

# Special Education Professional Practice Professor Awarded National Outstanding Student Chapter Advisor Award



Heather Weese, 2025 recipient of the Outstanding Student Chapter Advisor Award

Heather Weese, professional practice assistant professor in Special Education and Rehabilitation Counseling (SPERC), in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services (CEHS) is the 2025 recipient of the Outstanding Student Chapter Advisor Award from the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). The national award recognizes one CEC Student Chapter advisor every year who has demonstrated an exemplary commitment to engaging members of a student chapter and guiding their educational, personal, and professional development in the field of special education. Weese was nominated by colleagues in SPERC.

Tom Higbee, department head of SPERC, said about Weese's recent national recognition, "I have known Ms. Weese for many years and can think of no one more deserving of this award. She helps the students organize activities and provides them with mentorship as they develop leadership skills by modeling leadership and providing direct support and instruction when necessary. I truly admire the patient and positive leadership she provides."

In 2012, Weese left her eight-year position at Logan High School, where she taught students with significant cognitive disabilities in grades 9-12, to join USU as a

professional practice assistant professor in SPERC. She has served as the faculty advisor for Utah State University's student chapter of the Council for Exceptional Children since 2013.

Weese has taught more than 380 online students who have graduated in special education. She has also supervised over 275 practicum students and student teachers, overseen two doctoral students who were teaching special education courses, been a committee member for 20 master's students, and supervised more than 30 undergraduate teaching fellows. In total, she has taught more than 1,100 graduates. Also, since joining CEHS in 2012, Weese has been selected "Teacher of the Year" (2019-20 and 2022-23) by undergraduate students in SPERC, highlighting the impact she has had on her students.

Weese explains, "As the chapter advisor, I work most closely with the officers of Student Council for Exceptional Children. I love working with them. I love seeing them step up to leadership roles and seeing their new and innovative ideas."

"Heather wants to help the world of special education and the lives of those with disabilities change for the better," says Erica Rood, 2022 secretary of the CEC student chapter at USU and now Weese's colleague teaching preschool in the Logan area. "She is making changes in our community and in the lives of students at Utah State University and was one of the best advisors and professors I was able to learn from and work with."

Most years, the USU student chapter comprises every student in the special education program, and they gather every month for activities, fundraisers, and recruitment. Student members have participated in activities such as spreading awareness for the campaign "Spread the Word to End the Word" with the Best Buddies club on campus; organizing food, clothing, and supply drives for local schools and organizations; and attending the annual Utah CEC conference, to name a few.

Rood recalls, "As one of our monthly events, we did a fundraiser to help different programs in our small community that help those with disabilities, and we were able to raise almost \$1K.

While we were planning this activity, Heather made sure to give ideas and thoughts, but she always let us lead the discussion and have the ultimate say of how we wanted to implement our ideas. This helped us take ownership of our SCEC, while she was a mentor who helped us reach our potential."

Looking back at the past 13 years of mentoring the students in the CEC chapter, Weese says her relationships with the students has brought meaning and fulfillment. "I love seeing them become leaders, watching them participate and being concerned about creating a cohesive university club as well as belonging to a professional organization," she says.

In early March, Weese was formally recognized for her exceptional efforts as a student leader mentor at USU at the annual CEC Convention and Expo in Baltimore, Maryland.