

WSU NEWS

WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY NEWS & EVENTS | JUNE 2026



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Follow [@weberstatepresident](https://www.instagram.com/weberstatepresident) on Instagram for WSU information, initiatives, events, and community engagement opportunities.

MEET INCOMING PRESIDENT CHRIS MALLETT

Chris Mallett first came to Weber State University as a student. He said that experience informed everything he's experienced since in higher education leadership, from years at Western Governors University to his position at Northeastern University.

"Years ago, I was a 22-year-old carpenter in Davis County," Mallett said. "My wife, Charlet, was a Wildcat before me. Watching her grow as a student inspired me to believe that I could succeed here, too. I enrolled in evening courses and was immediately welcomed by talented faculty and staff who helped build my confidence and abilities.

That was the spark that changed my life."

Mallett will return to his alma mater, serving as WSU's 14th president, beginning Aug. 1.

"I am excited to work together to ensure all students find opportunities like I did here," Mallett said. "Together with every WSU colleague, student, graduate, partner, and stakeholder, we will fuel unparalleled opportunity and impact by continuing to honor Weber State's mission, values, and community."

Stay tuned for information on welcome events, where Wildcats can get to know Mallett.

WELL-KNOWN LEADER IS APPOINTED AS DEAN OF THE DUMKE COLLEGE OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS

Next month, Weber State University's Dr. Ezekiel R. Dumke College of Health Professions will welcome a new dean who's already well-known on campus.

Darcy Carter, a longtime educator and administrator with two decades of experience at Weber State, has been selected for the role.

"The College of Health Professions has such a strong tradition of excellence, and I'm really honored to build upon that as a dean," Carter said.

Carter has held numerous leadership positions throughout her career at WSU, including her most recent role as associate dean for the College of Health Professions. Before that, she was the School of Health Administrative Services chair, the Master of Health Administration program director, and the Office of Graduate Studies curriculum chair.

Her experience spans clinical coordination, internship and capstone management, and leadership across all levels of education.

"I've seen that the College of Health Professions changes people's lives," Carter said. "It prepares them for meaningful and rewarding careers. And those careers impact the lives of patients, their families, and community members that our students go on to serve."

Carter describes herself as a "Wildcat from the start." She came to WSU through the Early College program, then earned her bachelor's degree and Master of Health Administration at the university. She also holds a Doctorate of Health Sciences from A.T. Still University in Missouri.

"I'll always be grateful for the opportunities that Weber State has given me, and I want to continue paying that forward to the next generation of students," Carter said. "This is more than where I studied or where I work. Weber State has become a part of who I am."

Her relatives also add to what she calls the "Carter family Wildcat legacy." Her mom, husband, two sons, two daughters, two sons-in-law, and two daughters-in-law are all alumni or currently attending WSU.

"Anyone who knows me well knows that I bleed purple," Carter said. "I'm proud of the work we do."

Beginning July 1, Carter will take the reins from Dean **Yasmen Simonian**, who's retiring at the end of the month after a 45-year career with the university.

She'll oversee the university's largest academic college, which offers credentials ranging from certificates and associate degrees to bachelor's and doctorates. The college has about 5,200 students majoring in healthcare fields and is a top provider of health professionals in Utah.

Carter said she looks forward to working alongside faculty, staff, students, alumni, healthcare partners, and the community to continue creating new opportunities together.

One of her personal mottos is "everything is figureoutable," which guides how she approaches innovation and collaboration. She has that message on a glass sign in her office, setting the tone for her leadership every day after she parks her purple car and heads into work.

"A great college is really built through shared vision, strong partnerships, and commitment to helping other people succeed," Carter said. "And I'm so excited to work in an environment where I can help people thrive and feel supported as we shape the future of healthcare."





PROGRAM APPLICATIONS NOW OPEN: WSU LAUNCHES BACHELOR'S FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSISTANTS

Weber State University is expanding its reach in Utah's healthcare industry with a new bachelor's degree for [occupational therapy assistants](#).

