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CAAS MPH NEWSLETTER

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Featured In This Edition:

MESSAGE FROM THE NDFS DEPARTMENT HEAD	1
ACCREDITATION UPDATE	2
SPRING GRADUATE HIGHLIGHTS	3
GENERAL ADVISORY BOARD	9
CAAS MPH PROGRAM IN THE NEWS	11
STUDENT ADVISORY BOARD	13
COMMENCEMENT AND UPCOMING EVENTS	15
FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA	17



College of Agriculture & Applied Sciences
UtahStateUniversity

A MESSAGE FROM THE NDFS DEPARTMENT HEAD

Welcome to the spring edition of the USU Master of Public Health Program newsletter! Spring is always an exciting time in academia—filled with celebrations of achievement, new beginnings, and the energy of graduation. It's a season to honor the hard work and dedication of our students, as well as the faculty and staff who support them. Housed jointly in the Department of Nutrition, Dietetics and Food Sciences and the Department of Animal, Dairy and Veterinary Sciences, our MPH program continues to grow in impact and reach, and we're proud to share a glimpse of the progress made this semester.

In this issue, you'll find highlights of our graduating class, updates from both the student and general advisory boards, and a call for new members to join these vital groups. We're also sharing upcoming events and an important update on our CEPH accreditation. Thank you for being part of our MPH community—your continued support and involvement helps shape the future of public health in Utah and beyond.



Heidi Wengreen, PhD

**Nutrition, Dietetics and Food Science
Department Head and Professor**

ACCREDITATION UPDATE

In January 2025, the Master of Public Health (MPH) program underwent a positive site review as part of the accreditation process through the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH). The reviewers highlighted numerous strengths of the program, including its intentional curricular design and strong engagement of both students and stakeholders. We are especially proud to have fully met all accreditation criteria with no suggested or required changes for improvement! This clearly demonstrates the commitment of our faculty and staff who have worked hard over the years to continually refine the program to meet student and industry needs.

The final decision regarding the program's accreditation status will be made in July 2025. We look forward to sharing the official status with you all then! Thank you to the many of you involved in this process. We couldn't have gotten this far without the support of our students, faculty/staff, administrators, and public health stakeholders.



Dr. Mateja Savoie-Roskos

PhD, MPH, RD, FAND

Associate Dean for Academic Programs and Student Services
College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences

Associate Professor

Master of Public Health Program Director

Spring Graduate Highlights

Graduation season is here, and we couldn't be more proud of all our students who are reaching this exciting milestone!

As we celebrate the Class of 2025, we're thrilled to highlight a few of our amazing graduates and share their unique journeys and achievements. Congratulations to the entire graduating class — you inspire us every day!

Tari York

Tari York is completing the Master of Public Health in Public Health Nutrition program this spring! For her APE, she helped USU Extension complete a survey regarding a diabetes cookbook. She also rewrote an SOP and updated the R code for a data project at the Utah Department of Health and Human Services for the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program.



Tari says that the highlights of her program were the skills she developed and the people she met that will help her in her future career, which she says she now feels ready for! Her current plans are to continue working with the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, and keeping her eyes open for nutrition related opportunities that pique her interest.

Victoria Lewis

Victoria is graduating with her Master of Public Health in Veterinary Public Health degree this spring! A highlight of her time in the program was serving as part of the Student Advisory Board (SAB), where she was able to work closely with professors and faculty to implement changes for the students. Being a part of the SAB allowed her to become close with students from both program concentrations (veterinary and nutrition) and gave an extra level of student engagement and understanding.



Victoria says, "I am proud of the amount of new information I learned and how to incorporate it into real-world situations. Having a deeper understanding of One Health and the importance of public health has helped me to develop my advocacy for those who might not have a voice. I am extremely grateful for my two years studying veterinary public health and the students and faculty that helped me to succeed."

For her APE, Victoria worked with the Utah Department of Corrections K9 Unit to develop a needs assessment for the officers. The needs assessment focused on the knowledge officers have about veterinary medicine and what they would like to see improve for the K-9s. Officers shared the distress of not having adequate training in basic dog care, especially for working dogs. Based on the needs assessment, Victoria created an education pamphlet for the K-9 officers. The pamphlet has a comprehensive guide to examining your dog for issues, things to do in emergency settings, supplements to help prolong efficient work, and mental health resources for the officers and their K-9 partners.

