

# Annual CEHS Scholarship and Awards Banquet Honors Donors, Students, and College Award Recipients, Including Utah's First Lady Abby Palmer Cox

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2025 award recipients: Dr. Lisa Boyce, Dr. Rich Gordin, and First Lady Abby Cox

On September 23, the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services (CEHS) hosted its annual Scholarship and Awards Banquet to celebrate the recipients of the college's most prestigious awards, the dedicated students who received scholarships this year, and their generous donors. For the 2025 Fall semester, CEHS awarded more than 550 scholarships to students in the college, totaling nearly \$1.25M. Special guests that night included USU Interim President Al Smith, who is also the endowed dean of CEHS, and former Aggies, Utah Governor and First Lady Spencer and Abby Palmer Cox.

Recipients of the college's most prestigious awards—the Distinguished Service Award, the Strong Human Services Award, and the Professional Achievement Award—were highlighted for their contributions in the college and community. The 2025 awardees are Utah's First Lady Abby Cox; Lisa Boyce, professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies; and Richard Gordin, professor emeritus in the Department of Kinesiology and Health Science.

"It was an honor to recognize and celebrate the remarkable achievements of our faculty and alumni award winners at this year's Scholarship and Awards Banquet," said Shawn Whiteman, interim dean of CEHS and master of ceremonies for the event. "Their excellence in education, research, and service represents all that we strive for in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services! Further, we are deeply grateful to our donors, whose generosity makes it possible to support our students, and we are inspired by the dedication and promise of this year's scholarship recipients. Together, these honorees, supporters, and scholars reflect the strength and impact of the College of Education and Human Services and our goal to enrich lives."

## Abby Palmer Cox, Utah's First Lady Recipient of the Distinguished Service Award

*The Distinguished Service Award recognizes and celebrates the honor the awardee has brought to USU through his or her outstanding service and achievements.*

As Utah's first lady, Abby Palmer Cox hopes to inspire Utahns to break down the barriers that separate people from treating one another as equals. She is an outspoken advocate of "getting proximate," sharing our unique stories, connecting through our differences, and combating the empathy crisis in our country. Cox's initiative as first lady is called "Show Up," where she champions projects related to educator wellness and resilience, awareness, and support for youth and families in foster care, expanded access to Special Olympics Unified Sports programs in schools across Utah, and statewide services.

Born and raised in Mt. Pleasant, Utah, Cox graduated from USU with a degree in special education with a dual emphasis in early childhood and severe disabilities. Cox cherished her years at USU and followed in the footsteps of a long legacy of family members who attended the university.

"I see Aggies teaching all over the state and it makes me happy because I know they've had a great experience like I did," said Cox. "That's what Utah State University is doing; they are training teachers who then go out and have an impact on the future of the state. We cannot underestimate the power of a teacher."

## Lisa Boyce, Professor, Human Development and Family Studies 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.*

Lisa Boyce is a professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies and executive director of the Dolores Doré Eccles Center for Early Care and Education at Utah State University. Boyce's research focuses on early child development including interventions strategies aimed improving outcomes for children and facilitating resilience in the face of risk. Boyce's current projects include examining predictors of neurodevelopment in children from the Ecuadorian Amazon and evaluating the influence of STEM summer camps on executive functioning skills with children in San Juan School District.

Throughout her career, Boyce has demonstrated sustained leadership in human services and has applied her own and other relevant research to improve the lives of children in Utah, nationally, and internationally. Her focus on indigenous populations and building capacity within communities reflects a commitment developing relationships with an emphasis on reciprocity and ensuring that research is meaningful to the communities. In addition to collaborating with community members, Boyce works with interdisciplinary teams consisting of colleagues in education, engineering, and public health.

"One way I feel like I have made a broader impact is by mentoring my students in a way that they see service not as tangential but as integral to their roles," said Boyce. "I think it has really helped me to feel like I am doing something impactful."

**Richard Gordin, Professor Emeritus, Department of Kinesiology and Health Science  
Recipient of the Professional Achievement Award**

*The Professional Achievement Award recognizes the significant and lasting contributions an individual has brought to his or her field over the course of their career.*

Richard Gordin is professor emeritus in the Department of Kinesiology and Health Science (KHS) with 39 years of service at USU. He authored over 100 articles and more than 400 professional presentations. Gordin began his academic career as an undergraduate student at Ohio Wesleyan University and earned his master's degree from The Ohio State University in sport science and doctoral degree from the University of Utah in kinesiology. While there, Gordin worked with the Utah Red Rocks gymnastics team, assisting the gymnasts in keeping their mental health as strong as their physical game.

For 25 years, Gordin was the official sport psychologist to the USU women's gymnastics team, which led to an appointment with the U.S. women's gymnastics teams, followed by serving as a consultant for the U.S. track and field team and the U.S. Ski & Snowboard Association. Gordin's reputation in the athletic world grew as he focused on the importance of mental health practices for athletes. Gordin has been listed on the sport psychology and mental training registry of the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee since the early 1980s. He served as a mental health consultant for U.S. athletes at the 1988, 2004, 2010, and 2014 Olympic Games.

The Dr. Richard and Colleen Gordin Sport Psychology Endowment was established in 2023 to support students in KHS who intend to pursue a career in sport psychology or physical education coaching. "Scholarships are a way to pay back all the experiences that my students have given me over the years," said Gordin. "A student-professor relationship is a two-way street. I've learned a lot from my students, so my wife and I decided to start this endowed scholarship and we're really happy that we did."

"I think it's amazing that there are people who want to help future students and current students do what they want to do with their lives," said Kendra Jackson, Gordin scholar for 2025-2026. "It's nice because I can explore my other interests—like getting into research or shadowing or just getting more out of my college experience—so the scholarship has been very helpful in that aspect." Jackson, a kinesiology major in KSH, is already seeing the benefits of her sport psychology coursework as she coaches Cache Valley youth in club volleyball.

Dr. Richard Gordin, Professional Achievement Award

Utah First Lady Abby Cox, Distinguished Service Award

Dr. Lisa Boyce, Strong Human Services Award