

# *the* WESTTEXAN

A Publication of the West Texas A&M University Alumni Association // Summer 2024



## A SPIRITUAL OASIS *Reopens*

P. 4 ASSOCIATE DEGREES ADDED

P. 12 MAY GRADUATION

P. 24 TARGETING BEST AND BRIGHTEST



# the WEST TEXAN

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The West Texan is the official publication of the WT Alumni Association. The West Texas A&M University Alumni Association is a nonprofit corporation organized for the benefit of WT, a member of The Texas A&M University System. The WT Alumni Association is located in Buffalo Courts on the WT campus in Canyon, Texas.

Postage is paid at Amarillo, Texas. Postmaster: Send address changes to The West Texan, WT Alumni Association, WTAMU Box 60753, Canyon, Texas 79016 or visit [BuffAlum.com](http://BuffAlum.com) to update contact information.

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# EXECUTIVE TEAM LETTER



**Ronnie Hall** has had the opportunity to meet thousands of students and alumni in his 29 years of employment at West Texas A&M University. Ronnie is living his dream job of working with people who believe in the vision and mission of an incredible university. He began his career with WT in 1995, and through the years, he has been fortunate to meet faculty and staff who modeled servant leadership, creating in him a desire to do the same for students and alumni.

**Abby Waters** graduated from WT with her undergraduate degree in 2017 and master's in 2019. Throughout college, she worked for the University and, upon graduating, continued in a full-time capacity. In her various roles, she continually felt called to serve the students of WT and has loved the new adventure of serving the alumni. She is eager to continue finding ways to connect and engage alumni and find new and exciting ways to involve them in the ever-growing Buff family.

Dear Buffs,

The WT Alumni Association's goal is to connect you to WT and other WT Alumni. The University and the Alumni Association has various opportunities to attend WT events and engage with the Buff community near and far. Below are a few of the ways that you can be involved and make an impact for your University.

With the tragic Panhandle wildfires, we saw countless communities come together in support and generosity, the compassion matching the greatness of the tragedy. Many WT alumni and WT students live in the towns that were impacted, and we saw wonderful support for all those affected from WT, WT alumni, and the Panhandle. You can read more about the Panhandle wildfires, as well as how WT alumni can receive a replacement diploma on pg. 23.

Last year's Homecoming was a roaring success. With more than 20 events throughout the week leading up to an exciting Game Day, more than 10,000 people joined us on campus. Volunteers make WT Homecoming successful. WT alumni and friends stepped up and helped us get the word out by delivering Homecoming posters to 33 towns in the Texas Panhandle. If you would like to volunteer, contact our office today! Mark your calendars: WT Homecoming is set for Oct. 12.

This spring, we launched our Buff Owned Businesses Directory, an online list of businesses that are owned by WT alumni. There are now more than 160 businesses listed on the website. Our hope is that the Buff community will support these Buff Owned Businesses. You can view the list of businesses and register your business by visiting [BuffAlum.com/buff-businesses](http://BuffAlum.com/buff-businesses).

Many great things are happening with West Texas A&M University and the WT Alumni Association. Please feel free to reach out to us for ways to be involved.

Have a blessed day & Go Buffs!

*Ronnie Hall* *Abby Waters*



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WT Alumni Association

## New Thunder Rolls into WT

The WT Herdsmen have begun training Thunder XV—nicknamed “Doc”—while Thunder XIV continues his duties as the University’s live buffalo mascot.

“‘Mater,’ as we’ve nicknamed our current Thunder, is still a pretty sweet guy, but he weighs 1,340 pounds and is continuing to grow,” said **Dr. Kelly Jones ‘18**, clinical assistant professor of agriculture and adviser of the Herdsmen, Thunder’s student handlers. “At some point, it becomes a safety issue, so we put out feelers for any orphaned calves that we could adopt.”

Dr. Charles “Doc” Addington, a bison producer in Brownwood, offered one of his calves that had been abandoned by its mother, and the young calf—nicknamed both in honor of his previous owner and for a character in the Pixar film “Cars,” like its predecessor—arrived at the Thunder Lodge pen in late April.

“The plan is to let him grow over the next 12 to 18 months and slowly start phasing him in,” Jones said. “Bringing him to events while he’s young helps with his training, because he’s exposed to lots of people and noises.”

Thunder, one of only two live buffalo mascots in the United States, is run onto First United Field by the Herdsmen during WT football games at Bain-Schaeffer Buffalo Stadium. He also makes a variety of other community appearances.

## WT Tuition Waiver Expanded

Many part-time WT employees and their families may now be eligible for half-off tuition and mandatory fees.

In a March 13 memo, WT President Walter V. Wendler announced that, beginning with this year’s Summer 1 session, the University’s Employee and Family Tuition and Fees Reduction program also would apply to employees who work 50 percent or more of the hours of a full-time employee. Their spouses and dependent children also are eligible.

The waiver program—which launched in May 2022—already is considered to be among the most generous offered by any state college or university in Texas or The Texas A&M University System. About 150 employees or their dependents have taken advantage of the waiver since its launch.

The discount applies to both baccalaureate or graduate degrees, but not to certificate programs, non-degree applicable courses or second bachelor’s degrees. It also does not cover course materials, housing or meal costs.

## Nursing School Renamed

**Joe and Laura ‘84 Street** joined with WT officials during a March 7 press conference to announce their \$2.5 million gift to establish the Laura and Joe Street School of Nursing in WT’s College of Nursing and Health Sciences. The gift was the largest ever made by the Amarillo couple.

Laura Street earned a Bachelor of Science in nursing and a family nurse practitioner master’s degree at WT soon after the couple made Amarillo their home in 1984. Laura Street also is a 2018 WT Distinguished Alumna.

In addition to providing a \$500,000 endowment for operational support of the Street School of Nursing, the gift will provide \$1.4 million in scholarships and graduate assistantships, and \$600,000 to name two new professorships.

## WEST TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

### faculty and staff accomplishments

WT faculty and staff members have received awards, published works and been elected to serve in various capacities.

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Fifteen West Texas A&M University faculty members were recognized for outstanding performance by being awarded tenure and/or promotion for the 2024-2025 academic year.

This total includes six faculty members awarded tenure and promotion to associate professor and nine promotions in academic rank to professor. WT’s recommendations were announced at the annual spring address, which also included recognition of the retirements of 10 WT faculty members.

Award of tenure and promotion to rank of associate professor: **Dr. Nancy Garcia ‘09**, associate professor of communication; **Dr. Lorna Strong**, associate professor of sports and exercise sciences; **Dr. Ray Barbosa**, associate professor of education; **Dr. Adam Weiss**, associate professor of education; **Dr. Audrey Meador ‘10**, associate professor of mathematics; and **Dr. Vinu Unnikrishnan**, associate professor of engineering.

Promotion to professor: **Dr. Bridget Guerrero ‘02**, professor of agricultural business; **Dr. Tim Steffens**, professor of rangeland resource management; **Dr. Leslie Ramos Salazar**, professor of business communication; **Jon Revett ‘09**, professor of art; **Dr. Betty Coneway ‘06**, professor of education; **Dr. Janet Hindman ‘75**, professor of education; **Dr. Erick Butler**, professor of engineering; **Dr. Nathan Howell**, professor of engineering; and **Dr. Kenneth Leitch**, professor of engineering.

Retirees include **Dr. Rajan Alex**, professor of computer science; **Dr. Helen Blackburn ‘82**, Yvonne Franklin Chair in Music; **Sandra Davidson ‘78**, instructor of Spanish; **Raylene Dysert ‘06**, instructor of English; **Dr. Robert Hansen**, Regents professor of music and former director of the School of Music; **Dr. David Parker**, associate professor and extension specialist in water engineering; **Dr. John Pipkin**, Regents professor of agriculture, Paul Engler Professor of Animal Science and director of WT’s Equine Industry Program; **Dr. Daniel Seth**, professor of mathematics; **Dr. David Sissom**, Regents professor biology and former department head of Life, Earth and Environmental Sciences and Chemistry and Physics; and **Dr. Susan Martin Tariq**, professor of percussion.

.....

Ten West Texas A&M University faculty members earned more than \$25,000 in grants through the University’s Office of Academic Affairs. The development grants will finance travel and professional development for the faculty members. More than \$14,000 in additional funds were awarded this year.

Faculty members earning grants include: **Dr. Carolyn Baum ‘03**, ‘10, assistant professor of communication studies and director of the Attebury Honors Program; **Sarah Beckham-Turner**, assistant professor of voice; **Dr. Priscella Correa ‘12**, Baptist Community Services Professor of Nursing; **Dr. Vanessa Fiaud**, associate professor of sports and exercise sciences; **Dr. Traci Fredman**, assistant professor of speech and hearing sciences; **Alee Friemel ‘12**, Northwest Texas Healthcare System/Eunice King Professor of Nursing; **Dr. Collette Loftin ‘89**, Nancy and John Kritser Professor of Nursing and interim department head; **Dr. Sohee Kim**, assistant professor of criminal justice; **Lisa Robinson ‘13**, instructor of nursing; **Dr. Sarah Rushing**, assistant professor of piano; and **Kerrie Young ‘08**, instructor of nursing.

**Dr. Brock Blaser**, professor of plant science and assistant department head of the Department of Agricultural Sciences, and **Dr. Rick Haasl**, assistant professor of sports and exercise science and associate dean of the College of Nursing and Health Sciences, also earned an academic administrative development grant to attend the Harvard Management Development Program.

.....

**Dr. Dan Peterson** began his duties June 20 as WT’s new dean of the Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Art and Humanities.

“Fine arts and humanities should be right at a university’s core, and I see so many opportunities here,” Peterson said. “The nurturing of high-demand skills in creativity, innovation, and interaction for all WT students through this college is tremendous.” Peterson was previously the dean of the College of Health, Arts and Sciences at Oregon Institute of Technology.

He fills the shoes of Dr. Jessica Mallard, who retired at the end of the 2023-2024 academic year. Mallard, who will move to Costa Rica with husband Chuck, joined 2002 and was named dean in 2012. A scholarship fund in her name has been established by the Office of Academic Affairs.



**Dr. Maxine De Butte** is WT's first Twanna M. Powell Fellow and will receive a \$50,000 award to further her research into the effects of psychiatric medications on developing brains. De Butte is a professor of psychology and associate department head in the Department of Psychology, Sociology and Social Work in the Terry B. Rogers College of Education and Social Sciences. As a Powell Fellow, De Butte will receive \$50,000, plus additional University resources, to use at her discretion to further her research into the possible cognitive effects adult psychiatric medications may have on pediatric patients, whose brains are still developing. She will use animal models for the studies. The Powell Fellow Program was established via a gift from philanthropists Twanna and Don Powell. The Powell Fellow program is open to professors across WT's six Colleges.

• • • • •

Several WT faculty and staff members were honored at a year-end ceremony held by the Office of Academic Affairs.

The **Department of Sports and Exercise Sciences** and its 12 faculty members were given the Assessment and Assurance of Learning Award for its work in evaluating the effectiveness of its programs to ensure undergraduate and graduate students in the field obtain the absolute best education and practical experiences.

