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Dear Friends,

The Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services (CEHS) has continued to flourish through the 2016-17 school year. *U.S. News and World Report* has again named our graduate programs among the top tier of colleges of education nationally. We climbed four spots to reach 26th in the country, while maintaining our position as the best graduate school of education in the state of Utah.

A focus on research is a hallmark of our college, and 2016-17 was no different. CEHS was ranked 6th in the nation in research funding, and many of our researchers received national and international recognition for their work.

We were recently honored to have Utah Governor Gary Herbert visit the ASSERT preschool program for children with autism and our Aggies Elevated program for college students with disabilities. We were similarly pleased to welcome the Honorable Elizabeth Dowdeswell, the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario and a Utah State alumna herself, who visited our Sound Beginnings program.

Also this year, the Edith Bowen Laboratory School (EBLS) unveiled the National Blue Ribbon banner for their students and faculty. The National Blue Ribbon Schools program recognizes public and private schools based on their overall academic excellence and progress in closing achievement gaps among economically diverse students. EBLS was one of only two schools in the state awarded with this prestigious honor.

Construction of the state-of-the-art Sorenson Legacy Foundation Center for Clinical Excellence continues to progress. Our interdisciplinary approach to this center will allow for increased collaboration among departments and individual researchers, better preparing our students to contribute to their communities after graduation.

In this magazine, you will find many other examples of interdisciplinary approaches, from researchers who have found ways to connect STEM principles with the cultural heritage of Native Americans in southern Utah to non-native English speakers building bonds between classmates and teachers with the help of small teaching robots.

The Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services is committed to providing the best learning opportunities and educational research in the state of Utah. I am inspired by the highlights we have compiled for this issue of the *Review*, and I look forward to sharing them with you.

Sincerely,

Beth E. Foley
Dean, Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services
Utah State University
Utah Governor Gary Herbert visited the Utah State University Logan campus on November 4, 2016, spending time with students in the ASSERT autism program and the Aggies Elevated program.

To help children with autism reach their potential as they learn to communicate, the ASSERT (Autism Support Services: Education, Research and Training) preschool program at Utah State uses applied behavior analysis in which children practice appropriate behaviors and receive positive reinforcement. Children are taught to request what they want, thereby controlling their environment and getting their needs met.

The primary goal of ASSERT is to build the capacity of Utah school districts to provide effective, research-based educational services to children with autism. The applied behavior analysis method has spread to numerous Utah school districts, including Cache, Logan, Park City, and Granite school districts.

Governor Herbert was pleased to see these children demonstrating the skills necessary for success in kindergarten and beyond. "Our hope is that every child with autism will benefit from early intervention programs like ASSERT, because it makes a significant difference in their lives," said the governor. "We want to be involved in supporting these excellent programs."

Reflecting on the support from the governor and other Utah legislators, the director of the ASSERT autism program, Dr. Thomas Higbee, expressed his appreciation: "With help from the state of Utah, ASSERT has grown from a tiny beginning to a large on-campus program as well as programs throughout Utah that serve many families."

A visit to young adults with disabilities in the Aggies Elevated program was the next stop for the governor. Students from all over the nation with disabilities want to have careers. Many are taking college classes at USU with the goal of finding gainful employment and a meaningful career path. Several Aggies Elevated students are already beginning careers—at the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, USU’s Sound Beginnings program, the university recreation center, and Common Ground Outdoor Adventures. Students in the program are supported by mentors, tutors, study groups, a self-directed plan, and assistive technology.

Governor Herbert sat down with the Aggies Elevated students, and asked about their long-term career goals. The students were eager to share. "I love animals, and I want to go into animal science," said Hannah Fassmann. "In high school, I trained three guide dogs for the blind."

Berkeley Nero told the governor that Aggies Elevated has helped her focus on her goals. "I’m interested in music therapy—I love to show people how I really feel through singing and performing." Several students also expressed a desire to work with kids with disabilities.

Governor Herbert offered enthusiastic encouragement. "We all have disabilities of some kind, but some are more challenging than others," he told them. "You each have tremendous skills, and you’re working hard to develop those skills so you can have a happy and productive life."

