

# FOUNDATION AWARDS AND FACULTY RECOGNITION

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**FALL FACULTY MEETING  
AUGUST 21, 2025**

## To the faculty and staff:

Welcome to the Fall Faculty Meeting of Middle Tennessee State University. On behalf of the MTSU Foundation Board, I would like to thank you for your dedication and leadership, which have made MTSU the institution of choice for the region's top scholars.

We are grateful to all the faculty and staff seeking to provide a supportive learning environment to our students and an experience that is as personal and unique as our diverse student population. Since the establishment of the MTSU Foundation in the early 1960s, the University has been the beneficiary of gifts that have contributed significantly to its growth and development. Our mission is to provide financial assistance from alumni, friends, and the community to build an even stronger MTSU.

I congratulate today's recipients and all the faculty. Best wishes for an exciting, fulfilling, and successful academic year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brian F. Kidd". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Brian" and last name "Kidd" being clearly legible, and "F." in the middle.

Brian F. Kidd, '88  
President, MTSU Foundation





# FOUNDATION AWARDS





## Kate Goodwin

*Department of Theatre and Dance*

### Outstanding Teaching Award

Kate Goodwin has a B.S. in Speech and Theatre from Middle Tennessee State University and a Master of Fine Arts in Theatre: Stage Management from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). Goodwin began her career teaching theatre at the Nashville School for the Arts. Since then, she has taught in the theatre departments at the University of Memphis, Eastern Kentucky University, Asbury University, and Centre College before joining the faculty of the MTSU Department of Theatre and Dance, where she teaches and mentors both the stage management and theatre education students.

The pursuit of an M.F.A. in Stage Management at UIUC led to an exciting array of opportunities, including working with Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet Company in New York City, supporting Anne Bogart/SITI Company in residence at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, and touring internationally with The Builders Association production of *Continuous City*. Following graduate school, she served in various production and educational capacities with several theatre companies in Tennessee and Kentucky, including in 2014, when Goodwin became a founding member of the AthensWest Theatre Company—a professional Equity theatre company where she served as production manager for the first three seasons. Since moving to middle Tennessee, she has stage-managed for the Nashville Shakespeare Festival, co-created Play Space—a URECA and Tennessee Arts Commission grant-supported new play development workshop—guided MTSU Theatre’s collaboration with the Farm Project’s *The Ruminants*, and is now serving on the board of the newly created Tennessee Theatre Educators Association.

Goodwin also has a long history with the Tennessee Governor’s School for the Arts (GSFTA), having started as a counselor in 1997. She became theatre chair in 2021 before being named the director for the GSFTA in 2022. She happily serves the talented student-artists of Tennessee each summer on the MTSU campus.



## Samuel Haruna

*School of Agriculture*

### Outstanding Teaching Award

Samuel Haruna holds a B.S. in Geology from Kogi State University in Nigeria, an M.S. in Environmental Science from Lincoln University in Missouri, and a Ph.D. in Soils, Environmental and Atmospheric Sciences from the University of Missouri.

He began his academic career as a dissertation fellow at MTSU while completing his doctoral studies. Following the completion of his Ph.D., he joined MTSU's School of Agriculture as an assistant professor, where he has made a significant impact in both teaching and research.

Haruna has developed and taught a variety of agriculture-related courses, consistently earning student evaluations that exceed both college and University averages. In recognition of his exceptional teaching, he received the 2021–22 CBAS Teaching Excellence Award and has been named by graduating students as a faculty member who made a difference in their lives five times over the past eight semesters.

His research and outreach efforts include grant-funded projects that provide hands-on training and mentorship to MTSU students and local high schoolers in Rutherford County. Over the past four years, these initiatives have resulted in nine student-led conference presentations and nine student-involved, peer-reviewed publications in respected journals. He has also supervised four undergraduate Honors theses during this time.

Haruna is the inaugural mentor/coach of the MTSU Soil Judging Team and co-advisor of the Plant and Soil Science Club. His mentorship has helped students pursue graduate studies and secure employment across Tennessee and beyond.



## C. Rebecca Oldham

*Department of Human Sciences*

### Outstanding Teaching Award

Rebecca Oldham (“Dr. O”) is an assistant professor in the Human Development and Family Science (HDFS) program. In 2022, she received the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) Emerging Teacher/Mentor Award. As a romantic relationships expert, she prioritizes connection and support in research and teaching. She has mentored high school, undergraduate, and graduate researchers and served on dissertation committees in the field of sex and relationships. Her proteges have presented at local and national conferences and published work in peer-reviewed journals. She regularly gives seminars at MTSU and her alma mater about preparing for, applying to, and funding graduate school.

Oldham’s teaching focuses on fostering healthy relationships and communities. Her course on romantic relationships will be offered in the True Blue Core starting Fall 2025. In her Violence in the Family course, she strengthens MTSU-community connections through service learning and hosting Q&A panels with local professionals so the public can learn about domestic violence, child abuse, and elder abuse prevention and intervention.

Oldham is committed to instructional innovation. Across her courses, she experiments with high-impact practices, such as project-based learning, student-led learning, and flipped classrooms. Since 2021, Oldham and librarian Ashley Shealy have collaborated to publish quantitative and qualitative assessments of their integrating information literacy curriculum into an HDFS course. Moreover, she and her HDFS colleagues have replaced expensive textbooks with open educational resources and shared what they learned through MTSU workshops, a national conference roundtable, and publication.

Oldham’s service reflects her passion for teaching and mentorship. She is proactively engaged as faculty advisor and co-founder of the HDFS student organization, the Middle Tennessee Council on Family Relations. She is an Engage advisory board member, an NCFR Student and New Professionals representative and mentor, and an International Association for Relationship Research teaching committee member.



## Ashley Valanzola

*Department of History*

### Outstanding Teaching in True Blue Core

Ashley Valanzola is an assistant professor of History. She holds a B.S. in History from the United States Naval Academy, an M.A. in Diplomacy from Norwich University, and a Ph.D. in History from George Washington University. She spent six years as a surface warfare officer in the Navy, stationed in San Diego and

Washington, D.C.

Since joining the faculty in 2021, Valanzola has taught courses ranging from first-year surveys of European history to upper-division and graduate courses in her areas of expertise. These include courses on modern France, the Holocaust, women's gender and sexuality studies, and European Jewish history. She also supervises master's and Ph.D. students in History and Public History. She is a member of the graduate and Honors faculty.

In summer 2022, Valanzola received the President's Commission on the Status of Women curriculum integration grant for her general education survey course, which shortly thereafter became part of the True Blue Core. Within her Western Civilization I course, the grant allowed Valanzola to bring much-needed attention to content on gender and power, sexuality in ancient Greece, sexual violence against women, and the regulation and restriction of women's reproductive rights.

Valanzola sees her history courses as a way to empower students to make contemporary decisions from a historically informed perspective. To do this, her courses prioritize diversity, which means introducing students to a diverse range of human experiences across time and also making them aware that history itself is constructed by scholars from different religious, ethnic, sexual, and economic backgrounds. Teaching for the True Blue Core means interacting with a wide range of majors, and her courses help translate the strengths of historical thinking into a set of tools students can take with them after leaving the classroom. By bolstering communication, writing, and analysis skills, she hopes students gain the confidence to navigate an increasingly complex and polarized world.

In addition to her focus on students, Valanzola has used her professional training in sexual assault victim advocacy and her research on trauma to co-moderate a Faculty Learning Community (FLC). Focused on trauma-informed pedagogy, this FLC met during the 2024–25 academic year and hosted a workshop for faculty and students in May 2025.

Valanzola is grateful for the support of her History Department colleagues, graduate assistants, and mentors from the Association for Jewish Studies who have helped her foster meaningful student engagement and academic success.





## Jessica Arbour

*Department of Biology*

### Outstanding Public Service Award

Jessica Arbour is an assistant professor in the Department of Biology, where her research focuses on the evolution of organismal form and function, especially in freshwater fishes. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Toronto and held a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Washington. During these appointments she worked closely with museum curators at the Royal Ontario Museum and Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, where she gained a deep appreciation for connecting the public with natural history resources.

At MTSU, Arbour's outreach efforts center on broadening public awareness of Tennessee's remarkable freshwater fish diversity, including those found in the local community. Through her National Science Foundation-funded research, she has partnered with the Discovery Center at Murfree Spring to create interactive exhibit pieces highlighting Tennessee's beautiful and diverse darter fishes.

As part of the College of Basic and Applied Sciences STEM summer camp program, she led high school students on fish sampling trips in the Stones River watershed, introducing them to nongame fishes rarely observed by the public. She also developed an open-access, online gallery of 3D fish models on Sketchfab, which has been adopted internationally by universities and museums for education and outreach.

Through these initiatives, Arbour strives to share her passion for fish biodiversity, fostering greater public understanding of the ecological roles that freshwater fishes play in local and broader ecosystems.



## Emily Baran

*Department of History*

### Outstanding Public Service Award

Emily Baran is a professor and chair of the History Department. She earned her Ph.D. in History from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and her research explores the relationship between minority religious communities and modern states and societies in the Soviet Union and its successor states.

For over a decade, Baran has been a public advocate for religious freedom in Russia, speaking at the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and at international events to commemorate religious repression in the Soviet Union. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, she has served as a pro bono expert for a long and growing list of Russian and Ukrainian Jehovah's Witnesses who have sought asylum in the United States. Her role has been to provide the courts with an expert opinion, based on her decades-long research, on the country's conditions as applied to Witnesses. She works closely with the legal teams who represent Witnesses to carefully review the applicants' own statements and to place these claims of persecution within a historical context. She considers it a privilege to be able to share her knowledge of an often-misunderstood religious minority and to defend religious freedom for those most vulnerable to persecution.

During her tenure at MTSU, she has published two major books on Jehovah's Witnesses in the postwar Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia. Her first monograph, *Dissent on the Margins: How Soviet Jehovah's Witnesses Survived Communism and Lived to Preach About It* (Oxford University Press), reconstructed the history of Jehovah's Witnesses in the postwar Soviet Union. Her second monograph, *To Make a Village Soviet: Jehovah's Witnesses and the Transformation of a Postwar Ukrainian Borderland* (McGill-Queen's University Press), pieced together the imposition of Soviet rule on the far-flung village of Bila Tserkva (Ukraine), using recently declassified state security files, state and regional archival materials, and interviews with families of survivors.



## Maria Edlin King

*Department of Economics and Finance*

### Outstanding Public Service Award

Maria Edlin King serves as the visionary Director of the Center for Financial Literacy. Over her 27-year journey, she has transformed the organization into a statewide force for change, advancing financial and economic literacy across Tennessee and beyond. A trailblazer in her field, she designs and leads innovative programs in economics, personal finance, entrepreneurship, and business-focused professional development for K-12 educators, shaping the way financial education is delivered nationwide. Alongside program development, she spearheads the Center's grant initiatives and shares her passion with undergraduate students in the classroom.

In 2021, she led the successful effort to have October designated as Economic Education Month, and she continued that momentum by working with state legislators to secure April as Financial Literacy Month in 2023.

Believing that teaching teachers creates the ultimate ripple effect, King is committed to equipping educators with the deep understanding necessary to ensure accurate and effective instruction for generations to come. She estimates over two million students have been impacted by the Council's work—an enduring testament to its enduring impact.

King's leadership extends beyond the classroom. She served as President of Tennessee Jump\$tart (2022-2024) following years of involvement as a partner and board representative for both the Tennessee Council on Economic & Free Enterprise Education and the Center for Financial Literacy. She is also an active member of the National Business Education Association, the National Council for the Social Studies, the Tennessee Council for the Social Studies, and the American Chemical Society.

Beyond her contributions to education, King is the founding Executive Director of the Alliance for Recreational Empowerment, a nonprofit dedicated to empowering children with physical and mental disabilities. Through skill-building initiatives, the organization helps young individuals thrive as active contributing members of society. Each year, the Alliance hosts a transformative week-long summer camp—free of charge—providing life-changing experiences for its participants.

Whether mentoring future citizens and active voters or transforming classrooms through teacher training, King remains unwavering in her commitment to uplifting others. She takes pride in knowing her students personally, inspiring them to broaden their horizons, and guiding them to a world full of possibilities.



## Gaia Rancati

*Department of Marketing*

### Distinguished Early Career Research Award

Gaia Rancati is an assistant professor of Marketing and director of the Neuromarketing and AI Lab. She earned her Ph.D. in Marketing through a joint program between IULM University in Milan, Italy, and Claremont Graduate University. Her research explores the intersection of neuromarketing, artificial intelligence, and service robotics, with a particular focus on technology-mediated retail and service experiences.

She has published in journals such as the *Journal of Services Marketing*, *Computers in Human Behavior*, *Consumer Behaviour*, *Frontiers in Psychology*, and *Frontiers in Neuroscience*. Her work on gender biases in voice assistants earned her the Best Paper Award at the 2024 European Marketing Academy (EMAC) Conference. In addition to her individual research, Rancati is committed to collaborative advancement in the field. In 2023, she co-founded the Affectively Research lab network with several neuromarketing lab directors across the U.S., aiming to build an interdisciplinary research community.

She has also played an active role in shaping the scholarly conversation around biometric and neurophysiological methods in marketing. Rancati organized and led high-impact panels at the 2024 American Marketing Association Summer Conference and the 2025 Academy of Marketing Science (AMS) Annual Conference to promote the integration of neuro tools in consumer research. She will serve as a track chair for neuromarketing at the 2026 AMS Annual Conference. In parallel, Rancati has secured over \$150,000 in competitive research funding and is currently guest editing special issues for the *Journal of Consumer Marketing* and *Frontiers in Neuroscience*.

A dedicated educator, she teaches neuromarketing, retailing, and marketing research, and actively supports student scholarship. Many of her mentees have received top research awards. Her prior leadership roles in luxury retail, including at Louis Vuitton and Max Mara, enrich her academic contributions and make her one of the most fashionable academics in her field.



## Souvik Banerjee

*Department of Chemistry*

### Distinguished Early Career Research Award

Souvik Banerjee is an assistant professor in the Department of Chemistry and an active member of the Molecular Biosciences Ph.D. program at Middle Tennessee State University, where he has served since fall 2022. He is a member of the American Chemical Society, Division of Medicinal Chemistry, and the Royal Society of Chemistry (MRSC). He currently serves on the editorial boards of *Theoretical and Computational Chemistry* and the *International Journal of Molecular Sciences*.

Banerjee earned his Ph.D. in Organic Chemistry from the University of Southern Mississippi in 2013. Prior to his doctoral studies, he worked as a scientist at Biocon Biopharmaceuticals, a leading biotechnology company in India, from 2005 to 2008. Following his Ph.D., he completed three years of postdoctoral training in Medicinal Chemistry at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center College of Pharmacy, where he later served an additional three years as a research associate.

His first academic appointment was at the University of Arkansas–Fort Smith, where he joined the faculty as an assistant professor of Chemistry in spring 2020. Banerjee's research focuses on the discovery of small-molecule anticancer therapeutics, with an emphasis on targeting the microtubule and autotaxin-LPAR GPCR axis. His work has led to 25 peer-reviewed publications and two U.S. patents. He was recently awarded \$684,000 in external funding from the National Institutes of Health/National Institute of General Medical Sciences to support the development of novel antimitotic agents for metastatic melanoma.

Banerjee currently mentors a diverse team that includes three Ph.D. students, three master's students, and four undergraduate research students.





## Gregory T. Rushton

*Department of Chemistry*

### Distinguished Senior Research Award

Gregory T. Rushton has been a professor of chemistry and director of the Tennessee STEM Education Center (TSEC) at MTSU since 2018. He earned his B.A. in Chemistry from the University of Southern California and an M.Ed. in Secondary Science Education and a Ph.D. in Physical Organic Chemistry from the University of South Carolina.

Rushton's scholarly work sits at the intersection of chemistry, teacher education, and STEM education policy and practice. His research focuses on STEM teacher preparation, retention, and leadership; advancing evidence-based practices in chemistry teaching and learning; and promoting access and improved outcomes in STEM education.

His research has been supported by nearly \$12 million in funding as principal investigator from the National Science Foundation, the Institute of Education Sciences, and the U.S. Department of Education. Notable grants since coming to MTSU include PDConnect: A Scalable Community Approach to Improving Instruction in AP Chemistry Nationwide (\$1.4 million), Investigating Classroom Discourse in Active Learning Chemistry Environments (\$609,000), and the recently awarded LEADS: Leaders in Education Advancing Data Science (\$2.99 million). He has also served as co-PI or evaluator on an additional \$12.5 million in externally funded projects focused primarily on improving STEM teaching and learning in both secondary and postsecondary settings.

Rushton's work has been disseminated in more than 70 peer-reviewed publications, including the *Journal of Chemical Education*, *Science Education*, *Chemistry Education Research and Practice*, and the *International Journal of STEM Education*. He has delivered over 200 scholarly presentations and invited talks internationally, including recent keynotes in Turkey and Denmark.

He values the collaborative nature of his work and credits the many students, faculty colleagues, and institutional leaders with whom he has worked for the collective impact of his scholarship.

He is honored and humbled to be recognized with this award, which affirms the role of collaborative, translational research in shaping the future of STEM education.



## Joyce Anne Finch

*School of Nursing*

### Distinguished Early Career Creative Activity Award

Joyce Anne Finch has been a faculty member with Middle Tennessee State University since fall 2014, initially on a clinical track. In fall 2022, she accepted a tenure-track position and recently completed her third year. A native of Middletown, Ohio—located between Cincinnati and Dayton—Finch earned her associate degree in Nursing and B.A. in Sociology from Miami University (1997), followed by an M.S.N. and M.Ed. from Xavier University (2006/2007). She earned her Ph.D. from MTSU in August 2022. Prior to joining MTSU, she was an assistant professor at The Christ College of Nursing and Health Sciences in Ohio.

A registered nurse for 28 years, Finch is passionate about educating students through her love of simulation. She integrates concepts such as communication, clinical judgment, professionalism, patient safety, and teamwork into her simulation design. She has created two nursing escape rooms and many other simulations for the undergraduate program for the second, third, and fifth semesters, including specialty courses. She views simulation as a powerful tool to replicate real-life experience in a controlled and safe environment, where long-term goals are to facilitate and improve clinical judgment without causing harm to a real patient.

Finch's research includes "Quality of Nursing Care in Relation to Work Environment from the Perspective of Bedside Nurses," "Improving Clinical Simulation Experience of Nursing Students Who Participate in Simulation as Part of Their Clinical Experience by Administering a Debriefing Survey," "Collaborative Research SCC-DG: Engaging and Joyful Long-Term Care with Connected Communities," and other research in progress within simulation and public health. Finch believes that nursing is a career of service and is involved in many service opportunities.

Finch is on the University's Academic Appeals Committee and Faculty Senate. She serves the School of Nursing in the role of chair of the Resources Committee, co-chair of the Curricular Redesign Committee, and member of the Faculty Organization Committee, School of Nursing Chairs Committee, and course coordinators. Finch is involved in fundraising for the MS Society, is vice president of the board for Murfreesboro Cold Patrol, and participates in other community organizations. Professional organization memberships include Sigma, American Nurses Association, and Society for Simulation in Healthcare (SSH).



## Fred Arroyo

*Department of English*

### Distinguished Senior Career Creative Activity Award

Fred Arroyo is the author of *Alba and Other Songs*, winner of the third Gunpowder Press Alta California Chapbook Prize, published in a bilingual edition (2024). His *Sown in Earth: Essays of Memory and Belonging* was shortlisted for the 2021–22 William Saroyan International Prize for Writing. He is also the author of *Western Avenue and Other Fictions* (also shortlisted for the Saroyan Prize) and *The Region of Lost Names*—all three of these titles with the University of Arizona Press.

His writing has appeared in the anthologies *Camino del Sol: Fifteen Years of Latina and Latino Writing* and *The Colors of Nature: Essays on Culture, Identity, and the Natural World*. Arroyo's *Emigrant Creek and Other Songs* (poems) will appear with *Letras Latinas / Red Hen Press Collaborative* in 2027. He is also working on a collection of short fictions, *The Book of Manuels*.



## Philip E. Phillips

*Department of English /  
University Honors College*

### Career Achievement Award

Philip E. Phillips is associate dean of the University Honors College and professor of English at MTSU, where he has taught since 1999. He earned his B.A. in English with minors in Latin and Philosophy from Belmont University, and his M.A. and Ph.D.

in English from Vanderbilt University. He holds certificates from the Université Catholique de l'Ouest in Angers, France, and the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Prior to joining the faculty at MTSU, he was a lecturer in English at Vanderbilt and an AP English and elementary French teacher at Battle Ground Academy.

