

Seismic Activity: From First-Gen Student to Award-Winning Educator, This Engineering Professor is Using AI to Make the World a Safer Place

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Disruptive technology, seismic concerns and a national issue of aging infrastructure. Mohsen Zaker Esteghamati isn't just addressing these challenges; he is integrating artificial intelligence to prepare the next generation of engineers. An effort that hasn't gone unnoticed.



Mohsen Zaker Esteghamati, a first-generation student and assistant professor of structural engineering at Utah State, has won three major awards in a single academic year.

"We used to have this more traditional way of doing things, and now we have all these new, disruptive technologies," Esteghamati said. "I think it's very important to understand how we can adopt this technology and use it for engineering."

After taking research, teaching, graduate student mentorship and service into consideration Esteghamati, a first-generation student and assistant professor of structural engineering at Utah State, has won three major awards in a single academic year:

- 2026 Winner of the Engineering Educator of the Year, Structural Engineers Association of Utah
- 2026 Winner of the Terry Peshia Early Career Faculty Award, American Institute of Steel Construction.
- 2026 Winner of the Engineering Educator of the year, Utah Engineers Council

"Sometimes we wonder about our roles and the impact that we have as professors," Esteghamati said. "To me, a good educator is somebody that serves people. One that nourishes and serves people and elevates them in life. I feel like getting these awards kind of reinforced that I had an impact. So that was meaningful."

As a first-generation student, Esteghamati wasn't sure he fit in as an academic because he didn't see many people like himself. It was a struggle, but he is appreciative of the way his education shaped him and the people and spaces that encouraged him.

"I feel like our college is very supportive," said Esteghamati. "I was lucky to have a department head, Marvin Halling, that has been a great example of what an educator should be."

Now, Esteghamati sees an opportunity to give back.

"Being an immigrant, you know, that's always in the back of your head," said Esteghamati. "You are trained to have a bit of a global perspective. I think science by nature is an international effort."

Esteghamati believes that students from the College of Engineering are well-positioned to contribute on a state, national and global level.

"I want my students to be able to adopt these technologies and really help us and help our field move towards the next stop," Esteghamati said. "I don't know what that looks like, but I am hopeful that we can figure it out together."

Esteghamati is the co-leader of the new Utah Earthquake Engineering Research Center and is the center's leader in earthquake resilience, focused on the growing concerns of the Wasatch Fault.

At the Utah Transportation Center, Esteghamati is helping to develop AI models to help prioritize maintenance, repair, and ensure that bridges and beyond stay in quality condition.

Esteghamati earned a bachelor's degree in civil engineering at Iran University of Science and Technology, a master's degree in structural engineering from Amirkabir University of Technology, a master's degree in statistics from the University of Akron, and a PhD in Civil Engineering at Virginia Tech.

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