

TRUE NEWSLETTER

SPRING ISSUE 2026 #4



TWO PROGRAMS, ONE MISSION

Dr. David Sandweiss



The Southern Utah Regional Medical Campus (SURMC) will welcome its first cohort of students this fall, with plans for them to relocate to Iron and Washington counties to complete Phases 2 and 3 of medical school. This milestone prompted educators at the Spencer Fox Eccles School of Medicine (SFESOM) to refresh rural medical education offerings — streamlining curriculum and expanding student opportunities in the process.

The TRUE (Tribal, Rural and Urban Underserved Medical Education) program and RUUTE (Rural and Underserved Utah Training Experience) are joining forces around a shared mission: providing students a foundational grounding in underserved medicine alongside community-centered clinical and research experiences, with the ultimate goal of addressing Utah's rural physician workforce shortage.



Scan to learn more about RUUTE



Stephanie Lyden, MD
Interim Director - RUUTE Program
Course Director - CEE



Sarah Norton, MD, MSc-GH, MA
Co-Director - TRUE



Madelyn Carter, MPH, CPH
Interim Director - RUUTE & Regional Affairs



Michelle Hofmann, MD, MPH, MHCDS
Senior Associate Dean - Rural, Underserved and Regional Medical Education

Students will continue to have the opportunity to earn a 15-credit Graduate Certificate in Underserved Medicine. Phase 1 features a foundational didactic course; Phase 2 centers on a Longitudinal Integrated Clerkship (LIC) in Tribal, Rural, and Underserved settings, paired with RUUTE's signature Community Engagement Experience (CEE), which trains students to identify community health needs and design public health interventions. In Phase 3, students deepen their interests through clinical electives in underserved communities and develop their professional identities. The certificate culminates in a capstone that integrates four years of learning, clinical engagement, and scholarship across TRU communities.

We're excited to bring together the best of both programs into a more cohesive, impactful experience for our students.

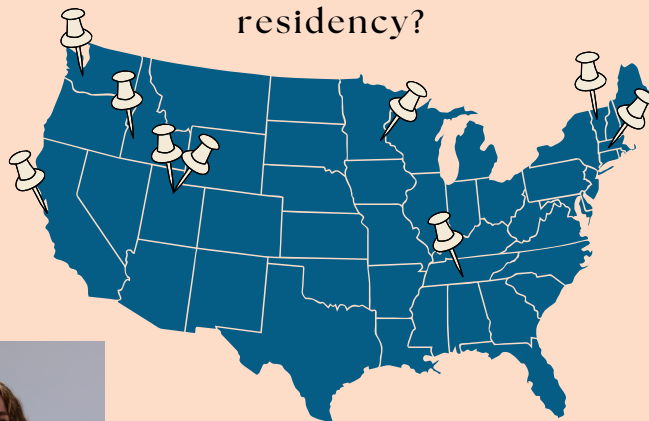
CELEBRATING TRUE GRADUATES



COLTON SCHLAG - FAMILY MEDICINE, MADIGAN ARMY MEDICAL CENTER

In 10 years, I see myself working in the community in central Idaho or Western Montana.

Where are our MS4s headed for residency?



MADISON MCLAUGHLIN - GENERAL SURGERY, VANDERBILT

In 10 years, I plan to be finishing a fellowship in pediatric surgery.



SARINA SCOTT - CHILD PSYCHIATRY, UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

In 10 years, I hope to be working in my home state of Wyoming.

Through TRUE, I met lifelong friends and colleagues. This education fostered growth and experiential learning while reinforcing the values like genuine connection, finding purpose through service to others, and curiosity about what creates a healthy and fulfilling life. Because of TRUE, I feel empowered to one day return to my rural roots in Wyoming.

JESSIE MONTGOMERY - TRIPLE BOARDS, UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

In 10 years, I see myself practicing in rural Montana.

In TRUE, I learned not only what it is like to practice rural medicine in the heart of the four-corners area, but also how to greet my patients in Navajo, how to make a paintbrush out of yucca, how to farm indigenous foods on indigenous land to make dishes with a history that outlasts the establishment of this country. I was able to connect with the communities that our system has historically failed to recognize. These experiences have shaped me into a person who wants to continue to show up for these populations through service and connection.



ADAM GAUDIN - EMERGENCY MEDICINE, BAYSTATE MEDICAL CENTER

In 10 years, I hope to be working rurally on the East coast, or returning home to work for Utah Navajo Health System.