**Kelly Hoppe**, associate director and head of outreach and instruction for Cornette Library, was given the Academic Affairs Staff Excellence Award.

**Don Lefevre '79**, associate professor of music and director of bands in the School of Music in the Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Arts and Humanities, was presented the Instructional Excellence Award.

**Dr. Audrey Meador '05, '10**, assistant professor of mathematics in the College of Engineering, earned the Professional Service Excellence Award.

**Dr. Barbara Wang**, the Edwards Professor of Finance and Banking in the Amarillo National Bank School of Accounting, Economics and Finance in WT's Paul and Virginia Engler College of Business, won the Intellectual Contributions Excellence Award.

**Dr. Jenifer Kunz**, professor of sociology in the Department of Psychology, Sociology and Social Work in WT's Terry B. Rogers College of Education and Social Sciences, was presented the Distinguished Innovation in Teaching Award.

**Dr. Ty Lawrence '97**, professor of animal science and Caviness Davis Chair in Meat Science in the Paul Engler College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences, won the Distinguished Graduate Faculty Award.

The individual awardees were given \$3,000 honorariums, and the Department of Sports and Exercise Sciences was given a \$6,000 prize.

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**Dr. Janet Hindman '75** is the first professor to be appointed to a position under the aegis of the University's Hill Institute.

Hindman has been named the Dyke Rogers Professor of Educational Leadership in recognition of her success in the classroom and her key role in shepherding WT's doctoral program in educational leadership, said Dr. Gary Bigham, dean of the Terry B. Rogers College of Education and Social Sciences and Regents Professor of Education.

In the position, Hindman will serve both as a professor within WT's Department of Education and as a scholar for the Hill Institute.

The Hill Institute, an interdisciplinary academy of researchers, teachers and students to be funded via private donations, was formally announced following a \$20 million gift from **Cheryl '84 and Alex '85 Fairly** in October. To date, theirs is the largest family gift to WT's One West comprehensive fundraising campaign and in University history.

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Faculty members in WT's Terry B. Rogers College of Education and Social Sciences are leading new research into the experiences of families with children with dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, and speech and language disorder. The project, "Lived Experience of Parents of Children with Specific Learning Disabilities," is funded via a \$2,500 Richard and Mary West Traylor Research Grant from WT's Center for Learning Disabilities.

**Dr. Malvika Behl**, associate professor, counselor education program chair and principal investigator, is partnering with three colleagues: **Dr. Kenneth Denton '05**, associate dean and associate professor of psychology;

**Dr. Betty Coneway '06**, head of the WT Department of Education and the Geneva Schaeffer Professor of Education; and **Dr. Mikyung Shin**, the Bill Piehl Professor of Education.

The researchers are focusing on four common disorders that affect a person's ability to read, write, do math and speak.

## Buff Wins National Equestrian Championship

**Marty Kacsh '24**, a May graduate in animal science / pre-vet from Evergreen, Colorado, won the Level 1 team horsemanship western competition at the Intercollegiate Horse Show Association National Championship, held May 3 to 5 at the Tryon International Equestrian Center in Tryon, North Carolina.

Haley Bucher, a senior equine industry and business from Washington, Illinois, was named reserve national champion in Level 2 team horsemanship in western competition.

Overall, the western team placed fourth, only three points behind its closest competitor, Midway University.

## Leavin' on a Jet Plane

**Filiberto Avila '24**, a May graduate digital media and communication from Spearman, recently won a Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship Program award for the 2024-2025 academic year from the U.S. Department of State and the Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board.

As a Fulbright participant, Avila will study, conduct research and teach abroad for the upcoming academic year through the Fulbright U.S. Student Program.

Recipients of Fulbright awards are selected in an open, merit-based competition that considers leadership potential, academic and/or professional achievement, and record of service. As Fulbright alumni, their careers are enriched by joining a network of thousands of esteemed alumni, many of whom are leaders in their fields. Fulbright alumni include 60 Nobel Prize laureates, 89 Pulitzer Prize recipients, and 39 who have served as a head of state or government.

Avila, who will leave in September, will work on the Madrid and Segovia campuses of Spain's IE University as an English teaching assistant in the IE University Language Center and Writing Center.

## Top Students Named

Two first-generation college students were recognized as WT Woman and Man of the Year during an April 19 celebration.

Yadhira "Yaya" Avalos, a junior biology / pre-med major from Hereford, and Filiberto Avila '24, a May graduate in digital media and communication from Spearman, were among several students recognized at the year-end All-University Honors Ceremony.

Avalos was president of WT's FIRSTGEN organization for first-generation students and is a Rogers LEAD WT Scholar. Avila was student body president for 2023-2024. Both are alumni of WT's College Assistance Migrant Program for students from migrant families.

## Riding to Victory

WT's ranch horse team was named reserve national champion in Division 1 of the National Intercollegiate Ranch and Stock Horse Association Show, and two students were named reserve national champions.

The national reserve championship is the latest in a string of victories for the team, part of WT's Department of Agricultural Sciences in the Paul Engler College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences. The team won its first world championship in November and won the National Reined Cow Horse Association Collegiate Challenge in February.

At the April 15 to 17 championship show in Amarillo, WT competed alongside five other Division 1 teams, placing second in both rounds and finishing as reserve national champion. A total of 151 students representing 16 teams from 10 states competed.





## WT Launches Embedded Associate Degree For Students

West Texas A&M University students soon can earn an associate degree en route to completing their bachelor's degree, thanks to a new plan approved by The Texas A&M University System Board of Regents that will help combat student indebtedness.

TAMUS Regents this year approved a plan that establishes eight new degree programs: associate of arts degrees in liberal arts and humanities and multidisciplinary studies, and associate of science degrees in business, education, health sciences, mathematics, natural sciences and social sciences.

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**We want our students to complete a bachelor's degree. That's part of our ultimate goal and mission as a university.**

-WT President Walter V. Wendler

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The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges have approved the launch of an embedded associate of science in mathematics degree in fall 2024. The remaining seven embedded associate degrees should be available beginning spring 2025, pending final approval by the Coordinating Board.

The new degree program shows that WT continues to pioneer new ways to assist students in keeping their indebtedness as low as possible.

“We want our students to complete a bachelor's degree. That's part of our ultimate goal and mission as a university,” WT President Walter V. Wendler said. “But we understand that students may have life events that require them to pause their education. That's why we believe these embedded associate degrees will be helpful now and in the future.”

WT officials say the new associate degree plans will support the University's efforts in student retention in two ways.

First, students who feel they need to pause their education will be encouraged to see how close they are to completing the embedded associate degree. If they can finish that degree before pausing, they likely will be able to earn higher salaries in the workforce. They also will have completed the University's core curriculum, so it would be easier for them to return to WT in the future.

Plus, students often struggle between their sophomore and junior years, said Dr. Chris Thomas, vice president for student affairs.

“By creating a midpoint benchmark, we hope students will see what progress they've made and will be encouraged to continue on to complete their bachelor's degree,” Thomas said.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor, people with associate degrees earn almost 14 percent more in average weekly earnings. Those holding an associate degree are 38 percent more likely than those with a high school degree to be in a management, professional or other related job.

The New York Times reported that about 37 percent of students who enrolled in four-year institutions in 2013 and took on student loans didn't graduate within six years. The rate jumped to 75 percent for students at private institutions. Without a degree, those students often struggle to repay their loans and end up mired in debt.

The embedded associate degree plan is another example of WT's commitment to reducing student debt. A recent study shows that the average debt for WT graduates has dropped 23 percent over the past seven years.

Students will not enroll in an associate degree program, so the plan is not meant to compete with community colleges. Rather, the degree will be automatically awarded to them once they meet the requirements. They will be mailed a diploma, but they will not take part in graduation ceremonies. These degrees will not be awarded to students who already hold an associate degree.

“Our intent is still for these students to earn their bachelor's degrees, and our commencement ceremonies will continue to reflect that,” said Dr. Neil Terry, provost and executive vice president for academic affairs.

In addition, WT expects the embedded associate degree will aid in recruitment, attracting students who are interested in achieving both an associate and a bachelor's at the same school.

The eight embedded associate degrees represent each of WT's six Colleges: the Paul Engler College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences, the Paul & Virginia Engler College of Business, the Terry B. Rogers College of Education and Social Sciences, the College of Engineering, Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Arts & Humanities and the College of Nursing and Health Sciences.

Students will be required to reach 60 semester credit hours to earn the embedded associate degree — 42 hours of core curriculum courses and 18 hours aligned with their major.

WT's embedded associate degree plan aligns with THECB's “Building a Talent Strong Texas” initiative and its 60x30TX plan to have at least 60 percent of Texans attain a postsecondary credential by 2030.



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# ACTIVE DELTA ZETA MEMBERS ARE A PRECIOUS RESOURCE

## DELTA ZETA ALUMNAE ESTABLISH ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP FUND

BY CHIP CHANDLER

**A**lumni members of one of the University's oldest sororities have created a permanent legacy for the students following in their footsteps.

The first Delta Zeta Alumnae Endowed Scholarship recipient will be chosen in the fall.

The scholarship fund was first announced at Delta Zeta's Zeta Zeta chapter's 65th anniversary festivities during the 2023 Homecoming celebration. Initial fundraising efforts have secured a current balance of \$30,000 in the endowment, with a goal of raising a total of \$100,000.

"The tradition of scholarship and giving to others as exemplified with early Delta Zetas has continued through the years and is being expanded now with this endowed scholarship," said **Marsha Thaten Murphy '72**, who served as Zeta Zeta president in 1970. "The endowment is a vision that connects our sisterhood through the past, present and future.

“THEIR DEDICATION NOT ONLY HONORS OUR PAST BUT ALSO LIGHTS THE WAY FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR ALL OF US, AND THAT IS WHAT SISTERHOOD IS ALL ABOUT.”

-Chapter president Zapryce Johnson

"Active Delta Zeta members are a precious resource, and the scholarship fund helps to ensure an affordable and accessible education," Murphy said.

The current membership is thrilled to see the establishment of the scholarship, said chapter president Zapryce Johnson, a senior marketing major from Amarillo.

"It is truly wonderful that our alumni have made such generous legacy gifts," Johnson said. "Their support is a powerful reminder of the enduring commitment to scholarship and sisterhood that defines Delta Zeta. Seeing this legacy gift from our predecessors is incredibly inspiring. It reinforces our bonds, motivates us to achieve academic excellence and shows us the lasting impact of our shared values. Their dedication not only honors our past but also lights the way for a brighter future for all of us, and that is what sisterhood is all about."



The endowment was accomplished through a pooled fund with donations from Murphy, Annette Nall, **Barbara Lewis Bain '60**, **Peggy Creel Trosper '73**, **Deborah Sue Glass McDonald '77**, **Roberta Burrows McNeese '76**, **Marsha Elliott Hughes '73**, Kathy Cardinal Ward and **Suzanne Warren George '73**.

WT's Pooled Scholarship Program offers a unique opportunity for groups of friends, colleagues, community and family members to combine their resources and create a lasting legacy through a named endowment. Donors have the flexibility to name the endowment in honor or memory of a group, class, organization, faculty member or friend. Establishing a named endowment creates a permanent legacy which honors their values, celebrates their connections, and leaves a lasting imprint on WT and its students.