His teaching and research areas include American, British, and early European literature. He is best known in academia for his scholarship on Edgar Allan Poe, John Milton, and Boethius as well as for his leadership as president of the Poe Studies Association and his roles in organizing its last three international conferences, in Kyoto, Boston, and Paris. His most recent books on Poe include *Poe Spaces: Within and Beyond the Spatial Turn* (2025) and *Poe and Place* (2018), winner of the J. Lasley Dameron Award. In February 2026, he will be the keynote speaker at the Edgar Allan Poe Spanish Association International Conference in Madrid. Having published in *Animals in the American Classics* (2022) and *Animals in Classic American Poetry* (2025), Phillips was the keynote speaker in January 2025 at the International Conference on Ecocritical Approaches to World Literature and Culture at Ravenshaw University in Cuttack, India.

His book publications in the areas of medieval and Renaissance literature include *Remaking Boethius* (2019), *Vernacular Traditions of Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy* (2016), *Prison Narratives from Boethius to Zana* (2014), *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages* (2012), *The Consolation of Queen Elizabeth I* (2009), *New Directions in Boethian Studies* (2007), and *John Milton's Epic Invocations* (2000). He has published numerous articles, chapters, and reviews, and he enjoys coordinating the Honors Lecture Series and teaching research methods, European literature, and American poetry in addition to directing undergraduate and graduate research at MTSU.

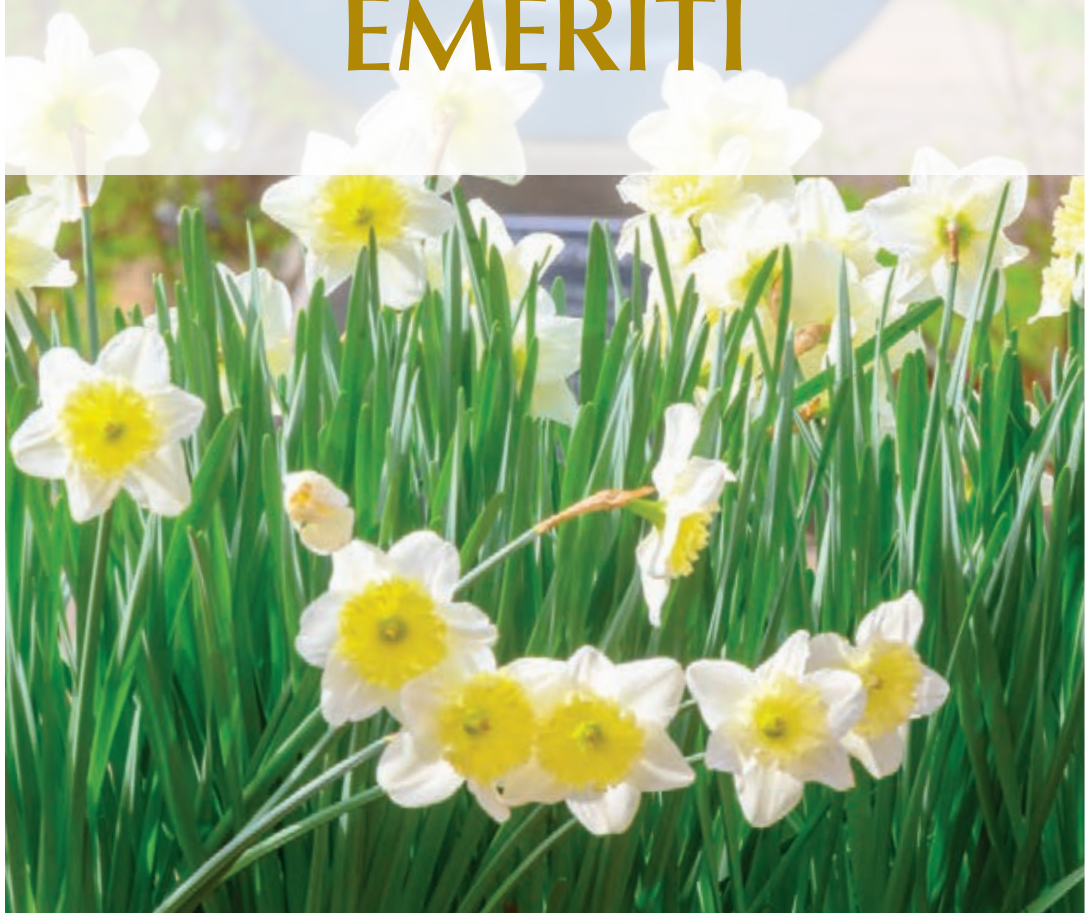
A three-time recipient of the MTSU Foundation Distinguished Research Award (2008, 2015, and 2021), Phillips chairs nearly half of all Honors thesis committees, mentors URECA projects, and has directed nine Honors theses, ten M.A. theses (with two in progress), one M.A. portfolio, and five doctoral dissertations (with one in progress). He has served as a reader on many more.

In respect to service, Phillips chaired MTSU's 2015–2025 Academic Master Plan Committee and served on the SACSCOC Leadership Team. He recently chaired The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi's first-ever Strategic Planning Taskforce (2022–24) and is now the president-elect of the national organization. With the support of the College of Liberal Arts and the Honors College, he founded and served for 10 years as the director of the Great Books in Middle Tennessee Prisons program.





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*Research*

*Service*



## Raphael Bundage

*Professor Emeritus*

### School of Music

Raphael Bundage provided distinguished musical leadership at MTSU and in the Nashville community, beginning with his arrival at the University in 1985.

He directed the MTSU Schola Cantorum, an auditioned ensemble that toured both locally and abroad, including Scotland, England, France, and Italy.

In addition to his work at MTSU, Bundage conducted the Middle Tennessee Choral Society from 1985 to 2022. Together with Schola, the Choral Society performed masterworks of the choral repertoire including Mozart's *Requiem*, Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, *The Creation* by Franz Joseph Haydn, J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, and Verdi's *Requiem*.

Bundage also founded the prestigious National Orpheus Vocal Competition, which attracted collegiate and young vocal artists from across the United States. Many current and former MTSU students successfully passed the rigorous audition process and competed in the event. The competition brought national visibility to the School of Music and the University. He served for 11 years as the director of the Governor's School for the Arts.

In addition to serving as director of choral activities, Bundage directed the MTSU Opera. Under his leadership, fully staged productions included *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *The Crucible*, and *The Magic Flute*. In collaboration with the MTSU Department of Theatre and Dance, Bundage also conducted productions of *Ragtime*, *Les Misérables*, *West Side Story*, and *Anything Goes*.

In the Nashville community, Bundage served as a musical leader as well, directing the Nashville Symphony Chorus from 1987 to 1991 and the Nashville Opera Chorus from 1990 to 2000.

Bundage expressed his heartfelt gratitude for the honor and privilege to musically serve the middle Tennessee community.



## Shelley Caswell-Moore

*Professor Emerita*

### School of Nursing

Shelley Caswell-Moore has worked as a registered nurse for 46 years, spending the last 15 years teaching undergraduate and graduate students in the School of Nursing. She worked in both community hospitals and academic medical centers as a direct care nurse and as a hospital administrator before entering full-time academia at MTSU in 2010.

Her clinical expertise includes critical care and oncology, with a special passion for the care of older adults. She championed many creative opportunities for Nursing students' enhanced learning about the care of older adults, including conducting the Second Wind Dreams Virtual Dementia Tour, use of Reality Works Geri-Sim equipment, and strengthening community partnerships for student experiences at Mindful Care Adult Day Services, NHC Murfreesboro, and Adams Place. Caswell-Moore has advocated for long-term care residents' safety and quality of care by volunteering as a State of Tennessee Long-Term Care Ombudsman for several years.

Caswell-Moore's research interests include staff nurse work environment, staff nurse decisional involvement, student nurse learning environment, structural empowerment, critical thinking, nursing student empathy, student willingness to work with older adults and those with dementia, and effects of cross-training using high-fidelity simulation on hospital staff teamwork. She has published peer-reviewed articles in high-impact journals and has presented nationally and internationally on much of this work.

In addition to department, college, and University service while at MTSU, Caswell-Moore has supported and been active in her state nurses associations (New York, Florida, and Tennessee) her entire career as well as in Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society for Nursing. She has achieved certifications in critical care nursing, clinical research administration, and online teaching. Whether it be taking care of patients, leading hospital staff, or mentoring nursing students, Caswell-Moore would choose to do it all over again.



## Yüan-ling Chao

*Professor Emerita*

**Department of History**

Yüan-ling Chao was born in Taiwan to parents who moved there from their native Jiangsu province in China. The family later relocated to Hong Kong, where her father accepted a professorship at New Asia College, which later became part of the Chinese

University of Hong Kong.

After graduating from Hong Kong Baptist College in 1981, Chao came to the United States for graduate studies. She earned her master's degree in History from the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 1983, then attended the Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies (Stanford Center) in Tokyo from 1983 to 1984. Following a brief break, she pursued doctoral studies in History at UCLA. Her research included a year at the Kyoto University Research Center for Cultural Studies, as well as archival work in libraries across Taiwan and China. She completed her Ph.D. in 1995.

Chao's research focused on the history of medicine in late imperial China. Her work took her to national and international conferences in Europe, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and China. Her book *Medicine and Society in Late Imperial China: A Study of Physicians in Suzhou, 1600-1850* examined the professional networks and strategies of legitimation used by literati physicians who came to dominate the region's diverse medical landscape.

At MTSU, she taught classes on the history of China, Japan, medicine, and world civilizations, as well as special topics courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. She served as undergraduate director for the History Department from 2013 to 2019 and acted as faculty advisor to Phi Alpha Theta and the Asian American Student Association.





## Linda M. Clark

*Professor Emerita*

### Department of University Studies

Linda M. Clark is a dedicated educator, mentor, and scholar with over two decades of service at Middle Tennessee State University. A four-time graduate of MTSU and Vanderbilt University, Clark holds a Doctor of Education in Higher Education Administration and has built her career around advancing student learning

and engagement in mathematics.

As a professor in the University Studies Department, Clark has taught more than 90 sections of general education mathematics courses, continuously innovating her curriculum to improve student outcomes. Her work includes developing hybrid and online course formats, creating instructional videos, and integrating collaborative learning tools into the classroom. These efforts reflect her lasting commitment to accessible, student-centered instruction.

In addition to her teaching, Clark is a published scholar whose work has explored student engagement, the use of technology in mathematics education, and strategies for improving retention. She has co-presented nationally and contributed meaningfully to the academic dialogue on best practices in higher education.

Her service to the University is exemplary. Clark played an active role on numerous committees, including the Promotion and Tenure Committee, and mentored a generation of faculty members at MTSU. Her leadership has extended beyond campus through her elected role with the Tennessee Association for Student Success and Retention.

Honored with the John Pleas Faculty Award and the Excellence in Teaching Award from Southern Community Bank, Clark demonstrated sustained excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service. Her contributions have left a profound and lasting impact on the MTSU community.



## James N. Comas

*Professor Emeritus*

### Department of English

James Comas joined the English Department in 2006 as an associate professor specializing in the history of rhetoric and history of criticism. He was awarded tenure 2009, in part due to the publication of *Between Politics and Ethics: Toward a Vocative History of English Studies* (Southern Illinois UP), a study of political tensions in the

development of academic English studies.

His scholarly work also includes publications on the French linguist Émile Benveniste, the complex role of European literary theory in African literatures, the influence of rhetorical theory on postmodernism, and the relevance of ancient Greek ethical theory to the teaching of literature and composition. Because of his interest in the institutional history of English studies, Comas especially enjoyed showing students how social conditions helped shape the study of literature and the teaching of writing. At the same time, he emphasized the enduring, transcendent qualities of literary art—often drawing parallels between classical text like Sophocles’ tragic drama and contemporary expressions such as the hip-hop poetry of Kendrick Lamar.

From 2016 to 2019, Comas was recognized six times as an instructor selected by graduating seniors for making significant contributions to their success. During his 17 years at MTSU, Comas was elected three times to the English Department’s Tenure and Promotion Committee, chairing the committee in 2018–19. He also served as chair of two successful search committees and was elected to the chair search committee in 2013. Additionally, he was an original member of the department’s Faculty Governance Committee, established in 2014 to codify departmental procedures. Comas served on several college and University committees including the University Curriculum Committee (2009–11) and the University Disciplinary Committee (2014–16).

In retirement, Comas continues to research the development of American literary criticism in the wake of World War I.



## Craig Cornish

*Professor Emeritus*

### School of Music

Craig Cornish served as associate director of bands and director of athletic bands at MTSU, where he conducted the Symphonic Band, coordinated athletic bands, and taught both undergraduate and graduate courses. MTSU's Band of Blue, under his direction, was featured at the 2007 College Band Directors National Association

Conference, where it was recognized as a premier college marching band.

A dedicated educator, Cornish received the MTSU Foundation Outstanding Teaching Award and was named Favorite MTSU Professor in the *Daily News Journal* Ruthies Awards in 2010. In 2013, he was named to the MTSU Athletic Director's Ring of Honor, an honor on display in the Sports Hall of Fame on campus. He was also named Professor of the Month by the Lambda Sigma National Honor Society, received the 2016 National Society of Leadership and Success Excellence in Teaching Award, and was presented with the 2017 Orpheus Award from Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia.

When Cornish held a similar position at the University of Nebraska, the Cornhusker Marching Band was seen by millions at the 2001 Tournament of Roses Game and Parade. The University of Nebraska Symphonic Band performed for state and regional conventions. Cornish was a four-time recipient of the Outstanding Contribution to Students Award—similar to an honor he earned at MTSU more than 20 times.

Cornish began his career teaching high school band in Kentucky. Honors and awards include four Kentucky Music Educators State Marching Band Championships, three Contest of Grand Championships, two invitations to perform at the Kentucky Music Educators Conference, the 1996 Sudler Trophy, and a 1988 invitation to perform at the Midwest International Band and Orchestra Clinic.

Cornish is a member and past president of the Middle Tennessee State Band and Orchestra Association, as well as a member of the National Band Association, National Association for Music Education, Tennessee Music Education Association, and Phi Beta Mu, and an honorary member of Kappa Kappa Psi and Pi Kappa Lambda. He is an active clinician and adjudicator who has written over 200 award-winning marching shows.



## Mary A. Evins

*Professor Emerita*

### Department of History

Mary A. Evins joined MTSU's Department of History in 2005, becoming a research professor in 2020. Beginning in 2009, she directed MTSU's American Democracy Project, advancing civic learning across the curriculum, awakening students to their roles as citizens in our participatory democracy and to their

responsibilities as co-creators of the world in which we live. Under her leadership, MTSU student voting and voter registration have markedly increased, with MTSU consistently winning state and national recognitions. Constitution Day programming has become an annual campuswide plenary event with nationally preeminent speakers. Every college now plans and engages in Constitution reading and Constitution Week activities.

A facilitator of the longest-running Faculty Learning Community on civic learning and civic engagement, Evins has worked to further civic learning across the disciplines at MTSU. She partnered for nine years with Psychology in a general education paired-class learning community that interleaved U.S. history and American principles with psychology, integrating AAC&U VALUE rubrics. Under a statewide National Endowment for the Humanities grant, she advanced intercultural and civics education at institutions of higher education across Tennessee, for which she was named Cultural Bridgebuilder in 2017 by the American Muslim Advisory Council of Tennessee. Evins serves on the American Association of State Colleges and Universities' ADP steering committee and received the national AASCU award for Faculty Leadership in Civic Engagement in 2023. Integrating her civic campus work and historic research, Evins' publications include her anthologies *Tennessee Women in the Progressive Era: Toward the Public Sphere in the New South* (2013) and *Constructing Citizenship: Tennessee Public Women in the Progressive Era* (2025), on women's work in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that laid the groundwork for woman suffrage.

Evins earned a B.A. in History and Anthropology and an M.A.T. in Education from Vanderbilt University and later received an A.M. and Ph.D. in Cultural History from the University of Chicago.



## Bichaka Fayissa

*Professor Emeritus*

### Department of Economics and Finance

Bichaka Fayissa joined the Department of Economics and Finance in 1980 and received his Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Tennessee. Over the course of his 45-year tenure, he has taught principles of economics, managerial economics (graduate and undergraduate), business statistics, money and banking (undergraduate level), economic growth and development, and health economics (graduate and undergraduate) at MTSU. He has developed new courses, chaired 10 dissertations, served on numerous dissertation committees, and mentored hundreds of students. During 2015–16, Fayissa also served as interim chair of the Department of Economics and Finance.

He has published over 65 refereed papers in A- and B-rated journals based on the ABDC and some in C-rated journals. His Google Scholar account reveals 3,222 citations of work. His articles have appeared in *The World Economy*, *World Development*, *Journal of Development Studies*, *Tourism Economics*, *Journal of International Development*, *Review of World Economics*, *Applied Economics*, *Quarterly Review of Economics and Finance*, and *Journal of Economics and Finance*.

Fayissa co-edited a book titled *The Palgrave Handbook of Africa's Economic Sectors*, published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2022. He has served on the editorial board of *Journal of African Development* and the *Journal of Oromo Studies*. He has made numerous presentations at international, national, and regional economics associations and reviewed numerous articles for academic journals.

He has served as president of the Academy of Economics and Finance (AEF), the African Finance and Economics Association (AFEA), and the Oromo Studies Association (OSA). Fayissa is the founding editor of the *Journal of Oromo Studies*. He was awarded Service Fellow of the AEF in 2005 and a Lifetime Achievement Award from OSA in 2023. He also has received MTSU awards for Distinguished Research and Outstanding Public Service.

Fayissa has served on the Faculty Senate, Graduate Council, University Promotion and Tenure Policy, Faculty Research Committee, International Studies Committee, and other committees.



## Margaret Fontanesi-Seime

*Professor Emerita*

### Department of Social Work

Margaret Fontanesi-Seime joined Middle Tennessee State University in 1994 from the University of Arkansas. During her 30-year career at MTSU, she played a crucial role in establishing Social Work as an independent department. In 1998, she was pivotal in securing accreditation for the Department of Social Work by the Council on Social Work Education. She was also instrumental in developing and establishing the Master of Social Work degree (M.S.W.) in 2010.

Seime was appointed to the Honors College faculty in 1999, where she developed and taught Honors courses. In spring 2010, she became director of the Health Care Services minor. As part of her University service, Seime served as the B.S.W. program director from 1994–97 and as practicum director for the Department of Social Work from 2004–10.

Throughout her tenure at MTSU, Seime was widely recognized for excellence in teaching and her dedication to students. Her awards include the Outstanding Teacher Award, Outstanding Advisor Award, the OWLS, Outstanding Professor Award, and the Outstanding Teacher Award from Disabled Student Services.

Seime's research focused on individuals experiencing homelessness, addressing poverty, and geriatric social work. She received numerous grants to support this research and published several articles and one book. She actively involved students in her research and international projects, including multiple trips to rural communities in Honduras.

Her dedication to social work education extended beyond the classroom. She organized student visits to social service programs in high poverty areas, arranged tours of the Civil Rights Museum, and mentored students completing their research. Seime established the MTSU chapter of Phi Alpha International Social Work Honor Society and served as the faculty sponsor for the honor society until her retirement in 2024.

To further support future social workers, she established the Dale R. Seime Scholarship, which aids students pursuing careers in medical social work.





## Marion D. Hollings

*Professor Emerita*

### Department of English

Marion D. Hollings received a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering from Tulane University's School of Engineering in 1978 and worked as an engineer before returning to college to pursue the liberal arts. She received an M.A. in English in 1984 and a Ph.D. with a specialization in Renaissance Studies from the University of Arizona in 1994.

She joined MTSU as an assistant professor of English in 1994. She was tenured and promoted to associate professor in 1999 and advanced to professor in 2004. Hollings served as a member of the Honors College and College of Graduate Studies faculties and taught in the Women's and Gender Studies program. From 2004 to 2008, she served as director of Graduate Studies for the department and developed the graduate certificate in Women's and Gender Studies.

She taught courses in early British and European literatures, critical and feminist theory, and women's and gender studies at both graduate and undergraduate levels. Her research focused on classical reception and representation in early modern culture. Her publications have appeared in *Indography: Writing the "Indian" in Early Modern England*, ed. Jonathan Gil Harris (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), and *The English Renaissance, Orientalism, and the Idea of Asia*, ed. Walter S.H. Lim and Deborah Johanyak (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Hollings served as national bibliographer–North American Branch for *Encomia*, the journal of the International Courtly Literature Society, for 15 years and continues to serve on the publication's advisory board. She is past president of the Tennessee Philological Association (2023).