Enrollment in college for young adults with disabilities means better employment and better wages throughout adulthood, without dependence on public programs. Sarah Bodily, director of the Aggies Elevated program, stressed the importance of raising expectations before students graduate from high school. "We are working in high schools to increase the awareness that students with intellectual or developmental disabilities can thrive in a higher education environment."
Utah State offers the only traditional residential program of this kind in Utah, and is one of a few in the western United States. With all Aggies Elevated students living on campus, the experience of navigating a more independent life is part of what makes this program unique.

Sophia Shaffer, a first-year student, said "My favorite part of being an Aggie is making new friends, like my roommate Brianna." Josh Watts, also in his first year, said, "It was scary at first because I never lived with roommates before, but I got used to it. I love making new friends, and I love that I get to contribute."

Dr. Beth Foley, Dean of the College of Education and Human Services, emphasized a remarkable aspect of the program: "With the help of grants and private donations, we keep the cost at normal tuition. This helps to make the program affordable and sustainable."

Speaking afterwards about his experiences with both preschool children and young adults on the Utah State campus, Governor Herbert said, "When I see the optimism these young people have, it helps me be optimistic, too. These USU programs are very impressive, and we want to support them. We want everyone to have opportunities to improve their lives."

"These USU programs are very impressive, and we want to support them. We want everyone to have opportunities to improve their lives."
—Gary Herbert, governor of Utah

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How Do Our Brains Perceive Time?

Catalin “Cat” Buhusi has spent his career asking deeper questions about how one’s brain perceives the passage of time. In Dr. Buhusi’s lab, experimental work involves the use of rodent models to manipulate, visualize, and examine various aspects of the involvement of the dopaminergic system in normal and abnormal behavior. Theoretical and computational modeling is used to integrate the growing body of data relative to the role of the dopamine system in learning, memory, and attention. Research is relevant to psychopathology ranging from autism to addiction, mental retardation, Parkinson’s and Huntington’s diseases, and schizophrenia.

Buhusi got his doctorate in experimental psychology at Duke University, then advancing to postdoctoral fellow and assistant professor, and switching from “fuzzy systems” to “fuzzy rats.” He studied the way animals change their behavior based on timing or the perception of time. At Duke, Buhusi got his first small grant, which allowed him to ask deeper questions about how one’s brain perceives the passage of time.

There is much more to be done in human studies, but Buhusi’s work in USU’s Department of Psychology on understanding how timing perception works in the brain has potential for applications in treatments for diseases of the brain. His lab currently investigates interval timing and decision making in animal models of Parkinson’s disease.

— Gary Herbert, governor of Utah

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— Gary Herbert, governor of Utah
humility more important to marital bliss than communication? For decades, success in marriage has been believed by most family science researchers to be the result of outward skills, such as communication or conflict resolution. These abilities are certainly important, but what if one’s character naturally leads to these skills—and is consequently a stronger predictor of success?

A new study from Utah State University’s Dr. David Schramm and his fellow researchers from the University of Alberta, Bastyr University, and the University of Arkansas found that humility, or rather the perception of humility, in your spouse can contribute to a happy marriage.

Dr. Schramm, who is an assistant professor and Extension specialist in the Department of Family, Consumer, and Human Development at USU, helped develop the survey that was given to people in Arkansas, Utah, and Vermont as part of the “Qualities of Character and Marital Well-Being” study.

Schramm’s data came from random phone interviews with more than 1,500 married individuals. The next step of the research, currently underway, is gathering more data on virtues and character strengths and comparing answers from both members of the couples they survey.

As the data from the first phase were analyzed, three characteristics immediately stood out—humility, compassion, and positivity. "It was quite a surprise to find that all three of these qualities effectively predicted marital happiness” said Wallace Goddard, professor of Family Life at the University of Arkansas and team leader for this research project. “Of course there is nothing wrong with good communication. But using the right words doesn’t build a relationship when there is malice in our hearts. Good communication happens very naturally when our hearts are filled with humility, compassion, and positivity.”

