

addenda

The University of Tennessee at Martin Faculty and Staff Newsletter | Jan. 12, 2026

Dr. Laurie Couch selected as next UTM provost

Dr. Laurie Couch has been named as the new provost and senior vice chancellor for academic affairs at UT Martin.

The announcement was made in a university-wide message Dec. 16 to faculty and staff from UT Martin **Chancellor Yancy Freeman**. Her start date will be announced in the coming weeks.

Couch is currently provost and senior vice president of academic affairs at Salisbury University in Maryland. Her duties include overseeing faculty and student success, curriculum, enrollment management, strategic planning and research.

She is also responsible for instructional design and delivery, student academic support, policy oversight, experiential learning, program

review and budget management.

Couch was previously associate provost for undergraduate education and student success at Morehead State University in Kentucky, where she also was a psychology faculty member for 26 years.

"UT Martin stands at a significant juncture – one rich with opportunity to strengthen student outcomes, broaden our academic offerings and deepen our connections with communities across West Tennessee and beyond," Freeman said in a university announcement. "Dr. Couch possesses both the vision to see what's possible and the practical experience to make it happen."

Couch comes to UT Martin as the university experiences positive momentum on



Couch

several fronts, including two consecutive years of enrollment growth.

"UT Martin represents the best of what higher education has to offer," Couch said in a statement. "The university is focused squarely on promoting the success of its students through innovative, career-ready programs.

"Its dedicated faculty and staff are deeply committed to ensuring academic excellence through exceptional teaching and rich learning experiences, both inside and outside the classroom."

Couch earned her doctorate and master's degrees in experimental psychology from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and a bachelor's degree in psychology from Mississippi State University.

UT Martin's chief academic officer position was previously held by Dr. Philip Cavalier who, in July, became president of Kutztown University in Pennsylvania.

Dr. Stephanie Kolitch serves as the university's transitional provost until Couch begins her duties.

Dr. Matthew Bice announced as next CEHBS dean

Dr. Matthew R. Bice has been appointed as the new dean of the UT Martin College of Education, Health, and Behavioral Sciences.

The announcement was made Jan. 5 in an email from UT Martin **Chancellor Yancy Freeman** to UTM faculty and staff. Bice's official start date will be announced later.

"I am honored to serve as the dean of the CEHBS at the University of Tennessee at Martin and join a community so deeply committed to student success, innovation and societal impact," Bice said in a statement. "My family and I

look forward to joining the UT Martin community and working with faculty, staff, students and partners to advance excellence in teaching, research and service."

Bice is currently the provost and vice president for academic affairs at Baker University in Baldwin City, Kansas. He previously held academic and administrative positions at the University of Nebraska Kearney before coming to Baker University.

He succeeds **Cindy West**, who retired at the end of 2025 after serving 10 years as dean.

"The College of Education,

Health, and Behavioral Sciences stands at an important crossroads," Freeman said in the university announcement. "Opportunities exist to deepen ties with regional partners and industries in the CEHBS disciplines, expand our reach to new students, and reinforce our reputation for preparing outstanding education and health professionals.

"Dr. Bice offers both the vision to chart this course and the operational experience to navigate it successfully."

Bice earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in kinesiology from the University of Texas



Bice

Permian Basin and his doctorate in health education from Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

Bice thanked Freeman, **Dr.**

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YoUTMs

highlighting the excellence of our faculty and staff

Dr. Cooper Johnson and Dr. Jamye Long, professors of management, led Go Cloud Careers training in November on the topic of communication, where they focused on the skills needed for executive-level employees to be effective and efficient.

As this is one of the most popular topics in GCC's curriculum, the discussion with the participants was unique and included questions about techniques for women to be heard in predominately male-



Johnson

attended meetings, the role mentors play in preparing mentees for success or failure, recognizing and respecting



Long

the audience, and tips for communicating with self-sabotaging employees resistant to receiving advice.

Blake, Rutledge named department chairs

The UT Martin College of Humanities and Fine Arts announced two new department chairs at the start of the spring 2026 semester.

Dean Jeffrey R. Bibbee announced Jan. 7 that Dr. Jody Blake, associate professor of music, would be the chair of the Department of Music, where he had served as the interim department chair, and that Dr. Tracy Rutledge, professor of mass media and strategic communication, would be the chair of the Department of Mass Media and Strategic Communication.

Rutledge succeeds Dr. Robert Nanney, who served as the department chair for 25 years.



Blake

"The whole university will benefit from the creative and dynamic leadership that both Dr. Rutledge and Dr. Blake bring to their respective departments," Bibbee said. "Both of them are excellent teachers, researchers and campus leaders."