Hollings retired in 2025 after 31 years at MTSU.



## Justyna Kostkowska

*Professor Emerita*

### Department of English

Justyna Kostkowska is a professor of English. She teaches and publishes in modern British literature and 20th century women writers, with a focus on Virginia Woolf, Jeanette Winterson, and Wisława Szymborska.

In addition to scholarly articles, she has published two books: *Virginia Woolf's Experiment in Genre and Politics 1926-1931: Visioning and Versioning The Waves* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2005) and *Ecocriticism and Women Writers: Environmentalist Poetics of Virginia Woolf, Jeanette Winterson, and Ali Smith* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). She has presented regularly at the International Virginia Woolf Conference in the United States and Great Britain.

In collaboration with W.D. and Kathleen Snodgrass, she has published numerous translations of contemporary Polish poets, including Jan Twardowski, Leszek Szaruga, and Katarzyna Borun-Jagodzinska. Her translations of the poems of the Nobel Prize winning Polish poet Wisława Szymborska have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Mid-American Review*, *Pleiades*, and *The American Poetry Review*.



## **Philip A. Loubere**

*Professor Emeritus*

### **School of Journalism and Strategic Media**

Philip A. Loubere has taught for 16 years in the Media Design concentration in the MTSU School of Journalism and Strategic Media. His areas of specialty include information graphics, illustration, print and digital publication design, and front-end web development.

Since arriving at MTSU in fall 2008, Loubere has taken responsibility for updating the Media Design concentration to cover online media and to meet industry standards for digital media, introducing two courses in web, app, and digital interface design and revising other course curricula.

Prior to joining MTSU, he worked as a visual journalist at three major metropolitan newspapers—*The Seattle Times*, the *San Jose Mercury News*, and *The Orange County Register*—over a period of 12 years from 1996 to 2008. Before that, he taught art and design classes at Pierce College and at the University of Puget Sound, both in Tacoma, Washington.

He has over 30 years of professional experience in design, graphics, and illustration for print and digital media. His clients have included the Max Planck Institute for Intelligent Systems, Digital First Media, Sierra Entertainment, and the InterContinental Hotels Group.

During his time as a visual journalist, he helped the publications he worked for win eight industry awards, including as a graphics team member for *The Seattle Times*' 1997 Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting. As a practicing artist, his work was selected for inclusion in 21 national and international juried group shows and 10 invitational shows, earning six awards including Best of Show, Patron, and Purchase.

Loubere has an M.F.A. degree from the University of Wisconsin, an M.A. from Eastern Illinois University, and a B.F.A. from SUNY College at Buffalo, N.Y. He is the author of *A History of Communication Technology*, published by Routledge in 2021.



## Rhonda L. McDaniel

*Professor Emerita*

### Department of English

Rhonda McDaniel received a Bachelor of Music Therapy degree from Shenandoah Conservatory of Music in 1986 but chose not to pursue professional registration due to limited prospects for the future of the field. After nine years working in small business, she returned to college to complete undergraduate coursework in English to prepare for graduate study. She earned an M.A. in English in 1998, initially just to see if she could do it, and went on to complete her Ph.D. at Western Michigan University in 2003 with a specialization in old and middle English languages and literatures.

MTSU hired her as an assistant professor in 2003. She earned early tenure and promotion to associate professor in 2008, followed by early promotion to professor in 2013. McDaniel served for many years as graduate advisor and then director of Graduate Studies for the department from 2020 to 2023.

McDaniel taught courses in old and middle English language and literature, as well as history of the English language, at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Her research interests included manuscript studies, the virtues and vices, memory, and gender in old and middle English literature. She published numerous articles and a book titled *The Third Gender and Ælfric's Lives of Saints* (2018), part of the Richard Rawlinson Center series published by Medieval Institute Publications.

McDaniel retired in 2024 after 21 years at MTSU and is now pursuing certification as a UT Extension Master Gardener in east Tennessee.

**Tammy J. Melton***Professor Emerita***Department of Chemistry**

Tammy J. Melton grew up in Murray, Kentucky, and attended Murray State University, where she earned a B.S. in Chemistry, summa cum laude. She received a Ph.D. in Inorganic Chemistry from Texas A&M University, where she conducted research under Priestley Medal winner F.A. Cotton.

She previously taught at St. Norbert College in De Pere, Wisconsin, where she conducted research on battery applications for the U.S. Air Force and was awarded a patent for an electrochemical discovery. She also served as a section chair of the Northeast Wisconsin section of the American Chemical Society.

Melton's research interests have included inorganic chemistry, chemical education, the history of science, and the intersection of science and religion. Her scholarly work has been published in *Inorganic Chemistry*, *Journal of the Electrochemical Society*, *The Chemical Educator*, and *Journal of Chemical Education*.

She joined the faculty of MTSU in 1999 and received the Outstanding Teaching Award for the 2002–03 academic year. She has devoted her career to improving undergraduate education in chemistry, especially in the laboratory, and served the Chemistry Department as the laboratory coordinator for introductory chemistry. She has produced multiple chemistry laboratory manuals adopted by universities across the country.

Believing that the best teachers must continue to learn, Melton took courses in the Department of Geosciences at MTSU, and in 2007 earned a second B.S. degree, this time in Geology. From 2008–14, she served as a “shepherd” of the new Science Building, assisting in the planning and realization of a major advance in the teaching and research of chemistry and biology on campus.

Most recently, she served on the General Education Committee and as a department liaison to help guide the department's offerings into the new True Blue Core.



## John Merchant

*Professor Emeritus*

### Department of Recording Industry

John Merchant earned a degree in Music Engineering from the University of Miami in 1989. While in school, he began working as an intern at Middle Ear Studios on South Beach, owned by Barry, Robin, and Maurice Gibb of the Bee Gees, where he progressed from assistant to chief engineer and studio manager. In 2004, he opened

his own studio, RedDoor, to produce new and established acts.

Over the course of his career, Merchant has had the opportunity to work with a notable array of musicians, songwriters, producers, and engineers. Beyond his extensive work with the Gibbs, his production credits include Barbra Streisand, Michael Jackson, Dolly Parton, Toni Braxton, Celine Dion, Coldplay, and Lenny Kravitz, as well as producers Arif Mardin, David Foster, Dave Cobb, Phil Ramone, Andrew Scheps, and many others. He is signed as a writer to Sony/ATV Publishing.

In 2008, Merchant was nominated for a Grammy as producer of *Mika's Life in Cartoon Motion*, and in 2009, he produced a best-selling DVD on mixing techniques for Multiplatinum Pro Tools. Merchant served as a musical advisor for the HBO documentary *How Can You Mend a Broken Heart* and the upcoming Bee Gees biopic on Paramount.

After completing his master's degree in Recording Arts and Technologies at MTSU, he started teaching for the Department of Recording Industry, which he served as chair from 2020–23. As faculty, Merchant developed courses in mixing techniques, studio production, live sound, and immersive audio. He also taught classes throughout the U.S. and internationally, offering guest lectures and training in England, Germany, Australia, Norway, and the Middle East. For the University, he focused on community outreach in underserved communities, working with middle and high school students and their families across Tennessee.

In May, Merchant began a position as director of Focusrite Group Professional for the Americas.





## Susan Myers-Shirk

*Professor Emerita*

**Department of History**

Susan Myers-Shirk earned her Ph.D. in History from Pennsylvania State University. She has been a faculty member in the History Department at MTSU since 1994. Her area of research is U.S. cultural and intellectual history, and in 2009 she published a book on religion and psychology in the 20th century, *Helping the Good Shepherd: Pastoral Counselors in a Psychotherapeutic Culture, 1925–1975*. She has published additional refereed journal articles, encyclopedia entries, and book reviews in her field.

Myers-Shirk has advised numerous graduate students in History over the years and, in her role as department graduate director (2003–05), oversaw the design, proposal, and approval of a new Ph.D. in Public History. The History Department had long been recognized nationally for its master's level programs in Public History and historic preservation, but MTSU was one of the first to offer a Ph.D. in Public History, which remains one of a handful of such programs at the leading edge of the discipline.

After serving as general education director at the department level from 2012–16, followed by one year as interim department chair, Myers-Shirk became director of general education for the University in 2017. At the direction of Provost Mark Byrnes, she initiated the first substantive redesign of the general education curriculum in 50 years. This six-year process resulted in the launch of a new general education curriculum, the True Blue Core, and the establishment of the Center for the True Blue Core in 2024–25. As a result of her work with general education curriculum, her research has shifted. She presents frequently at the Association of General and Liberal Studies (AGLS) and the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU) Conference on General Education, Pedagogy, and Assessment (GEPA). She has co-written a chapter about best practices in redesign that is forthcoming in a two-volume series on general education design and pedagogy being published by the AACU.

Currently she is collaborating as a co-principal investigator with faculty and administrators from the Tennessee Board of Regents on a grant from the Teagle Foundation to create a Cornerstone Humanities Pathway through the general education curriculum at all 23 of Tennessee's public higher education institutions.



## Jean Nagy

*Professor Emerita*

### Department of Art and Design

Jean Nagy has dedicated 35 years to MTSU, serving in a variety of roles, and takes particular pride in two of her accomplishments. First is her 10-year tenure as chair of what is now the Department of Art and Design. During that time, she oversaw the department's move from a barn into the newly renovated Todd Hall and—working closely with the faculty—successfully led efforts to earn accreditation from NASAD, the National Association of Schools of Art and Design.

Her second point of pride is her work mentoring aspiring graphic designers. “It is always exciting to see the light turn on when the student learns a new skill,” she says.

Outside the University, Nagy has served as a designer/design consultant/coordinator for a broad range of organizations, including Uncle Dave Macon Days, the Jazz Festival, American Cancer Society, Nashville Cares, the *Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association*, State Farm Insurance Company, Middle Tennessee American Orff-Schulwerk Association, and the Friends of Fall Creek Falls State Park Inc., among others.

Before joining MTSU, she worked as a program coordinator and data manager for a federal grant program—writing and proofreading proposals and processing survey data. Her professional experience also includes time with the graphics department at *The Tennessean* and projects for the *Daily News Journal*.

Nagy served as a member of the art faculty for the Governor's School for the Arts and was the graphics director of the now obsolete MTSU/TSU Summer Journalism Program. She was selected as one of the College of Liberal Arts Outstanding Advisors and has been recognized numerous times as a person at MTSU who makes a real difference to our students.

Her specialties include computer graphics, publication design, typographic design, and, to get away from computers, quilt design.



## **Deborah Newman**

*Professor Emerita*

### **Department of Criminal Justice Administration**

Deborah Newman served MTSU and its students for 35 years as a faculty member in the Department of Criminal Justice Administration (CJA). She came to MTSU as a former FBI special agent, as a licensed secondary teacher in biology and chemistry, and as a licensed attorney (all with experience). Newman maintained continuous full graduate membership for the entire 35 years, with 21 years as full professor and with 11 of those years as chair of the CJA Department.

Newman taught more than 20 different CJA courses, in person and online. She created many new courses and developed several existing courses for online teaching. She also developed the concentrations in Homeland Security and Law Enforcement that would eventually become independent degree programs within the department's offerings. Her background in criminal justice, biology, and chemistry provided her the foundation to be a major contributor in creating the B.S. in Forensic Science for MTSU.

Newman has published in peer-reviewed journals (sole author or first author) and presented papers at professional conferences. She served as the thesis chair for more than 20 students who graduated with the M.C.J. degree in Criminal Justice Administration at MTSU.

Newman has provided over 80 training presentations for local and state law enforcement agencies. She also coordinated and directed four-day POST-certified statewide seminars hosted at the MTSU Police Department; provided radio interviews and presentations; and served on dozens of departmental and University committees.



## Martha Norkunas

*Professor Emerita*

### Department of History

Martha Norkunas served as professor in the Public History program at Middle Tennessee State University from 2009–24. She is the author of *The Politics of Public Memory: Tourism, History, and Ethnicity in Monterey, California* and *Monuments and Memory: History and Representation in Lowell, Massachusetts*, in addition to numerous articles published in national and international journals.

Her work examines representations of memory and history in narrative, on the landscape, and in museums, and how they intersect with race, gender, class, and power. From 1999–2009, Norkunas directed the Project in Interpreting the Texas Past at the University of Texas at Austin, where she taught graduate students to create more diverse and inclusive interpretations at Texas historic sites.

At MTSU, Norkunas created an oral history track for Public History students, directed oral history projects including the African American Oral History Project (now at the Library of Congress), and hosted a webinar series. She taught graduate seminars in community-engaged public history, partnering with organizations around the state.

Norkunas has lectured in the U.S. and internationally and is the recipient of fellowships and grants from the American Council of Learned Societies, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Houston Endowment, and other foundations. In 2018 she received the Oral History Association Postsecondary Teaching Award, a national award granted to a distinguished postsecondary educator, and in 2023 received the MTSU Outstanding EXL Faculty Award, recognizing an educator who provides outstanding leadership and excellence in the field of experiential learning.

She is a former board member of the National Council on Public History, is the chair of the Oral History Association's International Committee, and has served on the board of the International Oral History Association from 2016–25 as vice president, North American representative, and chair of the International Scholarship Committee.



## Dwight J. Patterson

*Professor Emeritus*

### Department of Chemistry

Dwight J. Patterson taught in the Chemistry Department at MTSU for more than 28 years, rising through the ranks from assistant to associate professor. Prior to joining the faculty at MTSU, he was director of research and development of extruded products at Empire Berol in Shelbyville, Tennessee. Other industrial positions include Story Chemical in Muskegon, Michigan; Allied Chemical in Hopewell/Petersburg, Virginia; Dow Chemical in Midland, Michigan, and Granville, Ohio; and GE Plastics in Mount Vernon, Indiana.

He earned a B.S. in Chemistry from Western Kentucky University in 1973. After several years in industry, he returned to graduate studies, earning an M.S.E. (1983) and Ph.D. (1985) in Macromolecular Science from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio.

At MTSU, he was a research advisor to undergraduate and graduate students, including undergraduate Honors thesis students. Many of these students have been admitted to medical, dental, or pharmacy schools. Others have taken academic staff or industrial positions. He taught undergraduate general chemistry for majors and non-majors, general studies physical science, and upper-level and graduate polymer science and polymer laboratory courses. He was instrumental in setting up a mechanical testing and thermal analysis polymer lab in the new Science Building, utilizing research-grade instrumentation.

His research interests are synthesis and characterization of high-performance polymers, structure-properties characterization of engineering resins, polymer blends, bio-based polymers, polymer composites, and polymer design via computer modeling. He was awarded a summer faculty research position at NASA Langley and a six-month non-instructional assignment as a visiting scientist at the University of Tennessee.

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## Patricia Patterson

*Professor Emerita*

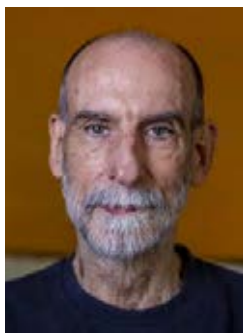
### Department of Chemistry

Patricia M. Patterson's 28-year career at MTSU in the Department of Chemistry has been an interrelationship of teaching, service outreach, and research to the University and community. Before joining MTSU in 1998, her industrial career included Com Alloy International, GE Plastics, Dow Chemical, and Union Carbide, along with teaching at Columbia State Community College, MTSU, and Volunteer State Community College. She earned her Ph.D. and M.S.E. in Macromolecular Science from Case Western Reserve University and her B.S. in Chemistry from Virginia State University. Her most rewarding teaching was the development of PSCI 4030 (EXL) for K–8 preservice teachers, aligned with the Tennessee Academic Science Standards for chemistry, physics, geology, and astronomy concepts with hands-on, minds-on activities and real classroom experiences.

Patterson was awarded five Tennessee Higher Education Commission grants (\$339,211) used for standards-based workshops for elementary, middle, and high school teachers. She enjoyed every aspect of the Science Olympiad, including being MTSU regional tournament director 2001–23 for grades 3–12, securing funding for the tournaments and scholarships for competing schools, recruiting schools, mentoring coaches and event coordinators, and serving as the secretary for the Tennessee Science Olympiad Board of Directors. Other professional service areas included the first faculty advisor for MTSU National Science Teachers Association Student Chapter for 14 years, science editor for the Tennessee Academy of Science, and advisor for General Science students.

Patterson received numerous awards, including the MTSU Foundation Outstanding Teacher Award and Public Service Award, John Pleas Faculty Award, CBAS Faculty Service Award, Off-Campus 2+2 Education Program (10+ years), and Tennessee Science Olympiad Award. She was recognized many times by graduating students as someone at MTSU who makes a difference.





## Jack Purcell

*Professor Emeritus*

### Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

Jack Purcell served in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, offering a wide-ranging curriculum that reflected both depth and adaptability. Over the course of his career, he taught numerous courses, including American philosophy, recent continental philosophy, philosophy and film, Asian thought, and ancient and medieval philosophy. He also taught several courses as one-time offerings, including a course on philosophy and nature of desire and a course examining the internet in its early years.

While continental philosophy was a principal research interest in the early years, Ancient Greek philosophy and Asian thought became primary research interests over the last 20 years.

Beyond the classroom, Purcell played an integral role in establishing the Applied Philosophy Lyceum, a speaker series that began in 1991 and continues. He was the schedule coordinator for each semester's class offerings and created and managed the department's webpages through various iterations.



## Kim Cleary Sadler

*Professor Emerita*

### Department of Biology

Kim Cleary Sadler began her career as an adjunct faculty member in the Department of Biology at MTSU in 1989 and served in that capacity for 13 years. During this time, in addition to teaching the biology course for Elementary Education majors and large lecture sections of the general education non-majors course, she also worked closely with the Center for Environmental Education. Sadler was hired as a tenure-track faculty member in 2002.

Sadler has maintained a high level of productivity during her career at MTSU. As a principal or co-principal investigator, she applied for more than \$21,500,000 in grant funding through her many collaborations and partnerships at the local, regional, state, and national levels. This effort brought \$7,134,200 to MTSU for numerous projects supporting the MTSU mission of research, teaching, and service.

Sadler taught various courses at MTSU, from biology courses for preservice teachers to doctoral-level classes. She is a Mathematics and Science Education Ph.D. program professor with full graduate faculty status and an Honors College and Experiential Learning faculty member. Sadler served 15 years in the department as faculty coordinator for the non-major biology course BIOL 1030/31.

She has collaborated with her students and colleagues on numerous projects, involving ecological restoration, teaching and learning practices, and informal science education. This has resulted in more than 67 presentations with students, 36 scholarly articles and book chapters, multiple educational resources, videos, more than 50 media events, and several theses and dissertations. Her efforts have not gone unnoticed at MTSU: She has been awarded the Outstanding Teaching in General Education, Public Service (twice), OWLS Professor of the Year, Outstanding EXL Faculty, and many CBAS awards.



## Suk Jai Seo

*Professor Emerita*

### Department of Computer Science

Suk Jai Seo has served Middle Tennessee State University with distinction for 23 years, joining the Department of Computer Science in 2002 as an assistant professor and advancing to professor in 2010. Her research focuses on graph theory, algorithm analysis, and computer science education, with an emphasis on detection systems

modeled as graphs.

She has published over 45 peer-reviewed articles, many in leading graph theory journals, and has presented her work at numerous national and international conferences. Her research has been supported by internal MTSU grants and external funding from the National Science Foundation. In 2004, she was awarded a prestigious NASA/American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) Summer Faculty Fellowship. In 2012, she was honored with the Distinguished Research Award from the College of Basic and Applied Sciences.

Seo has been a dedicated educator and mentor, supervising numerous undergraduate and graduate research projects. She advised several Honors theses and served on many master's and doctoral committees. She also helped undergraduate students secure research funding and guided them through their projects.

She has taught over 10 undergraduate and graduate courses, consistently earning excellent evaluations. Her dedication to student learning has been recognized by students, who frequently cited her as a person at MTSU who makes a real difference.

Seo has held leadership roles at the department, college, and University levels, notably leading the ABET accreditation assessment committee and preparing the Self-Study Report for 2024–25. Professionally, she served as an organizer for graph theory conferences and a regular reviewer for academic journals and conferences. From 2002 to 2018, she contributed to community outreach through annual workshops for the Expanding Your Horizons program (now known as Tennessee Girls in STEM), inspiring middle school girls to pursue interests in science, technology, engineering, and math.

