



# EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP & POLICY STUDIES

## **GREETINGS FROM THE DEPARTMENT HEAD**

Dear ELPS community,

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville is a university on the rise, and our department is also flourishing. We welcomed Dr. Brandon Kliever to Rocky Top this fall as an associate professor in the Leadership Studies program, brought in several large research grants, and launched a new master's degree in evaluation methodology. In the last year, our faculty have helped shape legislation in Congress, build partnerships in the Knoxville community, received national recognition for their scholarship, and even coached at the Olympics in Paris.

This year is an opportunity to shape the future of ELPS as we work to grow our faculty, lay the groundwork to launch new programs, and undergo academic program review. It is an honor and a privilege to lead this department, and do not hesitate to reach out if there is anything that I can do for you.

### **Robert Kelchen, Ph.D.**

*Professor & Department Head*

Department of Educational  
Leadership & Policy Studies



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# News and Announcements

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## **Dr. Brandon W. Kliwer, Associate Professor**

Dr. Kliwer joined ELPS this Fall from Kansas State University as the Coordinator of our Leadership Studies Minor!

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## **Dr. Martinez Participates in Faculty Senate-Organized Panel Discussion**

Due to his publication in The Conversation, Dr. James Martinez was invited to participate in the Faculty- Senate-organized panel discussion: “Writing for The Conversation: Opportunities, Challenges, and Tips.”



## **Dr. Zahra Awarded George Julnes Endowed Social Betterment Conference Award**

Hosted by the American Evaluation Association, the leading evaluation conference, this award honors the remarkable legacy of Dr. George Julnes, whose contributions have impacted social equity and human well-being.

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# News and Announcements



## Education Research & Opportunity Center (ERO) Receives FAFSA Completion Grant

ERO received a FAFSA completion grant this summer and had excellent results with 585 FAFSAs completed, 84 completion events, and 1854 community participants!

## Dr. Brian Mells Recognized as Prestigious Field Award Recipient

Dr. Brian Mells named recipient of William J. and Lucille H. Field Award for Excellence in Secondary Principalship for the State of Tennessee, recognizing an outstanding secondary school principal each year. Dr Mells also teaches within our EDAM program.



## CSP Faculty, Dr. Frank Cuevas, Named a NASPA 2025 Pillar of Profession

This award, one of the NASPA Foundation's highest honors, recognizes exceptional members of the student affairs and higher education community for their work and contributions to the field. [Learn more here.](#)

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# News and Announcements



## New Evaluation Methodology MS Program

In Fall 2024, ELPS launched our new distance education MS program in Evaluation Methodology. Designed for the working professional, all courses are fully online & asynchronous, enabling students to complete assignments at times convenient for them.

## ESM Program Launches New Evaluation “MAD Blog”

The ESM program launched the MAD (Meaningful, Action Driven) with Methods & Measures Blog, in Fall 2023. Our goal for our blog is to engage in discussions and enrich scholarly contributions about the field of Measurement, Evaluation, Statistics, and Assessment (MESA).



## Meet the ELPS Staff

The ELPS Staff are essential to the department's success. Their mission is to provide extraordinary support to individual programs, faculty, students and members of the educational community.

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# Student Highlights



## Marcus Hilliard - HEAM PhD

HEAM student Marcus Hilliard also serves as senior associate athletics director and chief of staff for Tennessee Athletics. Hilliard was recently named to Knox News' "40 Under 40." [See more here.](#)

## Noelia Rodriguez - CSP MS

CSP Student Noelia Rodriguez and CSP Coordinator, Dr. Mary Duenas, presented their "How cultural upbringing affects the college experience: The case of first-generation, Mexican American students" paper at the [AAHHE Conference](#) in St. Louis



## Cameron Molidor - EDAM PhD

Cam Molidor had an Arts Based auto-ethnography proposal accepted to "Queering Rural Education," a joint special issue co-hosted by the [Journal of Research in Rural Education \(JRRE\)](#) & the [Journal of Queer and Trans Studies in Education \(JQTSiE\)](#), which only has a 14% acceptance rate!

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# Student Highlights



## Zac Hyder - HEAM PhD

HEAM PhD student, Zac Hyder recently held his dissertation defense. He also recently lead-authored an article alongside ELPS alumnus Gresham Collom and ELPS faculty Dr. Patrick Biddix in the [Texas Education Review](#).

## Kala Ison - EM

Evaluation Methodology MS Student [Kala Ison](#) is the Project Manager for the Children, Families, and Communities portfolio at the University of Mississippi. She says the program, so far, has been an incredibly enriching experience.



## Amy Clevenger - CSP MS

Amy Clevenger is a member of the NASPA Graduate Associate Program (GAP), an initiative created to increase leadership and networking opportunities for graduate students within NASPA.

[Learn more here.](#)

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# Student Highlights

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## Richard Amoako - ESM PhD

ESM student, Richard Amoako is currently working on the Comprehensive AI Integration Readiness Survey (CAIIRS), which is focused on higher education teaching and learning and has been accepted for a paper presentation at the [AERA 2025 Annual Meeting](#).

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## Spenser Smith - HEAM PhD

HEAM student Spenser Smith was selected for a panel discussion on Artificial Intelligence in October. Titled “AI in Action: Transforming Business School Operations.” [See more here](#).



## Emily Ballesteros - HEAM PhD

HEAM student Emily Ballesteros is currently working on research projects on older adult digital literacies with Dr. Jen Kobrin and DEI content in RA training with Dr. Lauren Irwin, which has been accepted for a paper presentation at the [2024 ASHE Annual Conference](#).



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# Alumni Highlights



## Dr. Alex Oldham - EDAM PhD

Dr. Alex Oldham has been nominated for National History Teacher of 2024! Selected as Tennessee's winner earlier this Summer, Dr. Oldham's passion for history and education continues to inspire students!

## Dr. Bryan Coker - HEAM PhD

Dr. Bryan F. Coker is the President of Maryville College. He previously served in other administrative roles including his role as the Dean of Students at Jacksonville University (FL), and Director of Student Judicial Affairs for the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Dr. Coker also teaches within our HEAM PhD program.



## S. Nicole Jones - ESM PhD

Dr. S. Nicole Jones is a current faculty member within the College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Georgia. She is also an adjunct professor for our EM program as well as a member of the AALHE and a co-facilitator of the Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Learning Community (NTT FLC) at UGA.



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# Alumni Highlights

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## Dr. John Walker - ESM PhD

Dr. John Walker works as a psychometric manager for the Renaissance's Fastbridge Assessment Suite. His work has contributed to innovative approaches and practices in educational assessments. He is also an adjunct professor within our EM program.

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## Dr. Crystal Diaz-Espinoza - HEAM PhD

Dr. Crystal Diaz-Espinoza is the Director of Graduate Enrollment for Robbins College of Health and Human Sciences at Baylor. She oversees enrollment management for all hybrid & online graduate programs working to bring innovative strategies to help students find their passion in health sciences.



## Kayne Gilliland - EDAM EdS

Kayne Gilliland is currently enjoying his second year as Assistant Principal and 18th year as an educator at Shelbyville Central High School. He earned his Ed.D. degree within ELPS in Spring 2024.



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# Stay Connected



## Contact Us!

We would love to hear from you all! Please contact us and share your wonderful information by emailing [elps@utk.edu](mailto:elps@utk.edu) or our Marketing & Communications Coordinator, Jonah Hall, [jhall152@utk.edu](mailto:jhall152@utk.edu).

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and Policy Studies**

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