

World Renowned Researcher on Aging JoAnn Tschanz Named Endowed Chair of Human Services in CEHS

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Endowed Chair of Human Services JoAnn Tschanz

JoAnn Tschanz, clinical neuropsychologist and professor in the Department of Psychology in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services (CEHS), has been named the Emma Eccles Jones Endowed Chair of Human Services by Endowed Dean Al Smith. The endowment is provided by the Emma Eccles Jones Foundation and is awarded to nationally recognized scholars to amplify their productivity and impact, foster a vibrant and expanding scholarly culture within the college, and bring national attention to CEHS.

“Dr. Tschanz is a leading scholar who is addressing issues that are critical to individuals and their families,” commends Dean Smith. “She has been instrumental in the success of others through her mentoring and has meaningfully contributed to the launch of our Alzheimer’s Disease and Dementia Research Center. I am excited to see her leverage her new role as an endowed chair to create even greater impact.”

In Cache Valley and across the nation, Tschanz’s name is synonymous with the long-time research project, Cache County Study on Memory and Aging (CCSMA), funded by the National Institute on Aging (NIA). In fact, her interest in participating in the study was the catalyst for her joining Utah State University in 1995. “They were recruiting an onsite neuropsychologist for the Cache County Memory Study, and so I applied for it,” recalls Tschanz.

Over the 15 years that Tschanz worked on the population-based study, she served as both clinical director and co-investigator. “At the time, Cache Valley was very unique in that women lived 10 years longer on average than other women in the United States and men lived 15 years longer,” explains Tschanz. The team of researchers set out to discover why by conducting cognitive testing, clinical evaluations, and interviews of more than 5,000 older adults in Cache County.

The results of the CCSMA study have yielded more than 100 published papers in scholarly journals, and studies continue. Because the data are continuing to produce findings, Tschanz still has graduate students working on age-related studies for their dissertations.

Tschanz subsequently led the Cache County Dementia Progression Study (DPS), a longitudinal study that examined the risk factors and outcomes related to all causes of dementia. DPS also examined issues related to dementia caregiving.

In her more than 25 years of age-related research at Utah State University, Tschanz most appreciates the many people who have participated in the studies as well as her colleagues and what they bring to their shared research objectives. “I value the interdisciplinary collaborations and learning from other people about their expertise,” she says. “We have physicians, gerontologists, neuropsychologists, nutritionists, food scientists, geneticists, and stats experts working together, and it was always a pleasure to learn about their areas of expertise.”

Before she came to Utah State, Tschanz earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Idaho State University, and a Ph.D. in clinical psychology with a minor in behavioral neuroscience from Indiana University. She also completed a clinical internship and postdoctoral fellowship in clinical neuropsychology at the University of Washington Medical Center in Seattle.

Tschanz has been a faculty member in the Department of Psychology at CEHS since 1999. She is primarily affiliated with the Clinical/Counseling Ph.D. program, for which she has served as the director of clinical training until her recent appointment as the endowed chair.

“It is an honor to be the Emma Eccles Jones Endowed Chair of Human Services,” says Tschanz. “The endowment will provide funding to support various research activities and endeavors and will help serve as a springboard to pursue many other ideas. The budget will also be helpful as we strive to support research assistants

or acquire equipment that may not get funded from grants but are very critical to conducting research.”

Dean Smith adds, “In addition to the endowed chair’s scholarly output, grants, development of junior scholars, and other matters that are of great significance to the college, each year the endowed chair may invite a guest lecturer or host other scholarly events that involve national experts to engage the college and other units at Utah State. This is a way to nurture our scholarly culture at USU, bring attention to the college, and recognize the Emma Eccles Jones Foundation for providing the endowment.”

Looking back at her twenty-five years at Utah State, Tschanz remains enthusiastic. “I think what really makes the university a good environment for me are the colleagues and friends I know and work with here. The USU community is very supportive, and it is a great place to work. It seems like I’ve been here forever,” she laughs, “but I don’t see myself leaving any time soon.”