**Kevin Smith** (*posthumously*)***Professor Emeritus*****Department of Sociology and Anthropology**

Kevin E. Smith was an esteemed colleague among the Anthropology faculty in the MTSU Department of Sociology and Anthropology for 31 years. Born in Savannah, Tennessee, in 1964, his academic journey led him through Vanderbilt University, where he earned his B.A. (1986), M.A. (1990), and Ph.D. (1992) in

Anthropology. His dissertation on Mississippian archaeology in the Middle Cumberland River Valley set the foundation for a career that significantly shaped our understanding of this region's past. A scholar of many interests, Smith made significant contributions to African diaspora archaeology and Mississippian iconography while also working to make archaeology more accessible to the public. He led MTSU archaeological field schools at the Castalian Springs site (A.D. 1200–1350), establishing a major research project to investigate the Middle Cumberland Mississippian cultures of the Nashville Basin.

Smith played a central role in building the Anthropology program at MTSU, developing coursework, mentoring students, and expanding opportunities for hands-on research. His impact extended beyond the classroom, shaping generations of southeastern archaeologists through both field and lab training. His dedication to hands-on education allowed hundreds of students to gain their first field experience under his guidance. However, he was never content with just training students in excavation techniques; he instilled in them an ethic of stewardship, a commitment to rigorous research, and a dedication to public engagement.

Smith passed away on March 14, 2025. He will be remembered as a beloved teacher and mentor, a true friend and colleague, a respected and influential researcher, and a dedicated leader at MTSU.

**Cheryl Ward** (*posthumously*)***Professor Emerita*****Department of Marketing**

Cheryl Ward passed away on July 3, 2024, after a courageous battle with cancer that began in 2010. She developed a deep love for traveling, attending country music concerts, finding joy in the mountains of east Tennessee, and spending time with family and friends. She was known for her dedication, courage, passion,

and positive attitude.

Throughout her life, Ward was a beacon of strength and kindness. She faced challenges with unwavering determination and optimism, inspiring those around her. She was a distinguished academic serving as a tenured professor in the Department of Marketing at Middle Tennessee State University for 26 years. She was passionate about teaching and taught thousands of students in consumer behavior, international marketing, and principles of marketing. Ward had a dynamic teaching style and encouraged lively discussions and experiential learning activities in her classes. She also enjoyed leading study abroad programs.

Ward was an active researcher with publications in numerous top-tier journals. Her active service included the University, marketing discipline, and community. She served on the Executive Committee of the Society for Marketing Advances as director of academic placement services for several years. Overall, Ward made a tremendous contribution to marketing through her expertise and lifetime dedication.





*Through commitment  
to teaching, research, and  
professional service, the MTSU  
faculty achieves the University's  
mission of providing quality  
educational programs in a  
supportive campus environment.*



# FACULTY

## TENURED AND PROMOTED





## Rafet Al-Tobasei

*Department of Computer Science*

### Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor

Rafet Al-Tobasei is a computational scientist and educator whose work bridges the fields of bioinformatics, genomics, and computer science. He earned his Ph.D. in Computational Science from Middle Tennessee State University, focusing on transcriptomics and genome analysis in aquaculture species, particularly rainbow trout. He later completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where he contributed to genomic and epigenomic research in both aquaculture and human health.

Al-Tobasei's research focuses on developing bioinformatics tools for genome-wide analyses, including single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) discovery, genome-wide association studies (GWAS), DNA methylation, and long non-coding RNA networks. His work has led to significant contributions in annotating the rainbow trout genome and identifying genetic markers associated with key aquaculture traits, such as muscle yield and disease resistance. With over 20 peer-reviewed publications and nearly 900 citations, he has advanced the understanding of functional genomics in aquaculture and has led projects funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the National Institutes of Health, including a USDA-National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) study on the gut microbiota-muscle axis.

At MTSU, Al-Tobasei teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in programming, data science, and computational biology. He mentors students in research and integrates bioinformatics into the Computer Science curriculum. He has also guided international faculty from the American University of Kurdistan in developing computer science programs.

His service record includes key roles on departmental search committees and serving as co-chair of the annual HackMT programming competition, where he mentors student teams on innovative coding projects. Additionally, he has served on the MTSU Faculty Senate and chaired its Finance Committee. Nationally, he serves in leadership positions within the NRSP-8 National Animal Genome Research Program and contributes to organizing scientific workshops. As a faculty advisor for multiple student organizations, Al-Tobasei exemplifies leadership, mentorship, and a commitment to inclusive excellence in research, teaching, and service.



## M. Elizabeth Barnes

*Department of Biology*

### Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor

M. Elizabeth Barnes is a researcher and educator in the Department of Biology who studies how to improve science communication between scientists, students, and the public, especially around culturally controversial topics such as climate change, vaccines, and evolution.

Her work focuses on promoting communication that bridges political, religious, and other cultural divides.

As a Ph.D. student at Arizona State University and a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow, Barnes developed an instructional framework that has been shown in numerous studies to reduce perceived conflict between religion and evolution. This work has been featured in *Scientific American*, BBC Radio, and NPR, and earned her the National Association of Biology Teachers' Evolution Education Award in 2021.

In 2023, Barnes received an NSF CAREER grant, the most prestigious award given to a junior researcher, to design and test instructional approaches that prepare undergraduates to effectively communicate about climate change and vaccines across differing worldviews. She mentors many undergraduate and graduate researchers, supporting both collaborative and independent projects. She continually pushes herself and her students to conduct research that creates real-world impact.

Barnes' research and teaching are significantly shaped by her lived experience. She grew up in government housing with parents who struggled with drug addiction and mental illness. Without a high school diploma, she left home at 15 and supported herself as a waitress before enrolling in community college at age 19. As a first-generation college student from a family with blended sociocultural roots, she is committed to making science inclusive and accessible to people from all religious, political, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Her work is guided by a core belief that science can be a unifying force for societal good when communicated with humility, compassion, and cultural awareness.



## **Vishwas N. Bedekar**

*Department of Engineering Technology*

### **Promoted to Professor**

Vishwas N. Bedekar joined Middle Tennessee State University in fall 2013 in the Department of Engineering Technology (ET) as an assistant professor. He was promoted to associate professor in August 2019 and served as interim chair of the ET Department from August 2019 to July 2021. He received his B.E. degree in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Bombay, India, and his M.S. in Mechanical Engineering and Ph.D. in Materials Science and Engineering from the University of Texas at Arlington. After finishing his Ph.D., Bedekar was a postdoctoral associate at Virginia Tech and a research assistant professor at the University of Arkansas before joining MTSU. He has also been coordinator for the Mechanical Engineering Technology concentration since January 2024.

Bedekar has authored over 35 journal publications in high impact journals and presented at international and national conferences on research related to energy-harvesting materials and devices. He is a reviewer for 15+ internationally circulated journals and has served as a panelist for federal and state funding agencies related to materials and manufacturing. Bedekar has successfully mentored three Ph.D. dissertations, one M.S. thesis, and five Honors theses. Some of this research was funded at both the local and state levels.

Bedekar has taught 22 distinct courses in the past 12 years at MTSU and was recognized multiple times as a someone who made a difference in students' lives. He received the MTSU Foundation's Outstanding Teaching Award for 2018–19. He is a member of the Society of Manufacturing Engineers (SME) and has served as treasurer, vice chair, chair elect, and chair of SME Chapter 43 of Nashville. He has been a faculty advisor of SME student chapter S239 at MTSU since October 2014. Since 2016, Bedekar has been mentoring teams of students at the National Robotics Challenge, where they won multiple awards in various robotics competitions each year. For his contributions, SME has recognized Bedekar with the Distinguished Faculty Advisor Award twice, for 2022 and 2024, for his outstanding dedication to mentoring students and advancing the manufacturing industry through education and research. Bedekar is also involved in community service activities for youth, such as arranging engineering workshops for Boy Scouts of America, South Sudanese Girls in STEM, and Merit Badge University.



## Robert Fowler Jr.

*Department of Aerospace*

### **Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor**

Robert Fowler Jr. joined MTSU in fall 2019 as an assistant professor in the Aerospace Department, teaching in the Professional Pilot concentration. He received his B.A. in Psychology from the University of Maine and his M.S. in Aeronautics from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. He graduated in August

2025 with an Ed.D. in Assessment, Learning, and Student Success, with a concentration in Higher Education, from Middle Tennessee State University.

Fowler is a commercial pilot and Federal Aviation Administration certificated flight instructor with over 20 years of experience instructing in multiple aircraft, including the technically advanced Cirrus SR20 and SR22. He has almost 7,000 total flight hours and over 6,000 hours instructing students from Asia, Africa, Europe, South America, and the United States. His experience includes Part 61 and Part 141 flight school management, general aviation airport management, and fixed base operator (FBO) management. Before coming to MTSU, he worked at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Florida, as a flight training manager and adjunct professor in the College of Aviation.

Fowler's research interests include the effect of inadequate English language proficiency on safety and flight training performance and diversity issues in the commercial aviation industry. He has published several peer-reviewed articles, including "Aviation English Assessment and Training" in *Collegiate Aviation Review International* (2021); "Native Language Effects on Flight Training Performance" in the *International Journal of Aviation, Aeronautics, and Aerospace* (2022); "A Literature Review of Aviation Diversity" in the *Aviation Technology Education Council Journal* (2022); and "Women and Minorities in Commercial Aviation: A Quantitative Analysis from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics" in the *International Journal of Aviation, Aeronautics, and Aerospace* (2023).

Fowler has presented his research at the University Aviation Association Conference every year since 2020. In 2024, he was invited to speak about his research on "Native Language Effects on Flight Training Performance" at the International Civil Aviation English Association Conference in Hong Kong.





## Alisa Hass

*Department of Geosciences*

### **Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor**

Alisa Hass is a hazard climatologist whose work focuses on how meteorological hazards affect human populations. Her main area of focus is on how urban residents are exposed to extreme heat, how a person's perception affects the protective actions they employ, and how adaptation and mitigation interventions in urban areas reduce urban heat exposure and heat-related health issues.

After receiving her Ph.D. at the University of Tennessee, Hass joined the Department of Geosciences at MTSU in 2019. During her time at MTSU, Hass has developed numerous community-engaged programs with entities such as the Nashville Mayor's Office, Cumberland River Compact, and the National Weather Service. These programs include heat mapping urban Nashville, developing new methodologies in personal heat exposure research techniques, developing an extreme heat educational and research program for teenagers in urban Nashville, and investigating responses and perceptions to an unwarned tornado in Murfreesboro. Hass developed a new climate and climate change literacy program for general education geoscience classes at MTSU that involved the use of cutting-edge personal heat sensor technology.

These projects have been funded through the National Science Foundation's Improving Undergraduate STEM Education program, NOAA, National Integrated Heat Health Information System, Natural Hazards Center, Oak Ridge Associated Universities, and internally through an MT-IGO synergy grant. Her work has been published in top journals, such as *Environmental Research*, the *International Journal of Biometeorology*, and *Pedagogy in Health Promotion*. She has published several professional check sheets through the Natural Hazards Center Institute of Behavioral Science and two articles on severe weather and tornadoes in *The Conversation* and *Scientific American*.

Hass has a deep appreciation for teaching and working with students. She has mentored four graduate students and more than 20 undergraduate research students, with multiple students presenting at national conferences and co-authoring published manuscripts. She has been recognized three times as an instructor who makes a difference in the lives of students.



## **Alanna Vaught**

*School of Agriculture*

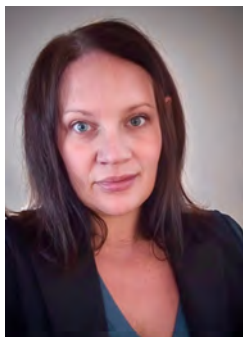
### **Promoted to Master Instructor**

Alanna L. Vaught serves as an instructor and the dual credit program coordinator in the School of Agriculture. She earned a B.S. in Agricultural Business with a minor in Secondary Education from MTSU, an M.A. in Instructional Leadership from Tennessee Technological University, and a doctorate in Agricultural Education from Texas A&M University. She joined the MTSU faculty in 2006 and has taught over 20 different courses.

Vaught was instrumental in the creation of the school's dual credit program by writing and winning a \$157,000 Perkins IV Reserve Grant to begin the program. Since the program's inception, Vaught has spoken to over 4,000 high school students in approximately 31 counties over the past several years as coordinator. She won an additional \$119,500 in Perkins funding for 2011–12. To date, the program has given thousands of high school students the opportunity to earn college credit in six possible courses. She encourages these students to pursue post-secondary education options and explore college success techniques. Vaught has given various national presentations on the success of the School of Agriculture dual credit program and won first place in the Southern Association of Agricultural Educators Innovative Idea Presentation competition.

Vaught includes hands-on learning in many of her classes and encourages students to become active on campus and in their surrounding communities. She often partners with local industry to introduce students to job opportunities in agriculture, and she works closely with 4-H and FFA. She was recognized by the College of Basic and Applied Sciences in 2009–10 for excellence in teaching innovation and received the Outstanding Teacher Award from the MTSU Foundation in 2012. She also received the 2023 True Blue Citation of Distinction for Achievement in Education (MTSU Faculty). Vaught also developed the former M.Ed. program in Agricultural Education Leadership.

She runs a commercial Boer goat and Dorper sheep operation with her husband and sons. Vaught and her family also own and operate multiple rural tourism venues in middle Tennessee.



## April Weissmiller

*Department of Biology*

### **Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor**

April Weissmiller received her Ph.D. in Neurosciences from the University of California San Diego before completing a postdoctoral fellowship at Vanderbilt University, where she changed fields from neuroscience to cancer biology. She remained at Vanderbilt for one year as a research assistant professor before joining

MTSU as a tenure-track faculty member in fall 2020.

Weissmiller's research is centered on investigating basic mechanisms of cancer in rare and aggressive pediatric and young adult malignancies. Her research team seeks to understand how cancer cells initiate and maintain their cancerous state through revealing the molecular mechanisms that promote genome dysregulation and cancer cell function. Her team's key discoveries have exposed the mechanisms by which chromatin regulatory complexes, signaling proteins, and transcription factors promote pro-tumorigenic cancer gene expression in these unique malignant settings. Her research has received support from several funding streams, including a Rally Foundation for Childhood Cancer Research Young Investigator award and several grants awarded through the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Weissmiller is also passionate about mentoring and training the next generation of scientists. She has mentored over 28 undergraduates and graduate students while at MTSU. Of these trainees, more than 15 have been co-authors on manuscripts for their contributions, and 13 undergraduates received funding through MTSU's Undergraduate Research Experience and Creative Activity (URECA) grants. Her dedication to mentoring also reaches the students she teaches—she has been selected as a faculty member who makes a difference to students and was recognized as an influential faculty member by Phi Kappa Phi. She completed Engage certification for the upper-division course she primarily teaches.

Weissmiller is active in service internally and externally. The activities she has been part of include being the chair of the Institutional Biosafety Committee, serving two years on the University Council for Sponsored Research, leading a University-wide Responsible Conduct of Research training day, and serving on approximately two NIH reviewer study sections per year.



## Yixiang Wu

*Department of Mathematical Sciences*

**Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor**

Yixiang Wu received his Ph.D. in Mathematics from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette under the supervision of Keng Deng. He then held a prestigious Fields Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of Western Ontario in Canada, working with Xingfu Zou. Prior to joining MTSU, he served as a non-tenure-track assistant professor of Mathematics at Vanderbilt University, where he worked under the direction of Glenn Webb.

Wu's research interests lie in differential equations and mathematical biology. His work focuses on enhancing classical ordinary differential equation models by incorporating critical biological and environmental factors such as spatial heterogeneity, individual mobility, and population age structure. He investigates how these factors influence population dynamics, including the extinction and persistence of single populations, competitive exclusion and coexistence among multiple populations, and the spatial spread of infectious diseases. His research has resulted in over 40 publications in leading journals, including *Journal of Mathematical Biology*, *Journal of Differential Equations*, *SIAM Journal on Applied Mathematics*, *SIAM Journal on Mathematical Analysis*, *Nonlinearity*, and *Journal of Nonlinear Science*. Wu's work has received international recognition, as reflected in his Google Scholar profile with over 1,100 citations. His research is supported by a Simons Foundation grant.

Wu has taught a wide range of courses at MTSU, including calculus, analysis, differential equations, vector analysis, abstract algebra, and linear algebra. He has also actively mentored both undergraduate and graduate students, supervising several research projects—among them an undergraduate Honors thesis—and hosted a visiting Ph.D. student for a year.

In addition to his teaching and research, Wu plays an active role in service at both the departmental and institutional levels. He has served on several key committees, including the Undergraduate Program Review Committee, the Library Committee, the Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity Committee, and one departmental hiring committee.



## Cindy D. Ayers

*Department of Human Sciences*

### **Promoted to Master Instructor**

Cindy Ayers has a B.S. in Animal Science and an M.S. in Food Science and Technology from the University of Tennessee. Ayers is uniquely qualified to teach food science from all aspects. She still lives on her family's farm and raises livestock. She worked in the food science field for over 30 years, first in research and development for a retort processing company making MREs for the military. Ayers then had an opportunity to move closer to home and worked in a variety of positions at a major player in the chain restaurant industry. Specifically, she managed the food safety training aspect for well over 300 company restaurants and supervised the company's coordinated response to foodborne illness.

During this time, she served on several national food safety boards. In 2005, after the birth of her sons, she worked as a hazard analysis critical control point (HACCP) coordinator for a small barbecue company.

While working as the HACCP coordinator, she was also an adjunct professor in the School of Agriculture for nine years. In 2014, this led to her current full-time position in the Department of Human Sciences teaching food science courses. Ayers helped develop a Food Industry concentration in the Nutrition and Food Science program and manages the Foods Lab. Ayers also updated the food safety courses and developed a new one, Food Laws and Regulations. She currently serves on the Tennessee Food Safety Task Force.

Ayers has several students making major contributions to the food industry in middle Tennessee and looks forward to many more. As evidence of her service to students, she has repeatedly been recognized as an instructor who makes a difference. She is also a past recipient of the Outstanding EXL Faculty Award.

Ayers is a servant leader and chairs her women's group at church. Charitable contributions include MTSU Little Raiders Angel Tree, serving the homeless at Journey Home, and speaking to various groups across Rutherford County regarding food safety. She is also active in the local Farm Bureau, where she serves on the Leadership Committee and the Board of Directors. She is passionate about educating youth on where their food comes from.



## **J. Claire Cook**

*Department of Human Sciences*

### **Promoted to Professor**

J. Claire Cook received her M.S. in Human Development and Family Science from The Ohio State University and her Ph.D. in Human Environmental Sciences, with a concentration in Human Development and Family Science, from the University of Missouri. She joined the MTSU faculty in August 2012.

Cook has taught eight different classes in the Human Development and Family Science (HDFS) program and initiated significant revisions to the program's curriculum, including elevating the program to a major. Her efforts for excellence in teaching have been recognized through nominations for the Instructional Technology Award (2014) and the Outstanding Teaching Award (2022), and receipt of the Bob Womack Distinguished Faculty Award (2016) and the MTSU Outstanding EXL Faculty Award (2021). Her curriculum enhancements were supported by the Engage Major Pathways grant (2022–23), the Walker Library Information Literacy grant (2021–22), and the Tennessee Board of Regents Open Educational Resources medium scale conversion grant (2022). Cook has been recognized by students as having made a significant contribution to their success 13 times since 2017. She has also supported the individualized learning of students through the supervision of 247 student interns, chairing one Honors thesis, and serving as a member of three dissertation committees.

Cook's research focuses on understanding parent-child relationships and the scholarship of teaching and learning in HDFS. She has presented her work at national and international conferences, published in premier journals in her field, and served as an ad-hoc reviewer for journals in HDFS.

Cook also takes an active role in service to the department, University, community, and her profession. She has served on 26 departmental committees (six of which she chaired), various University committees, Faculty Senate, the 2025 QEP development committee, three advisory boards, and one foundation board.



## Karen C. Davis

*Department of Health and Human Performance*

### Tenured

Karen Davis is an associate professor in the Department of Health and Human Performance, where she has served since 2019. She holds a Ph.D. in Education from the University of Central Florida and is committed to advancing equity and cultural responsiveness in the field of communication sciences and disorders (CSD). Her research focuses on culturally responsive practices and the recruitment and retention of diverse students in CSD programs.