Dr. Goddard further explained that one way researchers defined humility was as a willingness to admit when we have made mistakes or are wrong. Compassion was measured as a willingness to help people...
when they are suffering. Positivity was defined as someone who expects the best or is optimistic.

To determine the quality of humility, researchers asked the spouse about the other’s traits. Is he open-minded, respectful, modest? Is she able to put herself in another’s shoes? Is he aware of personal limits and willing to put off his own needs? Does she recognize her spouse’s desires, goals, and challenges?

Married people, particularly women who viewed their partner as humble and compassionate, reported more marital satisfaction than those who did not.

From a family science perspective, this approach is a novelty. The research, published in the journal *Family Relations*, shows that humility actually buffers marital stress and opens the door to connection and solutions. “All of us are born with a craving for connection,” said Dr. Schramm, “and these virtues are seeds that can initiate changes from the inside out.”

—Dr. David Schramm, assistant professor in Family, Consumer, and Human Development at USU

Interestingly, even financial status or previous matrimonial experience weren’t predictors of marital happiness. The lesson may be that people, perhaps women in particular, can search for partners who are humble—but the message is also that it helps to change our own perspective if we want to be happier in our marriage.

One of Schramm’s favorite phrases is “people are more important than problems.” It’s important to focus on the whole person and see things from their perspective, not dwell on small problems or disagreements. Schramm says that often our compassion is a matter of getting the bigger picture or the whole story. When we tune in to another’s reality and better understand their needs, objectives, and challenges, we expose ourselves to our partner’s vulnerability and need.

“Think of it as similar to when we’re irritated by another driver in traffic,” said Schramm’s fellow researcher Adam Galovan of the University of Alberta. “I’m pretty sure the other driver is not thinking about impeding you.”

Can these qualities be learned? “Responding to another’s need, or even seeing it, stirs our desire to be more humble and kind—just what Tim McGraw suggests,” Schramm said with a grin.

When we perform a small act of kindness or show awareness of the other person’s need, it can be a catalyst to create a feeling of humility and compassion in another person. These can be “moving moments;” moving beyond relationship skills to be open to others’ experiences. When we are open, we can absorb the best qualities of our loved ones or our partner.

With this exciting new vein of research, Dr. Schramm is helping USU to fulfill its mission to serve the community and the state of Utah. Schramm teaches classes in the community on marriage and parenting and is researching how personal character applies to healthy relationships. He is currently exploring predictors of healthy relationships and how to improve relationship quality.
Dr. Beth MacDonald is giving an important gift to the world: exceptional math teachers. Schools are in need of mathematicians who are both creative and technical, and Dr. MacDonald trains educators to respond to different learning needs.

The pre-service teachers MacDonald trains are often surprised at how much fun math can be. When they go on to help their own students to enjoy learning math, it is a great reward for MacDonald to know that many students are being positively affected.

She works with many English as a Second Language students and those who come from low socioeconomic status. “All kids have different abilities,” said MacDonald. “If students are not learning in the typical manner, it doesn’t mean that they’re not capable or successful. They’re simply needing different things in place to leverage their learning.”

She encourages future teachers to integrate assessment into daily activities, so they can be constantly updated and aware of the diverse ways their students are learning. The ability to communicate and listen effectively when engaging students in mathematical discourse is vital.

“I promote inquiry-oriented instruction so teachers can give students multiple entry and exit points when solving math problems,” MacDonald said.

Teaching for 15 years in elementary classrooms prepared MacDonald to be an advocate for her pre-service teachers. “I understand the perspective of the math teachers,” she said. “Teaching math in elementary school is different because you have to be an expert in many levels; living that identity has helped me connect better to my students.”
Dr. Jamison Fargo has committed much of his time, energy, and passion towards alleviating homelessness among military veterans. Fargo is a professor in the Department of Psychology in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services at USU. He is also a research scientist with the National Center on Homelessness among Veterans and the Philadelphia Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

Fargo’s research is driven by the premise that prevention is the best solution to many behavioral and social problems. Working with colleagues at the Salt Lake City Veterans Affairs (V.A.) Medical Center and the University of Utah, Dr. Fargo explores risk factors that can help predict homelessness, including the effect of military misconduct, exposure to sexual trauma, substance abuse, mental health, and economic issues.

