



EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP & POLICY STUDIES

GREETINGS FROM THE DEPARTMENT HEAD

It has been a busy academic year in ELPS. Here are some of the key events that defined our department in the 2024-25 academic year:

- Many of our faculty and staff have received awards from the college, university, and national organizations for their outstanding work.
- We underwent a thorough academic program review process that highlighted the many strengths of ELPS while also giving us some areas to work on going forward.
- We successfully hired two tenure-line faculty members to begin in the fall and are conducting searches for a staff member and an assistant/associate professor of practice.
- We had opportunities to bond as a department and with our colleagues in the Education Research & Opportunity Center.

ELPS's work does not stop in the summer, but we are all looking forward to a period of calm before things ramp up again in August. Have a wonderful summer!

Robert Kelchen, Ph.D.

Professor & Department Head

Department of Educational
Leadership & Policy Studies



[Donate to ELPS Here](#)

News and Announcements



Dr. Duenas Receives Outstanding Doctoral Mentoring Award

The Graduate School recently announced that Mary Duenas won the first ever Outstanding Doctoral Mentoring Award! This award recognizes that mentoring graduate and professional students can be critical to their success. Dr. Duenas also recently received the Mena Valdez Outstanding Faculty Award at NASPA as well!

Dr. Irwin Recognized as Annuity Coeptis Emerging Professional

Dr. Irwin received this award at the ACPA Convention in Long Beach, CA. The award honors exemplary educators in the early stages of their careers. Irwin was one of five early-career professionals recognized for their contributions to the field.



CSP Program Pausing New Student Enrollment Moving Forward

Moving forward, the CSP program will shift away from primarily serving students who work in 50% time graduate assistantships towards a new model that provides a different type of experience for our students. We are excited about these changes and believe they will enhance the professional preparation and development of our graduate students.

[Donate to ELPS Here](#)

News and Announcements

Dr. Kelchen Recognized as Top Scholar Influencer by Education Week

Dr. Kelchen ranked 31st out of 200 scholars nationwide in Education Week's Edu-Scholar Public Influence Rankings for 2025. He is the only scholar from the University of Tennessee to make this year's list!



Leadership Studies Adjunct Faculty Dr. Gary Petree Receives Faculty Advisor Award from TennACADA

Dr. Gary Petree received the Outstanding Advising Faculty Advisor Award from TennACADA. Nominated by Heath Cox, he went to great measures to help the advisor and his student!

ERO's Amy King Partners with MDC to Present at Grand Challenges Conference

Amy King, an Educational Specialist within the Education Research & Opportunity Center, partnered with the Metro Drug Coalition, a substance abuse prevention and recovery center that serves the local community, to present at the Grand Challenges Conference in Murfreesboro.



[Donate to ELPS Here](#)

News and Announcements



The Education Research & Opportunity Center Hosts TRIO Day in Spring

This February, the ERO Center hosted the TRIO Day with over 300 participants! This event gives first-generation, low-income, and disabled potential Vols access to the skills, experience, and knowledge they need to succeed in formal post-secondary education.

Dr. Leia Cain Named New CEHHS Senate Representative for ELPS

Dr. Leia Cain has recently been named as the new College of Education, Health, & Human Sciences (CEHHS) Senate Representative for the Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies.



ELPS Holds The Annual ELPS Awards Ceremony in May

The ELPS Department held its annual Awards Ceremony in May as we all got the chance to spend time together with other faculty, staff and students while enjoying great food, prizes and awards!

[Donate to ELPS Here](#)

News and Announcements

Three ELPS Members Receive Recognition at CEHHS Ceremony

Dr. Louis Rocconi, and Dr. Lauren Irwin, as well as our Business Manager, Constance Honorable, all received award recognition at the 2025 Faculty & Staff Recognition Ceremony across CEHHS.



ESM Launching New Evaluation Methodology Certificate This Fall

The Evaluation Statistics & Methodology (ESM) program will launch two new certificates this Fall.

One being the Evaluation Methodology graduate certificate. [Click here for more information.](#)

ESM Launching New Survey Methodology Certificate This Fall

The Evaluation Statistics & Methodology (ESM) program will launch two new certificates this Fall. One being the Survey Methodology graduate certificate. [Click here for more information.](#)



[Donate to ELPS Here](#)

News and Announcements

Congratulations to Our Students Who Recently Defended Their Dissertations or Doctoral Applied Research Successfully:

Dr. Hope Adkins, PhD

Dr. Christian Lockhart, PhD

Dr. Meagan Booth, EdD

Dr. Amanda Mason EdD

Dr. Adam Brimer, PhD

Dr. Anne McKendry EdD

Dr. Katrina Benson, PhD

Dr. Julie Roe , PhD

Dr. Katherine Estep, EdD

James Sparkman, EdS

Dr. Melissa Grant, PhD

Dr. Laura Stansell, PhD

Dr. Jesse Gray, EdD

Dr. Natalie Stepanov, PhD

Hunter Grubb, EdS

Dr. Marshall Steward, PhD

Dr. Shea Hennessee EdD

Dr. Brittany Sutton, EdD

Dr. Jordyn Horner, EdD

Dr. Casey Upson, EdD

Dr. Toni Jackson, PhD

Dr. Blake Weiss, PhD

Dr. Stephanie Knight, EdD

[Donate to ELPS Here](#)

Student Highlights



Abraham Cervantes - HEAM PhD

HEAM PhD student Abraham Cervantes was recently awarded the ACPA Latinx Outstanding Early Scholar Award at the recent ACPA Convention in Long Beach, California!

Amanda Mason - EDAM EdD

Amanda Mason, in our EdD Ed. Leadership program has accepted a position with the Tennessee Department of Education as the Senior Manager of Early Childhood Special Education upon her graduation in May 2025.



ESM PhD Students Present at CEHHS Research Colloquium

ESM Ph.D. students Jerri Danso and Sara Hall (pictured), as well as Richard Amoako, and Chelsea Jacobs presented their research during the Spring semester at the CEHHS Research Colloquium.

[Donate to ELPS Here](#)

Student Highlights



Abraham Cervantes - HEAM PhD

Abraham Cervantes will present research this July at the British Educational Leadership, Management, and Administration Society Annual Conference, held in Brighton, England.

The research presentation is titled: “The Politics of Identity: How ‘Latinx’ Reflects the Tension Between Academia and Culture”

Jerri Danso - ESM PhD

Jerri Danso, a PhD student within our Evaluation, Statistics, & Methodology program recently received the opportunity to serve as faculty at the 2025 ACPA Assessment Institute. She will be facilitating sessions for the Department and Divisional Leaders track.



Richard Amoako - ESM PhD

Richard Amoako, a PhD student within our Evaluation, Statistics, & Methodology program recently received a student award for his presentation “Towards a Culturally Responsive Evaluation Framework for Rural Appalachian School Mental Health Programs” at the Eastern Evaluation Research Society 2025 Annual Conference.



[Donate to ELPS Here](#)

Volunteers of Distinction!



Amy Clevenger - CSP

College Student Personnel student, Amy Clevenger, recently received this award that celebrates outstanding students who received their degrees in Fall 2024 or will receive their degrees in Spring 2025.

Gavin Aitken - CSP

College Student Personnel student, Gavin Aitken, recently received this award that celebrates outstanding students who received their degrees in Fall 2024 or will receive their degrees in Spring 2025.



Noelia Rodriguez - CSP

College Student Personnel student, Noelia Rodriguez, recently received this award that celebrates outstanding students who received their degrees in Fall 2024 or will receive their degrees in Spring 2025.



[Donate to ELPS Here](#)

Alumni Highlights

Phil Cook - HEAM PhD

The Lee University Board of Directors recently announced the appointment of Dr. Phil Cook, a Higher Education Administration PhD alumni, as the school's next President, effective July 1st, 2025.



Aaron Culver - VOLS Lead Ed.S.

Aaron Culver, a 2020 ELPS Vols Lead program graduate, and former principal of Kittrell Elementary School recently completed his Ed.D. degree from the University of the Cumberland. Dr. Culver was hooded on May 1st.



Paul Kirkland - ESM PhD

Dr. Paul Kirkland works as a Grant Manager for Monroe County Schools. His work has contributed to the implementation of impactful initiatives in STEM education, school safety and educator development. He is also an adjunct faculty within our ESM PhD program!



[Donate to ELPS Here](#)

Alumni Highlights



S. Nicole Jones - ESM PhD

Dr. Jones recently received the Best Faculty Engagement Strategies award for her virtual poster exhibit at the Assessment Leadership Institute hosted by the University of Hawaii. Jones is also an adjunct faculty member within our Evaluation Methodology MS program!

Anna Banks - ESM PhD

Dr. Anna Banks works for NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston TX where she serves as the Engineering Directorate's Business Intelligence Manager. She recently received the Helen B. Watson Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation Award from the College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences.



Rolen Blaine - EDAM EdD

Rolen Blaine, a Fall 2024 ELPS graduate, who is currently the assistant principal at Fountain City Elementary School, was recently appointed principal of New Hopewell Elementary School and will become effective as of July 2025.



[Donate to ELPS Here](#)

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 or our Marketing & Communications Coordinator, Jonah Hall, jhall152@utk.edu.

**Support Educational Leadership
and Policy Studies**

**Visit our
Social Channels:**



**325 Bailey Education Complex
1122 Volunteer Blvd.
Knoxville, Tennessee 37996
Phone: 865-974-2214
Fax: 865-974-6146
Email: elps@utk.edu**