Davis has shared her scholarship through over 20 conference presentations, peer-reviewed publications, and a book chapter. She was awarded the Tennessee Board of Regents Student Engagement, Retention, and Success (SERS) grant to create the Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology (SLPA) Uplift peer mentoring and tutoring program, which continues to inform her collaborative research with undergraduate students.

As an educator, Davis is known for her use of high-impact teaching practices and for converting core courses into Engage-designated classes. Her contributions to teaching and mentorship have earned her recognition for positively impacting students' lives.

Her service spans University, state, and national levels, including leadership in the Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders (CAPCSD) and invited speaking engagements across the country. Notably, she was nominated for vice president of student affairs for the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, a rare recognition for faculty from undergraduate-only institutions. She currently serves as the administrative fellow in MTSU's Office of Student Success.

Beyond campus, Davis is actively involved in community service and leadership, including her current role as state president of the American Association of University Women of Tennessee (AAUW-TN). Through her teaching, research, and service, she remains dedicated to promoting access, inclusion, and excellence in both higher education and the CSD profession.





## Carmelita L. Dotson

*Department of Social Work*

### **Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor**

Carmelita L. Dotson joined MTSU in 2004 and currently serves as program coordinator for the Bachelor of Social Work program. She holds an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and a B.S. in Sociology from Tennessee State University (TSU) and an M.S.S.W. from the University of Tennessee. A licensed advanced

practice social worker, she brings over 37 years of professional experience.

Dotson is a dedicated educator committed to student success, inclusive education, and community engagement. She applies high-impact, equity-centered practices in her teaching and mentorship. As department curriculum chair and representative to the College of Behavioral and Health Sciences Curriculum Committee, she champions academic innovation and mentors students and faculty. She has advised MTSU's student chapter of the National Association of Black Social Workers since 2010.

Her scholarship centers on inclusive teaching, health disparities, child welfare, mentorship, and social justice. She collaborates with students and colleagues on publications, presentations, and grant initiatives. Her values of Think, Work, and Serve, and pedagogy grounded in the African principle of *Ujima*—collective work and responsibility—foster student engagement, collaboration, and social change.

Dotson served on the Faculty Senate (2022–25) and contributes to University, college, and departmental committees. She is also active in the community, serving on boards and advisory committees for the Boys and Girls Club, National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Middle Tennessee Branch, TSU's College of Public Service, and United Way of South Central Tennessee.

Her honors include the 2025 John Pleas Award, 2025 Career Influencer Award from MTSU Career Development Center, 2023–24 Council on Social Work Education Program Director Academy Fellow, 2023 Tempest Award from the American Association of University Women (AAUW) Murfreesboro, 2022 NASW Middle Tennessee Social Work Educator of the Year, 2021–22 LT&ITC Faculty Fellow, 2020 Honorary Mace Bearer, and Influential Faculty Member (2010–present). Her contributions continue to shape student learning, academic innovation, and community impact.



## Leigh Ann Grant

*School of Nursing*

### **Promoted to Clinical Associate Professor**

Leigh Ann (Krabousanos) Grant graduated from Roane State Community College with her associate degree in Nursing in 1995 and from MTSU with a B.S.N. in 1999, and then in 2014, received her M.S.N. with a Nursing Education concentration at MTSU.

Grant's nursing experience has spanned over 30 years in both corporate and nonprofit environments, allowing her to develop a diverse skill set and an agile approach to problem solving. Prior to becoming an educator at MTSU in 2014, Grant worked in specialized fields of nursing, such as medical-surgical, home health, cardiac/telemetry, orthopedics, and a wound care clinic. With a strong background in leadership, organizational development, and client engagement, she provides the qualifications and experience needed to foster student learning and practical application.

During the past 10 years, Grant's teaching responsibilities have included MTSU lab courses for undergraduate and graduate students and clinical/lab instruction at long-term care facilities and acute care facilities. She became course coordinator for Caring for Adult Clients I Clinical in Spring 2020, which was at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a dedicated professional committed to excellence, integrity, and service, Grant transitioned an on-ground interactive course to a remotely delivered course, implementing evidence-based practice through creative endeavors. Also at this time, Grant worked with St. Thomas Hospital and MTSU Health Services to coordinate student participation at the St. Thomas and MTSU COVID-19 vaccination clinics. As an individual who is passionate about mentorship and volunteerism, she supervised MTSU Nursing students during multiple Remote Area Medical Clinics in several Tennessee counties.

Grant was nominated by a student for the national Daisy Award and became the first recipient of the clinical Daisy Award at MTSU's School of Nursing. Currently she is the clinical coordinator for the Capstone Clinical course, which ensures graduating students are prepared to transition into the role of professional nurse.



## **Vickie Harden**

*Department of Social Work*

### **Promoted to Professor**

Vickie Harden is an alumna of MTSU's undergraduate Psychology program with minors in Criminal Justice and Sociology. She holds an M.S. in Social Work from the University of Tennessee and a Ph.D. in Human Performance from MTSU.

Harden currently serves as interim chair and Master of Social Work program coordinator in the Department of Social Work. She played a pivotal role in establishing MTSU's M.S.W. program, which initially began as part of a three-university collaboration. After the initial partnership's dissolution, MTSU launched a standalone M.S.W. program, which received full accreditation in 2021.

With over 30 years of experience in social work practice, Harden's academic and professional work centers on trauma and abuse—particularly in children, family systems, and across generations. Her primary research involves an extensive qualitative analysis of narratives from formerly enslaved Africans, exploring historical and intergenerational trauma and introducing a reformulated concept of resilience to reflect collective resilience and growth. She and colleagues from Tulane University most recently presented their research findings at the Hawaii University International Conference on Arts, Humanities, Social Science, and Education in January 2025.

Beyond her contributions to the Department of Social Work, College of Behavioral and Health Sciences, and MTSU, Harden is very active in community services. She serves on the Board of Directors for the Prevention Coalition for Success and the Advisory Board for Resilient Roots Family Wellness Center.

Harden has authored and served as principal investigator on more than \$12 million in federal grants. She currently serves as co-principal investigator on a Bureau of Justice Assistance grant in partnership with Rutherford County Government, where she is a member of both the reentry stakeholders group and advisory council.



## Mary Lynn Hubbard

*School of Nursing*

### **Promoted to Clinical Associate Professor**

Mary Lynn Hubbard is a dedicated and skilled nursing professional with experience in patient care, leadership, and health care education. With a Master of Science in Nursing from Tennessee State University and board certification in psychiatric and mental health nursing, Hubbard cultivated a nursing career marked

by excellence, innovation, and a commitment to advancing patient outcomes.

Throughout her career, Hubbard has held various roles in mental health clinical practice, education, and administration, contributing to the development of effective health care strategies and improving patient care standards. Her expertise has been concentrated in the areas of mental health and crisis intervention. She has been recognized for her leadership in implementing best practices, mentoring aspiring nurses, and driving initiatives that enhance health care delivery.

Hubbard's achievements include the Outstanding EXL Faculty Award 2022–23 and nomination for the Daisy Award for extraordinary nursing faculty. She is passionate about fostering a collaborative health care environment and preparing nurses to respond to individuals in mental health crises in the community.

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Hubbard is deeply motivated by her dedication to compassionate patient care and the opportunity to make a tangible difference in people's lives. She believes in the power of education and mentorship to shape the future of health care and is committed to inspiring the next generation of nursing professionals.



## **James Loveless**

*Department of Psychology*

### **Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor**

James Loveless, a native of South Carolina's Midlands region, earned both his bachelor's degree in Psychology and a master's in Professional Counseling from Clemson University. He then worked as a community mental health counselor and adjunct instructor before entering the Clinical Health Psychology doctoral

program at East Carolina University. He completed his American Psychological Association-accredited internship at the Augusta University/Charlie Norwood Veterans Affairs Medical Center and a two-year postdoctoral fellowship in behavioral medicine at the University of Virginia.

Since coming to MTSU, Loveless has served as core faculty in the Clinical Psychology master's program and, as of May 2022, has served as its director. He teaches graduate courses related to clinical interviewing, professional issues and ethics, and behavioral medicine. At the undergraduate level, he teaches similar courses included within the popular Mental Health Services minor and serves as a major advisor for those interested in pursuing a career in adult mental health services.

Regarding scholarship, Loveless has continued his program of research related to the etiology of hypertension by further exploring the connections between resting blood pressure and its bio-behavioral correlates. He has also collaborated with colleagues at MTSU and elsewhere on projects related to health behavior choice in the workplace, reducing behavioral emergencies among medical inpatients, and improving the training of psychiatry residents in the delivery of evidence-based psychotherapies. Finally, he regularly supervises students completing master's or Honors theses on topics related to health and clinical psychology.

Beyond teaching and scholarship, he has an active program of service, much of which involves increasing the availability and accessibility of evidence-based mental health care. Promoting master's level practice in health services psychology has been a particular focus for Loveless, and he has served in various consulting and leadership roles at the national and state levels to support such.



## Kay Murphree

*School of Nursing*

**Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor**

Kay Murphree received her Doctor of Education in Instructional Leadership and Nursing Education from the University of Alabama. Murphree's research focused on safe medication administration knowledge in senior B.S.N. preceptorships. Her research was presented at the Sigma Theta Tau International Nursing Honor Society Conference in 2019. She collaborated with Shelley Moore on a study—"Educational Interventions, Student Empathy, and Interest in Working with Older Adults: A Phased Study"—which was accepted for presentation at the Southern Gerontological Association 41st Aging Conference (2021).

More recently, Murphree completed a quantitative study, "Level of Faculty Interaction and Factors Influencing Faculty Evaluation of Students in Pre-licensure Baccalaureate Preceptorships," also presented at a Sigma international conference (2023). She collaborates on an ongoing research study with Maury Regional Medical Center on "Safe Administration of Intravenous Push Medications in Acute Care." She has completed her first year as co-principal investigator (Debbie Lee, PI) on a MTSU School of Nursing sub-award of a five-year Gerontology Workforce Enhancement Program (GWEP) Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant through Vanderbilt University. As co-PI of the sub-award, she has been responsible for developing the curriculum, program timeline, and coordinating the content of a 12-month gerontological RN apprenticeship in partnership with National Healthcare Corporation.

Murphree is also active in service. She has served on the Faculty Senate (2022–25) and Steering Committee (2024–25), IRB (2021–25), Academic Appeals, and departmental committees (Curriculum, Chair, Program Effectiveness, Admissions, Student Success, Student Nurses Association faculty). Professional service includes peer review for a professional journal, keynote speaker for TSU College of Health Sciences Research Day (2022), service on regional and local Sigma nursing committees, Academy of Medical-Surgical Nursing Content Development Committee, and Maury Regional Medical Center New Knowledge and Innovation Committee.

Her clinical experience extends over 30 years with expertise in adult critical care and adult medical surgical nursing. She regularly teaches classes on adult health (medical-surgical nursing and critical care clinical) and advanced pathophysiology. Student evaluations reflect appreciation of her teaching and expertise.



## Melissa Palicka

*School of Nursing*

### **Promoted to Clinical Associate Professor**

Melissa Palicka is a dedicated nurse educator and health care professional whose career blends a deep commitment to pediatric and community health nursing with a passion for teaching and service. As a faculty member in the School of Nursing, she coordinates and teaches pediatric nursing clinicals, as well as courses such as introduction to nursing practice-clinical, health assessment lab, clinical skills lab, and advanced health assessment lab. Palicka has worked to enhance the pediatric simulation lab experience for students by providing a more realistic simulation in their final semester of nursing school. She has also collaborated with colleagues to create a new clinical experience course for first-year nursing students.

Palicka holds a Master of Science in Nursing from Tennessee State University, a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Middle Tennessee State University, and a Bachelor of Science in Education from Xavier University. She began her unique professional journey as a kindergarten teacher before transitioning to nursing in 2009. This dual background has empowered her to bridge the disciplines of health care and education, inspiring and equipping the next generation of nurses.

Her clinical background includes roles as a bedside nurse and quality improvement analyst at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt and as a school nurse for Rutherford County Schools. With a strong focus on pediatrics and community health, Palicka is particularly passionate about helping students transition into the nursing profession by preparing them with the skills to manage workplace stress and build resilience.

Palicka is also a committed community volunteer, offering her time to organizations such as the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Center (as a patient advocate), the MS Bike to Jack and Back medical support team, and Second Harvest Food Bank. She participated in the Rutherford County Health Department's COVID-19 vaccine clinic on campus and the Virtual Dementia Tour and has been actively involved in various School of Nursing committees.

Her excellence in education has been recognized by both peers and students. She has served as a mentor for new faculty and as a preceptor for other nurses who are pursuing degrees in nursing education. Palicka is a recipient of the EXL Award for 2024–25 and has been honored by her students as a faculty member who makes a difference.





## Kristina M. Plunk

*School of Nursing*

### Promoted to Clinical Associate Professor

Kristina Plunk is an RN and dedicated nurse educator with 25 years of combined clinical and academic experience. Committed to shaping the future of nursing, Plunk currently serves as a clinical coordinator for multiple courses in the School of Nursing, where she designs and delivers evidence-based curricula to prepare nursing students for the complex demands of health care.

Plunk began her nursing career after earning a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the University of Memphis. She furthered her education at the University of Memphis by completing a Master of Science in Nursing with a concentration in Nursing Education. She brings a strong foundation of nursing theory and clinical practice to the classroom, simulation lab, and clinical settings.

Prior to transitioning into academia, Plunk worked in women's health caring for patients in labor and delivery, postpartum, and newborn nursery, where she developed a deep understanding of patient-centered care, collaboration among multidisciplinary teams, and the importance of lifelong learning. Her experience as a nurse and patient advocate has influenced her teaching philosophy and shaped her into an educator who strives to create a learning environment where students feel safe and encouraged to develop their ability to communicate effectively, utilize critical thinking to make safe clinical decisions, and provide professional, compassionate care.

Throughout her teaching career, Plunk has been recognized for excellence in teaching. She has received the "person who makes a real difference" letter on multiple occasions when students acknowledged the positive impact Plunk had on their education. In May 2022, she received the Outstanding EXL Faculty Award, and in April 2023, she received the Daisy Award, an international recognition for exceptionally skilled and compassionate nurse educators.

In addition to teaching, Plunk remains actively involved within the School of Nursing through faculty development, curriculum analysis, and integration of innovative teaching strategies. She has served on various committees and coordinates community service activities. She is devoted to integrating simulation into the curriculum, creating an inclusive learning environment, and promoting research and education to improve health outcomes for all women across the lifespan.



## **Karin Randolph**

*School of Nursing*

### **Promoted to Clinical Associate Professor**

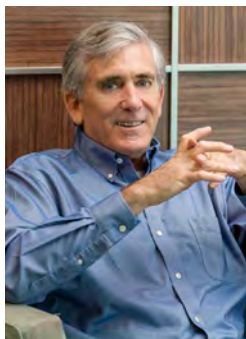
Karin Randolph holds an M.S.N. in Nursing Education from Union University (2012) and a B.S.N. from the University of Mississippi Medical Center (1981). With 44 years of wide-ranging experience, she brings expertise in medical-surgical nursing, oncology, women's health, pediatrics, ambulatory

clinics, and administration.

Before joining MTSU in fall 2020, Randolph served in nursing leadership roles where she developed an internship program that fueled her passion for teaching and mentoring future nurses. Her focus has always been on shaping compassionate, ethical, and critically minded caregivers.

After just one semester at MTSU, she became the course coordinator for introduction to nursing practice—clinical, implementing numerous positive changes informed by evidence-based research. Working with community partners, she ensures students have access to exceptional clinical environments where they can refine skills and knowledge acquired in the classroom. During the pandemic, Randolph played a crucial role in coordinating students to serve at MTSU COVID-19 vaccination clinics, utilizing this experience as a clinical opportunity. This initiative provided students with valuable hands-on experience and contributed to the community's health efforts. In conjunction with MTSU Health Services, she coordinates nursing students to assist with fall flu vaccination clinics.

Randolph also enjoys teaching caring for adult clients I—clinical, watching the progression of Nursing students in the medical-surgical setting. Her efforts have not gone unnoticed, as she has been recognized several times by students as a faculty member who makes a difference. Randolph believes the most significant impact educators can have on students is to instill the idea that nursing is not just a job but also a calling. She hopes MTSU Nursing students will always be compassionate caregivers who continue to have a positive impact on patient outcomes across middle Tennessee.



## Carter F. Smith

*Department of Criminal Justice Administration*

**Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor**

Carter F. Smith directs the master's program in Criminal Justice Administration, where he has taught since 2006. A nationally recognized expert on gangs, criminal organizations, and the intersection of military service and criminal behavior, Smith brings a wealth of experience from both academia and a distinguished

22-year career in federal and military law enforcement.

He holds a B.S. in Public Management from Austin Peay State University, a J.D. from Southern Illinois University, and a Ph.D. from Northcentral University. Before entering higher education, Smith served as a special agent with the U.S. Army Criminal Investigations Division (CID), leading investigations that ranged from drug trafficking and fraud to national security threats involving military-trained gang members. His military career culminated in his role as criminal intelligence and anti-terrorism programs manager at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

Smith has authored or co-authored numerous peer-reviewed articles and several books, including *Gangs and the Military* (Rowman & Littlefield), *Gangs and Organized Crime* (Routledge), and *Private Security Today* (Pearson). His research has been cited by media outlets from NPR and *The New York Times* to the History Channel's *Gangland* series.

His most recent passion explores the life of Samuel Mason, tracing his transformation from Revolutionary War officer to river pirate. Drawing on archival records and court transcripts, the project reconstructs Mason's criminal trajectory and his downfall in the forthcoming Bloomsbury publication *From Patriot to Pirate: The Outlaw Life of Sam Mason*.

A passionate educator, Smith has designed dozens of courses for online and hybrid learning environments and has mentored both undergraduate and graduate students in research. He serves as a peer reviewer for national journals, a frequent conference presenter, and a consultant for federal, state, and local agencies on gang-related and security topics.

Smith is a three-time recipient of the Frederic Milton Thrasher Award for gang research and investigation and a former CID Command Special Agent of the Year.



## Murat Arik

*Department of Management*

### Promoted to Professor

Murat Arik holds a B.A. in Public Administration from Ankara University and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Political Science from Syracuse University and the University of Connecticut, respectively. Additionally, he earned a Post-Doctoral Bridge Program certificate in Management from the University of Florida.

Arik is the director of the Business and Economic Research Center (BERC) at MTSU and the chairholder of the Jennings and Rebecca Jones Chair of Excellence in Urban and Regional Planning. Furthermore, he is the associate editor of the *Global Journal of Management and Marketing* and an editor emeritus of the *Global Journal of Accounting and Finance*. His teaching covers a broad array of topics within strategic management and international business. Arik also oversees the Chair of Excellence in Urban and Regional Planning Scholars Program, which provides research and engagement opportunities for undergraduate students to address urban and regional challenges through academic research.

Arik dedicates much of his time to research in the areas of international business, regional economic development, economic impact analysis, and competitive dynamics. Recently, he received the Certified Economic Research Professional designation from the Council for Community and Economic Research. Throughout his career, he has published numerous articles that have earned awards and honors. Notably, he received the Institute for Global Business Research's Distinguished Research Award for his paper "Predicting Pro-Environmental Behavior: A Cross-Cultural Study" (Nashville, TN, 2025). He received the Economic and Workforce Applied Research Award in Impact and Sustainability for the Tracking Tennessee's Economy dashboard (Sacramento, CA, 2025). Arik is the author of two books: *Understanding and Analyzing Competitive Dynamics* and *Economic Impact or Contribution*, both published by Lexington.

Beyond his academic work, Arik is committed to service both on and off campus. He is actively involved on the Board of Directors for Cumberland Region Tomorrow, the Board of Directors for the Council for Community and Economic Research, and the center directors council for the Jones College of Business. Additionally, he serves as the research coordinator for the Jones College of Business for the University Council for Sponsored Scholarship.



## W. Randy Clark

*Department of Marketing*

### **Promoted to Professor**

Randy Clark received his Ph.D. in Marketing from Georgia State University. He previously obtained a Master of Marketing Research from the University of Georgia. After his master's degree, he worked as a project manager and research associate for research firms in Atlanta, working with client companies such as Coca-Cola, Home Depot, Marriott, and UPS.

Clark's research has spanned multiple streams, but primarily focuses on business relationship constructs such as trust, dependence, and credibility. He has published his research in international journals, including the *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing*, the *Journal of Managerial Issues*, *Management Review Quarterly*, the *Journal of Management Inquiry*, and the *Marketing Management Journal*. In addition, his research has been published in practitioner-focused publications such as the *Nashville Business Journal* and numerous printing industry association outlets, and presented at multiple marketing conferences, such as the Marketing and Public Policy Conference, the Academy of Business Research Conference, MBAA International, and the Atlantic Marketing Association Conference.