The program is designed to increase access to training in northern Utah, strengthen the state's workforce, and elevate patient care. An initial investment of \$2.5 million from the Larry H. & Gail Miller Family Foundation made this new degree offering possible.

"As occupational therapy advances, industry professionals have recognized the need to move beyond traditional associate-level training," said **Robyn Thompson**, OTA program director. "We see how this bachelor's degree will serve students better than an associate degree. We're being forward-thinking with this, creating better training and more career opportunities for our graduates."

Weber State's program is one of fewer than 20 baccalaureate programs across the U.S.

Students in the program will have access to state-of-the-art facilities. WSU will formally open its Occupational Therapy Pathways Building on the university's Ogden campus later this year. This innovative space features hospital, clinic, and home environments, and was designed to simulate the challenging situations students will face outside the classroom.

"Our students do not just learn in a perfect, ADA-compliant world," said **Rhonda Roth**, assistant professor and the OTA program's academic field coordinator. "They learn how to adapt their care to the diverse, sometimes cramped, and unmodified spaces in which their future patients actually live. This hands-on immersion ensures our graduates are exceptionally prepared for the unpredictable nature of occupational therapy."

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR GRADUATES

Graduates earned 4,517+ credentials this spring, ranging from certificates to associate, bachelor's, and postgraduate degrees. This year also saw outstanding student engagement across commencement activities, including a record 668 graduates at the General Studies convocation and 1,641 students attending Grad Finale.

"I'm incredibly proud of our graduates for continually showing us that a degree from Weber State is a powerful investment in their future and community," said Interim President **Leslie Durham**. "It's wonderful to see so many students recognizing that the hard work they put into their education here opens doors for a lifetime."

Spring's most-awarded degrees included nursing, radiography, health sciences, and computer science.



AWARDING CREDIT FOR STUDENTS' PRIOR EXPERIENCES

The Department of Criminal Justice was recently recognized for translating real-world experience into academic progress.

Through Prior Learning Assessment, a process that allows students to earn college credit for knowledge gained outside of the classroom, criminal justice students can earn class credit for relevant work experience.

The Division of Online & Continuing Education named the department a Prior Learning Champion, an award given to teams that are removing barriers for students through credit for prior learning.

"This is a great way for our department to recognize the valuable professional experiences that many of our students bring to their educational journey," said **Molly Sween**, Department of Criminal Justice chair. "Our department recognizes the time and money that goes into college, and we hope this is a way to assist students in leading to more efficient degree paths."



To qualify, students must have at least three consecutive years of full-time employment in a criminal justice-related profession within the last five years. The Department of Criminal Justice currently offers four exams that allow students to test out of a required criminal justice course.



EMPLOYEE GIVING SPOTLIGHT: MEET THE WILDCATS WHO AMPLIFY WEBER STATE

WSU's faculty and staff make a difference every single day. In this new section, read about colleagues who are helping students overcome obstacles, find their passions, and achieve their goals.

Becca Gibson, Alumni Relations engagement coordinator, has worked at WSU for 10 years. Before that, she was an undergraduate student here, and she is currently working to complete her master's degree at WSU. She said these experiences have motivated her to personally invest in students' growth and future.

Q: What inspired you to donate?

A: I believe in Weber because Weber believed in me. I really needed scholarships, especially as an undergraduate student, and I couldn't have continued my education if I didn't have that financial support.

I'm really so grateful for this community, and I want to be able to give back. It's a privilege to help build up students and see them succeed.

Q: What's an area or initiative you feel strongly about?

A: I love Cat2Cat. That's a student-funded scholarship, and it goes straight back to students. I've seen students build that over the years, and this year WSU students donated over \$7,000.

I also loved the Light the W campaign. I was excited to give to that because I feel like it's a symbol of hope in the community. To me, the W says 'Weber is here for you. Weber is a light for you.' It reminds people that this is a place where they can grow and thrive.