"We invite interested donors to join us in making a difference for generations of students," said Lesly Bosch Annen, assistant vice president for leadership gifts and development. "A member of the leadership gifts team will work with your group to fulfill your wishes."

Scholarship endowment minimum is \$25,000, which may be paid over five years. For example, if five individuals pledge \$6,000 each, they would pay \$1,200 annually over five years. During that time, a \$1,000 scholarship would be awarded annually. After all pledges are paid in full, the endowment will generate an annual scholarship award for perpetuity.

Zeta Zeta was founded Nov. 1, 1958. Currently, the chapter boasts 45 members.

Nationally, the Delta Zeta sorority was founded in 1902 at Miami University in Ohio. The sorority has enriched the lives of more than 220,000 alumnae and collegiate members in the United States and Canada.





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ONE WT ALUM HAS PUT HIS ENGINEERING DEGREE TO USE IN A VAST INDUSTRY:

# OUTER SPACE

By Brad Newman

**William Walker '12** is the chief technology officer for KULR Technology Group Inc., specializing in designing lithium ion batteries for use in new spacecraft.

"There's a growing space economy, and we're able to fill a niche to provide safe, well-designed solutions for the industry," said Walker, who has a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from WT.

Walker, a Canyon native, had his interest in space engineering piqued while attending WT. As an undergraduate, Walker took an internship at the NASA Johnson Space Center in Houston.

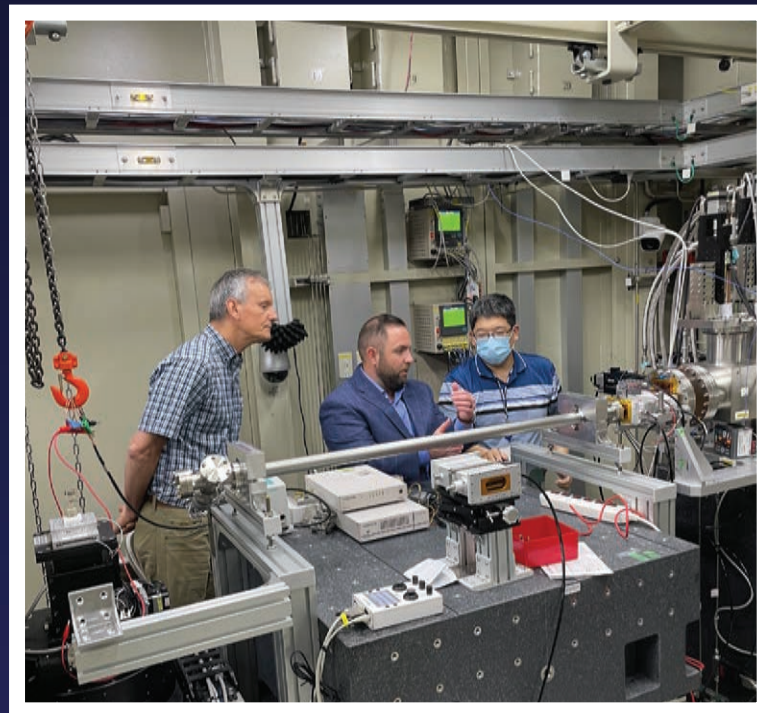
After earning his doctoral degree in material science and engineering in 2016 from the University of Houston, Walker returned to NASA.

For more than nine years, Walker worked for NASA in various roles, including as part of a team that assessed risks on the Orion spacecraft, the vehicle built to take astronauts to the moon in the coming years.

Walker and the team helped update the battery design of Orion to virtually eliminate potential energy storage problems.

"We become engineers to tackle and solve problems," he said. "It was really fun to be a part of that particular solution."

Walker joined KULR in early 2022. He was named CTO in November 2022.



① William Walker, center, explains a battery calorimeter experiment for NASA, with Dr. Eric Darcy of NASA, left, in Taiwan.

**“WT CREATED AN ENGINEERING ENVIRONMENT WHERE WE WEREN'T JUST ONE MORE STUDENT, BUT WE WERE PEOPLE WHO MATTERED”**

-William Walker

KULR is headquartered in San Diego, but Walker operates a team from a complex in Houston, designing, producing and testing lithium ion batteries for spacecraft.

That includes contracting with NASA, but KULR also works with other space startup companies.

"There are so many new companies in this industry, and every single one of them will need space-rated batteries for their spacecrafts," Walker said. "That's what we're providing, and at a fraction of the cost for these companies to do it themselves."

Walker credits his education at WT not only with the technical engineering skills, but also with interpersonal and leadership characteristics.

"WT created an engineering environment where we weren't just one more student, but we were people who mattered," he said. "I had the blessing of being on a first-name basis with my professors."

Walker said the one-on-one learning environment at WT still influences the way he conducts business every day.

"Part of my effectiveness in leading teams in a relational way all stems from the mentality that my professors fostered at WT," he said.

Walker has shared his expertise in the field with WT engineering students. From 2018-2020, he taught an online space vehicle design elective to engineering students as a part time instructor for WT.

Walker said his alma mater provided a "great foundation" for him—as well as for many others in his life.

Walker's wife, **Abby '12**, also is Buff. The couple have four children. Walker's mother and sister, **Kathey Walker '03, '09** and **Megan Bond '08**, also are WT alumni, and he has Buff alumni on his staff at KULR, as well.

"I never imagined I would eventually be a part of such amazing teams that have made the impacts that they have in how we do energy storage for space exploration," he said.





# ADVOCATING FOR TEXAS COTTON

BY BRAD NEWMAN

⬅ CEO Kody Bessent, left, with producer David Winters and Rep. Ronny Jackson (R-TX).

**Kody Bessent '07, '09** is a voice for cotton growers—lots of them. As chief executive officer of Plains Cotton Growers Inc., Bessent advocates for cotton producers across 42 counties in Texas, the largest cotton-growing region in the U.S.

"We get to step in alongside these cotton growers and seek to support them in ways that benefit the industry as a whole," he said. "It's rewarding."

A native of Acuff, Bessent obtained a bachelor's degree in agricultural education from WT, followed by a master's degree in agriculture with an emphasis in business in economics.

His WT education—particularly an internship opportunity afforded through the University—led Bessent to advocacy work for farmers.

As an undergraduate student, Bessent worked for former U.S. Rep. Mac Thornberry, and he returned to Washington D.C. after graduation.

Bessent became passionate about championing agricultural issues at the national level.

His work included supporting the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, commonly called the Farm Bill, a landmark legislation for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

After working both for the Texas Wheat Producers Board and the High Plains Water District, Bessent began at Plains Cotton Growers in 2015.

Based in Lubbock, Plains Cotton Growers represents a territory that plants an average of 3.75 million acres of cotton. That region produces about 65 percent of cotton grown in Texas and about 35 percent of cotton grown in the U.S.

The organization, formed in 1956, has three primary functions, Bessent said: legislative and regulatory representation at both the state and federal levels, market development, and research.

"These cotton producers don't often have the time on a daily basis to address some of the larger issues that they're facing," he said. "That's where we get to serve as a unique unified voice on their behalf."

Bessent has a longstanding history in agriculture in the High Plains region. His great-grandfather was among the first to establish a farming operation near Lubbock, which still continues today.

Bessent's lifelong ties to the region made WT's regional-focused department of agriculture the right place for his education.

“WT WAS VERY MUCH A HOME FOR ME,” HE SAID. “IT’S A REPUTABLE SCHOOL, AND MANY OF THE RELATIONSHIPS I MADE THEN I STILL MAINTAIN TODAY.”

-Kody Bessent

Bessent also said he pursued his education at WT in large part because of the encouragement of Dr. Lance Kieth, who now serves associate dean in the Paul Engler College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences and as professor of agricultural education.

"Dr. Kieth has been a mentor and friend who ultimately drove me to WT," he said.

Once on campus, Bessent found the size and close-knit environment "a really good fit."

"WT was very much a home for me," he said. "It's a reputable school, and many of the relationships I made then I still maintain today."

Over the years, Bessent has been pleased at how WT has expanded its agricultural programs and influence.

"I'm very proud to be a graduate of WT, and I'm proud of the way WT has grown over the years," Bessent said. "They've really done a lot of groundwork to build the University and develop it substantially."



# FINDING COMMON GROUND

## Sports and Exercise Sciences builds collaboration with Dance

BY BRAD NEWMAN

Arts and sports. The two disciplines can seem like opposite fields of study.

But at West Texas A&M University, dance students and faculty within the University's Department of Sports and Exercise Sciences have developed a rich collaboration – and a mutual admiration – since 2019.



**The sports and exercise science collaboration not only provides our dancers with additional knowledge, but it keeps them dancing stronger and longer.**

-Crystal Bertrand, WT instructor and director of dance



That's when a new on-site clinic opened for dancers in the Sybil B. Harrington Fine Arts Complex, with twice-a-week visits from faculty within the sports and exercise science department, including the former head of the department, Dr. Lorna Strong.

"The clinic is just steps away from our dance studio," said Crystal Bertrand, WT instructor and director of dance. "And it has become a vital, extremely instrumental part of our program.

"The sports and exercise science collaboration not only provides our dancers with additional knowledge, but it keeps them dancing stronger and longer."

In those five years, faculty have administered hundreds of clinic appointments with dance students.

During the individualized sessions with dance students, Strong, who served as an assistant professor until her departure in July, and her

faculty screen for injuries, provide body assessments with specialized lab equipment, mentor dancers about caring for their bodies, and assign rehabilitation plans as necessary.

"This has brought a new level of knowledge and understanding to our dancers," Bertrand said.

Strong also has invited to provide lectures concerning general health and wellness to dance students, and she and her faculty even frequently attend dance performances.

"They're able to see and have a better understanding of what the dancer's body is going through," Bertrand explained. "They have become part of the dance family."

But the benefits of the collaboration have served to strengthen WT's sports and exercise sciences program, too.

"While the dance majors and faculty may say we are doing so much for them, I would share that they provide an opportunity for me to use my skills as an athletic trainer and have allowed me to grow as I learn about a completely different activity than I have ever been involved with," Strong said.



**They... have allowed me to grow as I learn about a completely different activity than I have ever been involved with.**

-Dr. Lorna Strong, former department head



Dancers rehearse in studio space in Mary Moody Northern Hall.



Sports and Exercise Sciences works closely with WT Athletics.





The sports and exercise sciences department's cooperation with WT's dance program highlights just one of many ways the department is expanding—and often upending—traditional expectations of students studying in that field.

"Many see a degree from this program leading to coaching and/or teaching," Strong said. "However, we are so much more."

The department of sports and exercise sciences, with 12 faculty members, includes four undergraduate degree programs and one master's degree program. Currently, about 360 students study in the department, which has experienced consistent growth since 2021.

Dr. Blake Price, assistant professor of sports and exercise sciences, has kept track of graduates from the program for nearly 10 years. The careers that alumni from the program enter are much more diverse and specialized than many realize, he said.

"Perception is slowly evolving," Price said of the public's understanding of opportunities available to sports and exercise science students.

