

STUDENT/FACULTY NEWSLETTER



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

EAST TEXAS A&M

May Newsletter

WHAT'S INSIDE

FACULTY/STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS

PAGE 02

Literature and Languages

PAGE 03

Art

PAGE 04

Spring Learning Showcase

PAGE 05

Spring 2026 Graduation



FACULTY HIGHLIGHTS



**Literature
and Languages**
EAST TEXAS A&M

Dr. Christian Hempelmann Named to 2026 AI 75 Innovators in DFW



Christian Hempelmann Literature and Languages

"AI can be prompted to craft a joke, but it will never wield humor to get out of a scrape or explore possibilities."

- Christian Hempelmann

East Texas A&M University's Dr. Christian F. Hempelmann, professor of computational linguistics and director of the Semantic Artificial Intelligence and Creativity Laboratory, has been recognized as one of the region's leading innovators in the 2026 AI 75 Innovators in DFW list.

Presented by Dallas Innovates in partnership with the Dallas Regional Chamber, the annual AI 75 list honors influential leaders advancing artificial intelligence across North Texas, including researchers, entrepreneurs, executives, and educators.

Dr. Hempelmann is a computational linguist, AI-humor researcher, and leader of East Texas A&M's AI Initiative and Semantic Artificial Intelligence and Creativity Laboratory. In these roles, he helps shape AI curricula, build partnerships with industry, and prepare students for careers in rapidly evolving AI fields, he is also recognized as one of the few researchers internationally helping shape scholarly conversations surrounding artificial intelligence and humor.

Dr. Hempelmann's research focuses on computational humor and semantic AI systems, including the lab's Project Mercury, which develops hybrid systems that combine knowledge graphs and embeddings to represent the meaning of jokes through formal semantics. While AI can generate jokes, Dr. Hempelmann has emphasized the uniquely human role humor plays in creativity and communication.



In addition to leading East Texas A&M's growing AI presence, Dr. Hempelmann has collaborated with major industry partners. In 2022, he served as an applied scientist consultant at Amazon's Grand Challenge Lab, where he developed a prototype computational humor system and hosted an international roundtable focused on AI and humor research.

Before joining academia, Dr. Hempelmann worked in private industry as chief scientific officer at hakia.com and director of research and development at RiverGlass, his published scholarship has received more than 3,800 citations, reflecting the broad impact of his work in computational linguistics and AI research.

Dr. Hempelmann's recognition on the AI 75 list highlights both the impact of his research and East Texas A&M's growing role in advancing innovation and AI education in Texas and beyond.



“Power of the Pride” Mural Brings New Energy and Lion Spirit to Campus

A once-quiet corner of East Texas A&M University campus has been transformed into a vibrant new gathering space thanks to Power of the Pride, a large-scale student-created mural unveiled May 7 outside the Sculpture Lab near the McDowell Administration Building.

Created by graduating art students Sloan Rogers and Cassidy Allarah Steele, the mural celebrates unity, belonging, courage, and the shared identity of the East Texas A&M community. Commissioned by the university’s Public Art Committee, the project reflects a growing vision to bring more student-created public art to campus.



The mural features four stylized lions rendered in geometric, mosaic-inspired forms, connected by flowing blue-and-gold shapes that symbolize generations of Lions united as one community. A bold golden lion anchors the composition, representing leadership, creativity, and strength.

The project also served as a major creative milestone for both artists. After developing the concept digitally using Procreate, the pair painted the mural in six separate sections inside the Sculpture Lab before assembling and installing it outdoors. Fellow art students Raimi Roldshield, Cindy Fleming, Alisa Yactzak, and Min Ahn also assisted throughout the painting and installation process.

