

STUDENT NEWSLETTER



COLLEGE OF
**Humanities, Social
Sciences and Arts**

EAST TEXAS A&M

April Newsletter

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STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS

Balancing the Arena and the Classroom: Blaize Deree Excels in Breakaway Roping and Graduate Studies



Blaize Deree Literature and Languages

From the department of Literature and Languages, Blaize Deree makes her mark in breakaway roping, one of rodeo's most competitive events.

Being a member of the East Texas A&M University Rodeo Team while doing her Masters in English, Blaize competes at a high level while balancing the demands of graduate school and teaching.

Blaize and her horse, Sixx, captured a first-place finish at the Sam Houston State University collegiate rodeo with an impressive 2.2-second run in the first round, an achievement that highlights her skill and dedication in the arena.

Blaize's success comes during an exciting time for the program, as ETAMU hosted its first collegiate rodeo at the new Spur Expo, drawing nearly 2,000 fans and bringing together competitors from across the Southern Region. Competing on a home stage has added new energy and visibility to the team, showcasing the talent and hard work of student-athletes like Blaize.



Literature and Languages

EAST TEXAS A&M

Originally from Scotts Hill, Tennessee, Blaize was offered a scholarship to join the ETAMU Rodeo Team during her senior year of high school. She moved to Commerce in August 2021 to pursue a degree in English while continuing her rodeo career. Since then, Blaize has excelled academically, graduating magna cum laude in 2024 before immediately beginning her Master's in English.

Now serving as a graduate assistant, Blaize teaches two sections of ENG 100: Introduction to College Reading and Writing, all while taking nine hours of graduate coursework and maintaining a rigorous rodeo practice schedule five days a week. This demanding routine reflects her strong work ethic and ability to balance multiple roles at a high level.

"Balancing school and rodeo simultaneously is the most challenging thing I've ever done, but what a privilege it is to be challenged by a life that I once prayed for!" - Blaize Deree



Whether she is competing in the arena or guiding students in the classroom, Blaize represents the best of East Texas A&M, dedicated, resilient, and driven to succeed.

Featuring



Political Science

EAST TEXAS A&M

ETAMU Launches Civic Affairs Club with Strong Presence at Civil Discourse Symposium

East Texas A&M University students have established the Civic Affairs Club, a new student-led organization dedicated to fostering civic engagement and meaningful dialogue across campus. Founded on March 12, 2026, the club brings together students from all majors and perspectives with the shared goal of building a more informed, active, and connected student body.

The Civic Affairs Club is a nonpartisan organization that encourages open discussion on current events, public policy, and civic responsibility. Through forums, guest speakers, and conversations with elected officials, members develop essential skills in leadership, networking, critical thinking, and respectful dialogue.



We wanted to create a space where students don't feel like they have to agree, but can still have real conversations. Civic engagement shouldn't feel intimidating, and this club is about making it more accessible for everyone. - Club President

The club's mission was put into action during East Texas A&M's inaugural Civil Discourse Symposium, part of the Texas A&M System's "Civil Discourse in a Divided Age" initiative. The event brought together students, legislators, and national media figures, including former U.S. Congressman Mike Conaway, ABC News correspondent John Quiñones, PBS host Alexander Heffner, and multiple Texas state leaders, for conversations centered on effective and respectful communication.

Members of the Civic Affairs Club were actively involved throughout the symposium, engaging in both sessions and participating in discussions with speakers and panelists. The organization especially valued the opportunity to connect directly with State Representative Nicole Collier and journalist John Quiñones, gaining firsthand insight into the role of communication, ethics, and leadership in public life.

Two club members, Amarion and Ayden, were also invited to attend a luncheon with panelists, where they shared the mission of the Civic Affairs Club with fellow students and distinguished guests. These experiences not only strengthened the club's presence on campus but also reinforced its foundational values.

