James (Jens) Nielson is a graduate of the Utah State University Department of Psychology’s Professional School Counselor Program. Nielson completed a bachelor’s degree in psychology at Utah Valley University in 2009. Though he was interested in the Professional School Counseling program at USU, he ended up accepting a position as a rehabilitation counselor in his hometown. During the following six years, Nielson completed a master’s degree in rehabilitation counseling from Utah State and worked for Vocational Rehabilitation. Ultimately, he still felt the draw to professional school counseling and decided to transition his career. Nielson received his Master’s degree in Professional School Counseling in 2020.

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

My initial career goal was to complete a degree in school counseling and seek a job in my hometown of Blanding, Utah. I ended up receiving a job in Blanding as a rehabilitation counselor. I worked for Vocational for six years and enjoyed my time there, but I still had a desire to become a school counselor.

When a counseling position opened up at San Juan High School in 2017, I jumped at the opportunity. I ended up getting the job, getting my second master’s degree, and have been working as a school counselor since 2017. I have loved this job. I love the interactions with the kids, the variety of different interactions and activities I get to enjoy. This position also presented the opportunity to coach the high school baseball team.

Who was your biggest support while pursuing your master’s degree?

My wife and kids were definitely my support through all of this. My wife has sacrificed a lot and encouraged me to pursue my goals. She is patient, kind, and my best support. I could not have done it without her.

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

I learned that trust and developing positive relationships are key to success in this field. These students need school counselors. For many of the students I work with, the school is their safe place. Over the last three years, I have seen many students succeed due to the work of counselors and counseling center staff. Our job is critical in the school system.

What advice do you have for other students in the professional school counseling program or for those considering applying?

I would say that the most important thing you can do as a school counselor is develop positive relationships with students. This can be difficult to do, as your time is in demand for many other things. These things are all very important, but the most important attribute is the positive relationships you build, and that cannot be measured.

Describe USU in three words.

Professional, educational, and adaptable.