



**March 2026**

## From the College

“Be not afraid of going slowly; be afraid only of standing still.”  
— Chinese proverb

We are through the coldest part of the winter, and I appreciate everyone who helped during our snow and ice remote work. I continue to be amazed by how thoughtful and supportive so many of you are in taking care of our students.

A huge thank you as well to everyone who helped make the ASCEND Character Education Conference such a success. I am especially grateful to Jeff Byford and Dustin Hornbeck for leading such engaging breakout sessions.

I do have a few updates regarding personnel in the College. As many of you have already heard, we suspended the search for an Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs to allow us to commit our resources to current faculty and faculty needs. This decision allows us to reinstate the Faculty Research Grant Program. Steve Zanskas will be in communication with you very soon about that opportunity. We are also committing to a graduate student research paper competition at both the master’s and doctoral levels. Although we had fantastic candidates for the position, we will explore other options to support the work of the College through a different alignment of responsibilities.

On a related note, we had paused the Recruiter position search until the Associate Dean role was filled. Since that search has been suspended, we have now restarted the recruiter search and hope to have someone on board in the near future.

As we enter awards season, I am pleased to announce that we are implementing a new set of Alumni Awards. A group of five area alumni will serve as our selection committee as we recognize the Distinguished Career in Education Alumni Award, Outstanding Alumni Award, Outstanding Early Career Alumni Award and the Distinguished Friend of the College Award. More information on how to nominate individuals for these awards will be shared soon. Finally, please remember to provide feedback on the academic structure of the College through the link below.

[Academic Program Task Force feedback form.](#)

Wishing all of you a safe, happy and restful Spring Break.

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## Personnel

Rob Thornton, our IT guru, has left campus for another position in the City. IT Services is currently conducting a search to replace him with the College of Education.

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## Happenings: What's Going On This Month



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**March 3:** Tea On Tuesday  
Join the Dean's Office for a Social Hour  
Ball Hall 215-B | 3:00-4:00 PM  
RSVP | Any Wilson | [lwilson10@memphis.edu](mailto:lwilson10@memphis.edu)

**March 4:** Research Series | Community-Engaged Research Panel  
Ball Hall 209 | Noon-1:00

**March 9-15:** Spring Break | Monday-Sunday

**March 19-20:** Guest Scholar Visit | Dr. Odis Johnson Jr.  
The College of Education will host nationally recognized scholar Dr. Odis Johnson Jr. for a two-day campus visit featuring presentations and individual research consultations. One session will be open to the University community

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## Research & Scholarship Highlights



## College of Education Awarded AI for Tennessee Grant Supporting K–12 Learning

**MEMPHIS, Tenn.**- The University of Memphis College of Education (COE) has received an \$18,000 grant through the AI for Tennessee initiative to explore how artificial intelligence can support teaching and learning in K–12 classrooms.

The project focuses on working alongside teachers to examine how AI can be used to support seniors' experiential learning projects in ways that address real classroom challenges and strengthen instruction.

[Read more about their research »](#)

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## **CREP Faculty Lead UofM's Role in NIH-Funded Health Care Pathways Research**

MEMPHIS, Tenn. –The University of Memphis College of Education is participating as a research partner on a multi-year, NIH-funded project led by the University of Tennessee Health Science Center.

At UofM, the project is led by Mary Randolph-Frye, faculty member in the Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP), and focuses on strengthening pathways into health care careers through lab and data science experiences. The project runs through June 2026.

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## Dr. Chrisann Schiro-Geist and Patrick Krolik on Caseloads in Vocational Rehabilitation

**MEMPHIS, Tenn.**- Dr. Chrisann Schiro-Geist, director of the University of Memphis Institute on Disability (UMID), and Patrick Krolik, co-director of UMID and affiliated with the College of Education, recently published a study in the Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling.

The research examines the relationship between vocational rehabilitation counselors' caseload sizes and client employment outcomes at program completion. Findings indicate that counselors with moderate caseloads achieved higher rates of successful and high-quality employment outcomes, while higher caseloads were associated with lower employment rates. The study highlights the importance of caseload management and training to support effective counseling services and improve employment outcomes.

[Read more about their research »](#)

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## Dr. Huan Gao on Digital Literacy in Early Childhood

**MEMPHIS, Tenn.** – Dr. Huan Gao, Assistant Professor in Instruction and Curriculum Leadership, recently published a qualitative study examining digital literacy practices among elementary-age children in Australian homes. The research highlights how socio-economic and cultural factors influence access to digital resources and shape learning opportunities, underscoring the importance of equitable approaches to digital literacy in education.

[Read more about Dr. Gao's research »](#)

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For more research publications, check out the @COE LinkedIn and Facebook page



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## COE Community Highlights

### OTECP Residency Winners | February 2026



**Hannah Ringold**  
Student Teacher of the Month



**Marcia White**  
Supervisor of the Month



**Savannah Heck-Howard**  
Mentor Teacher of the Month

### Student | Mentor | Supervisor of the Month: February 2026

**MEMPHIS, Tenn.** – The College of Education Office of Teacher Education and Clinical Practice (OTECP) is proud to announce the recipients of Student Teacher, Mentor Teacher and Supervisor of the Month for February 2026: Hannah Ringold, Savannah Heck-Howard and Marcia White.

[Read more about the February residency award winners.»](#)



## Susan Mascari Receives Tiger Spotlight Award

**MEMPHIS, Tenn.** –Susan K. Mascari, academic services coordinator in Counseling, Educational Psychology and Research (CEPR), was recently recognized with a Tiger Spotlight Award for her outstanding service to students.

Susan was honored for her quick and thoughtful support in helping a student navigate course enrollment during the academic break. Her actions are a strong reminder of the important role staff play in supporting student success across the College of Education. Thank you, Susan, for your dedication and for the positive impact you make every day.





## College of Education Hosts ASCEND Conference Focused on Character and Leadership

**MEMPHIS, Tenn.** – The University of Memphis College of Education (COE) hosted its ASCEND conference on Feb. 17, bringing together faculty, researchers and education leaders to explore how character, intellectual development and leadership can strengthen student learning and responsible citizenship

[Read more about the ASCEND Conference »](#)

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## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



## CEPR Alumna Makenzie Perkins Advances Counseling and Student Support

Makenzie Perkins is a CEPR alumna whose work centers on supporting students through counseling and student-focused practice. Her experience reflects the College of Education's mission to prepare professionals who make a positive impact in schools and communities.

[Read more about Makenzie Perkins »](#)

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MEMPHIS

College of Education

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