

Celebrating Undergraduate Research at USU | Office of Research

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Associate Vice President for Research, Alexa Sand

In 1975, Utah State University funded the first Undergraduate Research and Creative Opportunity (URCO) grant, and in doing so became only the second institution to fund undergraduate research in a deliberate and dedicated way. In February 2021, our 45-year

dedication to undergraduate research was recognized by the Council on Undergraduate Research as the [best in the nation](#). In this episode of *Instead*, we give you a sneak peek into why this program is so important to who we are as a university.

First, Associate Vice President for Research, Alexa Sand, walks us through the ways that USU supports and encourages undergraduate research. While many people still think research is high brow and often out of reach, she shows us that research really is for everyone; from every background and discipline. Furthermore, Dr. Sand tells us that research is all about “getting past the obstacles that are always there no matter who you are.” This concept is further expanded as we talk with two pairs of mentor and student—Kelsey Bradshaw with Dr. Elizabeth Vargis, and Cedric Mannie with Dr. Breanne Litts.

Kelsey Bradshaw is a part of [Dr. Vargis' lab](#) which is researching how space impacts human cells. Kelsey's first major contribution to the project was to write a computer code for tracking particles, something that she knew she could do with her unique computer science background in a biological engineering lab. Kelsey tells us that she found purpose in the lab—that it was in this research process that she discovered what school is really about for her and that she really did love it.



Dr. Elizabeth Vargis



Kelsey Bradshaw, mentored by Dr. Vargis

Dr. Vargis believes that undergraduate research is an important component of the undergraduate experience and encourages all undergrads to give it a try. “This is an opportunity to try something new and see how it feels,” she says, “you don't have to become a researcher, but this is

an opportunity that you might as well take advantage of while you're here as an undergraduate student” Cedric Mannie came to Dr. Breanne Litts lab through the Native American Summer Mentorship Program (NASMP) which brings students from the two-year USU Blanding campus to USU's main campus in Logan to experience research in the labs. Cedric, who is a computer engineer, was drawn to Dr. Litts' LED (Learn, Explore, Design) lab because of its focus on indigenous communities. He currently is working on a project called We Got the Beat, a collaborative project working to use technology to inspire indigenous youth to think about health.



Dr. Breanne Litts



Cedric Mannie, mentored by Dr. Breanne Litts