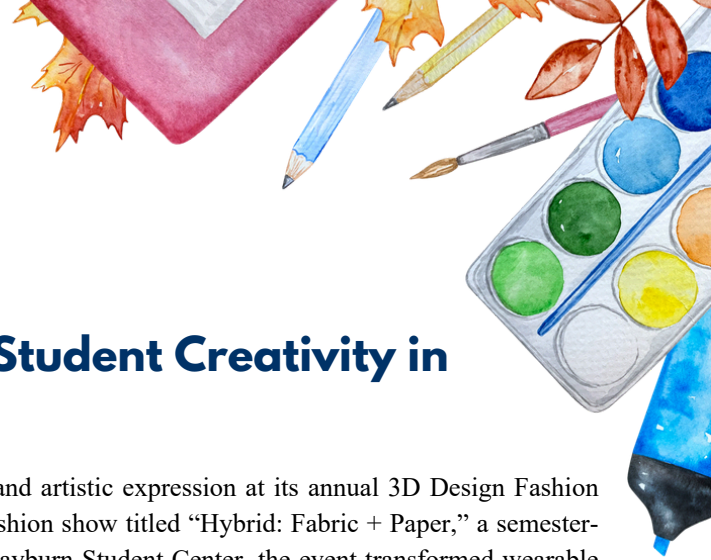
Many of the symposium's key messages closely aligned with the club's mission: listening to understand, engaging respectfully across differences, and recognizing the humanity in every conversation. These principles remain central to the Civic Affairs Club's vision of making civic engagement more accessible, inclusive, and impactful for all students.

Through its early involvement and growing presence, the Civic Affairs Club is already playing a meaningful role in shaping a campus culture grounded in dialogue, respect, and active participation in civic life.



Featuring Art

EAST TEXAS A&M



3D Design Fashion Show Highlights Student Creativity in “Hybrid: Fabric + Paper”

The East Texas A&M University Art Department celebrated innovation and artistic expression at its annual 3D Design Fashion Show, where students of Professor Josephine “Josie” Durkin had their fashion show titled “Hybrid: Fabric + Paper,” a semester-long project brought to life on the runway. Held on April 9 in the Sam Rayburn Student Center, the event transformed wearable design into a powerful showcase of storytelling, craftsmanship, and imagination.

Each student created a wearable work using a balanced combination of fabric and paper, along with thread, adhesives, and pigments. Behind each finished piece was a rigorous and hands-on creative process. Professor Durkin guided students to develop prototypes before working with machines, beginning with hand-sewing techniques in both fabric and paper. Students then translated their ideas into patterns, constructed custom garments, and even built personalized dress forms based on their models, ensuring each final design was tailored, intentional, and structurally sound before stepping onto the runway.

Cloud Cross – celestial night sky inspired layered dress

Michele L. Baker – multi-material piece inspired by movement and music

Emmi Price – sustainable design using repurposed denim and coffee filters

Jaxon Cunningham – structural exploration using simple materials

Stacia Coulter – yukata-inspired design blending tradition and subculture

Yuseong Jeon – sunset-inspired piece influenced by Korean hanbok

Noah Ullman – nature-inspired floral two-piece

La’Shira DeShield – bold, structured black and blue ensemble

Ariyanna Mestas – whimsical garden fairy design

Anthony Hernandez – high-contrast dress with dynamic yellow accents

Jaden Jackson – street fighter-inspired look with armor elements

Conlee Murray – elegant satin and upcycled design with paper cape



As judges deliberated, attendees supported the Clay Club, which hosted a fundraiser featuring handcrafted ceramics made by students. Proceeds will benefit future creative projects and opportunities.

The evening concluded with a final runway showcase and awards, celebrating the creativity and dedication of all participants. The 3D Design Fashion Show continues to provide students with a platform to experiment, take risks, and transform ideas into fully realized works of wearable art.



Featuring



Art

EAST TEXAS A&M



Photography Student Morgan Gridley Returns to NASA Internship

East Texas A&M University BFA Photography major Morgan Gridley has once again been selected for a highly competitive NASA summer photography internship at Johnson Space Center, marking her second consecutive year in the program.

NASA's Office of STEM Engagement (OSTEM) Internship Program provides students with paid, hands-on opportunities to contribute to real-world missions in science, technology, and space exploration. These internships are designed to build both technical expertise and professional readiness, offering students direct access to NASA mentors and projects that shape the future of the agency's workforce.

Originally from Gilroy, California, Morgan is pursuing a degree in Fine Art Photography and has already gained remarkable professional experience through her work with NASA.



Morgan Gridley
Art



During her first internship, Morgan worked closely with NASA's photography team, gaining hands-on experience and mentorship that quickly elevated her skills. By the end of the summer, she was entrusted with her own assignments: photographing more than 20 astronauts, capturing a launch from Mission Control, and even having one of her images featured in the news.