After graduation, Victoria plans to attend veterinary school to become an exotic/wildlife veterinarian. She hopes to attend USU's 4-year program this fall.



Kristi Higham

Kristi is completing the Master of Public Health in Public Health Nutrition program this spring. A highlight of her program experience was attending the USU study abroad program in Crete, Greece, learning about the healthful effects of the Mediterranean Diet as well as sustainable growing practices. She is grateful for all the faculty in the MPH program who helped her discover that her passion for gardening can intersect with food security and health promotion!

For her APE, Kristi set out to explore food insecurity among college students and identify practical strategies to address it. During her research, she discovered that a lack of food self-efficacy—confidence in one's ability to prepare healthy meals—can significantly impact students' eating habits. Many students either skip meals or rely on fast food, which can be both nutritionally lacking and financially unsustainable.

In collaboration with the UVU Wellness Program and their onsite dietitian, she developed an interactive lesson plan and a resourceful handout focused on affordable grocery shopping. She then led a one-hour cooking demonstration featuring simple, nutritious recipes made with budget-friendly ingredients—many of which are commonly available at campus or community food pantries. The demonstration included three versatile dishes: a hearty vegetarian soup, a flavorful Mexican casserole using rotisserie chicken, and a chicken salad designed to repurpose leftovers.

The accompanying handout provided students with grocery-saving tips, a guide to nearby stores, directions using public transportation, and suggestions for cost-effective items to buy at each location. This initiative aimed to empower students with the skills and confidence needed to cook for themselves, promoting both healthier eating habits and greater independence.

When asked about her future plans, Kristi says “I love university life, teaching, engaging with community stakeholders, and the agricultural focus of Utah State, so I would love to find a career for myself here at USU or an affiliated organization! In the meanwhile, I will continue working in the community garden that I helped create in my neighborhood and continue teaching Fitness for Life at UVU.”



Chandler Hughes

Chandler will be graduating this month, completing the Master of Public Health in Veterinary Public Health program. In the fall, she will be attending vet school at Western University of Health Sciences in Pomona, CA. After which, she hopes to practice small animal medicine in underserved areas, providing vet care to those who cannot afford it.

For Chandler's APE, she created a handout and social media campaign for a vet clinic on the importance of prevention for zoonotic and vector-borne diseases. It provided information on both vaccines and heartworm/intestinal parasite/flea/tick prevention. The handout is posted in exam rooms for staff and owners to reference when discussing the importance of these prevention measures. In addition to her APE, Chandler served on the SAB for the program, where she worked with faculty to ensure student needs were met. She says this opportunity was a highlight of her program experience!

Sarah Klass

Sarah is completing her Masters of Public Health in Veterinary Public Health this semester! As part of her program, she completed an Applied Practice Experience (APE) with Mote Marine Laboratory researching Red Tide. Red Tide is a harmful algal bloom caused by *Karenia brevis*, a naturally found algae in the Gulf of Mexico. This causes human health issues like respiratory irritation and headaches as well as devastating effects on the environment, wildlife, and economy.

Sarah says, "I truly loved doing the field work to get samples every month and monitor the water quality for signs on bloom initiation. I also learned a lot from coordinating and conducting mitigation projects to try and find a product that can limit the impacts that this bloom has on the Florida coast."

Up next, Sarah says she wants to focus on policy and advocacy for research funding for these kinds of phenomena that impact humans, animals, and the environment.

Ama Kafui Wurah

Ama will complete the Master of Public Health in Public Health Nutrition program this semester. Ama's APE included developing a culturally sensitive, nutrition appropriate recipe book for seniors at the San Lorenzo Latin American Community Center in Toronto. She worked closely with the community to incorporate traditional ingredients and cooking methods into recipes that aligned with dietary and health needs. Using vegetables grown in the center's garden and greenhouse, recipes were designed that were both nutritious and accessible, fostering a deeper connection between seniors and their food sources.



In addition to the recipe book, Ama played a key role in enhancing the community garden and greenhouse plan. She collaborated with community members and FoodShear, a nonprofit organization working on food justice through community-based initiatives, advocacy, and public education, to expand the variety of culturally relevant crops grown. This effort helped ensure a sustainable source of fresh produce for the seniors. By integrating nutrition education with hands-on gardening activities, she supported seniors in developing skills to grow and prepare their food, strengthened food security, and promoted long-term health benefits. This project not only enhanced food security and nutrition awareness among seniors but also strengthened community engagement around sustainable and culturally significant dietary practices.

