

# Valedictorians of CEHS Celebrated for Outstanding Academic Achievement

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In the weeks leading up to the 2024-25 commencement and convocation graduation ceremonies at USU, a remarkable group of valedictorians across the university are being recognized. These individuals are selected for their overall academic excellence for the duration of their undergraduate studies, and have the highest GPAs in their respective departments. Within the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services (CEHS), eight valedictorians—one to represent each department in the college—have received the distinguished recognition.

“The success of our valedictorians is a powerful reflection of their personal drive and dedication as well as their ability to learn from and collaborate with the exceptional faculty, mentors, and peers in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services,” remarked Shawn Whiteman, interim dean of CEHS. “Their journeys, undoubtedly supported by caring family members and close others, exemplify academic excellence and demonstrate the transformative power of shared knowledge. We look forward with great excitement to watching how they will continue to flourish, lead, and enrich lives in the years ahead.”

Following are the CEHS students selected to represent the college as valedictorians for the 2024-25 academic year.



**Emma  
Marchant, CEHS Valedictorian and Department  
Kinesiology and Health Sciences**

Marchant earned her degree in recreation administration with an emphasis in public recreation within the Department of Kinesiology and Health Sciences. She also earned a minor in disability studies. In addition to completing her coursework with a cumulative 4.0 GPA, Marchant was a member of the USU Eastern women’s softball team until she transferred to the Logan campus in 2023. Following graduation, Marchant will begin employment as a program manager at a senior recreation center in Salt Lake City. Looking back at her years as an Aggie, Marchant says she learned a lot as she balanced coursework with her commitments as a college softball player. “Between practices, games, and travel, I had to be super organized and manage my time well, sometimes staying up late to study after long days on the field. But staying focused on my goals helped me push through.” In addition to representing the Department of Kinesiology and Health Sciences as its valedictorian, Marchant was selected to represent CEHS as one of nine college valedictorians for the university.



**Peyton Ashby,**

the valedictorian for the **School of Teacher Education and Leadership**, majored in elementary education and graduated in December 2024. She is currently teaching 5th grade in Jordan School District and plans to renew her contract for another year. “It has been a rollercoaster of learning that I am excited to continue this coming school year,” Ashby said. “In the future, I hope to have found my ideal grade to teach and have a plethora of skills, lesson plans, ideas, and experiences in my tool belt.” Recalling her experience at USU, she says she most appreciated the practicum experiences for her major and learning alongside her classmates. “I met some amazing people, and I loved getting to step into lots of different classrooms and see what the teaching profession is really like. My time at USU taught me to work hard for the things that I want. I am so happy to forever and always be an Aggie!”



**Jordan**

**Broadbent** is the valedictorian for the **Department of Psychology**. Broadbent majored in psychology with a minor in chemistry. He said, “the best part of my psychology major was learning how to understand people—what drives them, what challenges them, and how we can support mental and emotional well-being.” Broadbent will begin medical school in the fall at Kansas City University and hopes to return to Cache Valley one day as a physician, addressing the physical and social needs of his patients and the community.



**Kelly**

**Herrington** is representing the **Department of Human Development and Family Studies** as this year’s valedictorian. Herrington majored in human

development and family studies with an emphasis in family and community services. After graduation she will return to her hometown of Sterling, Virginia, and seek employment as a preschool teacher. Herrington overcame multiple health challenges in the years leading up to graduation. "Because I had to take two semesters off, my college path has been unconventional," recalled Herrington, "but it's taught me to not compare my journey to others because everyone's path toward success is different." During her time at USU, Herrington thrived in the social aspects of school. "There's nothing like singing 'The Scotsman' after an Aggie basketball win in the Spectrum," she said.



**Julia Hult** is the valedictorian for the **Department of Nursing**. She will graduate with a BSN (Bachelor of Science in Nursing). Hult says the best part of her major was the clinical experiences, where she was able to directly apply what she was learning to real-life situations. "I loved connecting with patients, and seeing the impact of compassionate care confirmed that I chose the right career," she says. "The supportive professors, hands-on clinical experiences, and friendships I've made have shaped me into the person I am today." Julia is currently seeking full-time employment as a nurse in either Salt Lake or Utah county. In the future, she hopes to further her education to become a nurse anesthetist (CRNA) or fill a nursing leadership role.



**Katie Jacobsen** has been selected valedictorian to represent **Special Education and Rehabilitation Counseling**. Jacobsen majored in special education with an emphasis in severe disabilities. "The best part of my major was being able to work with students with disabilities and see their progress and to help them grow just like their peers," she said. She also loved the social aspect of USU. "I have met some of the greatest people here and I will miss being a student. It has been an experience I wouldn't trade for anything." This fall, she will join the Nibley Elementary School faculty as the special education teacher.



**Kara James** is representing **Instructional Technology and Learning**

**Sciences** as the department's valedictorian. James majored in human experience design and interaction. James most enjoyed the blend of flexibility and hands-on learning offered in her major. "The online courses allowed me to manage my time effectively, while the in-person classes provided interactive, project-based experiences. The program's focus on creativity and real-world applications really prepared me for the job market. Plus, the dedicated professors who mentored us beyond just coursework made the experience truly valuable." James also learned firsthand how to balance the demands of maintaining academic excellence alongside running a small business with her husband and conducting research. "Following graduation, I'll continue to grow our business, Bussin Bread, using the entrepreneurial skills honed at USU, while also taking on UX/UI design projects that utilize my prototyping expertise."



**Abigail**

**Strait** has been selected valedictorian for the **Department of Communicative Disorders and Deaf Education**. She majored in communicative disorders with a minor in American Sign Language. During her undergraduate years, Strait struggled with mental health challenges for the first time and learned how to be successful despite them. "Learning how to adapt to these challenges and how to advocate for the help I needed took time and was hard," she recalled, "but I learned that there are many people who are on my team and who will support me." Following graduation, Strait will continue her education at USU, beginning the master's program in speech-language pathology this summer. She hopes to work with children who are

deaf or hard of hearing and their families to provide education, encouragement, and support.