



## GREETINGS FROM THE DEPARTMENT HEAD

Happy Spring!

It has been a wonderful year for ELPS as we strive to take our programs and people to the next level. We are working to launch or update several academic programs to meet the needs of our students and the state of Tennessee. Several of our students and faculty have received recognition for their work, and nothing makes me prouder as a department head than seeing our students presenting at national conferences. We are working on an updated vision for our department that provides a plan for our next five years.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to us! We are working to engage our alumni and friends more, and we would love to hear about how we can support you.

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

*Professor & Department Head*  
Department of Educational  
Leadership & Policy Studies



# News and Announcements



## **Dr. Boyd Recognized As Professor of Practice Emerita Following Her Retirement**

The University has recognized Dr. Karen D. Boyd with the title of professor of practice emerita following her retirement this May.

Join us in congratulating Dr. Boyd and thanking her for everything she has done for the ELPS Department!

## **Dr. Hayes Elected as Vice President of Division A for AERA**

Dr. Sonya Hayes was recently elected Vice President of Division A for AERA! This national leadership role within the field reflects Dr. Hayes' influence in shaping research and practice in educational leadership and highlights her strengths on the national stage!



## **Dr. Miller Receives Mid-Career Award from ASHE Organization**

Dr. Ryan Miller was recently recognized by the Association for the Study of Higher Education for his expertise in higher education as he accepted the organization's Mid-Career Award!



# News and Announcements

## Dr. Rocconi Receives Excellence in Teaching Award

Dr. Louis Rocconi received the Excellence in Teaching Award in April at the Academic Honors Banquet that honors outstanding efforts in the classroom! Join us in congratulating him on this well-deserved award!



## ELPS Hosts Successful Bogue Lecture in February

The Bogue Lecture featured Dr. Kevin McClure from UNC-Wilmington where he discussed his book “The Caring University.” This lecture, open to all members of the university community, was a great success!



## Dr. Morrow's Work Recently Recognized As ELPS Director of Graduate Studies

Dr. Jennifer Ann Morrow was recently recognized by the Graduate School as a faculty fellow working to improve collaboration with the Graduate School ensuring graduate student success! Learn more here!



# News and Announcements



## **Dr. Alisha Erickson Recognized As Field Award Recipient**

Dr. Alisha Erickson, Principal at Poplar Grove School in the Franklin Special District, has been named as recipient of the William J. and Lucille H. Field Award for Excellence in School Principalship for the State of Tennessee in the Elementary Division. [Learn more here.](#)

## **Ms. Chara Hess Rand Recognized As Field Award Recipient**

Ms. Chara Hess Rand, Principal at Isaac Litton STEM Magnet Middle School in the Metro Nashville Public Schools, has been named as the recipient of the William J. and Lucille H. Field Award for Excellence in School Principalship for the State of Tennessee in the Secondary Division. [Learn more here.](#)



## **Dr. Martinez Continues Site Visits for Aspiring School Leaders**

Dr. James Martinez, pictured alongside Corey Bishop who is a member of our Online Leadership Studies (OLS) program continues performing site visits in support of aspiring school leaders as well as his important service on campus, at the national level, in his local community, and advancing research!



# News and Announcements

## Dr. Cain's Piece Published In Award Winning Poetry Anthology

Had I A Dove, a poetry anthology in which Dr. Leia Cain has a piece published, was recently awarded the Weatherford Award by the Appalachian Studies Association! This anthology is the first of its kind to win the award, and contains poems written by poets across Southern Appalachia who were impacted by Hurricane Helene.



## Richard Amoako and Dr. Morrow Published Article In International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

Dr. Jennifer Ann Morrow, alongside ESM PhD student, Richard Amoako, recently had their article "Development and Initial Validation of the Comprehensive AI Integration Readiness Survey (CAIIRS)" published in the International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education!



## Dr. Rocconi Received Certificate of Recognition for UTK Gen-AI Faculty Fellowship Program

Dr. Louis Rocconi served as a faculty coach for the UTK Gen-AI Faculty Fellowship Program providing guidance and feedback for faculty adopting generative AI into their courses!



# News and Announcements



## EDAM Faculty & Student Attend UCEA Conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico

EDAM faculty members Dr. Mary Lynne Derrington, Dr. Caroline Bartlett, Dr. Sonya Hayes, and Dr. James Martinez, alongside EdD student Matthew Murphy attended The University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA) Conference. Dr. Derrington also led a seminar at the conference!

