

# Celebrating First-Generation College Students at Utah State University

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## Inspiring Stories from Hayden Walker and Zakery Archuleta

Today, Utah State University (USU) proudly celebrates First-Generation College Student Day, recognizing the achievements of students who are the first in their families to pursue higher education. Among these trailblazers are Hayden Walker and Zakery Archuleta, both Biological Engineering majors whose stories showcase the resilience and ambition that define the first-generation experience, inspiring their peers and communities alike.

### Zakery Archuleta: Taking a Leap to Inspire Others



Zakery Archuleta, a Biological Engineering student from Taylorsville, Utah, was first drawn to USU during a campus tour in high school. The lively campus culture, complete with an energetic game of zombie tag, left a lasting impression on him. "Seeing the energy and all the amazing research made me want to be part of this place," he recalls. Now fully immersed in the university's opportunities, Zakery is excited to make the most of his college journey. Although facing the challenge of passing Calculus II, he is determined to encourage other first-generation students to pursue their goals in engineering. "I joined to prove that you can do this," he shares. "Take that leap of faith—it's possible!"

## Hayden Walker: A Journey of Passion and Purpose



Hayden Walker's path to Biological Engineering was inspired by his passion for helping others through medical innovation. Originally from Riverton, Utah, he was drawn to USU's engineering program and the possibility of making a difference. His commitment to biomedical engineering solidified after spending time in Peru, where he saw the impact of health disparities on underserved communities. "I realized I wanted to help people in a way that goes beyond what I first imagined," he explains. Although biology and chemistry didn't initially appeal to him, he now appreciates these subjects as crucial tools in his field. Hayden envisions attending medical school and one day using his skills to serve communities in South America.

### Finding Belonging and Overcoming Challenges

Both Zakery and Hayden have encountered unique challenges as first-generation students. Hayden remembers feeling unsure of his place at USU during his first semester but soon found a sense of belonging and purpose through support from professors and peers. "I feel comfortable here now," he reflects. "The program has been a great place to grow, and I feel like I'm truly part of something important."

For Zakery, the demands of his program are balanced by his desire to set an example for others considering engineering. "To be here and be part of what's happening at USU is amazing," he says. "I want others to see that if I can do this, they can too."

### Celebrating First-Generation Success

As USU celebrates First-Generation College Student Day, the stories of students like Zakery and Hayden remind us of the courage and determination it takes to forge new paths. Their journeys highlight not only the personal milestones of first-generation students but also their positive impact on families and communities. Through their achievements, Hayden, Zakery, and many others at USU demonstrate that higher education is more than an individual pursuit—it's a legacy that uplifts and empowers generations to come.

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