“These are just some of the puzzle pieces,” said Fargo. “Hopefully one day we’ll have enough pieces to better understand the full picture.”

Screening for homelessness can become more effective as early warning indicators are studied and as veterans can be referred to social services or a housing coordinator. Within 5 years after being discharged from the military, one in 10 veterans who have military misconduct on their record or have experienced sexual trauma become homeless. As more studies are conducted that shed light on these concerns, researchers like Fargo hope that the V.A. will be able to more effectively manage these issues earlier.

In addition to initiatives by the V.A., major cities across the nation developed plans about 10 years ago to end chronic homelessness. As a result of intensive efforts and funding, homelessness among veterans has declined significantly in the last few years. Some estimates show a decline from 70,000 to 40,000 homeless nationally between 2007 and 2015. These efforts have brought attention to the need for specific resources and services. “We have improved our understanding and descriptions of the problem,” said Fargo. “Now we want to figure out how to better prevent it.”

The V.A. in Salt Lake City built a homeless shelter called Valor House that has made a significant impact on reducing emergency needs for veterans with disabilities. Freedom Landing is another Utah facility that offers substance abuse treatment and mental health treatment.

“Homelessness is an important social problem,” said Fargo. “I enjoy statistics and quantitative methods, and it’s very rewarding on a human level to work on solving real-world problems.”

—Dr. Jamison Fargo, professor of Psychology in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services at USU
Utah State University’s College of Education and Human Services is ranked #26 in the nation & #6 in research funding.

2018 U.S. News and World Report
Every year the U.S. Department of Education seeks out and celebrates great American schools—those that demonstrate that all students can achieve high levels of academic success. The National Blue Ribbon School flag gracing an entry or flying overhead is a widely recognized symbol of exemplary teaching and learning. In September 2016, U.S. Secretary of Education, John B. King, Jr., announced that Edith Bowen Laboratory School (EBLS) was named a 2016 National Blue Ribbon School.

EBLS is a K-5 public charter school located on the campus of Utah State University and is a unit in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services.

The National Blue Ribbon Schools Program recognizes public and private schools based on their overall academic excellence or their progress in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups. Edith Bowen Laboratory School was one of just two schools selected from the state of Utah for this honor in 2016. On November 29, EBLS hosted an unveiling of the National Blue Ribbon banner at an assembly with the students and teachers, which included a video compilation of the students created for the occasion. The students paid rapt attention during the ceremony and cheered wildly for their teachers during the unveiling ceremony. Students then released balloons with Dean Beth Foley and USU mascot Big Blue cheering them on.

When asked about their favorite part of attending EBLS, many students focused on special field trips, diverse ways to learn, and the fact that there are “no bullies at our school.” Their appreciation for their teachers was notable, as they reflected on the different specialists and “people who help us” at the school. Students and teachers alike showed particular enthusiasm for EBLS Director Dan Johnson, with whom they all seem to have a personal connection. Teachers appreciate the tools and autonomy given to them by Dr. Johnson. Teachers are empowered to design their own lessons, work collaboratively, and put students first.

EBLS is a Title I school with 35% of the students on free and reduced lunch. In addition, 16% of the students at the school qualify for and receive special education services. “The faculty and staff value this diversity greatly,”

“We are honored to be nationally recognized for our commitment to fostering a diverse, interactive, and inviting school environment.”

—Dan Johnson, director of the Edith Bowen Laboratory School
said Dr. Johnson. “We are honored to be nationally recognized for our commitment to fostering a diverse, interactive, and inviting school environment.”

“Nearly 250 pre-service teachers come to the school each year as part of the teacher education program at USU,” said Johnson. “They have the opportunity to see how powerful instructional practices influence learning on various levels in a typical school environment.” Master teachers at the school use a constructivist approach to teaching as they provide students exposure to a wide variety of learning options that are hands-on and inquiry based. Whether in the classroom or in the field, students are given the opportunity to engage with an experience, reflect upon it, form meaning, and then apply their learning to new or novel situations. “As a faculty, we are working diligently to skillfully guide Edith Bowen Laboratory School into the future,” Johnson said.