## Dr. Derrington Attends ACAE 2026 Annual Conference Alongside EdD Student & Alumni

Dr. Mary Lynne Derrington alongside EdD student, Matthew Murphy, and alumni, Dr. Jordyn Horner, recently attended the Advancing Character Across Education 2026 Annual Conference where Murphy and Horner each presented a paper alongside Dr. Derrington!



## Dr. Morrow Conducts Workshop At Continuous Improvement Summit

Dr. Jennifer Ann Morrow recently conducted a three-hour workshop at the Continuous Improvement Summit titled Creative Methods for Visualizing & Disseminating Assessment Data. She had over 100 individuals in attendance!

# News and Announcements

## Leadership Studies Minor Creating Community Engaged Learning Pathways

Our [Leadership Studies Minor](#) delivered through a partnership with the [Jones Center for Leadership and Service](#) continues helping students connect what they're learning in the classroom to the real challenges facing organizations, the communities they care about, and the world!



## HEAM Masters Program Undergoes Spring 2026 Curricular Updates

Under Program Coordinator [Dr. Allie McGuigan](#), the [Higher Education Administration masters program](#) underwent some curricular changes to update course names and numbers to better reflect what is being taught in the classes, to better align with doctoral course numbering, and more. These changes become official on August 1st!

## Jonah Hall Receives Volunteer of Distinction Award for Graduate Studies

[Jonah Hall](#), our Marketing & Communications Coordinator, was recognized as a 2026 [Volunteer of Distinction](#) as a Masters student within the [College of Communication & Information](#) graduating in May!



# New ESM Courses



## Dr. Morrow Teaching New Course On Disseminating Evaluation Results

Dr. Jennifer Ann Morrow is teaching a new course this semester, ESM 570: Disseminating Evaluation Results. Starting next year, the class will be titled “Disseminating Applied Research Results” and the course will be offered every Spring in an online asynchronous fashion! Open to all graduate students!

## ESM Launching New Research Design Course This Fall

Dr. Fatima Zahra will be teaching ESM 630: Experimental & Quasi-Experimental Research Design this Fall where students will be able to design rigorous impact evaluations, analyze real-world policy data and more! Open to all graduate students!



## ESM Launching New Multi-Level Modeling Course This Fall

Dr. Louis Rocconi will be teaching ESM 685: Multi-Level Modeling this Fall . Students will learn how to build, estimate, and interpret multilevel models for clustered and longitudinal data, with an emphasis on practical application. Open to all graduate students!



# Congrats Recent Graduates!

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**Congratulations To Our Students Who Recently Defended Their  
Dissertations & Doctoral Applied Research Successfully!**

## Spring 2026

**Richard Amoako, PhD - ESM**

**Kimberly Carney, PhD - HEAM**

**Rachel Ladd, PhD - ESM**

**Bethany McKee, EdD - EDAM**

**Kacie Redmond, EdD - EDAM**

**Anita Still, EdD - EDAM**

**LaDawna Williams, PhD - HEAM**

**Emily Ballesteros, PhD - HEAM**

**Amanda Hunley, EdD - EDAM**

**Maria I. Martinez, PhD - HEAM**

**Amy Profant, EdD - EDAM**

**Brent Shelton, PhD - HEAM**

**Madalyn Walker, PhD - HEAM**

## Fall 2025

**James Cantrell, PhD - HEAM**

**Rosite Delgado, PhD - ACED**

**Jonathan Jerman, PhD - EDAM**

**Donna Wortham, PhD - EDAM**

**Cathy Cuevas, PhD - HEAM**

**Loren Fogerty, PhD - EDAM**

**Maria C. Martinez, PhD - HEAM**

## Summer 2025

**Clayton Carroll, PhD - HEAM**

**Maria Martinez Weiss, PhD - HEAM**

**Jerri O'Rourke, PhD - ACED**

# Student Highlights

## Jerri Danso - ESM PhD

Jerri Danso, an ESM PhD student, gave an oral presentation at the CEHHS Graduate Student Research Colloquium in April focused on a semester-long classroom pilot exploring how AI influences students' academic reading and writing. The presentation examined students' perceptions and reported use of AI, including changes in their awareness of AI's benefits and risks, attitudes and more!