Q: WSU has been around for 137 years, and employee support helps ensure the university remains strong for decades to come. What excites you about being part of this next chapter?

A: Weber's helped me as I work on becoming who I want to become. I get emotional talking about it — I wouldn't be where I am in life without help and without my education, so it's personal to me. I want to help students grow in those ways.

Interested in sharing your support? Employees can start or change a donation through the [payroll deduction website](#).

CELEBRATING 12 BELOVED TEACHERS



Twelve of WSU's most beloved faculty members earned the 2026 Presidential Teaching Excellence Award, personally awarded by Interim President **Leslie Durham** through a series of surprise classroom visits and announcements.

Winners were nominated by students, staff, and fellow faculty who recognized those making a difference in students' lives and education.

"Our faculty teach, mentor, inspire, and foster breakthroughs every single day," Durham said. "They're the driving force behind so many great things happening in classrooms, in the community, and in their fields."

Read what nominees said about the recipients:

NICOLE BEATTY

Teaching & Information Services

"Her enthusiasm for research is contagious."

BARRETT BONELLA

Social Work and Gerontology

"His belief in me has given me the confidence to chase opportunities I would have once avoided."

JASON FRANCIS

Teaching & Information Services

"He champions different teaching styles and techniques to meet the needs of the students."

ADAM JOHNSTON

Physics and Astronomy

"He reminded me that the right teacher can transform even the most intimidating subjects into something exciting and worthwhile."

JUSTIN KNIGHTON

Manufacturing Systems Engineering

"What stands out the most is how much he wants us to succeed."

JESSIE NIXON

Teacher Education

"She can give the greatest constructive feedback about anything, while building you up at the same time."

TYANDRA PEREZ

Nursing

"She was super helpful and made sure I had the tools to succeed."

MARY ANNE REYNOLDS

Nursing

"She doesn't just help students complete assignments. She helps them believe in their capacity to do doctoral-level work."

BRYANT THOMPSON

Business Administration and Marketing

"Bryant fosters an environment of complete trust."

MEGAN VAN DEVENTER

English

"She teaches with heart and reminds us daily that every person in the room matters."

JORDAN WEST

Health Science

"He is someone who is true and kind."

BRENT WARNOCK

Communication

"He is 100% here for the students."

[Watch the video:](#)



BRADY PRESIDENTIAL DISTINGUISHED PROFESSORS



Two Weber State University professors known for their excellent teaching, contributions to others, and research were selected as this year's Brady Presidential Distinguished Professors.

This 21-year tradition is named after the late Rodney Brady, who served as the university's president from 1978 to 1985. Rodney and his wife, Carolyn, provided a generous gift to fund this annual honor, which recognizes WSU professors who demonstrate the highest quality teaching, scholarship, research, and community service.

BRANDON KOFORD

Economics Professor

Brandon Koford's students and colleagues in the Department of Economics know him for his integrity, sound judgment, and collaborative leadership.

He's deeply committed to mentorship, making sure students feel both challenged and supported. From helping students secure scholarships and internships while attending WSU to guiding them toward full-ride scholarships at prestigious graduate

programs, Koford has a reputation for going the extra mile.

He's earned the Presidential Teaching Excellence Award, multiple Buehler Teaching fellowships, the Richard Alston Excellence in Teaching Award, and repeated nominations for the former Crystal Crest Rodney H. Brady Master Teacher Award.



MAREK MATYJASIK

Earth and Environmental Sciences Professor and Department Chair

Marek Matyjasik's dedication to immersive learning has taken students far beyond the classroom, from summer field camps throughout the state to expeditions exploring the volcanic landscapes of Iceland and Hawaii. In 1998, he secured funding for an undergraduate groundwater well field, the first at a university west of the Mississippi River, providing training to thousands of students in hydrogeology.

He has authored and co-authored more than 20 peer-reviewed manuscripts and delivered over 60 professional presentations, most with WSU students as co-authors or co-presenters.

