



UTAH VALLEY UNIVERSITY'S

SCHOOL *of* EDUCATION  
CONVOCATION

MAY 6, 2022



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# SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

## Message From the Dean

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Dear School of Education 2022 Graduates,

Congratulations! On behalf of the faculty and staff of the School of Education, I express our shared pride in you for successfully reaching your academic goals. It is a privilege to applaud your exceptional achievement of successfully completing your studies and earning your academic credentials from the School of Education at UVU.

Your persistent work and dedication to learning have been building blocks of your success and are a solid foundation for your professional pathway. As we celebrate your graduation, I invite you to stay connected with the School of Education and with UVU as a member of the community of proud Wolverines — as well as to pursue new opportunities to study and expand your professional knowledge and skills with us.

Congratulations again on your graduation and continue reaching your goals!

Sincerely,

Vessela Ilieva  
Dean  
School of Education

# VALEDICTORIAN

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## AUDRA ASTON

Bachelor of Science, *Elementary Education*

Audra D. Aston from Oakley, Utah, attended Sky View High School. While at UVU, she was able to maintain a 4.0 grade point average and graduate with high honors. “I put my whole heart and soul into my schooling, doing my best work,” she says. For Audra, the best part about attending UVU was getting to associate with great faculty and peers every day. After graduation, she will continue teaching fourth grade at South Summit Elementary School and plans to pursue a master’s degree. She enjoys singing, reading, and being outside, and is married to her supportive husband, Ki, with whom she is raising four children: Kiley, Kade, Olivia, and Isaac.

# GRADUATE ADDRESS

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## MARILYN SANDERS

Master of Education, *Higher Education Leadership*

Originally from Murphys, California, Marilyn Sanders attended Bret Harte High School in Angels Camp, California. She proved to herself that she can do hard things by maintaining a 4.0 GPA while working approximately 60 hours per week in two jobs. “My cohort has inspired me more than they will ever know,” Marilyn says. “In addition, I am grateful for the number of hours the professors have put into investing their time into their students and for putting up with me in the many office hours I have requested to go over assignments.” Within five years, Marilyn sees herself working on a university campus, ideally UVU, in an advisor position that supports first-generation students, career development, or rural students. Her favorite motto is, “If there’s a will, there’s a way,” and she wants to extend a huge thank you to her partner, Gus, for his constant encouragement, support, and positivity during these past two years.

# FACULTY & STAFF AWARDS

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## NICOLE GEARING

Assistant Professor, *Elementary Education*  
*Faculty Excellence Award*

Nicole Gearing is from Cranberry Township, Pennsylvania. She holds several advanced degrees, including a Ph.D. from Georgia State University in early childhood and elementary education with a concentration in elementary mathematics education. She is a recipient of the Utah Stem Action Center Math Innovation Grant, the STEM Fellowship from the Association of Mathematics Teacher Educators, and the Lorene Pilcher Outstanding Dissertation Award from Georgia State University. Nicole taught K-12 for 11 years and began teaching at UVU after receiving her Ph.D. She and her husband, Mike, have two children, Michael and Adelaide.



## JENNIFER CALL

Lecturer, *Secondary Education*  
*Lecturer Excellence Award*

Jennifer Call is from Humble, Texas, and received a bachelor's degree in special education from Texas A&M in 2005 and a master's degree in special education from Sam Houston State University in 2010. She became a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) in September 2010. In 2017, she joined the faculty of UVU teaching the autism minor coursework. Jennifer is both humbled and honored for the opportunity to help shape the future of teachers, parents, and the students they will work with. She is a proud aunt to 26 nieces and nephews. To UVU graduates, she says, "Keep going and embrace all that life brings you. There will be some real highs and some extreme lows. Both experiences provide learning opportunities that will shape your future in ways you may not even imagine."



### GENE NELSON

*Adjunct, Elementary Education  
Adjunct Excellence Award*

Hailing from Mesa, Arizona, Gene Nelson earned a Master of Library Science and a Bachelor of Science in psychology from Brigham Young University (BYU), and an Associate of Arts from Mesa Community College. He's worked in several librarian positions, most recently as the director of the Provo City Library, and taught college students at schools including Brigham Young University and Emporia State University. Gene has earned awards such as the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Provo City Library in 2022, the Fab Forty award from Utah Valley Magazine in 2018, and the Literacy Champion from the UVU Forum on Engaged Reading in 2017. He's been married for almost 50 years to his wife, Lori, and they have six children and sixteen grandchildren.



### CONNIE WRIGHT

*Administrative Assistant, School of Education  
Staff Excellence Award*

Connie Wright is from Orem, Utah, and earned a bachelor's degree in business management. She has worked several jobs in her life, with a majority of them being administrative assistant positions. She and her husband, Matthew, have two children and five grandchildren. Connie loves to work with students and see them succeed. To UVU graduates, she says, "Do your best and don't compare yourself with others. Everyone has different talents and abilities that are all needed in this world."