Information about the



Rutledge

College of Humanities and Fine Arts can be found at www.utm.edu/chfa, while information about the Department of Music can be found at www.utm.edu/music and for the Department of Mass Media and Strategic Communication can be found at www.utm.edu/mmssc.

The news at news.utm.edu

[Civil rights event rebranded as 'ENTICE'](#)

[UTM grad trades beach volleyball for chemistry degree](#)

[UTM banking team presents in St. Louis](#)

[UTM junior Hannah Fowler is one of seven nationwide to receive AMVAC scholarship](#)

 MARTIN | NEWS

Upcoming Skyhawk Home Events

Thursday, Jan. 15

- *Women's basketball vs. SIUE, 5:30 p.m., Kathleen and Tom Elam Center.
- *Men's basketball vs. SIUE, 7:30 p.m., Kathleen and Tom Elam Center.

Saturday, Jan. 17

- *Women's basketball vs. Lindenwood, 1 p.m., Kathleen and Tom Elam Center.
- *Men's basketball vs. Lindenwood, 3:30 p.m., Kathleen and Tom Elam Center.

* - conference competition. Full athletics schedules can be found at utmsports.com.

Dates and times are subject to change.

***Promote a faculty or staff member
by sending a YoUTM to
addenda@utm.edu!***

Parr brings wildlife to Kiwanis Club meeting



John Parr, director of wildlife at Discovery Park of America and a lecturer in the UTM Department of Biological Sciences, shared insight with Martin Kiwanis Club members about the state-of-the-art 100,000-square-foot museum sitting on the beautifully landscaped heritage park in Union City. Parr was the special guest at the Jan. 7 meeting of the group. He said that more than 250,000 visitors came to DPA last year. Parr talked about the variety of programs, exhibits and hands-on activities offered to visitors, including the excitement generated by the wildlife exhibits. For his presentation, Parr brought two nonvenomous snakes – a spotted king snake and a corn snake – and a box turtle for members to see closely. He discussed the behind-the-scenes care of the animals at the park and some of the policies of the Tennessee Wildlife Association that guide acquisition and care. Parr was introduced to the group by his wife, Kiwanis President Katie Parr, who presented him with a certificate of appreciation showing that a donation would be made in his honor to UT Martin's Captain's Pantry.

Innovative Technology Symposium seeks proposals

The University of Tennessee Innovative Technology Symposium is seeking proposal submissions for its 2026 event.

The third annual symposium will be held March 24-26 at the Knoxville Convention Center. It is hosted by the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Office of Innovative Technologies.

Proposal submissions must be sent by Friday, Jan. 16.

The theme of this year's symposium is

“Connecting People. Sharing Ideas. Shaping IT.”

The symposium will focus on everyday IT challenges, shared interests, honed skills, and newfound passions.

It aims to foster innovative IT solutions and promote opportunities for interaction, collaboration and knowledge sharing among Tennessee higher education IT professionals.

The event will include keynote speakers, breakout sessions and networking opportunities with peers, industry experts and technology companies involved in higher education.

Proposals may be submitted through [the symposium website](#).

Questions about the third annual UT Innovative Technology Symposium may be sent to ut_it_symposium@utk.edu

Burks, Crider receive Skyhawk Spirit Awards

Two UT Martin faculty or staff members were named to the December Skyhawk Spirit Awards.

Dr. Cassie Burks, assistant professor of nursing, was named to the December Skyhawk Innovation Award, while **Danielle Crider**, administrative assistant for the Office of Enrollment Management, was named to the Skyhawk Spirit Award.

The Skyhawk Spirit Award recognizes individuals whose creativity, adaptability and problem-solving enhance the student experience. All regular full- and part-time faculty and staff up to the level of director are eligible to receive Spirit Awards.

Burks received the Skyhawk Innovation Award for “modeling clinical excellence and innovative thinking in real-world settings,” according to her announcement letter. “From responding to an off-duty medical emergency and transforming it into a meaningful teaching moment



Burks

to demonstrating culturally responsive, patient-centered care during clinical rotations, your actions reflect sound judgment and resourceful problem-solving. Your innovation extends to the simulation lab, where you improved learning outcomes by enhancing pediatric IV training equipment and creating practical instructional tools.”

Crider received the Skyhawk Spirit Award because of her ability to find answers and work with students.

“Your willingness to step in, problem-solve, and guide others — especially during the transition to DASH — has



Crider

helped countless colleagues gain confidence and clarity in their work,” stated her letter of announcement.

“Your care for students is equally evident. During the busy August move-in period at Solution Central, your presence provided calm, direction and reassurance to students and families navigating a stressful moment. By welcoming students with patience, kindness and genuine hospitality, you helped them feel seen, supported and confident in their decision to choose UT Martin.”