Ama's future plans include focusing on improving maternal and infant health and nutrition in Ghana and Africa by addressing food access challenges and advancing research on sustainable nutrition interventions. Recognizing the critical role of early-life nutrition in shaping long-term health outcomes, she aims to work on initiatives that ensure equitable access to nutritious foods for mothers and infants.

Ama says, "I plan to contribute to policy development, community-based programs, and advocacy efforts that enhance food security and promote culturally appropriate dietary practices. Additionally, I am committed to researching and implementing sustainable nutrition interventions that leverage local food systems, reduce food waste, and support environmentally responsible food production. My goal is to bridge the gap between research and practice, ensuring that sustainable nutrition solutions translate into tangible benefits for vulnerable populations."

Abby May

Abby will be graduating this semester with a Masters of Public Health in Public Health Nutrition. She has also been completing a dietetic internship with the CAPD (Certificate in Advanced Practice in Dietetics) program!

For her APE, Abby created materials for the new volunteer program at Create Better Health, which is Utah's SNAP-ed program. She created an application process and a list of possible projects that volunteers could complete, along with steps to complete each project. She also created a mini-volunteer course that gave volunteers a very basic nutrition education before they started volunteering with Create Better Health. She says it has been exciting to see her outputs get implemented within the organization and to be able to evaluate her work.



"My APE project gave me the opportunity to start full-time work with Create Better Health as the Expansion Coordinator. I am working to teach online programs, work with the volunteer program, and work with grant writing and continuous improvement. I am also working to study for the RD exam to become a registered dietitian."

Abby says that a highlight of the program was seeing the growth within herself and her assignments as time went on. She states, "I really have learned so much about myself, public health, and developed as a writer and researcher during this program. It has been very fun to look back at old work and see how far I've come."

General Advisory Board

Over the past year, our MPH General Advisory Board has continued to play a vital role in shaping the direction of our program by sharing valuable insights into emerging trends in public health practice and research. Their input has helped us align our program priorities with the evolving needs of the field. This includes a growing emphasis on strengthening communication with diverse stakeholders to rebuild trust in public health messaging. This year, board members also provided suggestions for recruiting students from rural communities and discussed trainings and certifications that could be beneficial for our students and workforce partners. We are especially grateful for their participation in our CEPH accreditation site visit this January.

We sincerely thank our current board members for their time and dedication.

If you are interested in serving on our two-year advisory board, we'd love to hear from you! Contact casey.coombs@usu.edu for more information.



Commander Willy Lanier
DVM, MPH
Utah Department of Health and
Human Services



Lea Palmer
MBA, MPH, RDN
Utah Create Better Health



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Dr. Amanda Price
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Agriculture and Food



Kacey Nowak
MPH Utah
Department of Health
and Human Services

CAAS MPH Program in the News

So many that are involved with our MPH program have recently been recognized for their accomplishments and positive impacts on both students and the public health profession! Here are just a few:

Brooke Lister

Brooke Lister, a registered dietitian with the Utah State Be Well Program and a graduate of our program, was recently awarded the Emerging Dietetics Leader Award from the Utah Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Since 2021, Brooke has single-handedly created a nutrition program to meet the needs of USU students while involving current dietetics students, as well as other faculty and staff. Congratulations Brooke! We love to see the amazing things our alumni are doing!



Savannah Daines

Our program's very own Savannah Daines was recently awarded the Rising Star Award by the Utah Public Health Association. During UPHA's annual conference, Savannah's impressive public health contributions were obvious - she presented research on food insecurity and diabetes in Malawi, acted as a moderator for a panel about thriving in early career roles, and several of the students she mentors presented their recent work. Besides her work with our program, Savannah acts as Executive Director of the iHelp Foundation and Director of Athletics United.



The MPH program would not be what it is without the contributions and involvement of Savannah. Her work as the program assistant and graduate program coordinator is vital to the program and student success! Congratulations Savannah - this award is well deserved!



Katie Kraus

Katie Kraus began her journey in research as a passionate undergraduate in Utah State University's dietetics program, earning the title of Undergraduate Researcher of the Year in 2006. After spending seven years teaching at the University of Idaho, Katie returned to Utah State University to share her experience and enthusiasm with the next generation of students.