Dr. Johnson and Laura Reina represented Edith Bowen at a two-day awards ceremony in Washington, D.C., to celebrate their hard-won achievements.◆

“Nearly 250 pre-service teachers come to the school each year as part of the teacher education program at USU. They have the opportunity to see how powerful instructional practices influence learning on various levels in a typical school environment.”

—Dan Johnson
Dr. Yanghee Kim, an associate professor of Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences at Utah State University, is attempting to find out. With the help of a three-year grant from the National Science Foundation, Dr. Kim and her team of researchers will study how groups of young children interact with an educational robot.

The study builds on a previous research project conducted by Dr. Kim in which a robot, run via a smartphone app, encouraged children to learn English through a series of games and activities. The original robot was designed to work with children one-on-one, but during that research project Dr. Kim noticed that children were inviting others to participate with them.

“We didn’t have to teach them to take turns,” Dr. Kim said. “They invited their friends and then they naturally took turns, while other children were pointing and helping.”

This upcoming research project is designed to teach other academic skills beyond the English language. In addition, it can work as a “cultural broker,” Dr. Kim said. “Facing and managing diversity is a worldwide educational problem. Can we use this robot to mediate collaboration between people from different backgrounds?”

Because of the robot’s translation abilities, children who speak different languages can use the robot together. Children who aren’t proficient in English struggle in modern American classrooms, and research has shown that early difficulties often persist throughout a child’s educational career.

“If you don’t have a good command of English skills, there is no way to avoid falling behind in this academic journey,” Dr. Kim said. “Teaching academic skills is important, but the more important thing in early school years is building their potential, building their confidence, and building their positive identity.”

The hope is that allowing children of various backgrounds to work together will ultimately build bridges between cultures. “It’s not just a learning tool; it creates a social plaza,” Dr. Kim said. “The goal of this project is that two or more students can build positive identities and a respectful relationship.”

That can have an impact far outside the four walls of a classroom.

“We gather with birds of the same feather. Not because we are racist, but because it’s comfortable. We are not trained to work with people who have different perspectives and different cultural references,” Dr. Kim said. “We are different, but we can still work together.”
USU was recently pleased to receive a visit from the Hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Ontario Canada’s Lieutenant Governor. In this position, Ms. Dowdeswell is a representative of Queen Elizabeth II, who is Canada’s head of state. Ms. Dowdeswell earned a master of science degree in behavioral sciences from Utah State University in 1972. A graduate of the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services, Ms. Dowdeswell began her professional career as a teacher and university lecturer and has a deep interest in CEHS and its interdisciplinary approach.

The Sound Beginnings program exemplifies the best in scientific progress and focuses on helping young children who are hearing impaired to integrate into mainstream education. What started at USU in 2007 as a graduate training program now enrolls 35 children, with 18 graduate students helping them to learn one on one. Instead of learning only theories,
these graduate students are in the classroom from their first day in the program. This is not only beneficial for the children, but as Ms. Dowdeswell said, “It makes a great difference in preparing educators to work in a real life situation.”

Using the observation rooms at Sound Beginnings, parents can learn how to repeat the positive reinforcement techniques for better communication at home. Sound Beginnings is a free program, and many families with hearing-impaired children move to Cache Valley to take advantage of it. “This is just one example of how education is connected to health,” Dowdeswell observed.

Dowdeswell visited another program in the college that focuses on autism and helps children reach their potential as they learn to communicate. The ASSERT (Autism Support Services: Education, Research and Training) preschool program at Utah State uses applied behavior analysis. In this program, children with autism practice positive behaviors and learn to ask for what they need and want. USU professionals travel to other countries to teach their counterparts how to identify and instruct children with autism or with hearing loss. Utah State has built outreach programs to help create similar programs in the United States, Russia, Brazil, Canada, and throughout Europe.

