Engineering

Aimee Worthen Birdsall's path to teaching began in structural engineering, where she discovered a passion for helping others learn. Today, she is committed to making engineering accessible to all students, especially those who may not initially see themselves in the field.

She creates inclusive, supportive classrooms where students build confidence alongside technical skills. Her approach adapts to students at every stage—from introducing foundational college skills to emphasizing collaboration and real-world application.

Beyond the classroom, Aimee expands access to engineering through K–12 outreach and innovative programs, including a general education robotics course that reaches students across multiple campuses and local high schools. She also supports current students through mentorship, research opportunities, and industry partnerships.

ERICA MARIE GROVER



Lead Course Coordinator, Adjunct Instructor
Emergency Medical Technician Program
Salt Lake Technical College

Erica Grover's teaching centers on student success through active learning, adaptability, and support. She prioritizes creating an inclusive environment where students feel confident, engaged, and prepared for real-world challenges.

Recognizing that students face diverse barriers, Erica incorporates flexible, practical strategies that are readily accessible in the community. Her structured curriculum and feedback systems have contributed to strong outcomes, including consistent certification pass rates.

Beyond technical skills, Erica emphasizes empathy, reminding students of the humanity at the core of emergency medical care.

STACEY A. ROMNEY



Associate Professor
Physical Therapist
Assistant Program
School of Health Sciences

Stacey Romney's teaching is grounded in the belief that students learn best when they feel supported, engaged, and connected to their future profession. With more than 30 years of clinical experience, she designs learning environments that emphasize real-world application.

Her courses integrate hands-on labs, practical exams, and clinical-style experiences to help students develop the knowledge, skills, and professional behaviors required in physical therapy. A key extension of her work is the program's pro bono clinic, where students gain hands-on experience while providing care to community members.

Stacey's background in diverse healthcare settings informs her focus on communication, ethics, and cultural competence. She fosters a classroom environment built on trust, compassion, and equity.

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