As part of her work at Utah State, Katie frequently acts as a faculty advisor for MPH students. She also teaches some of the program's elective courses: Application of Research Principles in Dietetics and Advanced

Sports Nutrition. This year, Katie was awarded the College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences Undergraduate Research Mentor of the Year. We commend Katie for her dedication and impact to research and to student success!

Casey Coombs

Finally, we'd like to highlight Casey Coombs, an invaluable professor with the MPH program. Casey has immense experience in the public health field and brings her expertise to every class she teaches! We're proud to share that she has been honored with the North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture Teaching Award of Merit.

This award recognizes educators who demonstrate excellence in teaching and a commitment to student success at the postsecondary level. It's a reflection of Casey's dedication, innovation, and impact in the classroom. Congratulations Casey!



Student Advisory Board

The MPH Student Advisory Board (SAB), established in 2023, plays a vital role in the CAAS MPH program at Utah State University by providing feedback on student concerns, accreditation requirements, career development, and program resources. Acting as a bridge between students and faculty, the SAB ensures that student voices are heard and contributes to collaborative decision-making. Given that public health relies on multidisciplinary teamwork, serving on the SAB offers students valuable experience in working collectively to improve their academic environment before entering the workforce.

The SAB meets twice per semester, hosts a general student meeting where all students can share their thoughts, and sends a representative to monthly faculty meetings and general board meetings. The SAB fosters open communication and transparency in program leadership decisions. It allows students to provide constructive feedback on courses, policies, and resources while strengthening the overall sense of community. Though only recently established, the SAB has already made meaningful contributions to the graduate program, and its role is expected to expand as the program continues to grow.

Current or prospective MPH students that are interested in joining the 2025-2026 Student Advisory Board can contact Natalie Dalley at natalie.dalley@usu.edu.

2024-2025 Student Advisory Board



Chandler Hughes
Chair



Victoria Lewis
Vice Chair



Abagael Pfeiffer
Secretary



Ina Wells
Professional and
Career Development



Kimberlee Creech
Social Media
and Student
Communication



RG Perez
Board Member

Commencement Ceremonies

A photograph of the Utah State University main building, featuring a prominent central tower with a clock face and a flagpole. The building is surrounded by green trees and mountains in the background.

Utah State University Commencement Ceremony

**Wednesday, April 30 at 7 PM
Dee Glen Smith Spectrum**

A photograph of a modern, multi-story building with a large glass facade, identified as the College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences. The foreground is filled with vibrant pink and white flowers.

College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences Convocation and Hooding Ceremony

**Thursday, May 1 at 5 PM
Dee Glen Smith Spectrum**

Upcoming Events

2025 Climate and Health Symposium

April 29, 2025

West Jordan, UT

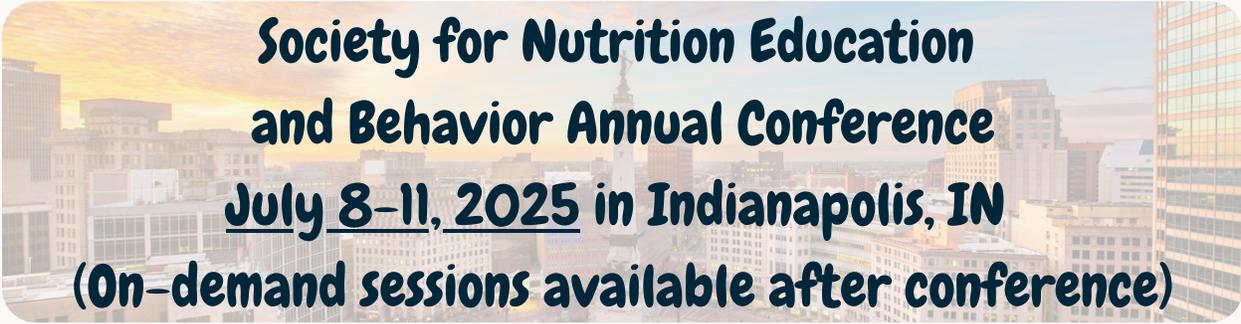


Society for Nutrition Education

and Behavior Annual Conference

July 8-11, 2025 in Indianapolis, IN

(On-demand sessions available after conference)



**Utah Chapter of the Society of
Public Health Education Annual Conference**

October 1, 2025 in Sandy, UT

Currently accepting abstracts



Utah One Health Symposium

November 5, 2024

Cedar City, UT



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