“Getting the knowledge and training out there to the world is our goal,” said Dr. Tom Higbee, director of the ASSERT program. “If we invest time and effort when children with autism are very young, we see the gains they make across the lifespan.”

Both the Sound Beginnings and ASSERT programs help children to reach their maximum potential and study in mainstream kindergarten. Observing these early intervention programs, Dowdeswell remarked, “I can see why people want to come here if they have the option.”

Graduate students are in the classroom from their first day in the program—as Ms. Dowdeswell observed, this “makes a great difference in preparing educators to work in a real life situation.”

Utah State University
Two Utah State researchers are taking a unique approach to “makerspaces” to improve STEM (science, technology, education, and math) education in the Native American community.

One important goal is to help the students realize that “STEM professionals aren’t all white men,” said Kristin Searle, an assistant professor in the Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences (ITLS) department at Utah State. “You can be an American Indian and an awesome engineer; research tells us that kids really struggle to see themselves in those roles.”

Makerspaces, which are intended to provide hands-on learning experiences, have traditionally been established in permanent locations. By creating mobile makerspaces that are operated out of vans, these researchers are taking educational opportunities to students in remote locations. “At one school, most students were without running water or electricity at home,” said Searle. “We’re the first to reach some of these places.”

Searle is working with Dr. Breanne Litts, an assistant professor in the ITLS department, as well as Bryan Brayboy, a professor at Arizona State University, and Yasmin
Kafai, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, to introduce science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) principles to American Indian children.

“Native American students are behind their peers in pretty much every measure of educational success,” Searle said. “If we look at math scores, especially in fourth grade and eighth grade, they lag behind all other racial and ethnic groups in terms of test scores.”

Searle explained that students who feel a connection to their culture tend to do better in school. “American Indian communities have been doing STEM for a very long time if we think of weaving, star navigation, or building a canoe,” Searle said. “These all involve STEM practices. But when kids learn STEM in school, they often don’t see that connection, so our research focuses on making that connection a little more explicit.”

Researchers have found that material is learned more easily and retained longer when it relates to aspects of a student’s cultural heritage. The projects being developed combine hands-on learning experiences with intergenerational learning, giving students an opportunity to work with their parents and grandparents.

“You have a grandparent or parent who is more of a cultural expert and a child who is more of a technology expert, so we are hoping those things will naturally meld together,” Searle said.

The team will work with Native American community partners to design specific workshops, focusing on electronic textiles, engineering with recyclable materials, and 3D printing.

Aspects of the project have been in motion for as long as 3 years, but it was just this past year that the team was awarded the Early-concept Grant for Exploratory Research (EAGER), a funding mechanism offered by the National Science Foundation for potentially transformative research ideas.

The team is building connections and laying the groundwork to continue work in these communities next summer. “In the end, I’d love to work myself out of a job,” Searle said. “I would love to have American Indian students take over what I do.”

“American Indian communities have been doing STEM for a very long time if we think of weaving, star navigation, or building a canoe. But when kids learn STEM in school, they often don’t see that connection, so our research focuses on making that connection a little more explicit.”

— Kristin Searle, assistant professor of Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences at USU
It’s the paycheck that Ryan loves talking about the most.

Normally, wages are not a conversational topic in the workplace, but no one in this office seems to mind. For Ryan, the paystub is a source of pride—evidence that he is contributing.

Ryan Dickey, along with his sister Sarah Dickey, were hired this fall to work at Malouf Sleep, an international bedding supply company headquartered in Cache Valley.

More than 120 employees work at the large office building, but Ryan and Sarah are notable because they are the first clients to be hired through Utah State University’s Employability Clinic.

The clinic receives clients from the state-funded Division of Services for People with Disabilities and works with them to find jobs in the community. They shifted focus in July to begin utilizing a "customized employment" process.

That process has already begun paying off for Ryan and Sarah.

Ryan Paskins, who serves as the director of the Employability Clinic, accompanied the siblings on a tour of the facilities at Malouf and was impressed with what he saw. “Malouf is very connected in the community and supportive of their employees,” Paskins said. “It was a really neat atmosphere.”
Following the tour, Malouf didn’t wait long to jump on the opportunity to bring Ryan and Sarah on board. “Before we were able to approach them to explore options, they contacted us and said, ‘What would it take for us to hire some of your clients?’” Paskins said.