Placing high value on teaching and mentoring, Clark has worked with 16 undergraduate and graduate students by serving on dissertation committees, directing independent studies, managing internships, or completing student research projects. He has been recognized 19 semesters as a person at MTSU who makes a real difference to students and six straight semesters as a Jones College top 30 instructor.

Clark has been active in service across the University, serving on many University committees, including the Faculty Senate, the Faculty Senate Steering Committee, the MTSU Faculty Leadership Academy, and the University Curriculum Committee, among others. Additionally, he has served on many college committees, including in a leadership role as chair of the Graduate Programs Committee, the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, and the Students Committee. At the departmental level, he has served on more than 40 committees, serving as committee chair more than 10 times. Professional service experience includes associate editor of the *Journal of Internet Commerce* for 19 years, Board of Advisors for SmartFox Technologies, and Board of Directors of the Nashville Football Club Youth.



## Aaron M. Gamino

*Department of Economics and Finance*

**Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor**

Aaron M. Gamino received his Ph.D. and M.A. in Economics from Vanderbilt University. He also has a B.A. in Economics and Philosophy from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

Gamino's research evaluates government policies in an economic framework. His research focuses on insurance, fertility, and contemporary policy issues. His work has been published in peer-reviewed journals, including the *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, *Economics & Politics*, *The Canadian Tax Journal*, *Health Economics*, the *American Journal of Health Economics*, the *Journal of Demographic Economics*, *Applied Economics*, *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy*, and *Economics Letters*. He has presented his research at national conferences, including the Southern Economic Association Meetings, American Society of Health Economists Conferences, and Kentucky Economic Association Conference.

Gamino has mentored Ph.D. students by chairing three dissertations and serving as a committee member for seven dissertations. He has also supervised undergraduate students as a chair of two Honors theses and as the economics club faculty advisor.

Gamino is also active in University service. He has served on many department, college, and University committees, and has begun a term on the Faculty Senate. He has organized the Economics and Finance Graduate Research Day, which allows Economics Ph.D. students to present their work to peers and faculty.



## Dennis Gupton

*Department of Management*

### Promoted to Senior Instructor

Dennis Gupton is a senior instructor in the Department of Management and the 2024 recipient of the E.W. “Wink” Midgett Distinguished Teaching Award—the highest teaching honor in the Jones College of Business. He was recognized for his outstanding instruction, innovative course design, and unwavering commitment to student engagement and success.

With more than 30 years of leadership experience in business—including roles as director of operations and CEO—Gupton brings real-world expertise into every class he teaches. His storytelling-based approach connects theory to practice, making business concepts come alive for students. He regularly teaches courses such as principles of management, entrepreneurship, new venture creation, and managing change and conflict in organizations.

One of Gupton’s signature contributions is the transformation of ENTR 3650 – New Venture Creation into an applied learning experience where students design, develop, and pitch original business ideas. He created a Shark Tank-style competition and a judged final round to help students build confidence, sharpen communication skills, and prepare for entrepreneurial success.

In addition to teaching, Gupton publishes business cases through the Southeast Case Research Association and coordinates annual campus visits for Clarksville High School students, helping introduce them to the possibilities of higher education.

Known for his enthusiasm, high standards, and genuine care for student development, Gupton continues to make a meaningful impact across campus and beyond.





## Benjamin Jansen

*Department of Economics and Finance*

**Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor**

Benjamin Jansen began his academic career at Middle Tennessee State University in fall 2018 after earning his Ph.D. from Florida Atlantic University.

Jansen's research focuses on valuation and market efficiency as well as studying deviations from standard financial economic models. His research has been published in prestigious journals that reach international audiences, such as *Critical Finance Review*, *Financial Review*, *International Journal of Managerial Finance*, *Journal of Financial Research*, *Journal of Investing*, and *Managerial Finance*. He has also presented his research at the Academy of Financial Services, Eastern Finance Association, Financial Management Association, Finance Symposium, Southern Finance Association, and Southwestern Finance Association.

Jansen teaches a variety of courses at MTSU across both graduate and undergraduate levels. At the graduate level, he has taught foundations of finance, managerial finance, portfolio analysis, and the M.S. in Finance capstone course, cases in finance. At the undergraduate level, he has taught behavioral economics and finance, corporate finance, financial statement analysis, investments, principles of corporate finance, and survey of finance.

Serving his academic community on various committees at the department, college, and University level, he also regularly reviews papers for conferences and journals and serves as a conference chair. Jansen also contributes to public discourse on financial issues through media appearances in outlets such as *U.S. News & World Report*, *WalletHub*, and *MoneyGeek*.

Continuing his education both professionally and personally, he earned Certified Financial Planner designation in Spring 2025 and is currently learning about history, philosophy, and the culinary arts.



## Lucy M. Matthews

*Department of Marketing*

### **Promoted to Professor**

Lucy M. Matthews brings a unique blend of professional experience and academic expertise to the field of marketing. After earning her B.S. in Marketing and Management from Indiana University and an M.B.A. with a concentration in Marketing from Georgia State University, she spent over 15 years in sales and

management before completing a doctorate in Marketing at Kennesaw State University. She joined the MTSU Department of Marketing in fall 2015.

Matthews' dedication to teaching is evident in her broad instructional portfolio—nine different undergraduate courses and one graduate-level course. She has also developed four online classes to expand access and flexibility for students. Her commitment to student success is further reflected in her mentorship of three undergraduate Honors theses, and in 2022, she was recognized with MTSU's Outstanding Teacher Award.

Her research interests span a variety of timely and impactful areas, including sales and sales management, burnout, engagement, grit, PLS-SEM, and interdisciplinary topics like innovation and entrepreneurship. Matthews has published 45 peer-reviewed journal articles, with her work being cited more than 9,450 times on Google Scholar—a testament to the relevance and reach of her scholarship.

A champion of applied learning, Matthews played an instrumental role in launching MTSU's Professional Selling concentration and certificate program, securing over \$150,000 in sponsorships. She has chaired committees at the department, college, and University levels, earning MTSU's Outstanding Public Service Award in 2023.

Her service extends beyond campus. She currently serves as managing editor of the *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management* and sits on the Board of Governors for the Society for Marketing Advances. Following her participation in the 2024–25 MTSU Leadership on Deck Institute, she now serves as a Provost Fellow for 2025–26.



## **Richard Tarpey**

*Department of Management*

### **Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor**

Richard Tarpey earned his Doctor of Business Administration (D.B.A.) from the University of South Florida in 2018. He is a two-time graduate of Middle Tennessee State University, where he received an M.B.A. in 2008 and a B.B.A. in Computer Information Systems in 1994.

Tarpey brings more than 30 years of industry experience to his academic role, including nine years at United Airlines in Chicago and 22 years with HCA Healthcare in Nashville. During his time at HCA, he developed a resource scheduling quality measurement standard that became the foundation of the organization's nurse scheduling system. His extensive background in labor management continues to inform his scholarly research on workforce systems in complex organizational environments.

At MTSU, Tarpey serves as coordinator of the undergraduate and graduate Supply Chain Management programs and as director of the MTSU Center for Supply Chain Management and Sustainability. In these capacities, he prepares students for careers in supply chain, project management, and health care management by integrating academic rigor with practical industry experience.

He has established partnerships with over 100 regional employers, enhancing student engagement through initiatives such as the Synergy project partnership and job shadowing programs. Tarpey also conceptualized and has organized the annual MTSU Supply Chain Summit for the past four years, with the 2025 Summit drawing over 250 attendees from industry, academia, and government.

In addition to his teaching and program leadership, he spearheaded the creation and THEC approval of MTSU's Master of Science in Project Management, the first stand-alone project management graduate degree offered by a public university in Tennessee, which will launch in Fall 2025.

He is also currently leading the development of a proposed Master of Healthcare Administration program.

Tarpey's contributions have been recognized through several honors, including the State Farm Outstanding Professor Award for both 2022–23 and 2024–25, as well as the 2024 E. W. "Wink" Midgett Distinguished Service Award presented by the Jones College of Business.



## **Ralph I. Williams Jr.**

*Department of Management*

### **Promoted to Professor**

Ralph Williams Jr. brings more than 25 years of leadership experience in the print industry, having served as president of three printing businesses and co-owners of two of those firms. He transitioned to academia in 2009 as a management lecturer and earned his Doctor of Business Administration from Kennesaw State University in 2015. He joined the Jones College of Business at MTSU as an assistant professor, and he teaches strategic management, entrepreneurial financial management, principles of management, and other courses.

Williams maintains strong ties to the print industry, collaborating with 14 regional printing industry associations spread across the United States. He conducts the Printing Industry Performance and Insights studies—comprehensive surveys and reports that address topics such as industry trends, cost analysis, effective workplace branding, growth of various printed products, financial benchmarks, and the application of strategic planning tools. His work has resulted in 54 published articles or reports in industry e-newsletters or magazines, and he has delivered over 30 presentations at association events.

A prolific researcher, Williams has authored 32 peer-reviewed journal articles, averaging three publications per year over the past decade. Three of his research articles were published in A-rated journals, based on the ABDC, and eight were published in B-rated journals. Williams' research addresses a plethora of topics, such as leadership credibility, total quality management (TQM), strategic planning tools, family business, supply chain, and conducting systematic literature reviews.

Williams enjoys connecting with MTSU students. His teaching evaluations over the past 10 years averaged 4.8 out of 5.0. His awards include the Jones College of Business E.W. "Wink" Midgett Distinguished Research Award (2022–23) and the Jones College of Business Bill and Kathy Jones Outstanding Professor Award (2018–19).



## Bonnie Barksdale

*Department of Elementary  
and Special Education*

### **Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor**

Bonnie Barksdale received her Ph.D. in Reading Education from Texas Woman's University under the supervision of Pat Watson. She also holds a B.S. in Early Childhood Education from Texas Woman's University and an M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction, with an emphasis in elementary literacy, from Texas Christian University.

Prior to joining the MTSU faculty, Barksdale served in public school systems in Texas and Illinois as an elementary classroom teacher, literacy interventionist, literacy specialist, and literacy coach. Her professional experience continues to inform both her teaching and research.

At MTSU, Barksdale teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in literacy education. Her research focuses on writing instruction in primary grade classrooms, the role of diverse classroom libraries, and the adaptive teaching decisions educators make during literacy instruction. She regularly presents her work at local, state, and national conferences, and her scholarship has been published in *The Reading Teacher*, *Young Children*, *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, and the *Tennessee Literacy Journal*.

Her contributions to teaching, research, and service have been recognized with several honors, including the 2023 Literacy Association of Tennessee Distinguished Professor Award, the 2021–22 Outstanding EXL Faculty Award, and a nomination for the 2025 College of Education Excellence in Service Award. She has also been recognized six times as an instructor who makes a difference in the lives of students.

In addition to serving on departmental and college-level committees, contributing to curriculum development, and reviewing for professional journals and conferences, Barksdale currently serves as the incoming chair (2024–25) of the Williamson County Literacy Association, a local chapter of the Literacy Association of Tennessee. This role reflects her ongoing commitment to literacy advocacy and community engagement.



## Heather Dillard

*Womack Educational Leadership Department*

### **Promoted to Professor**

Heather Dillard received her Doctor of Education in Curriculum and Instruction from Tennessee State University in 2012 while working as a middle school teacher. Her doctoral work focused on professional learning communities (PLC), an often-misunderstood component of K–12 schools. Working with her mentor, PLC at Work founder Robert Eaker, Dillard sought to understand the right work of an effective PLC and influence others to instill these practices.

Dillard's PLC work has shaped her career as she brought this background into her work in the College of Education at Middle Tennessee State University. Hired to work in the newly formed Residency I course, Dillard assisted the team of professors to develop a culture of interdependence, holding one another mutually accountable toward their shared goals. She was later invited to join the Assessment, Learning, and School Improvement Ed.D. team because it was formulated around the PLC work. Both the Residency I team and the doctoral program have gained national recognition for their success in preparing undergraduate and graduate students.

Experience with these teams led Dillard to join problem-based learning expert Terry Goodin in authoring the book *Mindset for Success: The Powerful Partnership of Problem-Based Learning & PLC at Work*. The book details the development of a problem-based learning mindset that allows teams to determine the root cause of problems they face and a course of action to eliminate it. Dillard also writes quarterly for *All Things PLC Magazine*, the only such publication of its kind, which has an international readership of 20,000 people.

Dillard actively serves the community by providing professional development and consultation to area schools in professional learning communities. Schools seek her knowledge to eliminate "PLC Lite" in their buildings. She also regularly serves on department, college, and University committees. In May 2025, she received the College of Education Excellence in Service Award.



## **Kimberly Evert**

*Womack Educational Leadership Department*

**Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor**

Kim Evert earned a B.S. in Spanish and Secondary Education from Knox College, an M.S. in Educational Psychology from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and a Ph.D. in Educational Policy from Michigan State University. She was then a postdoctoral research associate at the University of Virginia, working on the

Development of Ambitious Instruction study, where she studied elementary teacher preparation and novice teacher ambitious instruction and was mentored by Peter Youngs and Corey Drake.

Evert's research bridges teacher preparation, teacher learning, and novice teacher experiences. More specifically, her research examines how leadership practices, teacher learning opportunities, and school context shape teaching practice and teachers' perceptions of their work. Her recent work has been published in high-impact journals in both the areas of teacher education and educational leadership, such as *Elementary School Journal*, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *Teachers College Record*, and *Teaching and Teacher Education*. She is also a regular presenter at the national educational research conferences of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA).

Since 2020, Evert has served as the coordinator for the Secondary Education minor. She has also served as the chair for five dissertations for students in the Assessment, Learning, and School Improvement Ed.D. In May 2023, she was recognized for her service, earning the College of Education's Womack Fund in Service Award.





## Stacy Fields

*Department of Elementary  
and Special Education*

### **Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor**

Stacy Fields holds a B.S. in Elementary Education from Union University, an M.Ed. in Teaching, Leading, and Learning from Lipscomb University, and a Ph.D. in Literacy Studies from Middle Tennessee State University. Her research centers on K–12 literacy, meta-analysis, and adolescent writing, with a particular focus on instructional strategies that support English learners. Through her work, she aims to bridge the gap between research and practice, equipping educators with evidence-based strategies to enhance student learning.

Fields serves as the middle level coordinator in the Department of Elementary and Special Education, where she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in middle grades literacy, assessment, and classroom management. She advises students across licensure programs and mentors graduate research.

An active voice in literacy education, Fields has shared her expertise at national and international conferences, contributing to the fields of writing engagement, disciplinary literacy, and interventions for diverse learners. Her research has been published in *Reading and Writing Quarterly*, *The Reading Teacher*, *Preventing School Failure*, *Reading Psychology*, and other peer-reviewed journals. Recognized for both scholarly innovation and community impact, she has received honors including the Womack Family Innovation in Research Award and the Heart of Service Award. Earlier in her career, she was awarded the Clouse-Elrod Education Research Award and the Herbert M. Handley Outstanding Dissertation Award for her contributions to English learner adolescent writing research.

In addition to her research and teaching, Fields is dedicated to recruiting and mentoring future educators. She actively works to strengthen educator preparation programs, engaging with prospective students to highlight the impact and importance of middle level education. As middle level coordinator, she strives to create inclusive, student-centered learning environments and prepare teachers who will make a meaningful difference in their classrooms and communities.



## Sungyoon Lee

*Department of Elementary  
and Special Education*

**Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor**

Sungyoon Lee earned his Doctor of Philosophy in Reading and Literacy Education from Texas A&M University, where he was advised by Kausalai Wijekumar. Prior to his doctoral studies, he worked as an elementary school teacher in South Korea for nearly a decade and mentored elementary preservice teachers.

His research on reading processes, reading comprehension, and educational technology has significantly impacted both scholarship and instructional practice. His work has been published in leading international journals, including *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *Education Sciences*, *Reading Psychology*, and *Applied Developmental Science*. He has also presented his research at major conferences, such as the annual meetings of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the Society for Scientific Studies of Reading (SSSR), and the Literacy Research Association (LRA).

Lee has mentored both graduate and undergraduate students in his department and within the Literacy program. He has secured multiple internal and external grants, including awards from MT-IGO, the Academy of Korean Studies, and STARTALK. In addition to his active research agenda, he directed a Korean language summer camp for secondary students in 2024 with support from a STARTALK service grant.

He is also deeply engaged in service to the academic community, contributing to departmental and University committees and serving as a reviewer for professional journals. Since 2022, he has been an international board member of the Society for Korean Language and Literature Education. In recognition of his dedication to students, he has twice been honored as an instructor who makes a difference in their lives.



## Janna McClain

*Department of Elementary  
and Special Education*

### **Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor**

After spending nearly a decade as an educator in K–12 public schools, Janna McClain earned a Ph.D. in Teaching, Learning, and Diversity from Vanderbilt University. Her research, which utilizes mixed and multi-method approaches to investigate equitable literacy instruction for multilingual learners, has been published in high impact journals, including *The Journal of Educational Psychology*, *Reading Research Quarterly*, and *Educational Policy Analysis Archives*. Her research has been recognized by the Society for Research in Child Development for its strategic importance for policy. She has applied for over \$3 million in research grants, and most recently, she was invited by the WT Grant Foundation to submit a full proposal for its reducing inequality grant program.

McClain is committed to excellence in teaching. She has been recognized by graduating seniors as a professor who makes a difference and received the June Anderson Center CARE Award, and her syllabi were included in the National Council on Teacher Quality assessment of reading foundations courses, which resulted in an A+ rating for the Department of Elementary and Special Education. In addition to her work with undergraduate teacher preparation, McClain is a core faculty member in the Ph.D. in Literacy Studies program, where she has mentored six doctoral students.

In terms of service, McClain serves the profession as a multilingualism program chair for the Literacy Research Association and as newsletter editor for the Vocabulary Special Interest Group of the American Education Research Association. She is a principal reviewer for the *Journal of Education Psychology* and ad hoc reviewer for several other journals. Her public service includes facilitating over 100 hours of professional learning with over 500 teachers from more than 50 school districts. Her University service includes serving on Faculty Senate, in addition to college and department level committees.



## Laura E. Cochrane

*Department of Art and Design*

### Promoted to Professor

Laura Cochrane received her Doctor of Philosophy in Art History in 2009 from the University of Delaware, where she focused on medieval manuscript illustrations. She also began her career at MTSU in 2009.

Cochrane's research focuses on the relationship between words and images in medieval art, in particular how illustrations comment on and expand the meaning of religious texts. Her research has been published in notable art historical and medieval studies journals with international audiences, including *Studies in Medievalism*, *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture*, and *Studies in Iconography*. She has also contributed to several essay collections, including *Illuminating a Legacy: Essays in Honor of Lawrence Nees* (2024) and *Tributes to Adelaide Bennett Hagens: Manuscripts, Iconography, and the Late Medieval Viewer* (2017). She also regularly presents her work by means of invited presentations at national meetings, including the annual International Congress of Medieval Studies, the Saint Louis Conference on Manuscript Studies, and the Sewanee Medieval Colloquium.

In her latest project, she has shifted her focus to the study of 20th-century American synagogue decoration. This project has resulted in a fellowship, an article, numerous conference presentations, media interviews, and an award-winning documentary. The culmination of this work is the Database of American Synagogue Iconography, a searchable public database which is available through the MTSU library's Digital Collections.

She has also been active in service for her department, college, the University, and for her field. She served two terms on the Faculty Senate and has just completed a term as the chair of the True Blue Core Committee. She also regularly serves as a peer reviewer for fellowships and journals and has served on boards and advisory committees for art institutions.

In addition to her research and service, Cochrane is a dedicated teacher and has devoted her energies to developing numerous new art history classes, both for Art majors and for the True Blue Core. She has twice been cited as an instructor who makes a difference and has been nominated for a general education teaching award.



## Douglas Dabbs

*Department of Art and Design*

### Promoted to Professor

Douglas Dabbs is an illustrator and professor in MTSU's Department of Art and Design, with over 15 years of experience teaching at undergraduate and graduate levels. Dabbs played a key role in designing and launching MTSU's first illustration curriculum, co-developed the MTSU Illustration Library, established MTSU's first EXL-certified illustration courses, and has led nearly 20 student field studies with support from external and internal grants. In recognition of his contributions to teaching and mentorship, Dabbs received MTSU's 2024 Outstanding Teaching Award, 2024 Outstanding Experiential Learning Faculty Award, and 2020 College of Liberal Arts Faculty Student Mentoring Award.