Morgan credits the internship with helping her refine her career goals and expand her professional network. After graduating in December 2026, she hopes to pursue a career as a NASA photographer or in a similar field, continuing to combine her passion for photography with cutting-edge innovation.

"I learned so much from the photography team, who truly took me under their wing, this experience helped me figure out what type of photography I want to pursue and gave me incredible opportunities to grow and connect with professionals in the field."

- Morgan Gridley

Morgan's achievement highlights the strength of East Texas A&M's BFA Photography program, which continues to produce talented, driven students ready to succeed at the highest levels. Morgan's return to NASA stands as a testament to her dedication, creativity, and the impact of hands-on learning experiences.



Featuring



SCHOOL OF
Music
EAST TEXAS A&M

ETAMU Flute Studio Celebrates Student Success and National Recognition

The East Texas A&M University Flute Studio is celebrating an exciting season of student achievement, with multiple students earning graduate school acceptances, prestigious performance opportunities, and milestone accomplishments. Several seniors have received impressive Master of Music program acceptances for Fall 2026, reflecting both their talent and dedication as they graduate with their bachelors.



The studio, under the direction of Dr. Julee Kim Walker, offers a nurturing and dynamic environment where students immerse themselves in the art of flute performance and musicianship. Guided by accomplished faculty, students develop technical proficiency, musicality, and versatility across a range of genres and styles, preparing them for successful careers in music and beyond.

Sofia Gonzalez Ayala, a senior Music Education major, was accepted to the New England Conservatory and University of Colorado Boulder.

Dayeon Namkoong, a senior Music Performance major, earned acceptances to Baylor University, University of Houston, The Hartt School, and Austin Peay State University.



In addition to graduate school success, sophomore Danyoung Kim, a Music Education major, was selected as a flutist for the Chicago Summer Opera Festival in July 2026. This prestigious program provides instrumentalists the opportunity to perform in fully staged opera productions while receiving mentorship from world-class faculty. With its emphasis on performance and professional development, the festival offers a valuable platform for emerging musicians to refine their artistry and expand their professional networks.

Further recognition comes from the flute studio's graduate teaching assistant Lyn Hoang, who has been selected to perform with the National Flute Association's Professional Flute Choir for 2026, an honor that reflects exceptional musicianship.

Lyn also recently presented her Master's recital on April 9, marking an important milestone as she prepares to graduate with her Master in Flute Performance degree in May. The NFA Convention, where she will perform, is one of the largest gatherings of flutists in the world, bringing together thousands of performers, educators, and students for performances, masterclasses, and workshops.

Through performances, recitals, and professional opportunities, the Flute Studio continues to foster a culture of excellence and growth. Together, these achievements highlight the continued success of the East Texas A&M Flute Studio and its dedication to developing skilled, confident, and accomplished musicians ready to make their mark in the field.



Featuring



SCHOOL OF
Music
EAST TEXAS A&M

School of Music Brings “Seussical the Musical” to Life on Stage

East Texas A&M University’s School of Music delighted audiences with its spring production of *Seussical the Musical*, opening April 9 in the Finney Concert Hall. The lively and imaginative performance showcased the talent, creativity, and collaboration of student performers, musicians, and crew.

Originally created with lyrics by Lynn Ahrens and music by Stephen Flaherty, *Seussical* brings together some of Dr. Seuss’s most beloved stories, drawing primarily from *Horton Hears a Who!*, *Gertrude McFuzz*, and *Horton Hatches the Egg*. The musical, whose title blends “Seuss” and “musical”, has grown into a widely popular production for schools and regional theaters, despite its challenging initial Broadway run in 2000. Its enduring appeal lies in its imaginative storytelling and heartfelt themes of friendship, loyalty, and self-belief.

Directed by Dr. Patrick McNally, assistant professor of voice and director of opera, the East Texas A&M production reimaged this whimsical world through the lens of childhood imagination.



From the opening moments, the production captivated audiences with powerful vocals, energetic choreography, and colorful costumes. Memorable staging: such as Horton the Elephant perched in a carefully crafted, mobile tree, added both visual creativity and emotional depth to the storytelling.

The cast featured approximately 20 students from the Spring 2026 Ensemble: Opera Scenes course, supported by a live student ensemble and technical crew. Together, they brought to life iconic characters including the Cat in the Hat, Horton, Jojo, and Gertrude McFuzz, delivering performances that balanced humor, heart, and musical precision.