Matyjasik is a rare two-time recipient of a Fulbright Scholarship and has a successful record of externally funded research grants and awards totaling almost \$450,000 — which have directly enhanced access to education, curriculum, and undergraduate research.



UNWAVERING DEDICATION: DIXON AWARDS



Since 1970, the WSU Alumni Association has honored outstanding members of WSU's faculty and staff with an annual award named in memory of President H. Aldous Dixon, who served as the school's chief administrator from 1919 to 1920, and from 1937 to 1953.

BLAKE NIELSON

Alan E. Hall Endowed Professor, Department of Professional Sales

Blake Nielson has built his career around one central mission: helping students persist, graduate, and secure meaningful careers. While serving as department chair, he waived all departmental course fees and replaced that funding through donor support so students would not face additional financial burdens. He strengthened scholarship opportunities, modernized learning environments, and expanded hands-on experiences that directly improve student success.

He created and expanded entry and account management competitions that allow students to apply selling frameworks in realistic, professionally judged scenarios throughout their academic journey. He organizes and leads these events in partnership with industry sponsors, ensuring students receive direct feedback from employers and meaningful exposure to career opportunities.

He is known for his deep commitment to students and his dedication to helping them overcome challenges and complete their degrees.



KAORI TAKIMURA

Administrative specialist, Department of English Language & Literature
Adjunct instructor, Department of World Languages & Cultures

Kaori Takimura has dual roles as an administrative specialist in the Department of English Language & Literature and an adjunct instructor in the Department of World Languages & Cultures.

As an educator, Takimura is known for her innovative curriculum that integrates environmental and food sustainability — values deeply rooted in Japanese culture. Her dedication to her students' professional futures culminated in a summer 2025 study

abroad program. After a year of planning with a Japanese nonprofit, she led her students to Japan to volunteer for three days at the Fuji Rock Festival, providing them with invaluable experience and cultural immersion.

Takimura is the proud single mother of two teenagers. She credits her success to the leadership and support of her colleagues in the Telitha E. Lindquist College of Arts & Humanities, where she says working “has been a great experience and such joy.”



SUPER STAFF AWARD WINNERS



These 12 recipients go above and beyond their daily responsibilities. Whether through assisting a student in need, providing exceptional support to a colleague, or maintaining a level of professionalism that sets a benchmark for the institution, they embody the spirit of excellence that defines Weber State.

DAVID RODRIGUEZ

Senior media developer in Creative Arts & Technologies

KAYLENE WHICKER

Career advisor in the College of Engineering, Applied Science & Technology

AIMEE RUHNKE

Administrative specialist II in the Department of Dental Hygiene

LEVI SKINNER

Administrative specialist I in University Advancement

JACOB WILKEY

Assistant director for Career Services

MATTHEW SMITH

Academic advisor in the Department of Exercise & Nutrition Sciences

BRANDI HERNANDEZ

Administrative specialist III in Learning Support Services

LYNDA BLANCH

Administrative specialist III in Nursing Graduate Studies

JUSTIN VALDEZ

Academic advisor recruiter in the Department of Athletic Training & Occupational Therapy

SYDNE KNOWLTON

Front-end web developer in Information Technology

CHRISTY CALL

Administrative specialist II in the Department of Automotive Technology

SHELLIE WEEKS

Administrative specialist III in the Department of Criminal Justice

PRESIDENTIAL OUTSTANDING STAFF AWARDS

Five staff members were awarded for their commitment to their work and WSU's mission. Here's why nominees said they're outstanding in all they do:



ANNA BURLESON

Former web content manager in Marketing & Communications

"Anna is an absolute team player and collaborator."

HEATHER CHAPMAN

Senior director of data and analytics in the Office of Student Success Analytics, Academic Affairs Division

"Her work, leadership, and commitment have profoundly shaped Weber State University, making her an invaluable asset to the institution."

SHERI EDDINGTON

Assistant to the dean in the College of Engineering, Applied Science & Technology, Academic Affairs Division

"Sheri's productivity and quality of work seems like she is more than one person."

