

# International Researcher on Aging Rob Stawski Joins USU as HDFS Department Head

10/15/2024



Dr. Robert S. Stawski, new HDFS department head

The Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services (CEHS) welcomes Professor Robert S. Stawski as the new department head of Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS). Stawski is an interdisciplinary developmental health researcher whose research is focused on understanding the social, psychological, and biological underpinnings of mental, physical, and cognitive health in the context of adult development and aging.

"I have a strong passion for leading and collaborating on the development and sustainability of interdisciplinary, innovative, inclusive, and timely research benefiting individuals and families," explains Stawski. "I am steadfastly committed to cultivating environments and cultures that support researchers and facilitate research innovation delivering real-world impact for the populations it is intended to benefit, which I consider critical for academic research."

Prior to joining USU, Stawski was the deputy director of the Institute of Public Health and Wellbeing, a pan-university research institute at the University of Essex (UK), where he was also professor and research chair in Aging, Cognition, and Health in the School of Health and Social Care.

His research has been funded by the National Institute on Aging, William T. Grant Foundation, Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, National Sciences and Engineering Research Council (Canada), Swedish Council for Working Life and

Welfare, Australian Research Council, and Economic and Social Research Council (UK). Stawski earned his PhD in experimental psychology from Syracuse University.

"Professor Stawski is an outstanding scholar with a strong commitment to collaborative, mission-driven leadership," says AI Smith, endowed dean of the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services. "The future is bright for HDFS, and I am excited for Professor Stawski's work with our students, faculty, and staff to build upon the department's tradition of excellence."

Other key academic elements that are important to Stawski include ensuring high quality, work-force ready education and experiences for students, and providing an outstanding environment for leading research to be developed by faculty and students. "I believe in enabling and empowering new generations of diverse individual- and family-focused professionals to meet the unique challenges and needs of the individuals, communities, and regions they aim to serve. This can be accomplished through transformative educational experiences, which supports both the education mission of HDFS and the land grant mission of USU," says Stawski.

He continues, "Leading and supporting the development and delivery of robust training opportunities for HDFS students—and leveraging research, education, practice, and outreach—is imperative for ensuring strong student experiences and helping individuals and families to thrive."

Promoting the research of health and well-being has guided Stawski's entire career. "I pride myself on taking a problem-focused approach to research, as opposed to a discipline-focused approach," he says. "My career has involved working with interdisciplinary teams from a variety of disciplines including human development and family studies/sciences, psychology, nursing, kinesiology, health and social care, social work, social welfare and policy, internal medicine, geriatrics, and many others.

Not only is the USU academic environment enticing to Stawski, but he also feels that the Cache Valley community is a place that his family will thrive and feel accepted. When Stawski saw the online posting for the department head position in CEHS, he immediately thought of his colleague Beth Fauth, professor in HDFS at USU and director of the community-facing Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia Research Center (ADRC).

"I have known Professor Beth Fauth since 2004 when we met at a methods course in Gothenburg, Sweden," Stawski recalls. "When I became aware of this position, I reached out to Beth, who championed the department of

---

HDFS as a context characterized by collegiality, ambition, eagerness, and supportiveness—a context to run toward.”

Throughout their academic careers, Fauth and Stawski’s paths have crossed numerous times professionally. Fauth did her undergraduate degree where Stawski received his master’s degree, and Stawski completed his post doc where Fauth was working on her doctoral degree.

“Rob Stawski has been a highly respected scholar in the areas of gerontology, human development, psychology, and research methodology for many years,” says Fauth. “He is sought after for his research expertise, and he is well-connected to a large international research network. On top of that, he has leadership experience, he is student-focused, and he is a genuinely thoughtful and caring person. He will add a lot to our USU community.”

The future of the HDFS department is in good hands with Stawski at the helm. He says, “I believe serving as department head for HDFS is the ideal role for me to pursue these passions, and, importantly, grow the strengths, contributions, and legacy of the CEHS community in Human Development and Family Studies.”