The Megan Marie Hamilton Indigenous STEM Scholar Fund: A Legacy of Passion and Advocacy

Megan Hamilton

Utah State University alum Megan Marie Hamilton, was an extraordinary educator, researcher, and advocate whose influence extended far beyond the institution's classrooms and labs. A proud member of the White Earth Nation and the Pillager Band of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, Hamilton dedicated her life to creating inclusive spaces in STEM education, particularly for Indigenous and marginalized communities. Her legacy lives on through the Megan Marie Hamilton Indigenous STEM Scholar Fund, which aims to continue her groundbreaking work by supporting Indigenous students in their pursuit of STEM careers.

Hamilton's journey as an educator began in the Tooele County School District, where she taught middle school science for four years. She then expanded her impact by teaching high school biology, genetics, and marine biology in the Jordan School District, both in Utah. Her passion for STEM education and her dedication to fostering curiosity and understanding in her students were evident from the beginning.

Later, serving as a STEM professional practice assistant professor for USU Extension, Hamilton's role involved engaging communities and providing accessible STEM education, which aligned perfectly with her mission to make STEM inclusive and reachable for all. Her desire to delve deeper into educational research led her to leave this position and pursue a doctoral degree.

After earning a master's at USU Kaysville, which is part of the institution's Statewide Campuses system, Hamilton broke ground as the first doctoral scholar in the instructional technology and learning sciences program within the college on the Logan campus. Excelling academically, she contributed significantly to the field of STEM education through her innovative research, which emphasized the integration of Indigenous perspectives into mainstream curricula. Hamilton's academic achievements and her commitment to education have set a lasting standard for future scholars in the program.

Aubrey Rogowski with Megan Hamilton

"I first met Megan in the summer of 2017, and her potential as an academic scholar was immediately evident," said Andrew Walker, department head and professor of Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences at USU. "Even before beginning her doctoral studies, Megan excelled as a USU Extension research faculty member, and her accomplishments and awards within our department, as well as her recognition from national organizations, spoke volumes about her talent. Her research and dedicated service highlighted her commitment to harnessing diversity as a powerful resource to enrich educational experiences for all students. Megan truly set a standard of excellence that continues to inspire."

Aubrey Rogowski, a fellow educator and close friend who shared her academic journey with Hamilton, fondly reflects on the qualities that made her an inspiration at USU. As both a mentor and cherished friend, Hamilton's influence

left a lasting impact on not only Rogowski, but all those around her.

“Megan was incredibly true to herself and her Indigenous heritage,” Rogowski shared. “She seamlessly integrated her Anishinaabe identity with her scholarly work, blending her cultural roots with her passion for STEM in ways that were both innovative and deeply impactful.”

With an unmatched dedication to her students, Hamilton possessed an innate ability to connect with those she taught, often going above and beyond to ensure their success.

“She cared so deeply for each individual, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds,” Aubrey noted. “If someone was struggling, Megan was there, offering support and encouragement. Her loss has left a significant void in our community.”

Hamilton’s contributions to STEM education were profound, particularly in her efforts to make learning accessible and inclusive. One of her most recent projects involved a research-practice partnership with the Native American Curriculum Initiative (NACI) that aimed at integrating Indigenous perspectives into educational settings.

“She was instrumental in developing frameworks and rubrics to ensure high-quality Indigenous education,” Aubrey explained. “Megan collaborated closely with tribes to bring their voices into the classroom, creating hands-on learning experiences that were both meaningful and culturally sensitive.”

Her influence reaching far beyond USU, Hamilton joined Weber State University in 2022 as an assistant professor of STEM Education, where she co-led a multimillion-dollar grant initiative. This groundbreaking project was designed to equip doctoral students with the skills and knowledge necessary for teaching at the university level, furthering her commitment to enhancing STEM education and mentoring future educators.

“Megan’s work in this area was transformative,” Aubrey said. “She was committed to equipping future educators with the tools to create inclusive and effective learning environments.”

Deeply rooted in her Anishinaabe heritage, Hamilton’s approach to teaching and mentoring was profoundly shaped by her awareness of the systemic barriers faced by Indigenous populations within the Western educational system.

“Megan championed trauma-informed pedagogies and stood firmly against cultural appropriation,” Aubrey recalled of her mentor. “She listened more than she spoke, ensuring that every voice was heard. Her heritage taught her to value the collective wisdom of the community, an ethos she carried into her classrooms.”

The impact Hamilton had on her students and colleagues was profound. As the president of the Instructional Technology Student Association at USU the year before the pandemic, she fostered a strong sense of community, laying the foundation for resilience and connection during the challenging times that followed.

“Megan was a light to everyone,” Aubrey reflected. “She made people feel valued and welcomed, whether they were her students, peers, or fellow educators. Her kindness and compassion left an indelible mark on all who knew her.”

The Megan Marie Hamilton Indigenous STEM Scholar Fund

Following her passing in the summer of 2024, Hamilton’s family and friends came together to establish the Megan Marie Hamilton Indigenous STEM Scholar Fund at USU. This fund was created to honor her legacy and to continue her passionate mission of fostering diversity and inclusion in STEM education.

“This fund is about giving Indigenous students the opportunity to pursue their dreams in STEM,” Aubrey emphasized. “It’s a way to ensure that Megan’s work lives on, inspiring the next generation of scholars and educators.”

Endowment funds at USU, like this one, are designed to provide long-term financial support. The principal amount is invested, and the interest generated is used to award scholarships in perpetuity. This ensures that Hamilton’s vision of an inclusive and equitable STEM field will continue to thrive for years to come.

Through this scholarship, Indigenous students will not only gain financial support, but also a place at the table in STEM fields.

“Megan’s work has already begun to reshape the educational landscape in Utah,” Aubrey said. “This fund will help sustain that momentum, providing opportunities for those who might otherwise be excluded from these critical fields.”

Hamiliton's family and friends encourage contributions to the Megan Marie Hamilton Indigenous STEM Scholar Fund. A donation serves as a lasting tribute to her remarkable life and work, helping to share her light and pave the way for future Indigenous scholars. This fund aims to ensure that Megan's legacy of compassion, inclusion, and excellence continues to inspire and impact generations to come.

For more information or to contribute, please visit https://www.usu.edu/advancement/give/memorial/meganhamilton. Supporting this cause helps honor Megan's memory by advancing the work she was passionate about and nurturing the next generation of leaders in STEM.