I cannot understate how monumental TRUE has been in my life and career. It taught me things instrumental to being a rural or tribal physician and also what it means to truly be a healer. The experiences TRUE provides are unheard of and I'm so grateful I took

advantage of them, for example going out to UNHS. I would recommend TRUE to every medical student, regardless of specialty or practice setting. TRUE will change your life and how you practice medicine, and your patients will be thankful for it. It was the highlight of my medical school experience and I know it will continue to be for those who come next!



BITA TRISTANI-FIROUZI - DERMATOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

In 10 years, I hope to be a pediatric dermatologist with a special focus on gender affirming care and inpatient dermatology in the Pacific West.



IZAK WALKER - FAMILY MEDICINE, FULL CIRCLE HEALTH, BOISE, ID

In 10 years, I want to be working at a Federally Qualified Health Center, tribal health clinic, or rural hospital in the Intermountain West. I want to practice the full spectrum of family medicine: primary care for all ages, obstetrics, inpatient and emergency medicine.



OMAR SHIHAB - INTERNAL MEDICINE, HENNEPIN HEALTHCARE, MINNEAPOLIS, MN

In 10 years, I plan to be working as a hospitalist.



CODY ORTON - PLASTIC SURGERY, STANFORD

In 10 years, I see myself practicing in a setting that combines all aspects of reconstructive and aesthetic surgery with a special focus on providing surgical care to rural and underserved populations. I would love to come back to Utah and participate in medical education as well.

My favorite rotation of medical school was a rural family medicine clerkship in my hometown in Wyoming. TRUE has continued to fortify my goals and I am extremely grateful to have participated in this program.

RURAL MEDICAL EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

Dr. Reed Nelson

The Southern Utah Regional Medical Campus (SURMC) represents a transformative step forward in strengthening Utah's rural physician workforce. Established as part of the University of Utah Spencer Fox Eccles School of Medicine (SFESOM), SURMC is designed to train medical students in community-based settings across Southern Utah, with a focus on rural and underserved populations. By embedding learners in these environments, SURMC aims to improve physician recruitment and retention in regions that have historically faced significant workforce shortages in primary care and other essential specialties.

Dr. Reed Y. Nelson currently serves as Associate Dean for the Southern Utah Regional Medical Campus (SURMC) at the University of Utah Spencer Fox Eccles School of Medicine. His work is centered on integrating medical students into rural and regional health systems through longitudinal clinical experiences, close mentorship, and strong partnerships with local physicians and hospitals. In alignment with the Rural Physician Clinical Training (RPCT) pathway, he is helping build a continuum of medical education that extends from medical school to future residency programs in Southern Utah, with the goal



of increasing the number of high-quality primary care physicians in rural communities across the state.

SURMC's commitment to rural medical education is driven by a clear need: improving access to high-quality care in rural Utah by training physicians who are more likely to stay and practice in these communities. Meaningful exposure to rural practice, combined with strong community ties and supportive training infrastructure, is essential to addressing persistent workforce gaps, particularly in primary care.

This effort is part of a broader, coordinated expansion of rural medical education within SFESOM, including programs such as the Rural Physician Clinical Training (RPCT) pathway and collaborations with statewide partners. Together, these initiatives emphasize longitudinal, community-engaged training models that align education with real-world workforce needs.

WADE QUILTER, MS2

Your LIC: Rural LIC in St. George, UT

Most memorable experience during the Rural LIC: One of the most meaningful aspects of this experience was seeing firsthand the gaps in access to care across southern Utah. Visiting the local homeless shelter and speaking with emergency medicine physicians highlighted the needs of an often-overlooked population. Traveling to Caliente to work in a one-room emergency department also showed me the broad skill set required in rural medicine and how isolated critical access hospitals can be. Conversations with families who traveled several hours to see a visiting pediatric spine surgeon in St. George further demonstrated how meaningful it is when specialty care is brought closer to home.

How this experience is shaping your career goals: This experience has strengthened my interest in practicing in a rural or underserved setting. It has reinforced my desire to be part of a system that brings to patients rather than requiring them to travel long distances.



Plans for his Community Engagement Experience (CEE) project: I'm focusing on addressing healthcare gaps for the homeless population in St. George. In collaboration with the University of Utah PA program, we are working to expand an existing monthly clinic into a sustainable, student-led weekly clinic with mobile capabilities. I believe this project will help address the unique challenges faced by homeless populations in rural areas, including fewer healthcare resources and greater barriers to access. By bringing care directly to where patients are, I hope this work will reduce preventable emergency department visits, improve chronic disease management, and strengthen connections to the healthcare system for a vulnerable and often overlooked population.