Behind the scenes, students gained valuable hands-on experience in all aspects of production, from stage management to musical direction, reinforcing the program’s commitment to preparing students for careers in performance and music education.

Through its strong musicianship and imaginative storytelling, *Seussical the Musical* not only entertained but also highlighted the depth of talent within East Texas A&M’s School of Music, leaving a lasting impression on all who attended.





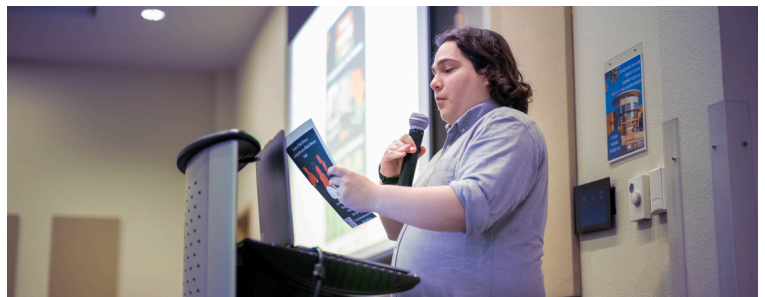
ETAMU History Club Brings the Past to Life Through Engaging Events

The East Texas A&M University History Club continues to build a vibrant community of students passionate about exploring the past and connecting it to the present. Open to both majors and non-majors, the club creates a welcoming space for discussion, learning, and shared curiosity.

Guided by the idea that “our ideas last longer than empires,” the History Club hosts a variety of events designed to spark interest and encourage meaningful conversations. Weekly meetings, held in the Ferguson Conference Room, provide students with opportunities to connect, exchange ideas, and engage with history in an interactive setting.



Throughout the semester, the club has organized several successful events that highlight both education and community engagement. One of its standout programs celebrated Black History Month, marking a century of Black history through storytelling and reflection. The event brought students together to honor influential figures and discuss the lasting impact of Black history on society.



In addition to academic discussions, the club also hosted a History Club Book Sale at the Campus Crossroads, offering affordable books for students across campus. The event not only promoted literacy and access to historical texts but also created a fun, informal way for students to engage with history outside the classroom.

Beyond these events, the History Club regularly features guest speakers, student-led discussions, and networking opportunities, allowing members to deepen their understanding of historical topics while building valuable connections. These activities emphasize critical thinking, storytelling, and the relevance of history in today's world.

With its mix of educational programming and community-focused events, the ETAMU History Club continues to make history accessible, engaging, and meaningful for all students, proving that the past is not just something to study, but something to experience.

Featuring



Annual Research Symposium

EAST TEXAS A&M

CHSSA Students Shine at Record-Breaking Research Symposium

Students from the College of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Arts (CHSSA) were among the standout honorees at East Texas A&M University's seventh Annual Research Symposium, which drew a record 177 student presenters and marked the largest event in its history.

Hosted on April 15 by the Division of Research and Economic Development, the symposium featured a wide range of student scholarship across disciplines.

CHSSA students earned top recognition in both oral and poster presentation categories, highlighting the college's continued excellence in research and innovation.

CHSSA Award Winners:

Undergraduate Oral: Ritika Deivasigamani — "Pedagogical Vertical Alignment in Instrumental Music Education"

Graduate Oral: Gouda Taha — "Collaborative Processing of ChatGPT Feedback in First-Year Writing Class"

Undergraduate Poster: Tyhler Nelson — "Regional Impact of Southern Identity in Rap"

Graduate Poster: Adrian Hernandez-Anderson — "Invisible Roots: Decolonizing Spanish Heritage Language Education Through the Representation of Indigenous Languages in Instructional Materials"

"As a full-time high school teacher, I've been able to see my pedagogical approach evolve in real time alongside my research," he said. "With the support of my advisor, Dr. Flavia Belpoliti, and through my work with open educational resources, I've developed a project that connects directly to classroom practice. It has reinforced the importance of critically examining the instructional materials we use and what they communicate to students about language, culture and identity." - Adrian Hernandez-Anderson



The symposium's growth, now expanded by 65% over the past four years, reflects East Texas A&M's rising research profile and its Carnegie R2 designation. For CHSSA students, the event provides a valuable platform to present original research, engage with professionals, and prepare for future academic and career success.

As participation continues to grow, CHSSA remains at the forefront of advancing meaningful, interdisciplinary research that connects scholarship with real-world impact.