

USU Welcomes New Engineering Education Assistant Professor | College of Engineering

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News Release — November 17, 2021 — A new assistant professor is joining the Department of Engineering Education at Utah State University.

Marissa Tsugawa comes to USU from the University of Nevada, Reno where they earned an undergraduate and master's degree in mechanical engineering and a PhD in engineering education. Tsugawa also completed a post doctoral research fellowship at UNR.



Marissa Tsugawa recently joined the engineering faculty at Utah State University. Tsugawa is part of the engineering education department and is working on a proposal to take a strengths-based approach to neurodiversity research and education.

Tsugawa's research background is in student identity and motivation. Moving forward, they want to center their research on neurodiversity in engineering education in order to develop more accessible teaching practices.

Most of the ways neurodiversity is currently understood are deficit based, Tsugawa said. Along with collaborator Catherine Spence of Minnesota State University, Tsugawa is working on a research proposal to take a strengths-based approach to neurodiversity research and education.

"It's a balance of both saying people bring strengths and they also have challenges," Tsugawa said.

While there are many barriers neurodiverse students face, such as difficulties obtaining a diagnosis, Tsugawa said paths to success and resources can be built into the

classroom to ensure traditionally marginalized students are better supported.

Tsugawa is also working on a project with Shuna Ni, an assistant professor of civil engineering at USU, and Cassandra McCall, an assistant professor of engineering education at USU, to study how junior engineering faculty see themselves as mentors.

"We're hoping that this kind of research will inform training and professional development for faculty who are coming in who don't have mentoring experience," Tsugawa said.

In addition to research, Tsugawa is looking forward to teaching classes next semester and is especially excited about resources available for faculty such as the Office of Empowering Teaching Excellence.

"These types of resources we didn't have at UNR and it's really cool," Tsugawa added.

Growing up, Tsugawa always wanted to be a scientist which is what drew them to engineering research. Outside of academics, Tsugawa watercolors and takes care of their two-year-old son. Although Logan is smaller than Reno, Tsugawa loves the very short commute and the mountains.

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