As part of his Foundations class – an introductory course for all sports and exercise science students – Price said he displays a chart showing the vast career possibilities.

"I want these students to know what their options are," he said. "I want them to have an end goal in mind."

But "for the vast majority of those first-year students, it's a surprise," Price said. "I don't think they grasp how broad this field is."

Graduates from the program increasingly go on to enter professional fields related to pre-allied health preparation, sport management, sport psychology, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and physician assistants.

"We also have students that learn of something they never thought they could do or would enjoy and go on to make careers from initial experience gained here," Strong said.



**In the real world, you have to work well with other people. The skills that are taught in our program, you can use them anywhere**

- Dr. Blake Price, assistant professor of Sports and Exercise Sciences



Alumni from the program have gone on to become firefighters, state troopers, game wardens, pilots, and more. One alumnus works with strength and condition and mission readiness at Cannon Air Force Base in New Mexico.

"The skills that are taught in our program, you can use them anywhere," Price said.

He specifically noted the program's emphasis on communication and teamwork.

"In the real world, you have to work well with other people," he said.

Students in the sports and exercise sciences program practice that sort of collaboration throughout their college experience, Price added.

Updates in lab equipment technology and a unique focus on academic research also creates well-rounded graduates from the program.

"We have state-of-the-art, incredible technology in our labs," Price said. "And every student walks away with an understanding of why research is important in whatever field they enter."

For Bertrand and the dance students, the inclusion of the department's expertise, technological tools, and mentoring has proven a success in every aspect.

"This collaboration is such a rewarding thing to see," she said. "It's exciting to be a part of these new and innovative projects that the University is continually doing."



The Performing Arts Clinic is located near the dance studio in Mary Moody Northern Hall.



Dance perform in the Happy State Bank Studio Theatre.





*Congratulations*  
**GRADUATES!**  
**CLASS OF 2024**







The final tally is 1,129 graduates for West Texas A&M University's Class of May 2024.

Overall, the University awarded 808 baccalaureate degrees and 321 master's degrees to spring graduates at the May 13 commencement ceremonies.

The oldest graduate was 73, and the youngest were 19. The graduating class includes 117 with a perfect 4.0 GPA and 25 veterans; 42.7 percent of the undergraduates are the first in their family to earn a college degree. Students from 41 states in the nation and 21 different countries graduated.

Additionally, 183 potential August graduates walked the stage at the May commencement ceremonies.













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**CHAPEL**

**WT**  
WEST TEXAS A&M  
UNIVERSITY

JOSEPH A. HILL  
**CHAPEL**

**FAITH**

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# IT IS SUCH A SWEET LITTLE CHAPEL

By Brad Newman

**S**haron Reep '84 still recalls the vibrant stained-glass windows and the wooden pews. She remembers walking down the aisle with her father under the high arched ceilings. A 50-year-old photograph shows her and her groom, Jack, smiling as they stood outside against the red sandstone walls.

The chapel where the couple exchanged marriage vows in December 1973 remains unforgettable.

It's on the very campus where the two met, West Texas A&M University's Joseph A. Hill Memorial Chapel.

"That's why we chose that place," Reep said. "It is such a sweet little chapel."

The Reeps are among countless couples who, in the chapel's 74-year history, have said "I do" in the chapel at WT. The space also has been a sanctuary for students, faculty and staff and community members seeking quiet solace for prayer, religious studies, memorials, worship services and other gatherings.

It has been a cherished location for decades. And now, the beloved icon has undergone a \$1.5 million renovation – updates that will preserve the chapel for generations to come.



## 'An Uplifting Space'

The Joseph A. Hill Memorial Chapel opened on WT's campus in 1950.

Named for WT's second and longest-serving president, the 2,590-square-foot building is the only privately funded chapel on a public university in Texas.

"President Hill created a place where people could come and pray and meditate and contemplate," said WT President Walter V. Wendler. "It's such an important part of our campus."

The chapel is nestled among towering trees along 26th Street on WT's Canyon campus. An iconic shingled spire rises on the northwest side of the building. The rustic exterior stone walls combine with lush surrounding landscaping to create a unique serene location on the otherwise bustling campus. Passersby can hear carillon bells ring daily from the chapel.

"All of these other buildings on campus have a purpose, but not like this one," said John Moya, lead architect for the renovation project. "this building's purpose is for worship and reflection."

Inside the intimate venue, with seating for 125 people, artistic stained-glass windows provide light into the narrow room. A center aisle leads underneath a vaulted ceiling with dark wooden beams. The stage is framed in an elegant stone arch.

"For a relatively small facility, it has an aspirational feel to it," Wendler said. "It's vertical. It's an uplifting space."

**"All of these other buildings on campus have a purpose, but not like this one, this building's purpose is for worship and reflection."**

-John Moya, lead architect for the renovation project

⬇ Visitors tour the chapel during the June 23 opening.



⬆ A new exterior door with stained glass was installed.



⬆ A new flag outside the Hill Chapel proclaims its central tenets.





## Updating a Landmark

The aging venue, however, was not without its needs.

"When you have a building that's 70-plus years old, it just needs some upkeep," said Dr. Todd Rasberry, WT's vice president for philanthropy and external affairs and executive director for the WTAMU Foundation.

The eight-month-long renovation project began in October 2023.

Crews replaced the chapel's exterior doors, repaired and washed the stonework, added LED lighting, remodeled interior side rooms and the bathroom, and replaced the flooring. New wireless internet, sound equipment, and security cameras also were installed.

Each stained-glass window was carefully cleaned and, if broken, meticulously replaced. The grounds surrounding the chapel have been completely reworked and re-landscaped. New low stone barrier walls have been erected with concealed lighting. A larger oval-shaped concrete plaza has been added to the west entrance of the facility, providing new outdoor options for events.

"Now everything is brighter and better than it was originally," Moya said.

The chapel has been brought into compliance with the American with Disabilities Act. The project has given the chapel 21st-century upgrades – but, notably, without altering the character of the historic building.

"We aimed to maintain the original style of the building as we improved the overall experience," Moya said.

People who previously attended a wedding ceremony or event in the chapel will recognize the space's familiar "country church" feel, Wendler said.

⬆ Extensive interior and exterior renovations took place over an eight-month period.

"We just want people to know that this place they love on the campus is still being well cared for," Wendler said.

The project is funded by a \$1.5 million gift from the High Plains Christian Ministries Foundation, a grant-making organization of Baptist Community Services.

**"This project, we felt, was a perfect opportunity to allow this historic facility to continue to be a spiritual focal point of the campus."**

-Steve Dalrymple, president, CEO and chief legal officer of BCS

"That donation breathed life into this project," Rasberry said.

The gift includes \$1.1 million for renovations and \$400,000 to establish an endowment to provide for ongoing maintenance.

"This project, we felt, was a perfect opportunity to allow this historic facility to continue to be a spiritual focal point of the campus," said Steve Dalrymple, president, CEO and chief legal officer of BCS. "It's so important to have that presence on the WT campus."





⌈ President Walter V. Wendler, left photo, and Dr. Todd Rasberry, vice president of Philanthropy and External Relations, describe the renovations of the Hill Chapel at the June 23 dedication.

## 'A Spiritual Oasis'

The renovated chapel officially reopened with a dedication and tea on the afternoon of June 23.

The afternoon welcomed back University alumni, supporters of the renovation project and people who married in the space for a special event of memories and celebration.

"This chapel is such a wonderful place," Dalrymple said. "And we're grateful that it can continue to be a spiritual oasis on the campus for all those who are seeking."

The newly opened chapel is again available for wedding rentals, as well as other special occasions. A church, Restoration Apostolic Ministries, offers worship services in the space on Sundays. WT alum Todd Hunt pastors the congregation.

Current students also can access the facility with their University-issued Buff Gold Card during regular hours.

"We want that to be a space that's available to them to use," Wendler said.

The president said the integration of academics and spirituality isn't a contradiction, but a value-added component of what makes WT a unique regional institution.

"Faith is such an important part of so many of our lives," he said. "To recognize that indicates a kind of wholeness to what we offer."

"Higher education has never said, 'to come here, you can't be a person of religious conviction or have a spiritual life,'" Rasberry said. "To the contrary, places like this are an affirmation that we know people of faith come here, and we want to provide a space for you to be a whole person."

Jack and Sharon Reep visited the chapel in November 2023 to mark their 50th anniversary. Then, the renovation project had just begun, but the couple still took photos in front of the new double doors, flanked by their family.

"I hope that many more generations will be able to have the experience here that we did," Sharon Reep said. "It's just a beautiful and unique place."

Ronald and Patsy Vaughn  
Married 1959



Doug and Genie McCause  
Married 1972



Bill and Brandi Clark  
Married 1996



AJ and Dwanya James  
Married 2022





# CAMPUS UPDATES

**West Texas A&M University continues to grow all across campus with remodeling and additions taking place. Take a look at the latest updates:**

## TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE RESEARCH AND EXTENSION

In an estimated \$30 million project, a new building on the WT campus will be constructed to house AgriLife Research and AgriLife Extension agencies. The multipurpose facility will provide office space for faculty and staff, training space to support educational outreach to the greater community, and research lab spaces to support faculty through open lab space and appropriate lab support. The proposed location will consolidate AgriLife Research state agencies in the region to a district on the WT campus. The new AgriLife building will be located to the east of the Veterinary Education, Research, and Outreach and Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory along Russell Long Boulevard. Construction is in its early phases, including site grading, utility installation, foundation work and more for a 33,400-square-foot building. Project completion is expected in late 2025.

## BUFF SPORTS PARK

The synthetic competition track will be machine cleaned, and repairs will be made to damaged areas ahead of the installation of a new elastomeric polyurethane topcoat. This process will restore track to a high-performance surface. Cost is approximately \$700,000.

## UNIVERSITY DINING HALL

New carpet and seating arrangements are being added to the east dining hall in the Caf. Multiple 10-seat community tables, banquettes, round and square four-top tables, and high-top tables and stools have been incorporated. Phase I of the project, which costs around \$330,000, should be completed over the summer in time for the fall 2024 semester. Phase II, which includes second-floor renovations, is still in the design phase. The dining hall also has undergone HVAC and electrical upgrades; total cost is \$4.4 million.

## JONES HALL

Elevators are being replaced in Jones Hall over the summer break. Estimated cost is \$766,000.

## BAIN ATHLETIC COMPLEX

After 15 years, the 12.5 million complex is now complete. The center will be expanded by approximately 14,180 square feet in a project that is estimated to cost approximately \$8.98 million. The expansion will provide modern office space for administrators and coaches; academic and meeting room spaces for teams; and track & field locker rooms.

## GENEVA SCHAEFFER EDUCATION BUILDING

Construction officially began in May for this \$30 million project, following extensive internal demolition and structural reinforcement of the building core. The building, commonly known as "Old Ed," is the second oldest educational building on the campus. Originally, the building was designed as a kindergarten-through-12th-grade school that supported hands-on learning for those seeking education degrees. Revitalization of this building will save a significant asset of the University and transform the building into a place that will be a destination to support and expand the already robust online learning programs. The building will house the WT Graduate School. The project is largely funded by the State of Texas Capital Construction Assistance Program, with a naming gift from the Stanley Schaeffer family. The 60,000-square-foot building is expected to open in late 2025.

