

# Meet the 2022 College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences Valedictorian: Madeline Peterson

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[Nutrition, Dietetics and Food Sciences](#)

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Dietetics graduate Madeline Peterson has the honor of serving as the 2022 valedictorian for the College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences. Madeline, a Minnesota native, grew up in the rural town of Watertown. Many of her early memories include watching her grandmothers bake homemade goods while she helped shape buns or peel carrots. From an early age, Madeline was interested in teaching at the secondary level and, as a junior in high school, developed a love for health and wellness.

As she explored colleges, Madeline found Utah State University by chance while searching for dietetic programs. After touring the campus, she fell in love. She discovered that USU's dietetics program offered hands-on experience unmatched by other universities.

"In dietetics, I'm teaching individuals about health, which is kind of like the best of both worlds for me," said Madeline. "I don't want to just be content and feel like I know everything there is to know about my job. Dietetics is always changing and evolving and that's something I really like about it."

Madeline is a three-time A-pin recipient, an award given to USU students who maintain a 4.0 for two consecutive semesters. She has been on the Dean's List every semester of her undergraduate degree. She was the 2021 Department of Nutrition, Dietetics and Food Sciences (NDFS) Undergraduate Scholar of the Year and the Utah Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics selected her as the 2022 Outstanding Dietetics Student in a Didactic Program. Madeline created a fact sheet on intuitive eating during adolescence which was selected in spring of 2021 to be published as a USU Extension Fact Sheet.

During her years at USU, Madeline worked for three semesters as a teaching assistant and undergraduate teaching fellow for various nutrition courses, as a peer advisor for the NDFS department, and as a peer mentor for the Connections course that helps orient new students to the university. Dawnetta Mehnken, the academic advisor for NDFS, describes Madeline as a proactive advocate and mentor for students.

A commencement tradition at USU is that each college's valedictorian honors a faculty member who influenced them most by inviting them to serve as the valedictorian's escort in the commencement processional and ceremony. Madeline has selected Stacy Bevan, a professional practice instructor in NDFS, to be her escort for commencement.

"The whole dietetics faculty is fantastic. We're all pretty close-knit in the program, all on a first name basis because there are so few of us," said Madeline. "Stacy took a chance on me. She was out on maternity leave while I took her food literacy course my freshman year, but based on the recommendations of others in the department, she reached out to me to ask if I would be her teaching assistant."

Madeline spent the past three semesters assisting with the lab section of the food literacy course. This semester, a dietetics graduate student assumed the responsibility of teaching the lab with Madeline helping make that a smooth transition for students and Stacy.

"Madeline is a joy to be around," Stacy said. "She is incredible with students, an excellent presenter, and knowledgeable about food. Students look up to her

and are comfortable coming to her with questions and concerns.”

Madeline was also an active participant in student life, including having been selected as a CAAS Ambassador and as secretary of the group in spring 2022. Madeline describes herself as a “big sports gal” with a love for all USU sporting events.

“I tried to go to as many football games as possible,” she said. “Basketball was also huge. During my freshman and sophomore year, my roommates and I tried to go to every single game just because the atmosphere was so fun,” said Madeline. “At one game I participated in the dress like Craig Smith (then men’s head basketball coach) game with a bald cap and everything.”

Madeline and her fiancé have also become “True Aggies” after attending the event for homecoming in fall 2021.

“I love Aggie Ice Cream, too,” said Madeline. “I always say I’m going to get a new flavor, but I always end up getting Aggie Blue Mint. The mint, the chocolate, the Oreos, it’s just a beautiful combination.”

After graduation, Madeline plans to complete a dietetics internship through USU in Salt Lake City, which will include a rotation between clinical service and community service with programs such as SNAP, WIC, and school district food service. Madeline hopes to earn her Ph.D. and teach future dietitians at the university level.