TRACY HICKS

Administrative associate for the Office of the Dean in the College of Social Sciences & Education

"Tracy Hicks embodies all of the qualities of dedication and determination that we want to see from our graduates at WSU."

ABEL MKINA

Assistant controller and director of Risk Management

"One of Abel's greatest strengths is his ability to work with others."

FACULTY & STAFF ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Vincent Bates, teacher education professor, gave the annual Jean Sinor Memorial Lecture at Indiana University titled “How Can Music Education Address the World’s Most Pressing Problems?”

Shelly L. Belflower, director of IT Software Licensing & Contract Management, received the Outstanding Leader of the Year award for her role as the Division B Director for District 15 Toastmasters.

Dustin Birch, mechanical engineering professor, was named a Miller Endowed Chair.

Matthew B. Crook, microbiology professor, authored and published “Proposal to replace the pro-illegitimate prokaryotic names ‘Candidatus Nostocoides’ corrig. Kulichevskaya et al. 2012 and ‘Candidatus Nostocoides acidiphilum’ corrig. Kulichevskaya et al. 2012 with ‘Candidatus Nostocimimus’ gen. nov. and ‘Candidatus Nostocimimus acidiphilus’ comb. nov.” in the *International Journal of Systematic and Evolutionary Microbiology*.

Vikki Deakin, history professor, published an online textbook titled “Our Mighty Dream: An American History,” published by Great River Learning.

Aimee Golden, College of Engineering, Applied Science & Technology advisor, was named a Career Services Career Champion for her work providing students with tools to further their careers before graduating.

Gary Johnson, political science professor, presented “Ogden Valley City: Creating a New Government” at the Western Political Science Association meeting.

Anne Kendrick, nursing assistant professor; **Melissa Neville**, nursing professor; and **Kristy Barron**, retired nursing professor, co-authored “Preparing Graduate Nursing Faculty for the Implementation of Virtual Simulation Using Simulation Facilitation Best Practices” in the *Journal of Nursing Education and Practice*.

Stephanie Kimmey, art history assistant professor, was accepted to the 2026 conference for the 32nd European Archaeological Association, held in Athens this summer. Kimmey’s presentation will be part of the “Cross-Analytical Approaches on the Materiality of Cult in Early Greek

Sanctuaries” session and explores disassembled dedications through depositional and archaeometallurgical analysis.

Heeuk “Dennis” Lee, criminal justice associate professor, co-authored “Negative Police-Citizen Encounters Ramp up on Perception of Justice” in *Race and Justice*.

London Lowe, nursing professor, and **Suzy Heugly**, nursing assistant professor, co-authored “The Cost of Suffering: Providing Workplace Support for Individuals With Chronic Pain” in *Workplace Health & Safety*.

Cora Neal, mathematics professor, was promoted to the 2026–27 interim associate dean of the College of Science and is the recipient of the Dr. Spencer L. Seager Distinguished Teaching Award, which recognizes outstanding undergraduate teaching in the College of Science.

Gail Niklason, executive director of Institutional Effectiveness and Accreditation, presented to the Nevada System of Higher Education on Weber State’s experience implementing the sub-120-credit hour bachelor’s degree in a presentation titled “Innovation in Completion.”

Jessie Nixon, **Katarina Anderson**, and **Ryan Cain**, teacher education faculty, presented with Gisela Martinez-Wheeler, instructional designer, on “Reflection of AI-generated lesson plans as dialogic work for preservice teachers” at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting.

Tanya Nolan, School of Radiologic Sciences chair, co-presented “Brave New World: Creative Curriculum Designs for the Future” at the Association of Collegiate Educators in Radiologic Technology conference in Las Vegas in February.

Colleen Packer, communication professor, and co-author **Natalie Williams**, special education professor, published an article in a special issue on global perspectives on teacher education in the peer-reviewed *Journal of the International Society for Teacher Education*. Their article is titled “Indigenous Teacher Education in Sonora, Mexico: The Comcáac Perspective.” An earlier version of this work was presented at the International Society for Teacher Education Seminar in Florianópolis, Brazil.