## CROSS HALL

Built-in furniture is being removed from rooms in Cross Hall to install new luxury vinyl tile flooring, to reposition electrical outlets and to paint walls. Residential Living will refurbish the rooms. Construction cost is about \$680,000.



# WT features alumni in art exhibit

BY BRAD NEWMAN

**Dick Archer '70** spent much of his career in the petroleum industry. He inspected pipelines for safety. He led emergency response teams at refineries. He drafted land surveys.

But Archer's lifelong passion for making art stayed with him throughout the decades.

"I never lost my skill or my love for art," he said. "I was touched by art everywhere I went."

Archer, who earned a bachelor's degree in art from WT, returned to his craft – painting – in earnest after retiring in 2007. He now works in watercolor from his home studio, expanding on techniques that he first learned more than 50 years ago in WT's art program.

Archer was one of 53 alumni chosen for WT's first alumni art exhibition, which showcased alumni works through the month of April.

"WT has always had such a great art program, and it's exciting to see so many alumni with all the different varieties and styles," Archer said. "I'm glad I got to be included."

**THIS EXHIBIT IS PART OF AN INITIATIVE TO FORM RELATIONSHIPS WITH PREVIOUS STUDENTS AND REALLY SHOWCASE THEM.**

-Jon Revett, art program director and Doris Alexander Distinguished Professor of Fine Arts.

The art program received about 170 submissions from 75 artists for the alumni exhibit. Guest juror Deana Craighead, curator of art at Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, selected 53 works, one from each artist chosen for the show. Three alumni received cash prizes as part of the exhibit.

The alumni exhibit, which organizers expect to continue each year, allows the University to highlight the extensive talent from WT.

"We were totally surprised and pleased with the response," said Jon Revett, art program director and Doris Alexander Distinguished Professor of Fine Arts. "This exhibit is part of an initiative to form relationships with previous students and really showcase them."

The exhibit, which hung in the Dord Fitz Formal Gallery inside Mary Moody Northern Hall, featured works from recent graduates – and as far back as 1970 and Archer's painting, "Abandoned Grain Elevators."

The watercolor work depicts rusting metal grain elevators that Archer photographed near Groom. It's representative of his portfolio, which includes primarily watercolor works of scenes depicting the Texas Panhandle.

"I'm always looking for things that would make an interesting painting," Archer said.



Jarys Boyd's "Interlude,"

Archer has works displayed in Amarillo's Arts in the Sunset and on occasion in other local venues. But being included in WT's exhibit was a special treat for the alumnus, he said.

**OUR STUDENTS CONTINUE TO CONTRIBUTE GREAT ARTWORK AND INSPIRE NEW GENERATIONS OF ARTISTS IN OUR REGION.**

-Jon Revett

When Archer first came to WT in 1965, he initially pursued a music degree. But after two years, Archer decided to join the art program, studying under artists like the renowned Emilio Caballero in the late 1960s.

Archer and his wife, **Crista '90 and '95**, also a WT alum, married in the Joseph A. Hill Memorial Chapel at WT.

"We're loyal Buffs," he said.

Alumni like Archer made the art exhibit such a unique and interesting show, Revett said.

"Artists like this are evidence that our students carry on what they've learned here throughout their lives," he said.

Revett said he was encouraged by the diversity of the alumni exhibit. Works ranged in style from paintings to glass blowing, from electronic sculpture to mixed media.

"It's impressive to see the creativity of our alumni, and how many of them have expanded their skills even beyond what we teach at WT."

Some of the alumni featured in the exhibit are employed in artistic fields, many are teaching art in area schools, and some, like Archer, are enjoying art as a lifelong hobby.

Archer credits his experience at WT with instilling – and fueling – his artistic zeal. And he encouraged prospective and current students not to miss an opportunity to benefit from WT's art program.

"Take one art class, and just enjoy it," Archer said. "It will open up your eyes and let you see the world differently."

WT's prestigious art program dates to its establishment in the early 1900s, when the famed Georgia O'Keeffe taught at the institution.

"The WT art program has become a force in the Panhandle culture," Revett said. "Our students continue to contribute great artwork and inspire new generations of artists in our region."



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If you or someone you know has lost their WT Diploma to the devastating wildfires, please contact the WT Alumni Association at [alumni@wtamu.edu](mailto:alumni@wtamu.edu) or 806-651-2311 for a replacement.

We know you worked hard for your diploma and would like to ensure you still have that physical memorabilia.

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# Targeting the Best and Brightest

**WT emphasis on valedictorians and salutatorians takes large leap in latest class**

By JON MARK BEILUE

The highest-achieving high school students who enroll at West Texas A&M University come from as close as a mile from campus and as far away as Oregon and Ohio. Seven from Randall County, for instance. Fifteen from New Mexico.

They come to study mechanical engineering, agricultural business, mathematics, environmental engineering, marketing and more. They come to sing in the WT chorale and play intercollegiate soccer.

But the most important thing is they come.

"It is important to secure the best and brightest students from our high schools in the Texas Panhandle," said WT President Walter V. Wendler. "They have regional and family connections that will help sustain future economic growth in our communities.

"We believe that our best students will be challenged and encouraged through study at WT. It is our pledge to the best and brightest among us."

Among those enrolled at WT from the high school graduating classes in 2021 and 2022, 76 are valedictorians and salutatorians, 30 of whom are from the Texas Panhandle.

WT's current freshman class saw a significant leap in attracting the top two in a graduating class: 75 valedictorians and salutatorians from the Class of 2023 enrolled this academic year, just one behind the previous two classes combined. Thirty-one of those students hail from the top 26 counties in Texas.

"It's very important to me personally, considering the pragmatism of Texas Panhandle folks, that an excellent education is available at a very reasonable cost at WT," Wendler said. "We are among the five lowest-priced universities of the 38 institutions in Texas. When you look at 'bang for the buck,' WT is a very good deal."

Charlotte Plotts discovered that. She was the valedictorian of the 229 students in Canyon's class of 2023 with a grade point average of 102.52. Many of her friends just assumed she would take her diploma and leave home.

Indeed, she applied to and was accepted at the University of Texas and to the University of Oklahoma. But she also was quickly accepted to WT. The hometown university won out for one very practical reason.

"To be completely honest, it came down to money," she said. "I thought it would be more beneficial to go to WT and graduate debt-free. That way I'd have some money to get my master's."

Plotts just missed scoring high enough on her SAT for a presidential scholarship. She has other supplemental scholarships, and she said her contacts within the math department earned her more scholarship money than the other two universities.

Plotts, a math major, already has 80 credit honors because of some dual-credit work in high school. She wants to become a data or operation analyst with a graduate degree in applied math.

"I wanted to go away initially," she said. "There's a lot of pressure if you finish highly ranked in your class to go to a huge college and do great things. There's a lot of expectations, but I'm thankful I came to WT. I met some cool people. There wasn't much of a learning curve which was nice."

It is a priority, Wendler said, that WT is aggressive in luring top students. At the least, the University will offer generous scholarship incentives to enroll.

"Our scholarships for valedictorians and salutatorians are robust," he said. "If potential students come with offers from other institutions, we will do our dead-level best to keep the best and brightest in the Texas Panhandle through our Beat Any Offer initiative, through which we try to top any offer from another four-year college or university in the United States."



The seasonally named Summer and Autumn TeBeest are not only twin sisters, but they also were valedictorian and salutatorian in Bushland High School's class of 2022.

Summer, initially a mechanical engineering major, focused on Colorado School of Mines, OU or WT. Familiarity won out.

"At the end of the day, it was WT," Summer said. "Honestly, I just grew up here, and I knew WT really well."

A self-described "major band nerd," the all-region band musician had been to WT summer band camp. Competing in speech and debate at Bushland also brought her and her sister to WT as well.

In her second year, Summer has changed her major to marketing, a decision she is "100 percent positive about." Same with her decision to attend WT, a choice she and Autumn, an environmental engineering major, made independently.

"Best decision ever," she said. "I've not regretted it one bit. Working at Starbucks on campus, I made a lot of friends. In classes, I get challenged a lot. I love my professors. They're amazing. Anytime you need help, they answer questions immediately. I really appreciate that."

Two significant scholarships, one from WT, provide a total of \$7,500. As a community adviser at Buff Hall, Summer has her housing paid. Her only disappointment at WT may be coming up just short on lucrative presidential scholarship. She needed a 30 on her ACT. She got a 28. A second attempt? A 29.

"Dang it, I was so upset," she said.

### More than a local draw

Nine high schools have sent both valedictorians and salutatorians out of the same class to WT over the last three years. Eight are in the Panhandle: West Texas High School in Stinnett, Wellington, Wheeler, Pampa, Sanford-Fritch, Fort Elliott, Silverton and Kress.

There is one outlier—Sargents, Colorado. It's a tiny stop with a population of 185 that is 128 miles west of Pueblo and 460 miles from Canyon. Sargents High School had a graduating class of 25 in 2022, yet valedictorian Taylor Rockey and salutatorian Emberly Spearman are both Buffs.

Rockey is the daughter of a potato farmer. She wanted to study some branch of agriculture. She also wanted to attend a college that didn't require a COVID vaccination, which was mandatory in Colorado. It also didn't hurt that Sargents' counselor, Janae Naranjo, was a WT graduate.

"When I told my counselor I was considering WT, she told me how much she loved it," Rockey said. "From there, I went and toured the campus over spring break and really liked the campus and ag program. After that, I was pretty much set in stone I was coming."

Rockey is majoring in ag business, while Spearman is studying general business.

"The first year was a little rough," Rockey said, "because I was questioning what I wanted to be. I took some general education classes that I wasn't that much interested in. Now that I'm in some higher-level courses I've come to enjoy it a lot more. I feel safe here and confident about my decision."

WT, like most regional universities, enjoys a home-court advantage with local students because of familiarity, comfort, cost and convenience. But about half of WT's students come from outside the Panhandle, and that includes valedictorians and salutatorians.

In WT's most recent three classes, there are 37 top-two graduates from Texas school districts outside the Panhandle. Additionally, there are 47 valedictorians and salutatorians from 11 states, including 15 from New Mexico and 12 from Colorado. More than half—55 percent—of valedictorians and salutatorians attending WT come from beyond the Texas Panhandle.

"We attract students from all over the nation and the world," Wendler said. "It's a great opportunity for students to be acquainted with those from many cultures and backgrounds right here in our own backyard."

Emmalee Wood was the 2021 salutatorian of Brennan High School in San Antonio. Her grade point average of higher than 102 was second among 625 other graduates. She received what she called a "good scholarship" from the University of Alabama and was accepted by Texas A&M University. Her local university, University of Texas–San Antonio, also was a possibility.

WT was a consideration—initially, only a consideration—as a place to also play soccer, a sport in which she was a standout at Brennan.

"I don't want to make it sound like WT was on the backburner, but at first it was, until I visited and then got a phone call from the dean of engineering (Dr. Emily Hunt)," Wood said.

