Director’s Message

Happy and healthy fall! We welcome our new students, and send cheers to those working to complete the minor, certificate, and graduate degree.

Following a two-year process, we are completing the final three course revisions this fall. This process led to the upgrade of our courses in order to implement new and engaging content using innovative technology. We are excited for this final milestone in our work to become a certified UOnline Program. Under the leadership of Dr. Kara Dassel, with support from Rebecca Dick (Online Program Coordinator), we also submitted the application for Program of Merit Status through the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education. This was a major undertaking and I would like to thank faculty and staff for the many hours of work that went into this endeavor. We look forward to updating you with positive news when the application review is complete.

In addition, we celebrate new certificate opportunities. We now offer an interdisciplinary certificate in care management and two new micro-certificates for working professionals focused on End of Life Care and Care for the Aging Population. Each micro-certificate includes two non-credit courses available through Professional Education.

As we move forward, it is our goal to continue strengthening partnerships both on campus and in the community in order to provide enriched experiences in education, research, and service.
**Emily Christensen** is a board certified music therapist and director of Crescendo Music Therapy. She graduated from Utah State University in 1989 with a degree in Music Therapy, and a minor in guitar pedagogy. Emily specializes in hospice, dementia and elder care and has additional experience with traumatic brain injury. She has completed additional trainings in Neurologic Music Therapy and is a certified Hospice and Palliative Care Music Therapist. Her company contracts with hospice agencies, nursing facilities and private clients across Utah to provide music therapy services. Emily enjoys being involved with related professional organizations, and is a member of the Utah Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, serving on their membership committee, a member of the Utah Music and Memory Coalition, the Music and Memory Workgroup for the American Music Therapy Association and is currently the president of the Utah Association of Music Therapists. Emily absolutely loves her clinical work, and witnessing the astounding effects that music has on the quality of life of her clients.

**Kayla Cook** graduated from Utah Valley University in 2017 in Behavioral Science with an emphasis in family studies. From a young age she has always loved older adults, so eventually she decided to make her passion into a career. She spent summer 2017 interning at a prestigious assisted living in Washington DC, where she really found her passion and drive to make a mark in the gerontology field. Kayla is a Certified Family Life Educator, and would like to use this talent and certification one day to help educate and assist caregivers of dementia patients. Along with this, Kayla is starting a business to help seniors write and publish their life story. She has found a passion for learning about the lives of the many older adults around her, and wants to help them share their life lessons with others.

**Julia Landfair** graduated from the University of Utah in 2015 with a Bachelor of Science in Health Promotion and Education. During her senior year, she completed an internship with the Alzheimer's Association. The internship experience transitioned into employment with the Association as the Community Outreach Specialist/Volunteer Coordinator. During her time with the Alzheimer’s Association, she resolved to continue her education and pursue a master's degree within the field of gerontology. In her spare time, she enjoys answering questions such as, “what is gerontology?” and “what is the difference between dementia and Alzheimer’s disease?” and is currently working on a way to keep answers brief, yet thorough, without inundating her audience with information, such as the many career opportunities in gerontology, or dementia facts and figures.

**Amber Thomas** - I graduated from the University of Utah in Behavioral Science and then in 2015 I became a Board Certified inter-faith Chaplain. I reside in Taylorsville with my husband Jordan of 7 years and two beautiful girls, Emma who is 4 yrs. old and AdaLynn 17 months, they keep us on our toes and are very busy but we love every minute of it! Starting at age 8 I would visit my mom at the Tooele Nursing Home where she worked as a LPN and wait for her to get off work. During those times I would visit and connect with the residents, as I got to know these individuals I deeply valued the wisdom they exemplified and I especially loved the gratitude they had for everyone even with their struggles and hardships. Since then and with obtaining my Chaplaincy I have gained an even deeper respect and love for geriatrics and know that serving the aging community isn't just a passion but is a life's calling. I love to read, travel, organize my home, try new foods and crafts and especially spend time with family and friends. I am excited to be a part of this much-needed program and continue my life's journey with each one of you!
My current area of research focuses on end-of-life care preferences in persons with Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias (ADRD). In a pilot study, funded by the UofU Center on Aging, we (Dr. Kathie Supiano, Dr. Rebecca Utz, Nancy McGee, Seth Latimer) examined whether end-of-life care preferences differ based on hypothetical disease scenarios with various death trajectories: Alzheimer’s disease (gradual trajectory), congestive heart failure (Intermittent trajectory), and pancreatic cancer (acute trajectory). We found that end-of-life care preferences in Alzheimer’s disease did differ from congestive heart failure and pancreatic cancer – likely due to the cognitive impairment associated with the disease. Our team (Dr. Kathie Supiano and Dr. Rebecca Utz) received funding this summer from the Dick and Timmy Burton Pilot Grant for the next phase of our research in which we will develop an instrument that will measure end-of-life values and preferences specifically for persons with ADRD. Our desire is to develop an instrument that will aid primary caregivers and health care providers in making decisions about end-of-life care on behalf of persons with dementia who have lost decision making capacity.

Alumni Spotlight: Wade Vest

My name is Wade Vest. I graduated with my MS in Gerontology in May 2014. I currently live in Las Vegas with my family, including my amazing wife and three children. We love to spend time as a family enjoying the outdoors, playing and watching sports, eating good food, and playing games. Our three young children keep us on our toes. I’ve been in the healthcare industry as a long term care administrator for just under 10 years now. I really enjoy creating meaningful days for the residents we serve and taking good care of our team.