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FACULTY & STAFF ACCOMPLISHMENTS (CONT.)



Kim Parkinson, School of Radiologic Sciences assistant professor, was named vice president of the Association of Collegiate Educators in Radiologic Technology Board of Directors for 2026–27.

Chelsea Pike, nursing assistant professor, co-authored “Enhancing Pediatric Celiac Disease Care: A Primary Care Provider Model” in the *Journal for Nurse Practitioners*.

Tressa Quayle, nursing associate professor and Associate Degree in Nursing department chair, published and co-authored “Factors associated with immediate postnatal care in Lao People’s Democratic Republic: an analysis of the 2017 Lao People’s Democratic Republic multiple indicator cluster survey” in *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*.

Marie Richards, information literacy coordinator for Stewart Library, presented at the International Society for Teacher Education Annual Conference in Adelaide, Australia, with her thesis advisor **Katarina Anderson**, teacher education assistant professor.

Sheryl Rushton, **Sara Gailey**, and **DeeDee Mower**, teacher education faculty, co-authored “Preparing Teacher Candidates for Cross-Disciplinary Critical Thinking Instruction” in *Envisioning the Future of Mathematics Education: Innovations, Strategies and Challenges in the AI Era*.

Chris Scheidler, English assistant professor, was accepted to present his research “Translanguaging beyond the paywalls: Modality and languaging as Open Source” at the Conference on Writing Education Across Borders 2026 in Ganzhou, China.

Deborah Uman, Lindquist College of Arts & Humanities dean, led a seminar on Shakespeare and belonging at the Annual Meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America. **Sarah Brew**, theatre assistant professor, and **Dawn Monique Williams**, theatre instructor, participated in the seminar by contributing the following papers: “Bilingualism and Access in Shakespeare Performance” and “‘What country, friends, is this?’: Collective Authorship to Create Belonging.”

Taylor Ward, School of Radiologic Sciences associate professor, co-published the textbook “Rad Tech’s Guide to Clinical Computed Tomography.”

Ariel Wilson, visual arts visiting assistant professor, had an exhibit titled “From where the sun is to wherever you are” on display at the Utah Museum of Contemporary from April 10 to June 6.

The Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry was selected as the recipient of the Department/Group category of the Affordable Course Materials Award from Stewart Library, recognizing efforts to use affordable course materials like Open Educational Resources or library resources.



WELCOME TO WEBER

FOR THE FIRST TIME OR IN A NEW ROLE

Tara Allred-Niekamp

Institutional Effectiveness

Sarah Balland

Sustainability Practices
Research

Ryan Barker

Athletics Admin and
Support

Caraline Black

Assistant VP Student
Pathways

Gordon Bowns

Bookstore-Wildcat Stores

Shasta Burton

Online and Continuing
Education

James Campbell

Athletics Admin and Support

Victor Canales

Athletics Admin and
Support

James Carr

University Police

Sarah Carter

Physician Assistant
Medicine

Joel Christensen

Facilities Management

Alisa Clements

Accounting Services

Tyler Edwards

Office of the Registrar

Paige Gleason

Botany

Christine Hashimoto

University Legal Counsel

Brandon Knox

Student Success Analytics

Dustin Kohl

Infrastructure Services

Camille LaRose

Bookstore-Wildcat Stores

Brett Lowry

Office of the Registrar

Ryker Mlynarski

Sports Facilities
Management

Ashley Montgomery

Library Learning & Student
Support

Julie Nguyen

Marketing and
Communications

Jennifer Snyder

University Legal Counsel

Christopher Thomas

Purchasing

Andrew Walden

Facilities Management

David Woolley

College of Engineering,
Applied Science, and Tech

RETIRED

HERE'S TO YOU!

Colleen Boam

Chemistry and Biochemistry
Dept

Carol Dillree

Internal Audit

Valerie Gooder

Nursing

CREDITS

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