Wood completed her third season in the fall as a defender for the Lady Buffs soccer team, needing only eight more classes to earn her mechanical engineering degree.

A presidential scholarship relieves Wood of much financial burden and allows her to focus on soccer and academics.

"I could have gone to A&M and studied engineering and worked, but here I get to be an active student and play soccer and be in the WT community," she said. "When I made my decision, I wasn't totally sure what I was getting into, but I wasn't going to look back."

"I didn't know what to expect when I first came—I didn't realize it could get so cold—but people in the athletic department love on me and get to know me. People are so kind and want to help you and make your life better. That's my biggest takeaway."



From left to right:

**Summer TeBeest**

2022 valedictorian of Bushland High School



**Taylor Rockey**

2022 valedictorian at Sargents High School in Colorado

**Emmalee Wood**

2021 salutatorian of Brennan High School in San Antonio





⬆ Larry Wise led the Buffaloes to their fifth regional title and an appearance in the 2024 NCAA Final Four. The Waxahachie product signed a professional contract with Södertälje BBK of the Swedish Basketball League



⬆ Eleonora Curtabbi placed second at the NCAA Division II Cross Country Championships as WT finished sixth as a team for the best result in school history. The Italian standout was a three-time National Champion on the track for the Lady Buffs

# Another Year with HISTORIC SUCCESS for WT Athletics

By Brent Seals

**T**he rich athletic history of West Texas A&M University continued this school year as 10 different programs qualified for the NCAA Division II Postseason. The Buffs and Lady Buffs combined for 111 All-Lone Star Conference selections as well as 12 LSC All-Academic honorees.

Michael McBroom, WT director of athletics since 2006, was named to the same position at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches in April. Doug Lipinski was named WT's new vice president of athletics July 10.

Lipinski, currently a deputy director of athletics at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan, was selected in a national search.

"I personally spoke with some of the best Division II athletic directors in the country, and Doug's name came up time and again," WT President Walter V. Wendler said. "Doug has years of experience at Grand Valley State, the leading Division II intercollegiate athletics program in the nation, and his commitment to excellence, hard work and leadership will ensure that he can build on WT's foundation of academic and athletic excellence."

Lipinski has spent 22 years at GVSU, his alma mater and a 16-time Learfield Director's Cup champion. He will begin his WT duties Aug. 28.

In the classroom, the Buffs and Lady Buffs combined for a 3.139 grade point average—the highest in school history. Thirteen of 14 programs earned at least a 3.0 GPA, led by women's golf with a 3.914.

WT led the Lone Star Conference with more than 400 LSC Commissioner's Honor Roll selections during the 2023-24 school year. The Buffs and Lady Buffs finished third in the LEARFIELD Director's Cup for the 2023-24 school year. That's the sixth straight and eighth overall time that WT finished in the Top 10 and the fifth straight year inside the Top 5.





⬆ Isaac Botsio has claimed four National Championships during his time at West Texas A&M while also qualifying for the 2024 Paris Olympics with Team Ghana.

WT Cross-Country proved to be one of the top programs in Division II last fall, with both squads qualifying for the NCAA National Championships in Joplin, Missouri. The Buffs registered their best finish in school history, finishing fourth overall as William Amponsah claimed the individual national championship. The Ghana native was named the NCAA Men's National Athlete of the Year. The Lady Buffs finished sixth overall, the best showing in WT history, with Eleonora Curtabbi finishing as the national runner-up. Zach Daniel became the first coach in LSC history to claim both the men's and women's Cross-Country Coach of the Year accolades.

Lady Buff Volleyball continued its dominance in 2023 as they claimed a share of the program's 21st LSC Championship, making a run through the postseason with wins in the LSC Tournament and the South Central Regional Championships, finally advancing to the team's 16th appearance in the NCAA Division II Elite Eight. Head coach Kendra Potts and the Lady Buffs claimed a pair of victories in Pennsylvania including a five-set thriller over top-seeded Tampa before falling in the national title match to Cal State Los Angeles. Torrey Miller, Carly Evetts, Bryli Contreras, Emma Becker and Taytum Stow earned All-American honors for their efforts on the court. Potts announced her departure for Grand Canyon University in February, and in March, Brittany Harry, the 2022 Lone Star Conference Coach of the Year, was named WT's 16th head volleyball coach.

Though they didn't qualify for NCAA postseason play, WT's soccer teams, football squad and women's basketball performed well and look to improve in 2024-25. The Josh Lynn era of Buffalo Football began this past fall as a strong recruiting class has expectations high for the future.



⬆ Dylan Feserman became the 15th All-American in Buffalo Baseball history in 2024 while also excelling in the classroom as the senior earned Academic All-American accolades.

Lady Buff Basketball narrowly missed the NCAA tournament as Josh Prock's team picked up 18 victories to advance to the LSC Championship in Frisco. On the pitch, the Buffs and Lady Buffs will feature a strong group of returners in 2024 under the guidance of Butch Lauffer and Chad Webb.

In indoor track and field, Matt Stewart guided WT to LSC indoor championships and a pair of top 5 finishes at the NCAA National Championships. The Buffs and Lady Buffs claimed a combined 32 All-American honors during the indoor season. Stewart and Daniel were named the USTFCCA Regional Coaches of the Year.

Buffalo Basketball made another deep run into the NCAA Tournament during the 2023-24 campaign as WT finished 30-5 overall with multiple weeks ranked atop of the Division II Top 25 poll.

Tom Brown's squad claimed the program's 11th LSC regular season championship as the Buffs hosted the South Central Regional Championships in the First United Bank Center, claiming wins over Angelo State, Dallas Baptist and Colorado Mesa. The Buffs advanced to their fifth NCAA Elite Eight before falling to Minnesota State in the national semifinals. Brown was named the NABC Regional Coach of the Year. Senior Larry Wise earned All-American accolades and was a finalist for the prestigious Bevo Francis Award.

WT Baseball returned to the NCAA postseason in 2024 as Matt Vanderburg's team went 37-19 overall, advancing to the program's 10th Division II tournament. The Buffs picked up a postseason win over Colorado Mesa on the Mavericks' home field before falling twice to eventual regional champion Angelo State. Senior Dylan Feserman became the 15th All-American in school history as he picked up the esteemed accolade by two different organizations.





⤴ Sarah Reed earned All-American honors for the Lady Buffs as WT claimed the program's first ever NCAA Regional Championship.



⤴ Florance Uwajenezwa registered an impressive showing at the NCAA Outdoor National Championships with victories in the 10,000m and 5,000m.

Meredith Jameson's golf squad continued their run as one of the top programs in the nation, claiming the program's first NCAA regional championships to advance to nationals for the third straight campaign. The Lady Buffs qualified for medal match play for the third consecutive season before falling to University of Indiana in a scorecard tiebreaker during the national quarterfinals. Anna Nomrowski, Lorenza Perini and Sarah Reed claimed All-American honors for their efforts on the links.

Men's Golf registered the best season in program history in 2023-24 as the Buffs made a run to the NCAA Division II national semifinals. Axel Ochoa and the Buffs registered a fourth-place finish at the NCAA regional championships to qualify for nationals for the second time in school history. Freshman Wyatt Provence of Amarillo put together the best 56-hole run in Division II Championship history and the lowest three-round score in NCAA history on his way to win 2024 Arnold Palmer National Individual Championship and earn First Team All-American accolades. The Buffs knocked off top-seeded West Florida in the quarterfinals before falling to North Georgia in the semifinals by one stroke.

Lady Buff Softball impressed during the 2024 campaign as they claimed the program's fifth LSC championship and hosted the LSC tournament. Tournament MVP Emilee Boyer led the Lady Buffs to their sixth tournament title. The team also hosted the NCAA Division II South Central Regional Championships. Michael Mook's squad finished 50-8 overall as Boyer, Diana Murtha, Brittini Rufus and Lauren Granger were named All-Americans for their efforts on the diamond.

Track & Field finished off the spring with dominant performances, including two conference titles in the LSC Outdoor Championships. The men registered the highest team score in program history, while the women notched the second highest score. Twenty-eight student-athletes qualified for the NCAA Outdoor National Championships, with the Buffs finishing second and the Lady Buffs finishing sixth overall. Florance Uwajenezwa won national titles in the 10,000 meters and the 5,000 meters, while Amponsah followed up his cross-country crown with a gold medal in the 10,000 meters. WT boasted 23 All-Americans during the outdoor campaign. Sophomore Isaac Botsio and alum Benjamin Azamati have qualified for the 2024 Paris Olympics in the men's 4x100m relay with Team Ghana.



West Texas A&M's Isaac Botsio and Benjamin Azamati will participate in the XXXIII Olympic Games in Paris as they represent Team Ghana in the 4x100m Relay.





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## Faculty and Staff Accomplishments continued from pg. 3

WT's **Dr. Vanessa Fiaud**, an associate professor in the Department of Sports and Exercise Sciences in the College of Nursing and Health Sciences, was approved as a volunteer for both the Paris Olympics and the subsequent Paralympic Games. The Olympics will take place July 26 to Aug. 11, followed by the Paralympics from Aug. 28 to Sept. 8.

"When it came around that Paris was going to host the Games, I jumped on the opportunity," said Fiaud, a native of France. "They made a call for volunteers last summer, so I went through a pretty grueling process—a personality test, a competency test, a language test. I have lodging available with family and I'm familiar with Paris, but I still waited for months and months to hear if I was accepted."

Her official duties weren't finalized at presstime, but Fiaud said she believes she will volunteer with the fencing and tae kwon do competitions for the Olympics and be attached either to a nation's delegation or specific dignitaries for the Paralympics.

Her Olympics assignment is particularly meaningful: Fiaud was a competitive fencer as a child.

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WT professors were part of a team of researchers who recently published an article exploring a pandemic-era rise in online aggression against professors, particularly female ones.

The team published "Cyberbullying of university faculty: An examination of prevalence, coping, gender and personality factors" in the June issue of *Computers in Human Behavior*, a top-ranked journal in the fields of business and social sciences.

WT professors on the team are **Dr. Leslie Ramos Salazar**, the Amjad Abdullat Professor of Business; **Dr. Adam Weiss**, assistant professor of education; and **Dr. Jillian Williamson Yarbrough**, the Virginia Engler Professor of Business Management. Ramos Salazar and Yarbrough teach in the Paul and Virginia Engler College of Business, and Weiss teaches in the Terry B. Rogers College of Education and Social Sciences.

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**Dr. Mona Ozmaeian**, assistant professor of mechanical engineering in WT's College of Engineering, recently won a U.S. Department of Agriculture grant to support women and minorities in STEM fields.

The project was one of 10 that won a total of \$2 million in USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture grants.

Ozmaeian's project is an online, interactive toolkit tailored to teach students in kindergarten through 12th grades about the hydrological cycle.

Once completed, the online tool will be offered to K-12 teachers in rural school systems and to county extension agents working with 4H and FFA clubs, Ozmaeian said.

Also working on the project are **Dr. Swastika Bithi**, assistant professor of engineering; **Dr. Mark Garrison**, professor of education and Killgore Research Center doctoral research faculty; **Dr. Nathan Howell**, the Bell Professor of Engineering; and **Dr. David Parker**, associate professor and extension specialist in water engineering.

