

Scholarship and Awards Banquet Recognizes One of Head Start's Original Founders, Utah Principal of the Year, and Professor Who Created Autism Preschool Program

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Endowed Dean Al Smith MCs the 2024 Scholarship and Awards Banquet

On September 23, scholarship recipients, faculty members, donors, and friends of the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services met for the annual Scholarship and Awards Banquet in Logan, Utah. The celebration is an opportunity to recognize the hard-working students, generous donors, and recipients of the college's most prestigious awards.

During his opening remarks, Dean Smith expressed gratitude to the donors, "whose generous support helps so many exceptional students. We could not do what we do without these special benefactors."

Smith continued, "These students are among the best, brightest, and hardest working in our college, and I am confident that they will touch the lives of many others in positive ways in the years ahead." The generosity of the donors enabled CEHS to award more than 400 scholarships for the Fall semester, totaling more than \$700,000. Scholarship recipients were seated beside their donors, fostering personal connections with their benefactors throughout the evening.

Recipients of the college's most prestigious awards—the Strong Human Services Award, the Distinguished Alumni Award, and the Professional Achievement Award—were also recognized for their contributions to the college and community. The 2024 awardees are Professor Tom Higbee, Principal Rachel Alberts, and Psychologist Anthony LaPray.

Professor Tom Higbee, Department Head, Special Education and Rehabilitation Counseling
Recipient of the Strong Human Services Award

The Strong Human Services Award honors a College of Education and Human Services faculty or staff member for his or her significant and sustained leadership in human services through applied research that improves the lives of children and adults.

Tom Higbee currently serves as professor and department head in the Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation Counseling and as executive director of the Autism Support Services: Education, Research, and Training program (ASSERT). ASSERT is an intensive behavioral intervention program for young children on the autism spectrum, which Higbee founded in 2003 and recently celebrated its 20-year anniversary. Higbee is committed to the broad dissemination of evidence-based supports for students on the autism spectrum and with related disabilities, and he has helped to create intensive behavior analytic preschool and school programs for these children in Brazil, Russia, Portugal, and throughout Utah.

Higbee is a former associate editor for the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* and the *European Journal of Behavior Analysis* and is the past president of the Utah Association for Behavior Analysis. He has also served as a member of the Practice Board of the Association for Behavior Analysis International, the Society for the Experimental Analysis of Behavior, and the Utah Psychologist Licensing Board.



Award recipients Professor Tom Higbee, Principal Rachel Alberts, and Psychologist Anthony LaPray

Principal Rachel Alberts, Sunburst Elementary
Recipient of the Distinguished Alumni Award

The Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services Distinguished Alumni Award recognizes an outstanding individual for his or her professional achievements and commitment in their field.

Rachel Belnap Alberts has been an educator for 28 years. She has taught 3rd and 5th grades, served as a reading specialist for early elementary students, taught science and math for USU's Core Academy, and served as an instructional coach for grades K-6. Alberts completed her M.Ed. in Leadership at Utah State University and has been a principal for the past ten years.

Five years ago, she helped design and implement the Teacher Academy Program at Sunburst Elementary in Davis School District. An initiative of CEHS's Center for the School of the Future, the program is designed to provide aspiring educators with hands-on embedded practicum hours that correspond with the concepts they are learning in their university courses. University professors teach classes at Sunburst Elementary, and Alberts coordinates with these professors to optimize the application of concepts their students are learning. At the same time, Sunburst's teachers serve as mentors for the university practicum students. Since Sunburst opened, more than 100 practicum students have completed the Teacher Academy Program, many of whom now teach in their own classrooms.

This year, Alberts was named Utah Principal of the Year. She believes that, in addition to working with students, the greatest benefit of being an educator is the opportunity to collaborate with dedicated, altruistic people who are working toward the same goal—the academic and social success of students.

Psychologist Anthony LaPray, Founder, Utah Psychological Associates

Recipient of the Professional Achievement Award

The Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services Professional Achievement Award recognizes an outstanding individual who has made significant and lasting contributions to their field over the course of their career.

Anthony LaPray spent his summers as a child thinning sugar beets in Southern Idaho on the family farm. One day in his 16th summer, he decided he didn't want sugar beets to be his future. He committed to go to college and change his life trajectory. During his first year of college at USU, LaPray pursued premed, but under the mentorship of psychology professor Arden Frandsen, he decided to join the ROTC and study special education and psychology.

Upon graduation, he continued his studies and graduated with a Doctorate in Education and Psychology from Brigham Young University.

LaPray taught at both BYU and the University of Utah, introducing students to the ideas of learning disabilities and accommodations while addressing psychological needs. He also spent a summer with doctoral graduates creating a curriculum for special education. In the late 1960s, word had reached Washington DC of LaPray's talents, and he was summoned to the Oval Office with 20 other rising stars to develop and implement a new program directed by President Lyndon Johnson, called Head Start. He travelled across the country implementing the curriculum and training educators and para-educators.

LaPray spent nearly 40 years running his own private practice. He also opened psychology wards in several hospitals, served in professional associations, and developed a group home for teenagers.

Celina Larsen, 2023 recipient of the Anthony LaPray Scholarship, was profuse in expressing her gratitude for LaPray. "The scholarship was a lifeline," she recalled. "It made it so I could finish college on a high note when it felt like nothing else was going right. And the impact that it's still having in my life—without the scholarship, I wouldn't be a teacher now. These children are my life." Larson graduated in May 2024 as the CEHS valedictorian and currently teaches kindergarten at Thomas Edison Charter School South in Nibley, Utah.

Dean Smith praised each of the scholarship recipients: "We want to recognize your determination, persistence, remarkable work ethic, and values-driven goals. These are qualities that will serve you well in any future endeavor, enabling you, your families, and your communities to thrive." He then offered his heartfelt advice. "I hope you will remember this evening of celebration and that you will find your own reasons to pay it forward in the years ahead—be it through your time, talent, or treasure."

Principal Rachel Alberts, Sunburst Elementary

Professor Tom Higbee, Department Head, Special Education and Rehabilitation Counseling

Psychologist Anthony LaPray, Founder, Utah Psychological Associates