The Gerontology program was tremendous for both my personal and professional growth. The personalized setting and interactions with professors and fellow classmates created a true environment of learning. The content of the program directly correlated with my day to day responsibilities as a long term care administrator. I am grateful for the challenges of the Gerontology program and for the opportunities it has created for me in the past, present and hopefully the future. We just opened a brand new Assisted Living/Memory Care in Las Vegas. It has been a new and exciting adventure, along with a lot of hard work. I am proud to be an alumni of the U and particularly the Gerontology program.
Using data from a randomized controlled trial of an individualized intervention based on the Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement, we addressed the question, “For whom is bereavement intervention most effective?” Two grief trajectories were observed within the sample (N = 226). The larger group (88%) represented the more normative course of bereavement over an 18-month period, compared to those we labeled as “reactive and responsive.” This latter group experienced the greatest difficulty but were more responsive to the intervention as indicated by a steeper decline in grief symptoms over time, independent of dosage. These findings suggest that future intervention efforts should target those experiencing the greatest difficulty, while tailoring the dosage to meet the specific needs of each individual.

Jackie Eaton, PhD, and alumni Nancy Madsen, MS, present their research as part of The Age Stage; a space promoting arts-based performances focused on the many ways creativity plays a role in aging. This presentation included discussion surrounding video clips from the research based play, Portrait of a Caregiver, which was created in partnership with 22 family caregivers with the goal of disseminating resources and increasing dialogue through performances produced by Walk Ons, Inc. For more information about this research: https://portraitofacaregiver.com
I was born in Boise, ID and have since lived in cities in New York, Texas, California, Utah, Idaho, and Kentucky – but will forever claim Louisville, Kentucky as “Home”. My husband, Joe and I met while bartending together at Bout Time in West Valley City. After six months we knew it was meant to be and decided to get married. Elaina, my daughter who is now 9, was our flower girl and since then we have added two more sweet, spunky and totally rambunctious children to our family, Simon is 3, and Hazel is 2.

A year ago, I was diagnosed with Lyme’s disease and have since been learning how to manage life with a chronic disease. I used to spend my free time at Zumba classes or reading, I now spend it chasing and/or snuggling my babies, baking my own bread, and learning how to create dairy-free meals for two kids who are allergic to milk. As part of my parent agreement, I volunteer at my daughter’s elementary school, The Open Classroom, for three hours/week and serve as Chair of the Library Committee one hour/week. I love getting to know her classmates, teachers, and other parents in our “Community of Learners” (I could go on forever about how much I love her Elementary School, but I will leave it at that). When miracles happen and I get some time to myself, without homework, chores, or kiddos to take care of, I love watching Law and Order, Marvel movies, and reading – I love, love, love reading.

In 2011, at the age of 30, I decided I needed to graduate from college in order to insist my daughter do the same when she was older. I went back to Salt Lake Community College and then, transferred to Weber State University. I graduated Summa Cum Laude in August 2016 with my BS in Health Education/Health Promotion and have recently certified as a Health Education Specialist. I will graduate with my Master’s of Public Administration in May 2018. I then hope to go on to get my doctorate in either education or public health (who knows, maybe both).

I have worked as a nanny, a preschool teacher, a bartender, a waitress, a copy-center attendant, a librarian, seasonal help for retail, an independent consultant for Usborne Books, a janitor, a stay-at-home mother, and most recently have worked as a Health Program Specialist in the Bureau of Health Promotion, at the Utah Department of Health and am now working as the Online Coordinator for the Gerontology Interdisciplinary Program in the College of Nursing. I have greatly enjoyed working in this position and helping Instructors develop courses, I have worked to edit and finalize an application for the U of U GIP MS to become a Program of Merit through the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education, and designed some advertising materials for the program. I also love to find and attend marketing events such as the Majors Exploration Expo, transfer days at SLCC, and The Generations Conference. I love getting to know the faculty here at the GIP and look forward to working on even more projects. I have recently resumed working with the Utah Department of Health part time. As I learn more about the older adult population, I find that I am passionate about educating the public and especially, advocating for family caregivers of patients with dementia. I hope to be able to continue my work at the University and market and promote the GIP as much as possible to give those entering the medical field the chance to study and care for the aging population.
Alianne Sipes graduated with a bachelor’s degree in child development, so naturally, she now works for Salt Lake County Aging & Adult Services. She is one of several volunteer coordinators for that agency, and manages the volunteers for their Outreach, SHIP, and Ombudsman programs, as well as serving as a volunteer liaison for their 16 senior centers scattered throughout the valley. Her volunteers serve the aging community by advocating for those in long-term care facilities, educating homebound seniors about community and government resources available to them, and helping individuals better understand their options with Medicare. She has served as a community representative on the GIP Advisory Council for the past 3 years. Alianne won the 2016-2017 GIP Preceptor of the Year award for her work with GIP students. When not trying to better the lives of our aging population, Alianne enjoys traveling and playing with her two 5-month old Labradane puppies.

Alzheimer’s Walk 2017

For the past several years, the faculty and students of the Gerontology Interdisciplinary Program have participated in the Walk to End Alzheimer’s Disease—sponsored by the Utah Chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association. On September 23, we joined hundreds of supporters to walk around the State Capitol. Family caregivers, professional caregivers and gerontologists, and persons with dementia participated. The GIP enjoys a mutually supportive relationship and are frequent partners in community activities.