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Professors in WT's Departments of Chemistry and Physics and Life, Earth and Environmental Sciences won the grant from the NSF's Division of Undergraduate Education and its Improving Undergraduate STEM Education program for Hispanic Serving Institutions.

WT, a Regional Research University, qualified for HSI status in 2016.

The team also will establish a faculty development workshop and student support modules designed to enhance undergraduate research experiences in both departments.

WT professors on the team are **Dr. Nick Flynn**, professor of biochemistry and principal investigator; **Dr. Erik Crosman**, assistant professor of environmental science and assistant department head; **Dr. Keshav Shrestha**, assistant professor of physics; **Dr. Maha Shrestha**, assistant professor of chemistry; and **Dr. Rebecca VanderLeest**, assistant professor of geology.

**Dr. Bruce Brasington**, WT's Twanna Caddell Powell Professor of History, and **Darlene Brasington '97**, former academic documentation coordinator for the Paul and Virginia Engler College of Business, have given \$25,000 to establish the Brasington Family Scholarship Endowment for History and have set up a \$500,000 bequest through the I Am WT—Leaving a Legacy program.

Half of the Brasingtons' bequest is earmarked for the Department of History in WT's Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Arts. Fifty percent will be used for scholarships, prioritizing non-education history majors, particularly first-generation students. Remaining funds will support faculty development, including travel, conference expenses, access to scholarly databases and more. The other half will be set aside for both WT's School of Music and the Department of Art, Theatre and Dance. Each area will receive significant scholarship funding, with preference given to first-generation students; remaining funds will be used for production expenses and faculty development.

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**Dr. Brian M. Ingrassia's** new book argues that the building of the world's most famous racetrack also hit the accelerator for America's love of cars.

In "Speed Capital: Indianapolis Auto Racing and the Making of Modern America," published Feb. 6 from the University of Illinois Press, Ingrassia traces the origins of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and connects its rise to the growth of the United States' automobile culture.

The Speedway's popularity exploded after World War I and in the 1920s, the so-called Golden Age of American Sports. The Speedway also helped advance both automobile and paving technologies. The track's bricks were so popular that some cities across the country adopted them for their own streets—including Amarillo.

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**Dr. Brad Johnson '81** is now the University's new Lanna and Bob Hatton Professor of Rural Community Leadership.

Johnson was a key player in the development of WT's Rural Community Leaders Fellowship program and the associated RCL Summit that is held annually.

The RCL Fellowship—a program of WT's educational leadership doctoral program and co-created by Johnson and **Dr. Shanna Peebles '98**, WT's Dr. John G. O'Brien Distinguished Chair in Education—is an opportunity to identify and recognize particularly talented and service-oriented rural leaders after their dedication and effectiveness has been proven in the field. An appointment gives educators the opportunity to pass on their hard-won wisdom to the next generation of rural leaders through collaboration with doctoral students and other fellows.

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In "Name, Image, and Likeness Policies: Institutional Impact and States Responses," published by Routledge, WT's **Dr. Darrell Lovell** and Dr. Daniel J. Mallinson of Penn State–Harrisburg examine new practices that allow student athletes to get paid for their likeness—and how those policies are already being stretched.

Name, Image and Likeness policies allow college athletes to control and profit from their personal brand thanks to state legislatures passing new policies beginning in 2019, which were upheld by the Supreme Court in 2021, then folded into new regulations from the NCAA.

While the rules technically don't allow student athletes to be paid to play, NIL rights give the students the right to be compensated via endorsement agreements and, in some states, to hire agents. The funds often are funneled from private donors to university athletes through collectives.

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Following the May death of **Dr. Paul Engler**, four professorships were set up in the two Colleges that bear his name at WT: the Paul Engler College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences and the Paul and Virginia Engler College of Business.

**Dr. Bridget Guerrero '02** has been named the Paul Engler Professor of Agriculture, **Dr. Carolyn Bouma** has been named the Paul Engler Professor of Microbiology, **Dr. Dave Howe** has been named the Paul Engler Professor of Entrepreneurship, and **Dr. Carl Zhang** has been named the Paul Engler Professor of Business Innovation.

In 2017, Engler and the Paul F. and Virginia J. Engler Foundation agreed to donate \$1 million a year for at least 80 years to the University. It currently stands as the largest gift in WT history.



## Forensics Success

**Isaac Doty '24**, a May graduate in sociology from Lubbock, placed third in the nation in communication analysis at the American Forensic Association National Speech Tournament in April.

**Alejandro Mata '24**, a May graduate in political science from Hereford, won a \$5,000 honorarium from the Dr. Bruce Manchester Scholar Series, for intensive study and research.

The WT Forensics team ranked 21st overall, competing in a range of events including prose, persuasion, informative, extemporaneous speaking, and dramatic interpretation.

The tournament is a platform for speech education at the college level, bringing together students from across the nation to compete for national championships in multiple events.

## Top Student Employees Named

Caden Bonilla, a senior biology major from Amarillo, was named 2024

Undergraduate Student Employee of the Year in recognition of his role as student director of New Student Orientations.

**Zane Platter '24**, a May master's in animal science graduate from Canton, South Dakota, was named 2024 Graduate Student Employee of the Year honoring his work throughout the Paul Engler College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences , especially with livestock judging and meat animal evaluation teams.

As student director of NSOs, Bonilla "hosted sessions, setup/tore down sessions, served as the main point of contact for peer leaders during NSO and assisted future students with issues as they arose," wrote Amanda Lawson, senior director for orientation and academic success, in her nomination form. "Caden was able to manage his time and efforts to seamlessly coordinate the student side of NSO while still being available to handle student issues."

Bonilla ran eight NSOs, coordinating with 35 departments and 200 incoming students in each of them.

In addition to being the "go-to graduate student to give a meat lab tour (and) teach a lab, Platter was integral to the growth and success of critical animal judging teams," wrote Dr. Loni Lucherk, WT's Gordon W. Davis Endowed Chair in Meat Judging.

## New Name, Same Mission

One of WT's more acclaimed departments now has a new name that better encapsulates the broad range of studies it offers.

WT's former Department of Communication Disorders is now the Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences in the University's College of Nursing and Health Sciences.

The new name signifies the work done by the faculty and staff of the highly regarded department, said Dr. Brenda Cross, department head and clinical assistant professor.

"Professionals in our field are the experts in speech, language, swallowing and hearing disorders," Cross said. "Our new name is a better reflection of the science that underpins everything we do in our field. Speech-language pathology and audiology are healthcare professionals, and we emphasize models of care balancing evidence, research and innovation with clinical observations."

The department dates back at least 25 years, and a previous program was in place in the 1970s.

The WT Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences includes eight faculty members and about 75 undergraduate and graduate students.

## Teacher Preparation Wins Accolades

WT's Educator Preparation Program recently earned a top honor from the Texas Education Agency.

WT's program earned a commendation by the TEA's State Board for Educator Certification under its "Preparing the Educators Texas Needs" category, the agency told the University in a March 8 letter.

WT was recognized for the percentage of prepared teachers in teacher shortage areas and for the percentage of prepared teachers employed in rural schools, both key measures in addressing regional needs.

The commendations—the first such awards received by WT—were voted on at SBEC's February meeting, at which WT's educator preparation program was reviewed and awarded the board's highest status by meeting the standard on every measure and subcategory.

Commendations also were granted for "Rigorous and Robust Preparation," "Preparing Educators for Long-Term Success" and "Innovative Educator Preparation."

SBEC looked at educator preparation for the 2022-23 academic year, during which 115 WT graduates were certified as teachers.

## Top Honors from U.S. News

WT's online bachelor's program ranked No. 45 in the nation and No. 3 in Texas, according to newly released 2024 rankings from U.S. News & World Report.

Several undergraduate and graduate programs also rank highly state- and nationwide in the new standings, with 11 total programs earning the magazine's coveted Best Program status: online bachelor's programs, online bachelor's programs for veterans, online undergraduate business programs, online MBA, online MBA for veterans, and graduate programs in computer information technology, criminal justice and public administration, education, engineering, business (non-MBA) and nursing.

Statewide, WT's online bachelor's program is behind only Texas A&M University and the University of North Texas.

Each of the 11 WT programs ranked in the top third of U.S. News & World Report's rankings.

## New Programs Added

The Paul and Virginia Engler College of Business and the College of Nursing and Health Sciences are launching new degree programs, following February approval by The Texas A&M University System Board of Regents.

Programs in the Engler College of Business are a new master of science in strategic human resource management program and a new bachelor of science in hospitality and tourism management. The Laura and Joe Street School of Nursing added a psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner degree program.

Classes are expected to begin in fall 2024, following final approval by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

The new graduate HR degree, which will align with the Society of Human Resource Management's competency model for HR professionals, will be unique in the state through a focus on how managers can form close partnerships with top management to achieve a firm's strategic goals.

The bachelor's degree will take advantage of the unique location of Canyon and Amarillo as hubs of hospitality and tourism, thanks to their location near Historic Route 66, Interstates 40 and 27 and Palo Duro Canyon.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, job opportunities in hospitality and tourism fields and in human resource management are expected to rise over the next decade. The psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner degree is an expansion of a post-master's certificate program WT began offering in 2020 in the Department of Nursing in the College of Nursing and Health Sciences. It will allow students in WT's bachelor of science in nursing degree program, and others, to continue their education, increasing the number of available mental health providers in the region and state. In general, a certificate is awarded after completing a field-specific, shorter program, as opposed to an entire field of study.

Nurse practitioner is the second-fastest growing career in Texas, according to the Texas Workforce Commission.



## WT Business Students Raise Thousands for Charities

Students in the Paul and Virginia Engler College of Business raised more than \$13,000 for Panhandle-area charities, including several agencies connected to the historic wildfires that tore through the area in March. Students were assigned to run a philanthropic project for the Leadership and Teamwork course taught by Dr. Kelly Davis McCauley, associate and Engler Professor of Management in the Department of Management, Marketing and General Business.

The College made matching donations through funds made available by the historic \$80 million donation from the late Dr. Paul Engler and his foundation.

Projects had to be large enough that students had to work together and also each have clear leadership roles in the project, McCauley said. The 24 students were allowed to select charities that were meaningful to them. The lineup included the Hope and Healing Place, Hartley Fire and EMS, Hope Lives Here, Kids Inc., and the Panhandle Disaster Relief Fund.

## Land Swap Helps Bring Mental Health Hospital to Amarillo

The Texas A&M University System Regents voted unanimously in May to approve a land deal in Amarillo that will help to build the only state hospital for inpatient mental health care in the Panhandle.

The deal involves leasing a 10-acre tract of land the Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory formerly occupied at 6610 W. Amarillo Blvd. before it moved its lab to the West Texas A&M University campus.

TVDML is leasing the Amarillo site for \$1 a year to the Texas Health and Human Services Commission to construct a 75-bed mental hospital.

HHSC plans to break ground on the hospital late this summer and begin admitting patients in fall 2027.