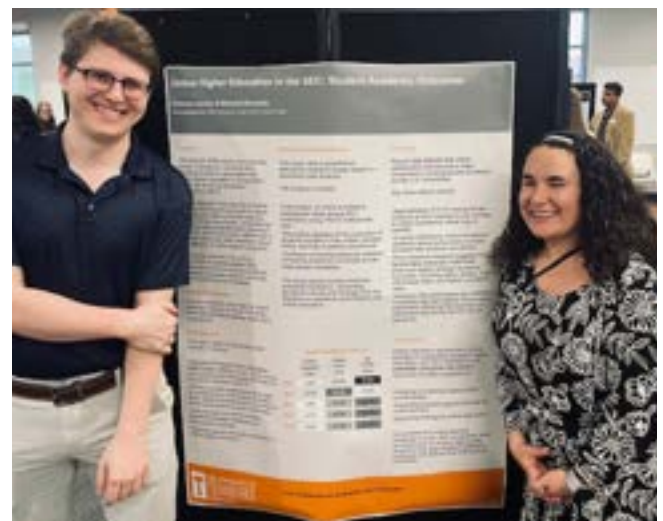


## Jerri Danso & Sara Hall - ESM PhD

ESM PhD students, Jerri Danso and Sara Hall recently presented a session at the American Evaluation Association Conference (AERA) last fall. Additionally, Jerri also presented one session individually!

## Chelsea Jacobs - ESM PhD

Chelsea Jacobs, an ESM PhD student, alongside Michael Richards, a fellow CEHHS graduate student, presented a poster at the CEHHS Graduate Student Research Colloquium in April examining trends in online enrollment across SEC universities, using undergraduate enrollment data from the National Center for Education Statistics IPEDS 2023-2024 survey.



# Student Highlights



## Chris Mayer - Qual. Grad Certificate

Chris Mayer, one of our qualitative research methods in education graduate certificate students has been working on a project titled Dumpster Treasures and WBIR recently covered the story on their website as well! This initiative turns discarded items into art, aiming to transform campus sustainability!

[Learn more here!](#)

## Timara McCollum - ESM PhD

Timara McCollum presented with Dr. Rachel Wong at the Spring 2026 AERA Conference on U.S. parents' perceptions of AI in K-12 education. She looks forward to returning this June to complete her dissertation on teacher data literacy and instructional data use, while supporting the university's Research Consulting Support team as a mixed methods consultant.



## Billie McNamara - ACED PhD

Billie McNamara has been appointed to a three-year term on the Editorial Boards for two peer-reviewed publications of the Association for Career & Technical Education. She was also recently asked to chair AAACE's newly established History & Archives Committee!



# Student Highlights

## Eva Ramsey - HEAM PhD

Eva Ramsey recently presented at the Association for the Study of Higher Education Annual Conference held in Denver, Colorado. She also received a Professional Organizational Development (POD) Network award, which supported her participation in the annual POD conference in San Diego last November!



## Miranda Rutan - HEAM PhD

Alongside Dr. Leia Cain, Miranda Rutan recently released a publication in the Journal of Queer and Trans Studies in Education exploring the complex interplay between queer identity and Southern cultural narratives among rural college students in the U.S. Bible Belt. The study illustrates how the South emerges as both a site of conflict and a source of support in rural queer storytelling and identity development. [Learn more here.](#)

## Katie Wiley - HEAM PhD

Katie Wiley currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Southern Association of Colleges and Employers (SoACE). As Director of Targeted Knowledge Groups, she leads strategic initiatives across key focus areas, while also advising committees that shape major association-wide programs!



# Alumni Highlights - 40 Under 40!



## Jada Russell - HEAM PhD

Dr. Jada Russell, who completed her Ph.D, in our Higher Education Administration program, was recently recognized as a member of the 2026 Volunteer 40 Under 40!

## Thomas Cruise - Adult Learning MS

Thomas Cruise, who completed his Master's Degree in our Adult Learning/Educational Psychology program in 2020, was recently recognized as a member of the 2026 Volunteer 40 Under 40!



## Tyvi Small - HEAM PhD

Tyvi Small, an alumni of our Higher Education Administration PhD program, recently shared his journey from growing up in Pahokee, Florida to helping shape access, opportunity, and engagement at UTK on WATE's Voices of the Valley!

# Alumni Highlights

## Ciara Gazaway - HEAM PhD

Dr. Ciara Gazaway, who completed her Ph.D, in our Higher Education Administration program, recently presented at three conferences this year NCORE, ASHE, & APA!



## Sarah Rodriguez - CSP/HEAM PhD

Dr. Sarah Rodriguez was recently named a 2026 EDU Ledger Emerging Scholar for her contributions to higher education. She serves as an Associate Professor of Engineering Education at Virginia Tech and is the author of a new book, Supporting Latinas in Engineering and Computing: A Chicana Feminist Approach!

## Sarah Nadel - ESM PhD

Dr. Sarah Nadel currently serves as an Associate Director in Market Research at C-Space where she focuses primarily on qualitative research. In this role, she partners with clients across a range of sectors to uncover what motivates their customers and how brands can better connect with their audiences!



# 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).

# Give To ELPS

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