Both artists are continuing their artistic and educational journeys after graduation. Cassidy earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Studio Art with a concentration in sculpture and plans to continue coursework toward her teaching certification. Sloan graduated with a BFA in Studio Art with all-level teaching certification and will return to East Texas A&M this fall to pursue graduate studies in curriculum and instruction with a dual-credit emphasis. The pair also recently earned acceptance into an upcoming exhibition at the Goldmark Cultural Center in Dallas, an opportunity they credited to networking and mentorship through the university’s art program.

President Mark Rudin expressed hope that Power of the Pride will be the first of many student-created murals across campus, helping shape spaces that reflect the creativity, identity, and spirit of East Texas A&M University.



Featuring



Spring Learning Showcase

EAST TEXAS A&M

Spring 2026 Learning Showcase Highlights Student Creativity and Research

East Texas A&M University students showcased creativity, research, and academic growth during the Spring 2026 Learning Showcase on May 6 at the Rayburn Student Center. The campuswide event featured projects from first-year students enrolled in CID 1300, CID 2301, and ENG 1302 courses, highlighting topics ranging from cultural identity and student life to music, athletics, and social perspectives.

This spring, approximately 942 students participated in the showcase, with more than 700 presenting projects in person. Supported by Student Transition and Support, the event provides students with early opportunities to develop research, communication, and critical thinking skills while connecting classroom learning to real-world issues.

Many explored topics such as cultural differences between international and traditional college students, perceptions surrounding heavy metal music listeners, communication among track athletes, and even the reasoning behind flat earth beliefs. Together, the presentations reflected the wide range of curiosity and perspectives among East Texas A&M students.



Various CHSSA presentation came from students in ENG 1302: Written Argument & Research course, one standout presentation contained performance of an original song inspired by the graphic novel Maus. Written by freshman Nicolas Lee and performed alongside fellow students Mackenzie Deaver, Hannah Johnson, Jayson Terrell, and Joshua Yeoh, the piece drew inspiration from early- to mid-20th century band music and blended historical storytelling with creative interpretation.



"The Learning Showcase exists to remind us what our students are capable of, I'm consistently struck by the creativity and perspective they bring and the way they connect their academic work to the world they actually live in"

- Sierra Jones, director of Student Transition and Support

The Learning Showcase continues to serve as an important milestone for first-year students, encouraging them to share ideas, build confidence, and engage more deeply in their academic journey at East Texas A&M University.

Featuring



Spring 2026 Graduation

EAST TEXAS A&M

Class of 2026 Celebrates Graduation at East Texas A&M University

Cheers, applause, and moments of pride filled the Field House as 1,586 graduates crossed the stage during East Texas A&M University's Spring 2026 commencement ceremonies on May 8th and 9th. Across five ceremonies, graduates celebrated the culmination of years of hard work, determination, and perseverance alongside family, friends, faculty, and fellow students.



The Class of 2026 reflected the diversity and spirit of East Texas A&M, ranging in age from 18 to 73 years old. Nearly 40% of graduates, 630 students were first-generation college students, making commencement especially meaningful for families celebrating new opportunities and milestones. Academic excellence was also strongly represented, with 669 graduates earning academic distinction.

Several graduates from the College of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Arts (CHSSA) shared reflections on their educational journeys and excitement for what comes next.

"As a first-generation college student, I'm standing on the shoulders of so many, so much support and so many hours and effort put in by so many people before me, and so it means a lot,"

- Emily Hale, M.S. in Sociology

"The next step for me is grad school and hopefully big stages!"

- Juni Gomez, B.A. in Music

"I'm going to continue my education here at East Texas A&M and get my master's, and I'm just super excited to start."

- Marcella Morel, B.S. in Sociology



Throughout the ceremonies, numerous CHSSA faculty members were present to celebrate alongside their students, sharing in the excitement of commencement and recognizing the achievements of graduates they had mentored throughout their academic journeys.



As the ceremonies concluded and graduates turned their tassels, the Class of 2026 stepped forward into new careers, graduate programs, and opportunities ahead, ready not only to face the future, but to shape it. Congratulations, Class of 2026!