The 88th Texas Legislature provided \$159 million to build the hospital but directed the Health and Human Services Commission to work with local stakeholders to find the land for it.

The West Texas A&M University Foundation is raising \$750,000 to purchase the bus terminal adjacent to Harrington Academic Hall WTAMU Amarillo Center. The University also is working with the city of Amarillo to use the property to further expand WT's Laura and Joe Street School of Nursing.

The net effect of the swap is an even deal: The Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory gets paid \$1.3 million — the appraised value of the property in 2023 — and West Texas A&M University gets property and cash worth \$1.3 million.

## Stop the Presses

WT students brought home 13 awards from the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association conference in San Marcos.

Two student media organizations in the Department of Communication won awards: The Prairie News, WT's student-run news organization, and 1910 PR, WT's student-run public relations firm. Winning students came from the Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Arts and Humanities, the Paul Engler College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences, and the the Paul and Virginia Engler College of Business.

**Jo Early '24**, a May graduate in digital communication and media from Amarillo, won first place in the print news writing live competition, third place for "The Tale of Sarah Jane" multimedia feature, and first place for the "College of Engineering Launches Fourth Punkin' Chunkin" general news video/multimedia story, both previously published on The Prairie News' website.

**JoLina Lopez '24**, a May graduate in digital communication and media from Abernathy, won first place for the previously published "Lost Faces, Found Voices" multimedia feature and second place for the general news video/multimedia story "Senate Bill 17 impacts diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives at West Texas A&M."

**Lindsey Sawin '23**, a December agricultural media and communication graduate from Vernon, won first place for the "What to Know about Thunder XIV" interactive infographics she created for a multimedia journalism course and later submitted for publication at The Prairie News.

## '50s

**Bill Neeley '59, '69** is a teacher and independent historian who has dedicated years to archival research. He has several published works, including "Quanah Parker and His People," and is in the process of publishing "Touchdowns and Turnbuckles: World Championship Athletes from West Texas State" with his grandson, Justin.

## '60s



**Rick Couch '68** is known as the No. 1 fan of WT women's golf. He served in Vietnam for one year and in the army five years as a helicopter pilot. He worked 32 years in plastics manufacturing, doing injection molding. Their biggest customer was Mary Kay Cosmetics.

## '70s



Since the early 2000s, **Judith Bretthauer '71** has been the owner of Bretthauer-Ramirez Staffing in Houston. After teaching two years, Judith joined M. David Lowe Personnel (the No. 1 agency in Houston according to the Houston Business Journal) for 26 years. She started her business after Lowe sold his company. Through many years, they have placed many thousands of people in local jobs.

**Dr. N. Andy Cole '71**, was recently named a 2023 Distinguished Alumni in the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources at Oklahoma State University. Cole currently funds a travel scholarship for OSU graduate students in Beef Cattle Nutrition and an Endowed Professorship in Animal Science at OSU. Cole also is engaged with WT, recently endowing a new professorship in animal science.

**Rosemary Robinson '73** is the longest-tenured employee of the City of Amarillo with 50-plus years of service. In February 2022, she was recognized by the city, and the celebration day was declared "Rosemary Robinson Day." She is a member of the Ladies Auxiliary of Downtown Women's Center and the Canyon-Amarillo WT Alumni Chapter; Rosemary has also served on CASA Light of Hope board.

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**Jim McLarty '78** worked in various healthcare roles before medically retiring in 2016. Since then, he co-teaches a dementia elective at Texas Christian University and provides education to TCU Alumni, churches, and other organizations. He also serves on an advisory council for Alter, an Atlanta-based organization that focuses on dementia education for predominately African American churches.

**Mike Criswell '78** retired from the office of Swisher County Attorney with Felony Jurisdiction after 30 years of service. Mike served on the board of directors of the Texas District and County Attorneys Association for two terms, and he was one of 106 members named as Founding Fellows of the Texas District & Prosecutors Society, established by the Texas District & County Attorneys Foundation.

## '80s

**Buster Davis '82** has been mayor of Gruver for 12 years, is a member of Gruver Lions Club, president of the finance council of the Sacred Heart Catholic Church and is treasurer of the Knights of Columbus. He also serves on the board of directors for the Panhandle Regional Planning Commission.

## '90s



**Melanie Smith White '95, '98** is a Pittsburgh-based comedian and playwright. She recently had her play, "The Moms are Alright," accepted into the world's largest solo theater festival in New York City. After sold-out shows in Pittsburgh, her play appeared off-Broadway as part of the United Solo Theater Festival.





**Molly Smith Swagler '98** serves as the assistant vice provost for enrollment and executive director of enrollment outreach at the University of Pittsburgh. After a rewarding career in media, Swagler spent the last decade in university administration. She has been featured nationwide at conferences, in podcasts, and various media highlighting her work.

## '00s

**Amy Henderson '00, '18** has been reappointed by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott to his Commission for Women, one of 15 women selected. She has served on several boards in the Amarillo area, was a recipient of a Top Twenty Under 40 award from the Amarillo Chamber of Commerce, and was selected as the 2010 Businesswoman of the Year by the Amarillo Chamber Women's Council.



**Jose Ochoa '01** has been named president and CEO of the National Museum of Mexican Art. Ochoa previously served as the president of ChiArts Foundation of the Chicago High School Arts, the founding executive and artistic director of ChiArts, and Superintendent of Cultural Arts for Nashville.



**Dr. Wendee Payne '05** has been reappointed to Texas Animal Health Commission by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott. She serves remotely as an associate solution consultant for Infor, a multinational company in New York City. She has served as a member of the American Society of Animal Scientists, National Association of Equine Affiliated Academics, and Equine Science Today.  
Photo by: Krista Francis Photos

**Eric Rath '00 and '04** was selected as one of the top 15 UIL Sponsors in the state of Texas. Rath is the band director for Canyon High School, and he has taken the band to state every year during his tenure as their director.

## '10s



**Ethan Douglass '13** recently was promoted to vice president of First United Bank's Amarillo Tradewind Banking Center. Douglass brings eleven years of banking experience to the role. An Amarillo native, he is very active in the Turn Center and The Bridge Children's Advocacy Center. He and his wife **Brianna '10** stay busy with their three kids' various activities.

**Cece '14 and Ale '20 Hernandez** serve, respectively, as assistant director of admissions at Angelo State and a nurse at Shannon Medical Center. For the past three years, the sisters have taken medical mission trips to Honduras with Baptist Medical and Dental Mission International.



**Caitlin Robb '14** was the winner of an Excellence in Writing Award at the University of Arkansas Law School. She has served as the editor-in-chief for the Journal of Food Law & Policy. After completion of the Missouri Bar, she will continue her career as a litigation associate.

**Anna Hogan '14** serves as one of the artistic directors and head of production at the Santa Fe Playhouse, one of the oldest theaters in the country. Hogan has an extensive musical theater background, including the New York theater scene and fulfilling the artistic director position at the Wallace Theater in Levelland.



**Alabama Bohannon '16** recently was promoted to vice president for First United Bank's Childress Banking Center and brings 10 years of banking experience to the role. He serves weekly with Meals on Wheels and is the president-elect for Childress Rotary Club. He and his wife, **Tori '14, '20**, enjoy all things outdoors with their daughter.

## Community, Student Leaders Honored by Engler College of Business

Top business students and community leaders were honored at a recent year-end event held by West Texas A&M University's Paul and Virginia Engler College of Business.

**Gene Sanders '70** was given the Ambassador Award, celebrating his long support of WT through the J.W. & Nell Foust Memorial Ink Cup Golf Tournament, which has raised nearly a quarter-million dollars for scholarships for business students.

Stewart, Martin, Dudley & Web accounting firm was given the Employer of the Year Award for advancing internship and employment opportunities for Engler College students.

**Tyler Young '14, '15 and '17**, who earned degrees in accounting and finance and economics at WT and is a wealth adviser and manager of investment research at SFMG Wealth Advisors in Dallas, was given the Horizon Alumnus Award for reaching significant career advancement in an early stage of a career.

**Charles '72 and Evelyn '79 Lyles** were given the Legacy Award for providing support to Engler College students. They established a memorial scholarship for computer information sciences majors in the memory of their son, **Carey Lyles '04**.

Overall, nearly 100 Buffs were commended as outstanding students or inducted into honor societies.

Cristian Bustillos, a senior finance major from Muleshoe, was named outstanding undergraduate student.

Sierra Kane, an MBA student from Amarillo, was named outstanding graduate student.

## Leading the Way in Liver Research

**Dr. Ty Lawrence '97**, WT's Caviness Davis Distinguished Chair in Meat Science and professor of animal science in WT's Paul Engler College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences, was a key member of a team investigating the causes of one of the costliest afflictions in cattle. Lawrence and scientists from the USDA's Agricultural Research Service, Texas Tech University and Kansas State University recently published a model study into the triggers for liver abscesses in cattle in the Journal of Animal Science.

The team also has earned a \$650,000 grant from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture to continue this work.

Liver abscesses often occur in feedlot cattle because they are fed a high-energy, low-roughage diet in order to reach the desired quality grades weight prior to slaughter. The abscesses can lead to the need to further trim carcasses, which can lead to more than \$900 million in annual beef industry losses.

WT has been a leader in researching cattle liver abscesses since the 1970s.

## Engineering Wins Grant to Help Area Companies

WT's College of Engineering is offering free assistance for Panhandle-area business owners seeking national grants for projects that both save and create energy.

The College recently won a \$250,000 Rural Energy America Program grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to help businesses improve their chances at scoring REAP grants.

Businesses seeking their own REAP grant have two 2024 application deadlines: June 30 and Sept. 30. Funding levels are uncertain after the final deadline.

REAP grants help agricultural producers and rural small businesses to build new facilities that utilize wind or solar energy, or to renovate existing structures to make them more efficient.

Interested applicants can contact Dr. Joshua Partheepan at [jpartheepan@wtamu.edu](mailto:jpartheepan@wtamu.edu) or 806-651-5265.



# **WT** Alumni Association

WEST TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY™

WT Box 60753 Canyon, TX 79016

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

806-651-2311 ALUMNI@WTAMU.EDU

BUFFALUM.COM

## ONCE A BUFF *Always a Buff*

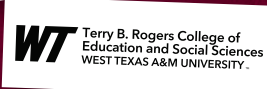
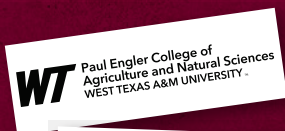
### **TRADITIONAL MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS:**

- All member benefits\*
- WT Spirit items
- Special membership benefits



### **COLLEGE LOYALTY BENEFITS:**

- Membership to your College specific network\*
- College specific car sticker
- Half of your membership goes back to the college of your choice.



*\*visit [buffalum.com](http://buffalum.com) to see the WT Spirit items for each membership level*

### **BENEFITS, PERKS AND IMPACT:**

- Student Alumni Scholarships
- Interaction with other WT Alumni
- Leadership development for students
- "Design Your Life" student mentor program
- Alumni led professional development
- Community service events
- Alumni Scholars Program

# **JOIN OR RENEW TODAY AT [BUFFALUM.COM](http://BUFFALUM.COM)**