Additional reflection: Although I do not have many photos of myself in action down here, one image that captures my experience well is a beautiful view of Snow Canyon from a quick run on my way home from clinic. A big part of the joy I have found here comes from the natural beauty of this area, and I hope to inspire patients to find happiness and health in nature whenever I can.



REED Y. NELSON, MD, MPH

As a longstanding physician leader in St. George, Dr. Nelson is uniquely positioned to lead the Southern Utah Regional Medical Campus as it prepares to welcome a starting class of 10 MD students this fall. Dr. Nelson previously served as Medical Director for Acute Pain Services and Obstetric Anesthesia at Intermountain Health.

He brings a strong foundation in medical education and leadership, an appreciation for community health and physician workforce needs, and has built trusted relationships across the Southern Utah medical community. He has strong ties to the University of Utah, where he earned both his bachelor's and master's degrees, and is an avid supporter of Utah athletics. Dr. Nelson is supported by his wife, Amy, their five children and a golden retriever named Rudy.



Q&A with Alex LaPoint, MS3

By Mahie Kama

What specialty are you interested in? How does TRUE influence this?

I came into medical school thinking that I wanted to work in rural primary care, which initially attracted me to TRUE. As time went on, I found myself drawn to neurology, which challenged my idea of the kind of physician I thought I wanted to be. My experiences in TRUE reaffirmed that I want to work with rural and underserved communities and my desire to become a neurologist gave me a more clear understanding of the kind of physician I want to become. Thanks to TRUE, I am confidently able to say that I want to be a neurologist that is committed to rural and underserved communities.

What drew you to the TRUE Pathway?

I was drawn to the unique curriculum that included opportunities to learn and grow as a physician in the communities that I hope to serve. Medical school can be hard, but attending classes throughout the year and participating in rural clinical rotations allowed me to engage in the type of medicine that I hope to practice someday. The program gave me something to be excited about and it constantly reminds me why I wanted to be a physician.

What is the best part of participating in TRUE?

The people I get to interact with make the TRUE experience so incredibly enjoyable. Dr. Sandweiss does a fantastic job at connecting students with practitioners and administrators who are actively playing a key role in rural and underserved healthcare. Each guest lecturer serves as a role model and offers such great advice for students on their own journeys through medical school.

What is your favorite non-medical activity?

I love to exercise and be outdoors; hiking is one of my favorite things that combine those two passions.

What super power do you want?

I would like the ability to teleport because I love to travel. Plus it would save me a ton of time and money on airfare.

What are some of your favorite TRUE moments?

My best memories come from our trip to Lander, WY in the summer of 2024. Specifically, the sweat lodge experience was truly amazing. I felt so welcomed and immersed in the tribal culture, and I got to do it with the best classmates!



Alex (far left) and his classmates enjoying a quick dip in the local creek after class in Lander, WY

What is a fun fact about you that most people don't know?

My family moved a lot when I was young. Before I turned 16, I had lived in 8 different houses, and all but two of them were in the same town. The longest period of time that I lived in any given house was three years.

What is one thing that, without fail, will make you smile every time?

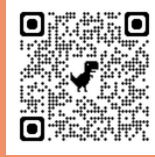
There's a video of a penguin that lives in Japan who walks to the fish market everyday. He wears a backpack and brings fish back for his family. It is so adorable.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received?

"There's always more to a person than what they choose to show. Good people look beyond appearances; they don't take advantage of the image someone portrays at the expense of the person beneath it."



JOIN THE EFFORT DONATE NOW!!



Visit us at:

<https://medicine.utah.edu/programs/true>

Your contribution helps us continue meaningful community-focused work. Funding allows us to expand clinical opportunities, enhance mentorship and professional identity formation, cultivate community partnerships and outreach efforts, and advance inter-professional healthcare education. Scan the QR code to give. Thank you.



MISSION

To prepare and encourage University of Utah medical students to choose residencies and careers in primary care that serve tribal, rural, and urban underserved (TRU) communities after graduation.

VISION

Comprehensive healthcare access for TRU communities across the Intermountain West.

VALUES

- Commitment to health equity and service for medically under-resourced communities.
- Reciprocal and respectful partnerships with the communities we serve.
- Centering patient and community perspectives in medical student learning.

BIG THANK YOU TO ALL THOSE WHO SUPPORT THE SUCCESS OF THE TRUE PROGRAM AND ITS STUDENTS!

NEWSLETTER EDITORS

Mack Tveit, MS3
 Mahie Kama, MS3
 Jacob Taylor, MS3
 Nicolas Edgar, MS3
 Claire Stanley, MS3
 Sarah Norton, MD
 David Sandweiss, MD
 Olivia Spencer, MPA