“They came in and it was a really light, happy feeling,” said Jake Neeley, a marketing manager at Malouf. “Immediately after their tour, we decided to see if we could work something out.”

The relationship has been mutually beneficial.

“We recognized how happy they are and how they brought this excited feeling to the office,” Neeley said. “Every single person they talked to just smiled. They brightened everyone’s day.”

The siblings work on alternating days of the week, spending a few hours cleaning the cafeteria and the break room, caring for the live plants around the office, and visiting with other employees. “They look like they’ve worked in restaurants because they are so thorough,” said Kenzi Falslev, whose spot at the reception desk means she is often the first to see Ryan or Sarah when they arrive. “It’s so cool because they’ll come in and they’ll be so independent. They’ll say, ‘I’ve got this, take my coat.’”

Even in just a few months of work, it’s evident that Ryan and Sarah are developing skills, Falslev said. “They’ve become independent and have really shown that they’re capable of doing things,” Falslev said. “They just do things in a different way.”

Finding jobs that match the clients’ talents and helping them to develop a skill set is the goal of the Employability Clinic. When clients come in, they sit down with Paskins and go through a skills assessment.

“We do an intensive assessment process individualized to them, and we identify their interests, abilities and skill level,” Paskins said. The assessment gives Paskins a good idea of the situations for which the client would be a good fit.

“This whole assessment process is a very strength-based process,” Paskins said. “We focus on what they can do rather than what they

“We find a situation that’s a good fit for them and for the employer so that it will be a win-win on both sides.”

—Ryan Paskins, Employability Clinic director
cannot do.” Clinic workers then visit with businesses in the community, like Malouf, to gauge interest and find potential employment opportunities for clients.

“We find a situation that’s a good fit for them and for the employer so that it will be a win-win on both sides,” Paskins said. As talks progress, Paskins sets up a time when he and the client can tour the business. The walkthrough gives the client and the company the opportunity to get to know each other. “That way, they can meet and just see if they’re a good fit,” Paskins said. “A lot of people don’t have experience with a person with a disability, so these meetings help knock down potential misconceptions.”

“They often say, ‘Oh this is someone who is happy and nice and friendly, and I can work with them and they can work with me,’” Paskins said.

If the company is interested in hiring a client, Paskins works with them to find a position of need in the business that fits the skills and interests of the individual. A client who has a culinary interest, for example, might work in a bakery, or an individual who is good with animals could work in a pet store. Paskins considers it a win-win because the client can find meaningful employment and the business gets a stable worker who is excited about the job.

The Employability Clinic is currently working with several clients, and Paskins hopes to develop working relationships with other local businesses in the near future.

“Every single person they talked to just smiled. They brightened everyone’s day.”

—Jake Neeley, marketing manager at Malouf
Dr. Studenka’s research in the Sensory Motor Behavior Laboratory concerns how we plan for and control movements that occur in sequence. The lab is currently developing an app to assess changes in the structure of visual-motor behavior following concussion.

Dr. Bolton researches how the brain makes balance-correction decisions in complex environments while the brain is engaged in decision making. Dr. Bolton’s work analyzes how the brain makes these decisions while maintaining its speed.

Dr. Vierimaa is researching which factors have the most impact on athlete performance, participation, and personal development in youth sports. Broadly, he focuses on the roles of social and contextual factors (e.g. coaching vs. the place of development).

Dr. Dakin’s research focuses on how the brain impacts balance with the long-term goal of better understanding the cause of balance disorders and how to reduce the risk of falls that increases as we age.

Dr. Thompson is researching how long consecutive shifts at work impact job performance, particularly in nurses. He has also studied the best exercise and nutrition approaches for older adults.

Litalien’s research focuses on an experiential learning methodology she created known as “Living State of Dance,” which helps individuals achieve a state of total awareness and can be used as a therapeutic tool.