Dabbs has served on numerous University committees, including a four-year term on the Faculty Senate, and leads community art initiatives through workshops at the Nashville Zoo, Brentwood Library, and local schools, while mentoring K–12 students through judging and thesis review. He contributes to the advancement of the illustration field through roles on editorial and advisory boards such as *Identity Theory and Graphesis* and served as a juror for the 2025 3x3 Illustration Awards and Exhibition—one of the world's premier illustration competitions. He now serves as its first comics chair, working with 3x3 to establish an international competition centered specifically on comics.

Dabbs' research focuses on dynamic visual storytelling and sequential art. His comic books and graphic novels have been published by Image Comics, Oni Press, 12 Gauge, and Desperado Publishing, with a forthcoming graphic novel accepted by Clover Press. Dabbs is the co-creator and artist of the critically acclaimed comic series *Klik Klik Boom*, which was featured in *The Hollywood Reporter*, received awards for its illustrated covers, and ranked among the top comic book series of 2023. His work has been featured in over 60 exhibitions at galleries, museums, and conventions in locations like South Korea, North Macedonia, Toronto, New York, California, and England, and his illustrations have appeared in 26 peer-reviewed art and literature publications.

Dabbs' artwork has earned international acclaim, receiving a Gold Award from the Society of Illustrators LA, as well as 15 awards from prestigious competitions such as American Illustration (six-time chosen winner), Brightness Illustration (two-time selected winner), 3x3: *The Magazine of Contemporary Illustration* (five-time merit award), Cheltenham Illustration (winner), and *Creative Quarterly* (winner). He holds both a B.F.A. and M.F.A. from Savannah College of Art and Design, where he was awarded the Presidential Medal for his research and creative work.



## Andrew Dix

*Department of Communication Studies*

### **Promoted to Professor**

Andrew Dix earned his bachelor's degree from Western Illinois University. His master's degree is from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, and he obtained his doctorate from the University of Southern Mississippi. He came to Middle Tennessee State University as a full-time instructor in 2011. His

teaching philosophy centers on striking a balance between educating and entertaining. Non-humorous dad jokes and references to rap music from the late 1990s are staples in his lectures.

Dix was awarded the Faculty Research and Creative Activity Award for the College of Liberal Arts in 2020. He has been the sole author of 22 peer-reviewed academic journal articles. The research at the beginning of his career investigated interpersonal attraction and humorous communication. Dix intends to research non-spoken communication in near-death experiences in the future, but he currently researches sports communication.

His seminal publication in the *Howard Journal of Communications* uncovered evidence that referees disproportionately called fouls against college basketball players from historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). The publishing team at Taylor and Francis disseminated a media press release of his research to 500 media outlets. Several media outlets created news stories about his research including (a) [thedailymail.com](https://www.thedailymail.com), (b) [insidehighered.com](https://www.insidehighered.com), (c) [diverseeducation.com](https://www.diverseeducation.com), and (d) [globalsportsmatters.com](https://www.globalsportsmatters.com). Some of his other sports-centric research examined deaf athletes.

Additional quantitative indicators of Dix's impact include: seven years coordinating his department's general education course, three years overseeing the departmental tutoring efforts, and three years of service on the Faculty Senate. He once attended a departmental meeting that was almost two hours long. He has been recognized as an instructor who makes a difference in students' lives on nine separate occasions. His student evaluations of teaching effectiveness were above the department, college, and University average on every metric in 12 different semesters.



## Pankhuree R. Dube

*Department of History*

**Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor**

Pankhuree Dube received her Ph.D. in History from Emory University with a specialization in modern South Asia. Before joining MTSU as an assistant professor, she held postdoctoral fellowships at

Dartmouth College and Hamilton College.

Her research has received generous support from the Social Science Research Council, the American Institute of Indian Studies, and the Association of Asian Studies. Dube's research and publications draw on oral history, with interest specifically in indigenous forms of knowledge and artisanal labor. Her first book project examines the life of the Pardhan Gond painter-intellectual Jangarh Singh Shyam (1962–2001) and the bardic recitations of the indigenous community of Pardhan Gonds in central India. In her analysis of indigenous groups within India, she frequently relies on folk songs, oral interviews, and vernacular tales translated into written texts, with an analysis of the omissions and modifications of the original. Dube's peer-reviewed international publications include articles in the journals *Social History*, *The Historian*, *Journal of British Studies*, *Cultural Studies*, *South Asian Review*, and *Contemporary South Asia*, and a chapter in the forthcoming volume *Crafting India's Skill Ecology: Reproductions, Recalibrations and Reimaginings*. She has presented papers at 28 scholarly conferences and workshops, including national conferences and prestigious workshops where funding was provided to invited participants selected from a competitive pool of international applicants. Most recently, she was invited back to Dartmouth for a conference honoring her mentor Douglas E. Haynes, now emeritus.

As an educator, Dube has voluntarily sought out MTSU's robust training programs, including sessions through LT&ITC (now the Center for Teaching and Mentoring), Engage, EXL, and the True Blue Core to expand and update her pedagogical skills for general education and upper-division courses. She has taught courses across different modalities (on-ground, remote, and online) to readily meet changing departmental challenges. Dube has expanded the History Department's offerings in world history and graduate education by designing courses on South Asia and serving on dissertation committees. Her research paper prompts on the theme of music complicate students' understanding of oral history and public history, encouraging them to delve into the rich set of archival sources available to them locally through the Center for Popular Music.

Her service includes participation on seven departmental search committees and membership on the University's Student Appeals Committee. She also helps coordinate the annual Strickland Seminar and serves on the International Committee of the Oral History Association.





## **Kimberly Dummons**

*Department of Art and Design*

### **Promoted to Professor**

Kimberly Dummons is a professor in the Department of Art and Design. She received the Faculty Student Success Award from the College of Liberal Arts in 2024 and one of two highly competitive Tennessee Arts Commission Individual Artist Fellowship Awards in 2020.

Dummons earned her B.A. from Xavier University of Louisiana and her M.F.A. from the University of New Orleans. In her studio practice, she uses cast metal sculpture, print, and collage to explore perceptions of identity and place, referencing the female figure and movement, and quilt motifs, respectively.

Her works have been exhibited nationally at venues including the Huntsville Museum of Art, the Webber Center Gallery at the College of Central Florida, the Muscarelle Museum of Art at the College of William and Mary, the Fort Tilden T-7 Gallery at the Gateway National Recreation Area, and the Louisiana Arts and Science Museum, as well as multiple sites around Tennessee. For the last 19 years, she has collaboratively organized a weekend summer arts workshop with the Art Department at Xavier University of Louisiana, at times partnering with the Ogden Museum of Southern Art and the Helis Foundation John T. Scott Center. Her work is included in several collections, both public and private, and she has a public sculpture commissioned by the city of New Orleans, *Buddy Bolden*, in Louis Armstrong Park.

Her service contributions to professional organizations include the Board of Directors for the Mid-South Sculpture Alliance, Advisory Committee to the Board of Directors at the Helis Foundation John T. Scott Center, and the Nominating Committee for the Board of Directors for the College Art Association. Service to her department includes the Scholarship Committee, Curriculum Committee, Gallery Committee, and multiple search committees.



## Christopher Dye

*School of Music*

### Promoted to Professor

Christopher Dye teaches courses in instrumental methods and materials, supervises student teachers, leads the Music Education Seminar, and teaches graduate courses in assessment, technology, policy, and advocacy. Dye holds degrees from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (Ed.D.), Columbus State University (M.M.), and Texas Lutheran University (B.M.). In addition to his teaching, he serves as associate director of the School of Music and previously served as interim director for two years.

Prior to his appointment at MTSU, Dye was a visiting lecturer in Music Education at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, teaching undergraduate and graduate coursework and supervising student teachers. He also served as a graduate teaching assistant with the University Bands and Music Education divisions at the University of Illinois, directing concert and basketball bands, assisting with the Marching Illini, and teaching coursework in conducting, pedagogy, and field experience. Dye taught for several years as a middle school and high school band director in the Frenship Independent School District in Wolfforth, Texas.

Dye is an active researcher in music education policy and instrumental music pedagogy, presenting papers and clinics at numerous state, national, and international conferences. Publications include articles in the *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, *Psychology of Music*, and the *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*. He currently serves the Tennessee Music Education Association as advocacy and government relations chair and is Tennessee's representative to the National Association for Music Education Advocacy Leadership Force and Advocacy Leadership Initiative. Dye is an Advisory Committee member for Music Makes Us, the public/private partnership supporting music education in Metro Nashville Public Schools.



## Eunbyol Ko

*School of Music*

### Promoted to Master Instructor

A native of South Korea, Eunbyol Ko has been praised for her artistry and intelligence as a soloist, chamber musician, and concerto soloist. She maintains an active international career playing a highly diverse range of repertoire. Performances have taken her to Brazil, Canada, Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Australia, China, South Korea, and the United States.

Competition honors include first prizes in the South Korea National Competition, the Eumyoun competition, and the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (CCM) Chamber Music Competition. She was also a prize winner in the International Yellow Springs Chamber Music Competition, the Kankakee Concerto Competition, and the Ibla Grand Prize Competition in Italy.

As a chamber musician, Ko has performed and recorded with notable groups and soloists, including SymbiosisDuo, the Awea Duo, Intersection, and acclaimed violinist Gao Can. She has been the official collaborative pianist for the Young-Pyong International Clarinet Festival, the Henri Marteau International Violin Competition, the Mozarteum International Summer Academy, and the Great Wall International Music Academy.

Ko is a dedicated teacher whose students have received numerous honors and awards, including top prizes in Music Teachers National Association (MTNA) state and regional competitions and the prestigious National YoungArts Competition, along with featured performances on NPR's *From the Top*.

Ko maintains an active schedule as an adjudicator, presenter, and masterclass teacher. She has presented at numerous College Music Society regional and international conferences, the MTNA National Conference, and the National Group Piano and Piano Pedagogy Forum. She was also the conference artist for the Kentucky Music Teachers Association State Conference.

Ko received her D.M.A. in Piano Performance from CCM and her M.M. in Piano Performance from Indiana University. She currently serves on the piano faculty at Middle Tennessee State University.



## Ida Fadzillah Leggett

*Department of Sociology and Anthropology*

### **Promoted to Professor**

Ida Leggett received her Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and conducted her dissertation research on girl cultures in rural Thailand. At MTSU, she has continued her work with children and youth, as well as on the globalization of Southeast Asian societies. More recently she has expanded her research into the process of fieldwork and co-edited *Field Stories: Experiences, Affect, and the Lessons of Anthropology in the Twenty-First Century* (2021), a volume published by Lexington Press.

Leggett's publications include "Negotiating Dangerous Spaces: Encounters with Prostitution and AIDS in Northern Thailand," "Girls' Agency through Supermobility: The Power of Imagined Futures in Young Adult Fantasy Literature," and "'Better Childhoods' as Immigration Narrative (Not) Told Through Food." She is currently conducting digital ethnographic research on the influence of virtual worlds on girls' concepts of possible futures.

Currently the Anthropology program director, Leggett is also a teacher and an advisor. She was the Asian Studies Minor advisor for over 20 years and has been the interim director for the Women's and Gender Studies program. She has worked with undergraduates in a variety of roles, including mentoring 29 undergraduates on their research projects for their Honors theses, senior theses, URECA grants, or McNair projects. Leggett also recently designed and ran an MTSU study abroad course in summer 2025 bringing 10 students to Singapore, which combined her research and teaching interests into one program.



## Kathleen O'Connell

*Department of Art and Design*

### Promoted to Professor

Kathleen O'Connell holds an M.F.A. from the University of Wisconsin–Madison (2006) and joined the MTSU faculty in 2012. A printmaker, book artist, type and lettering enthusiast, mother, stepmother, organizer, academic, and former ferry boat deckhand, she brings a range of experiences to her creative work. Through

individual and collaborative projects, she produces nationally and internationally recognized work, provides meaningful student experiences, and engages diverse communities connected to her practice.

O'Connell has presented multiple solo exhibitions and participated in prestigious juried shows. Her work is held in collections including University of California Berkeley, UW–Madison, Vanderbilt, Yale, and Target Corporation. Her collaborative artist book *Mi Ciudad, Mi Hogar | My City, My Home* was featured in the Fifth International Printmaking Biennial in Lima, Peru. A solo exhibition of hand-lettering is currently on display at the Hamilton Wood Type and Printing Museum in Wisconsin.

She curated the artist book exhibition “Libro-Arte” at the Peruvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and presented on an artist’s book panel in Italy. Her research has been accepted through peer-review for the IMPACT 10 conference in Spain and national conferences such as the College Book Art Association and Mid-America Print Council. O'Connell has led workshops at internationally recognized venues, including the Penland and Women’s Studio Workshop.

A dedicated educator, O'Connell challenges students to create meaningful, well-crafted work. Her students have earned honors such as the Southern Graphics Council International Undergraduate Fellowship and acquisition by multiple university special collections. She advises Tulip Poplar Press, the student printmaking club, and is often cited by graduating seniors as someone who makes a real difference.

Nationally, O'Connell has held leadership roles with the College Book Art Association. At MTSU, she contributes to committees, curriculum development, and recruitment, and serves as coordinator for the Visual Arts B.A. and B.S. programs. She manages over 3,000 square feet of studio space, overseeing historic press maintenance, equipment, budgeting, and materials—her hands-on work, including press repair, exemplifies her dedication.



## Will Perkins

*School of Music*

### Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor

Will Perkins received his Doctor of Music from Indiana University and has been lauded by *Opera News* for his “sympathetic, forthright tenor.” A diverse performer, Perkins has enjoyed singing lead roles in opera, operetta, and musical theater. His love for varied repertoire was also the subject of his dissertation, “Incorporating Musical Theater in the Classical Voice Studio,” which explores the benefits of the integration of this important American art form in singers’ personal and professional study for their artistic development as well as career sustainability in today’s market.

Perkins teaches applied voice and voice-related classes and directs the MTSU Opera Theater. The opera concerts he designs are unique and strive to make connections with the repertoire and current events to foster a stronger relationship between the music, the performers, and the audience. Additionally, Perkins has been sought after for his creative directing abilities by Indiana University Opera Theater, Sylvia McNair’s Opera Workshop, Tennessee Governor’s School for the Arts, and Brigham Young University, where he serves as artistic director of the BYU Broadway Bootcamp.

Service has been a hallmark of Perkins’ academic career; he has chaired committees at the department and University levels in addition to college-level work. He has also helped to foster a successful partnership between the School of Music and the Department of Theatre and Dance resulting in biennial productions of musicals and an annual performance for the MTSU Arts Celebration.

Performance credits include recital and oratorio work in venues such as the Salt Lake Tabernacle and a recent European concert tour singing the role of Peter in *Lamb of God*. He was featured as the tenor soloist on the premiere recording of the chamber arrangement of Dan Forrest’s *Lux: The Dawn from on High*, as well as the world premiere recording of the opera *Vincent* on the Naxos American Classics label.



## Tony Rodriguez

*Department of Art and Design*

**Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor**

Cuban American illustrator and educator Tony Rodriguez teaches illustration at Middle Tennessee State University. His work infuses flat color with bold line to convey a sense of spontaneity and simplicity. Although the art is created digitally, it has the look of traditional pen and ink gestural, dynamic, and

expressionistic drawings.

His works have been recognized by the Society of Illustrators in New York, *Communication Arts*, NBCUniversal, *Creative Quarterly*, *3x3*, *American Illustration*, *Latin American Ilustración*, *The Illustration Academy*, *Visual Arts Passage*, *Illustration Age*, *Applied Arts*, *Entertainment Tonight*, the Society for News Design, Grey Cube Gallery, and the United Kingdom's World Illustration Awards.

U.S. and international clients include *Rolling Stone*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New Yorker*, *GQ*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, *The Village Voice*, *The New Republic*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Washington Post*, *The Dallas Morning News*, *American Cowboy* magazine, *Computer Arts* magazine, *WIRED*, *Country Weekly*, *DAS Magazine*, *Blow Up* magazine, *Yankee Magazine*, *Nurant Magazine*, *Ace Entertainment*, Facebook TV, *Humanities* magazine, *Rhapsody Magazine*, *Misc Magazine*, *Peeps Magazine*, *The London Evening Standard*, *BBC Focus Magazine*, *Milk X Magazine*, *Flaunt Magazine*, Black Key Group, Atlantic Records, Rock Ridge Music, The Beach Boys, and Red Light Management.

Rodriguez earned his M.F.A. at Marywood University in Pennsylvania and his B.F.A. at Savannah College of Art and Design.





## Nick Satinover

*Department of Art and Design*

### Promoted to Professor

Nick Satinover's creative work in print media, sound, and installation presents contrasting visual and audio phenomena, utilizing formal and material strategies to reconcile and examine ambivalent experiences in space, place, and time. This research comes from observation, travel, and investigations into the various tangles of abstraction that perforate daily life. Of particular interest are the roles of language, illusionistic space in two-dimensional images, and the materiality of ink on paper, magnetic audiotape, home recording equipment, and collage.

Satinover has been awarded artist-in-residency periods at the Frans Masereel Centre in Kasterlee, Belgium; the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in North Adams, Massachusetts; In Cahoots Residency in Petaluma, California; the College of DuPage in Chicago; and the Tofte Lake Center in Ely, Minnesota. His artwork has been the subject of solo, group, and juried exhibitions nationally in venues such as Print Center New York in New York City; Highpoint Center for Printmaking in Minneapolis; Artspace in Raleigh, North Carolina; College of the Sequoias in Visalia, California; and Remarque Gallery in Albuquerque, New Mexico. His work is represented by Manneken Press.

Known as a lithographer, Satinover's work has made him a sought-after visitor to other institutions such as Purdue University, University of Tennessee, Washington State University, and the University of Georgia. In his time at MTSU, Satinover has presented his research or conducted technical demonstrations at 15 national and international conferences.

Satinover has been named an instructor who makes a difference four times. He has mentored and supported over 20 students in the completion of their thesis exhibitions since 2014, assisting several in their entry into graduate programs. Along with colleague Kathleen O'Connell, he serves as faculty advisor to Tulip Poplar Press, the student printmaking organization.

Satinover has been awarded a Non-Instructional Assignment Grant for spring 2026, during which he will complete two artist residencies and a solo exhibition of new work.



## Lauren Shouse

*Department of Theatre and Dance*

### Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor

Lauren Shouse holds an M.A. in Performance Studies from the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill and an M.F.A. in Theatre Directing from Northwestern University. She is the 2024 recipient of the MTSU CLA Faculty Creative Activity Award.

Shouse is an active freelance director and new play dramaturg. She has directed 10 productions with Nashville Repertory Theatre (our region's flagship professional theatre) including *Waitress*; *POTUS*; *The Cake*; *Every Brilliant Thing*; *Avenue Q*; *Rapture*, *Blister*, *Burn*; *Superior Donuts*; and *A Christmas Story*. She currently serves as Nashville Repertory Theatre's artistic advisor and has served as director and dramaturg for its Ingram New Works Project. She recently devised and directed the world premiere of Nate Eppler's highly acclaimed *Human Resources* with Nashville Story Garden and Oz Arts Nashville. She has been nominated for best director of a play or musical multiple times by Broadway World Nashville. She has also directed *The Wolves* (upcoming), *Our Town*, *The Ruminants* (part of the national College Collaboration Project), *Sense and Sensibility*, *Fun Home*, *Ride the Cyclone*, and *Everybody* for MTSU's Center Stage Series. In 2021, she co-created Play Space—a URECA and Tennessee Arts Commission grant-supported new play development workshop—which commissioned *The Willows* by playwright Sharyn Rothstein.

Prior to joining MTSU faculty, Shouse was the associate artistic director at Chicago's Northlight Theatre and directed over 15 productions in the Chicago area. She was nominated for the Joseph Jefferson Award for best director for her work on *The Cake* at Rivendell Theatre. She has also worked with Steppenwolf Theatre, Goodman Theatre, Lookingglass Theatre, Route 66, The Gift Theatre, Chicago Dramatists, and Raven Theatre.

Shouse has advised multiple URECA grant student projects in directing and new play development. She serves as an advisor to the Department of Theatre and Dance's Student Success Series. She serves on Faculty Senate and is the theatre division chair for Governor's School for the Arts. Shouse is an associate member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society.



