Department Spotlight: Emily Mendoza

Hillary Fruge

11/08/2021

Emily Mendoza is a senior in the Utah State University Professional School Counseling Program. Emily will receive a master’s degree in education in psychology upon her graduation in December 2021. Emily has always wanted to work in a career with children, and she found this path after job shadowing at an elementary school.

Why did you decide to pursue a degree in school counseling?

Before starting my senior year of my bachelor’s degree, I took some time off and explored different options. I did a job shadow with an elementary school counselor at the school where my mom taught, and I loved every second of it. I loved the classroom lessons where every student could have access to support, and I also loved the small group and individual meetings. It was wonderful to see how the school counselor empowered these students and how building their social and emotional skills also improved their academic skills.

Who influenced you most during your time at USU?

Tori Gillette set such an example of striving for both equality and equity for the students. All of her lectures were engaging and inspiring. Her passion for the field of school counseling was contagious!

What are your goals when you started the program? How do those compare to your current aspirations?

My main goal when I started the program was to learn all that I could to be a successful elementary school counselor. Being in an elementary school was my number one destination. The great thing about USU’s counseling program is that it prepares you to counsel K-12, and you can apply the content to all grade levels. I was offered a job at an elementary school for my internship. I am still learning and adding ways to be a successful elementary counselor, and I am loving it!

What is the most important thing you learned in the professional school counseling program?

I learned the importance of tiered interventions and providing services to all the students at our schools. Every student deserves and can benefit from time with the school counselor. I learned (and am still learning) how to advocate for students who silently struggle. I have learned how empowering it can feel to make a difference in the life of a child.

Where are you now?

I am currently the school counselor at Layton Elementary School in Davis School District. I am working as a paid intern until I graduate and get my license this December. After graduation, I plan on staying at Layton Elementary. I love it there and have made so many wonderful connections with students and faculty. It is the best job in the world. School counseling also allows for a great home/life balance. I get home at a reasonable hour to be with my cute kids and husband!

Why did you choose USU?

I received my bachelor's degree from Utah State University in 2013, and I fell in love with USU. When asking a school counselor friend about her education, she talked about how wonderful USU’s school counseling program was. I did not need much convincing. Once an Aggie, always an Aggie!
What advice do you have for other students in the professional school counseling program? Or to those considering applying?

To those considering applying: if you have questions, reach out to Jessie Koltz or any number of the amazing faculty from the program. Everyone is so helpful. You can also reach out to me to ask questions (emendoza@dsdmail.net). Talking with students who had recently been through the program helped me decide if it was the right fit.

To the students currently in the program: Start networking! Get to know your instructors, your TA’s, and your classmates, even if they are not at your site. Not only will they be a great resource for studying and looking for practicums and internships, but they also will become great friends!

Also, make sure to make time every day for self-care! As a student or professional in a career where the focus is helping others, you need to take care of yourself as well. Doing so will make you a better student and counselor.