Sydney Cheek-O'Donnell is Associate Dean for Research in the College of Fine Arts and an Associate Professor in the Department of Theatre at the University of Utah. Her long-time interest in political theatre, social justice, and feminism have led her on a circuitous journey from a dissertation on Italian actress, playwright, and activist Franca Rame, to the application of theatre in unlikely places, including health care and STEM education. She is particularly interested in understanding how the arts impact the wellness of individuals and communities. Dr. Cheek-O'Donnell is co-PI on a study that will investigate the use of a rehearsal framework to improve the interpersonal communication skills of medical learners. In addition, she is working with a multidisciplinary team on an NSF grant that examines the possibility of using theatre, narrative, and ecological restoration as tools to shift the way people see themselves in relation to science, technology, engineering, and math and, thus, improve the representation of minorities in STEM fields.

As Associate Dean for Research in the College of Fine Arts, Dr. Cheek-O'Donnell works with faculty seeking extramural funding for their research, and “translates” the significance of arts research (both creative and scholarly) for colleagues in other disciplines. She is passionate about finding ways to connect artists and arts scholars with unexpected collaborators as a way to increase creativity, solve challenging problems, and improve the quality of life for as many people as possible.

She teaches History of Theatre, Science on Stage, Dramaturgy, Directing, Theatre and Theory, and Gender on the Global Stage (but not all at the same time).

Dr. Cheek-O'Donnell earned a PhD in Theatre History and Dramatic Criticism from the University of Washington's School of Drama in 2004, and received her undergraduate degree from Carleton College in Minnesota.