

Michael Bailey – Jon M. Huntsman School of Business 2024 Professional Achievement Award Recipient

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Chris Corcoran, Michael Bailey, Douglas Anderson (dean), and Dwight Israelsen at the awards ceremony.

Today Michael Bailey is a senior research scientist at Meta whose groundbreaking research is being harnessed by policymakers to positively impact people's lives around the globe. But almost 20 years ago, he was a Logan High graduate who came to Utah State University (USU) in awe of his professors and eager to ask questions and gain the tools he'd need to launch into new frontiers.

Bailey says it was the combination of brilliant mentors at USU whose doors were always open for discussion, a strong work ethic that was drilled into students, and a desire to do something novel that led him on a career path that's been "totally unique." He says, "I know no one who's followed a career like mine."

His advice to students or career seekers: Discover what's unique about you and pursue those characteristics onto a new path.

"I think too often people say, 'I'm going to take a formula for success that I see around me and try to do that same thing,' rather than saying 'What's something new and different that I can offer that no one else is doing?'" Bailey said.

He believes when this open-minded perspective is paired with hard work, extraordinary things happen. And extraordinary things have happened in Bailey's career. In 2012, he started a full-time position at Facebook, the year it went public. Bailey says he was drawn to the innovative company, and it was just what he was looking for.

"In the early culture of Facebook we spent a lot of time building, trying, and experimenting. Everyone there wanted to build and try new things. They wanted to build the future," he said. "I wanted to be at the forefront of this new future that was being built and apply my economics skills at the frontier of technology. It was so much fun – nothing is as exciting as being on a team building new technology from the ground up."

Bailey was one of the first economists at Facebook. His research on social networks has been published in top scientific journals and featured in worldwide media outlets. He leads Meta's Social Capital Lab, a research group focused on the study of social networks, communities, and economic opportunity. The Social Capital Lab has partnered with Harvard's Opportunity Insights to create *socialcapital.org*, which introduced new measures of social capital and economic connectedness.

He's also a co-creator of the Social Capital Atlas dataset and the Social Connectedness Index, which are publicly available datasets measuring social connectedness. This research has never been done before, and its implications have the possibility to positively influence people's day-to-day lives. Bailey and his teams seek to understand social connectivity and how individuals and communities benefit from it and how it affects outcomes like jobs, purchases, moves, and where people choose to live and go to school.

The goal is to get data from Meta's Data for Good program into the hands of policymakers to use for social good. Bailey uses an example of a natural disaster to illustrate how data can influence policy.

"Imagine a hurricane hits a vulnerable region. Aggregated movement data showing who left the region to seek help at a shelter reveal which areas were the most impacted and signal to the government and Red Cross where to direct help and aid efforts," he said. "After the disaster we can study which communities were most resilient. We also look at the role of institutions and what kinds and types of institutions are most useful to help communities during crisis and what policymakers and governments can do to build social capital and strong institutions to help during a crisis."

Bailey and his teams' research findings are drawing worldwide attention as policymakers and practitioners seek to alleviate human suffering. For his extraordinary work, Bailey returned to where it all began and was honored on November 8, 2024, as a 2024 Professional Achievement Award Recipient at USU's Jon M. Huntsman School of Business in Logan.

Accompanied by family members at the award ceremony, Bailey presented his research, spoke about his time at USU, and spent time answering questions from and meeting with Huntsman School of Business (HSB) students. Bailey enjoys engaging with Utah State University (USU) students. His Aggie roots run deep.

His parents are USU graduates, and his grandfather, Datus M. Hammond served as the Biology Department Head in USU's College of Science. Bailey has continued the chain of mentorship and knowledge sharing with students through HSB's Department of Data Analytics & Information System's Analytics Solutions Center (ASC).

Since early 2023, Bailey has collaborated on projects with students in the ASC. Pedram Jahangiry, assistant professor and Project Mentor, calls the projects diverse and impactful, focusing on advanced data analytics and social insights. Jahangiry says Bailey has been an incredible partner who offers guidance and expertise for students.

"His collaboration has significantly benefited Huntsman students by providing them with hands-on opportunities to apply their learning to real-world problems. Mike has been a role model and mentor, always engaging with the students and pushing them to think critically and creatively," Jahangiry said. "These projects have not only enhanced their technical skills but also prepared them for careers in data analytics, as students learn how to tackle complex problems, manage large datasets, and deliver impactful solutions."

Jahangiry says when Huntsman students see a fellow Aggie like Bailey succeed, it gives them confidence and ambition to aim high and pursue their own new path.

"They believe that they too can make a significant impact in their careers," Jahangiry said.

Michael lives in Menlo Park, CA near Meta's main campus with his wife Meredith and their three children. The couple met while Meredith was working at the Asian Liver Center at Stanford University and Michael was beginning his PhD program. Meredith is currently the Executive Director for the Kaeme Foundation. They enjoy traveling, adventuring, and the outdoors.