What are the odds of achieving two significant life goals, plus a third honor you were never expecting, in the span of just a few months? Just ask Dr. Chris Corcoran, a USU- and Harvard-trained statistician, who is having an incredible, if mathematically improbable, year.

First, Dr. Corcoran, who is also an avid hiker and trail runner, completed a 45-mile rim-to-rim hike at the Grand Canyon in one shot, which he says was both “really hard and really fun.”

Second, he assumed the role of Management Information Systems Department Head in the Huntsman School of Business, after 15 years crunching numbers in the College of Science, most recently as the Mathematics and Statistics Department Head.

And third, the weekend before he started his new job, he answered an unexpected phone call from Dean Doug Anderson—and learned he had been appointed the inaugural David B. Haight Endowed Professor of Analytics. The endowed professorship was one of five announced by the Huntsman Fund for Faculty Excellence in May, with the stated goal of attracting superior talent to USU.
Dr. Corcoran is committed to preparing students for a rapidly changing world, where we’re “drowning in information and starving for knowledge,” he says. While Dr. Corcoran loves the classroom experience, he’ll be spending the coming year behind the scenes, building courses and programs that will boost the school’s capacity to rigorously train students in analytics and infuse them with the skills they need to succeed in the modern workforce.

“The technology we’ll be using 10 years from now may not even have been invented yet,” Dr. Corcoran says. “It’s essential for students to learn how to be adaptable, how to be flexible, and how to find solutions and apply them independently. Even soft skills like integrity, ethics, and problem-solving—these are just as important as the actual technical abilities.”

Whether leading a department, hiking the Grand Canyon, or preparing young minds for the future, Dr. Corcoran returns to one recurring theme. “It’s challenging and fun,” he says, “to introduce students to new ideas and watch them learn to successfully apply those principles on their own.”