## Jennifer Sterling Snodgrass

*School of Music*

**Tenured**

Jennifer Snodgrass is the new director of the School of Music. Previously, she served as director of the School of Music at Lipscomb University (2022–25) and director of graduate studies and professor of Music Theory at Appalachian State (2005–22). She holds degrees from the University of Maryland (Ph.D., Music Theory),

University of Tennessee (M.M., Music Theory), and Meredith College (B.M., Vocal Performance).

Snodgrass is an accomplished author. She was a co-author of *Fundamentals of Music Theory* (Pearson, 2012, 2019) and sole author of *Contemporary Musicianship: Analysis and the Artist* (Oxford University Press, 2015, 2020). Her latest research endeavor, *Teaching Music Theory: New Voices and Approaches* (Oxford University Press, 2020), focuses on pedagogical approaches in music theory and aural skills and is used in universities and conservatories nationwide.

Her research has been published in numerous journals including *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy Online*, *Sacred Music*, *Music Theory Online*, *College Music Symposium*, and the *Music Educators Journal*. She maintains an active presentation schedule at national meetings of the Society for Music Theory, College Music Society, and the National Association of Schools of Music, and is an active contributor to higher education conversations through *Inside Higher Ed*.

Snodgrass has received numerous awards for excellence in undergraduate education, including the University of North Carolina Board of Governors Excellence in Teaching Award, Microsoft Teaching with Technology Grant, Plemmons Leadership Medallion, Outstanding Professor Award from Appalachian Student Government Association, and the College Music Society Innovations in Technology and Teaching Award. She was named Faculty of Distinction at Appalachian State, was a quarter finalist for the Grammy Foundation Music Educator Award, and most recently received the Bledsoe Faculty Excellence Award in Humanities in the Arts from Lipscomb University.

She currently serves as co-director of the Gail Boyd de Stwolinski Center for Music Theory Pedagogy and is the executive editor of the *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy*. Snodgrass leads workshops at K–12 and university levels and serves as a lead evaluator for the National Association of Schools of Music.



## Amanda Swenson

*Department of English*

### **Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor**

Amanda Swenson received her Ph.D. in Linguistics from Massachusetts Institute of Technology and taught linguistics in the Boston area prior to coming to MTSU.

A dedicated teacher in both in-person and online classrooms, Swenson teaches general education writing and literature courses, upper-division grammar and linguistics classes, and graduate courses in Old English language as well as literature and linguistics. She has especially enjoyed the opportunities at MTSU to expand her teaching range. In collaboration with colleagues, she helped develop the English Language Linguistics concentration within MTSU's English major. She has mentored three undergraduate URECA grant projects and has been recognized five times as an instructor who makes a difference in the lives of students.

Swenson's theoretical linguistics research has focused mostly on understanding verbs and how they work in different languages. She has published the results of her work on the South Indian language Malayalam, including her 2019 book which provides the first major study in the generative tradition of the morphosyntax/semantics of Malayalam verbs, in a number of international venues. She has presented her theoretical research on Malayalam in international venues in India, Norway, Germany, and the U.S. and her work on "a-prefixed" verbs (e.g., "I'm a-comin'") in Appalachian English in regional and local venues. Her applied linguistic research has focused on linguistic tools for writing pedagogy, and she has presented it in India and in regional and local venues.

Swenson has served on curriculum committees across the University (English general education, English graduate, CLA, and undergraduate), as well as the CLA Academic Appeals and Grade Appeals committees. At the department level, she has served on the Online, Graduate Admissions, and Undergraduate Assessment committees. She has provided additional service to the English Ph.D. program by serving as a preliminary examiner and as a judge for a departmental writing award. She has served the profession by reviewing for a number of international linguistics conferences and journals.



## Jade Treadwell

*Department of Theatre and Dance*

### Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor

Jade Treadwell is an associate professor and director of dance in the Department of Theatre and Dance. A performer, choreographer, and scholar, she brings over a decade of experience in dance performance and education, having worked with StaibDance,

ClancyWorks, and Duncan Dance South, and as a freelance artist across Atlanta; Washington, D.C.; Tennessee; and Florida. She holds B.F.A. and M.F.A. degrees in Dance Performance and Choreography from Florida State University, where she was a member of the Dance Repertory Theatre under the direction of Lynda Davis and worked with renowned artists including Dan Wagoner, Gerri Houlihan, Susan Marshall, and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar.

As a choreographer, Treadwell draws inspiration from African American cultural history, community, and spirituality, and the central role of women in these traditions. Her work *Visceral Undercurrent* has been featured in museum exhibitions and national dance conferences. At MTSU, she curates mainstage dance concerts for the MTSU Dance Theatre company and mentors student choreographers for MTSU Dance Student Gala production and creative projects through the MTSU Honors College and awarded Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities grants. She has revised the introduction to dance course to align with True Blue Core specifications.

Treadwell teaches across technique and theory courses, integrating ballet, modern, jazz, and tap vocabularies. Throughout her tenure-track journey, she has been recognized for her influence and commitment to making a difference in the lives of students seven times.

With a commitment to service, she has served on the Public Service Grants and Undergraduate Curriculum committees, chair and faculty search committees, and those supporting the advancement and operation of Theatre and Dance programs. Beyond the University, she is a member of the International Association of Blacks in Dance, serves on the Research Committee for the National Dance Education Organization, and is a board member of the Tennessee Association of Dance. Treadwell holds an M.S. in Exercise Science and is pursuing a Ph.D. in Health and Human Performance. Her research centers on injury prevention protocols and movement screening methods to support dancer wellness and performance longevity.

Through her interdisciplinary teaching, choreographic work, and national service, Treadwell advances an inclusive and wellness-focused model of dance education that prepares students for professional dance and dance-related careers in the performing arts, education, and health. Her leadership continues to elevate MTSU Dance as a vital site of training, research, and creative expression in the region.



## Odie Blackmon

*Department of Recording Industry*

### Promoted to Professor

Odie Blackmon is the coordinator of the Commercial Songwriting program for Middle Tennessee State University's Department of Recording Industry. He has raised \$80,000 in funding while directing the planning and building of MTSU's new Songwriting Center.

Blackmon's songs have been recorded and performed by artists including Lee Ann Womack, John Legend, and Martina McBride. He has written No. 1 hit singles for Gary Allan and George Strait, resulting in over 31 million units in combined sales. He was named *Billboard's* No. 1 Hot Country Music Songwriter in 2005 and lauded for his Grammy-nominated, Country Music Association Single of the Year, "I May Hate Myself in the Morning." Blackmon has worked as a talent consultant for *American Idol* and *America's Got Talent* and is currently an artists and repertoire consultant for Thirty Tigers record label and Grammy-winning producer Frank Liddell.

In 2021, he was honored with MTSU's Outstanding Teaching Award. Previously, he received the True Blue Citation of Distinction for Achievement in Education from the MTSU Alumni Association (2020), the Distinguished Creative Activity Award from the MTSU Foundation (2017), and the Outstanding Faculty Award from MTSU's Experiential Learning Scholars Program (2016). He received the Experiential Education Rising Leader Award from the National Society of Experiential Education in 2018.

Blackmon has served on the Mechanical Licensing Collective Dispute Resolution Committee, as a board member of the Music and Entertainment Industry Educators Association and the Association of Popular Music Educators, and is a Leadership Music alum.

His current research interests are the effects of song and genre on synchronized interpretive water aerobic dance in rural populations. In his free time, Blackmon enjoys watching the *Gilmore Girls* series, sauna meditation, and listening to surf music instrumentals.



## Sally Ann Cruikshank

*School of Journalism and Strategic Media*

### Promoted to Professor

Sally Ann Cruikshank received her Ph.D. from the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University, following an award-winning career as a television news producer in Pittsburgh and Miami.

Cruikshank's research spans the globe, as she has traveled to several countries to conduct research on press freedom in post-conflict and post-genocide societies. She has conducted field research in Rwanda, Ethiopia, Palestine, and Myanmar (Burma) and published in peer-reviewed journals, including *Journalism Studies*, *African Journalism Studies*, *International Communication Research Journal*, and *Newspaper Research Journal*. Cruikshank has also conducted extensive research on artificial intelligence, mobile technology, and social media. Her research on social media has been published in the *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* and *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*. Cruikshank has also conducted workshops on journalism around the world for both students and working journalists. In 2019, she was the keynote speaker at a national conference on "Media Literacy—Overcoming the Digital Challenge" in Malta, and last year, she was invited to participate on a panel at the "Journalism and the Politics of Narrating African Suffering" conference at Harvard Law School.

Cruikshank teaches a variety of journalism courses, including digital media practices, social media (graduate level), mobile storytelling, and advanced reporting. She received the Ed Kimbrell Excellence in Journalism Teaching Award in 2021. Her second book, *Personal Branding for Journalists: A Guide to Making Social Media Work for You*, is forthcoming.

Cruikshank is an active member of the graduate faculty and recently ended a three-semester term as Graduate Council chair. During her time at MTSU, she has served as chair or a committee member for 26 graduate students' research. She also co-authored the new Digital Media master's degree launching this fall. Last year, she participated in MTSU's Leadership on Deck Institute.





## Dan Eschenfelder

*School of Journalism and Strategic Media*

### Promoted to Professor

Dan Eschenfelder holds a Master of Arts in Liberal Arts from Middle Tennessee State University (2024) and a Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communications from Southern Illinois University (1996). With over 25 years of experience in broadcast news and production, he served in roles including news photojournalist, bureau

chief, chief videographer, and news director in television markets in Missouri, Illinois, and Florida.

Eschenfelder is passionate about teaching students the skills they need to succeed in a broadcast career. His hands-on instruction has led many of his students to win numerous awards. He is the co-creator of Middle Tennessee News and MTN Sports, both nationally recognized and award-winning student broadcast organizations. He also trains students in sports broadcasting, including play-by-play announcing, with student work featured on ESPN, CUSA-TV, NFHS Network, and University athletic livestreams.

Alongside his wife, Associate Professor Christine Eschenfelder, he leads annual study abroad programs, where students have received national awards for travel reporting.

Before joining the faculty at Middle Tennessee State University as an instructor, Eschenfelder served as news director for GTN News, the CBS/NBC affiliate in Gainesville, Florida. He also spent more than eight years as chief videographer for the University of Florida's UF News Bureau.

His professional achievements include membership in the Phi Kappa Phi honor society and two prestigious Edward R. Murrow Awards for excellence. He has received multiple Telly Awards, a Communicator Award, an Addy, and the Golden CASE award. His work has appeared on major national platforms including *The Today Show*, *NBC Nightly News*, *Dateline*, *Good Morning America*, ESPN, CNN, and Fox News.

He is a member of several industry organizations, including the National Press Photographers Association, the National Association of Television Arts and Sciences, the Radio Television Digital News Association, and the Tennessee Association of Broadcasters. Eschenfelder also served for six years in the U.S. Army Reserves, achieving the rank of sergeant.



## Robert Gordon

*Department of Media Arts*

### Promoted to Professor

Robert Gordon earned his B.F.A. in Broadcasting and M.B.A. in Marketing from the University of Cincinnati and has been a faculty member at MTSU since 2007. He currently serves as interim chair of the Department of Media Arts and teaches multi-camera television program production.

A national television producer for over 40 years, Gordon has produced a wide range of entertainment programming for networks including Cinemax, PBS, CMT, TNN, GMC, The Family Channel, Time Warner, and syndication. He currently produces and directs *The Songwriters* series for PBS stations, recorded at MTSU.

At MTSU, Gordon has taught live-event television program production, including sporting events, television concerts, series, live events, and award shows. His students have produced live sporting events for ESPN+, as well as concerts and performances for Bonnaroo (broadcast on Hulu), the Nashville Symphony, Capitol Records, and professional acts at the Franklin Theatre.

In fall 2023, Gordon received the MTSU President's Silver Column Award for his work serving students. He is the only MTSU professor to have received the EXL Outstanding Faculty Award three times, and in March 2024, he was honored with MTSU's Conference USA Faculty Achievement Award.

Gordon has served on the Faculty Senate for eight years and was president for 2021–22 term. He has also held leadership roles in the Broadcast Education Association (BEA) for six years. Additional service includes time on the Gospel Music Association Hall of Fame Committee and founding the Nashville chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences (Emmys).

In April 2024, Gordon co-authored the 13th edition of the textbook *Video Production: Disciplines and Techniques*, published by Focal Press. This widely used international textbook has been a media education standard since 1978. He has also published several papers in the *Journal of Media Education*, focusing on teaching multi-camera television production, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. Two of his papers highlight his work teaching television production at Bonnaroo.

Throughout his tenure at MTSU, Gordon has volunteered for a myriad of opportunities in teaching, service, creative/scholarly activities, and leadership. He plans to continue to do so for many years to come.



## Tom Neff

*Department of Media Arts*

### Promoted to Professor

Tom Neff has been in the motion picture business for over 35 years, with experience in all aspects of the business. He has won many national and international honors, including an Oscar nomination, an Emmy win, and an Emmy nomination. A member of both the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences

and the Television Academy, Neff has worked in every film format from HD to 35mm to IMAX.

Neff created and founded Documentary Channel, the nation's first cable network airing documentaries exclusively, and is relaunching it as a streaming network.

He has directed such talent as Gregory Peck, Ned Beatty, Hal Holbrook, Kris Kristofferson, Ashley Judd, and Lloyd Bridges, and has interviewed many others—Lauren Bacall, Dolly Parton, Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings, and Merle Haggard to name just a few.

His last documentary, *Mr. Temple and the Tigerbelles*, was an HBO documentary finalist at the Martha's Vineyard African American Film Festival; winner of the Broadcast Education Association Diversity and Inclusion Creative Award; and one of four nominated finalists at Spain's FICA International Athletics Film Festival. This year, Neff completed a 21-year documentary project, *Clemmie G.: Unfiltered*, currently on the festival circuit.

Other works have included producing, writing, and directing the feature film *Running Mates*, which was distributed worldwide by New World Pictures; the Emmy-winning documentary *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Journey of Romeo Dallaire*; *TVA: Built for the People*; Oscar nominated *Red Grooms: Sunflower in a Hothouse*; the IMAX film *Our Country*; *Beatrice Wood: Mama of Dada*; *Louise Dahl-Wolfe: Painting with Light*; *Herb Alpert: Music For Your Eyes*, which screened at Lincoln Center; *Johnny Berlin 2*; the four-hour jazz series *Icons Among Us*, which screened at Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York; the shorter *emPOWERed* for the EPA and *Speed Dreams* for Exxon; and many others.

Neff's films have shown at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York's Whitney Museum of American Art, Lincoln Center, the Smithsonian, and the New York Paley Center; on PBS' *American Masters*; and at many other venues and festivals. He has been a panelist or guest speaker or given masterclasses at such festivals and schools as Sundance, Hot Docs, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Real Screen, International Documentary Association, University of Southern California, and New York University.



## **John Ouellette**

*Department of Recording Industry*

### **Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor**

John Ouellette earned his Bachelor of Music from the University of Massachusetts, Lowell. He has worked in the music industry in Nashville for more than 30 years. Ouellette worked in music publishing for over 10 years, handling every aspect of music publishing administration—from filing copyright applications, interacting with foreign sub-publishers, and negotiating and issuing licenses, to processing royalties and drafting and negotiating songwriter agreements.

Since graduating from law school and passing the Tennessee Bar Exam in 2006, he has been a practicing entertainment attorney. He represents record labels, publishing companies, managers, concert promoters, artists, songwriters, and producers.

Ouellette has been active in University service, serving on the Faculty Senate and the Faculty Senate Steering Committee, among others. He has also served on several department and college committees, as well as being the faculty advisor for the MTSU student chapter of Nashville Songwriters International.



## Denise Shackelford

*Department of Recording Industry*

### **Tenured and Promoted to Associate Professor**

Denise Shackelford received her Juris Doctor from Nashville School of Law and her undergraduate degree from Belmont University. Following over two decades in the Nashville music community, including stints at a record label and artist management firm, she joined the

Department of Recording Industry in the College of Media and Entertainment in fall 2019.

Shackelford has been deeply involved in academic leadership and curriculum development. She has previously chaired the University's Undergraduate Curriculum Committee and the Faculty Financial Aid Appeals Committee. In addition, she also served (or currently serves) on the college's Curriculum Committee and Career Development Committee, the department's Recording Industry Scholarship Committee, and multiple faculty search committees. Her work reflects a sustained commitment to program improvement and student success.

She was involved in the creation and development of the University's Master of Science in Legal Studies program, an interdisciplinary graduate degree developed in collaboration with the Nashville School of Law. She contributed legal and curricular expertise to its design and launch, helping bridge the gap between academic study and legal practice.

Her teaching focuses on the intersection of law, business, and media in the entertainment industry. She is the co-author of a peer-reviewed article in the *Music and Entertainment Industry Educators Association (MEIEA) Journal* examining the use of product placement in rap music. In 2024, she presented research on the structure and pedagogical value of student-run record labels at the MEIEA Annual Conference, reflecting her active engagement in national academic dialogue. She also served on the Board of Directors of MEIEA, helping shape national standards and best practices for music business education.

She serves as faculty advisor to two student organizations: Match Records, MTSU's student-run label, and Urban Entertainment Society, a campus group dedicated to the development of urban music and culture. Through these roles, she supports student creativity, entrepreneurship, and industry-facing experiences.

Outside the University, Shackelford maintains an active legal practice through her firm, Shackelford Entertainment Law, where she advises clients on a range of entertainment and intellectual property matters. She serves as counsel for the Country Radio Broadcasters, a nonprofit trade organization supporting country music and broadcast radio.

Shackelford's career reflects a commitment to mentorship, interdisciplinary learning, and bridging the gap between academic instruction and professional preparation in the creative industries.



## Allie Sultan

*Department of Media Arts*

### Promoted to Professor

Allie Sultan is an award-winning independent filmmaker whose work spans narrative fiction, documentary, and experimental modes. Her films have been screened and won awards at over 60 domestic and international film festivals.

A graduate of the M.F.A. in Cinema program at San Francisco State University, Sultan has worked as a picture and sound editor with some of the San Francisco Bay area's finest film production companies and organizations, including Francis Ford Coppola's American Zoetrope, ZAP Zoetrope Aubry Productions, Berkeley Sound Artists, the Bay Area Video Coalition, and Tippett Studio.

Sultan has taught filmmaking and video editing at Vanderbilt University, the Art Institute of Tennessee–Nashville, and the Bay Area Video Coalition. She is a board member of the National Association of Television Arts and Sciences Midsouth chapter. She has served as a board member for the University Film and Video Association, FilmNashville, and Women in Film and Television–Nashville. Sultan is currently leading the development of an M.F.A. in Film and Television at MTSU, which would be the first program of its kind at a public university in Tennessee.

Sultan directed, co-produced, and edited *Incognita's Infamous Adventures*, an award-winning musical superhero web series that is streaming on Amazon Prime. Her most recent project, "We Do It All: MTSU's College of Media and Entertainment," a 60-second commercial spot, was broadcast nationally on CMT and has won numerous awards, including an Emmy for Best Commercial Spot and three Silver Telly awards, including an award for her work in directing.

Dedicated to cultivating the next generation of independent filmmakers, Sultan is proud to be promoted to professor at her alma mater—MTSU.



## **Gina Johnson**

*Department of University Studies*

### **Promoted to Master Instructor**

Gina Johnson is pursuing her doctorate in Assessment, Learning, and Student Success at Middle Tennessee State University, where she received her master's degree in Math Education.

She began working in higher education in 2001 at Columbia State Community College as a math tutor and a few years later as the coordinator of tutoring in the Teaching and Learning Center. She was also an academic advisor for Columbia State's new student orientation and for all athletes, and an adjunct for developmental mathematics and study skills classes. After graduating in 2011 with her M.S.T. degree from MTSU, she was hired in University Studies. Soon after, she took on the role of coordinator for math tutoring. She also served on the committee that helped organize centralized tutoring, now known as the Tutoring Spot in the James E. Walker Library.

Johnson received the award for Outstanding Non-Traditional Student Faculty Support from the Student Government Association and June Anderson Center for 2014–15. She has also been recognized by graduates as an instructor who makes a difference. She was recognized as an influential faculty member in 2023 by Phi Kappa Phi.

Johnson continues to support students in various programs on campus such as MTSU's notable Scholars Academy and S.T.A.R.S, and Math Game Night sponsored by Engage and University Studies. She has been a faculty advisor for the MTSU chapter of Gamma Beta Phi honor society since 2018. This chapter has been recognized by the national organization as a Distinguished Chapter in 2019 and Exemplary Chapter for the past five years, 2020–25.