There are two types of Skyhawk

Spirit Award: the Skyhawk Spirit Award, which recognizes service and duty that goes beyond expectations or contributions that have a significant impact on department or university objectives, and the Skyhawk Innovation Award, which seeks to recognize employees who achieve beyond the status quo who implement an idea, initiative, process or system that improves efficiencies or outcomes.

Those receiving Skyhawk Spirit Awards get a \$50 cash prize and a commemorative plaque, while those receiving the Skyhawk Innovation Award get a \$250 cash prize and a commemorative plaque.

Recipients are chosen through nominations sent to the Skyhawk Spirit Committee at skyhawkspiritaward@utm.edu by the first Friday of the month.

There will be no Skyhawk Spirit Awards given in January. The deadline for nominations for the month of February is the end of the day on Friday, Feb. 6.

IACUC, IRB spring meeting schedule announced

The Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee and the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects in Research have set the dates for its spring 2026 meetings.

The IACUC will meet at 4 p.m. on Monday, Feb. 2; Monday, March 2; and Monday, April 6. All meetings will be held in 124 Gooch Hall.

The IRB will meet at 4 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 3; Tuesday, March 3; and Tuesday, April 7. All meetings will be held in 124 Gooch Hall.

■ The DASH Research Institutional

Review Board (IRB) is the new electronic submission system that will replace UT Martin’s Dynamic Form IRB process on Monday, Feb. 16.

The current IRB DynamicForm application will be removed on Friday, Jan. 30. All IRB submissions must be finalized by 5 p.m. on Jan. 30 to be migrated to the new system. No IRB submissions will be accepted from Jan. 31 to Feb. 15.

The DASH Research IRB will provide streamlined submission options and the use of Word documents for applications.

The Office of Research and Sponsored Programs OneSpace site has a new DASH Research IRB page with protocol forms, job aids, and other resources for the new system.

Those who missed the introduction and demonstration of the Institutional Review Board module in September can view the recording [at this site](#).

The video provides an overview of how to navigate the new DASH Research IRB system as well as a walkthrough of key steps creating a new IRB study submission through final sign-off.

BICE from PAGE 1

Stepanie Kolitsch and the search committee for their confidence and support.

Kolitsch is serving as the university’s transitional provost until **Dr. Laurie Couch** of Salisbury University in Maryland

assumes the permanent position in the coming months.

“I am grateful for the opportunity to build upon

UTM’s rich history and strong foundation that stretches across the region and nation,” Bice added.

WestTeach Class of 2025 graduates 28



Shown with the WestTeach Leadership Program Class of 2025 are (front row, l-r) Cassie Elliott, Toshia Mancini, Libby Lynch, Alivia McDowell, Beth Anne Overholt, Dr. Stacy Jones, Bailey Lea, (middle row, l-r) WestStar Assistant Director Jennifer Smiley, Kendra Lownsdale, Leslie Booker, Bryce Agee, Kathryn Arnold, Jenny Vego, Laura Dyer, Lilah Hall-Norell, Courtney York, Hailey Johnson, Kevin Carr, (back row, l-r) Dr. Patrick Smith, Alex Cochran, Cody Williams, Crystal Lock, Sunni Pack, Michele Huffstutter, Summer Willis, Alaina Wood, Tracey Conrad, Laurin Wallis and Dr. Jamie Mantooh, the university's executive director for strategic leadership and WestTeach coordinator. Not pictured is Michelle Robinson.

Campus Calendar

Monday, Jan. 19
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day
Friday, Jan. 23
• UTM Advisory Board,
1 p.m., 206 Boling University
Center.

Monday, Feb. 2
• International Animal Care
and Use Committee, 4 p.m.,
124 Gooch Hall.
Tuesday, Feb. 3
• Institutional Review Board,

4 p.m., 124 Gooch Hall.

Friday, Feb. 6
• WestStar Elevate, Russell
Duncan Ballroom, Boling
University Center.

*Events are subject to cancellation;
dates, times and sites are subject to
change. Send free-admission,
on-campus events to Addenda
at addenda@utm.edu.*

You Tell Me

• **Question** – Why does the spring semester always start on a Thursday?

• **Answer** – The spring semester typically has more scheduled holidays and breaks than the fall semester. In order to meet minimal credit hour requirements, the spring semester has to start on a Thursday to accommodate this schedule while still meeting expectations that finals are given on a Monday-Friday schedule, spring graduation occurs on a Saturday, and Maymester and summer terms are scheduled as expected.

Submit your questions to Addenda at addenda@utm.edu.

Read more UT Martin news at news.utm.edu!

Welcome back to campus!



UT Martin students and instructors returned to campus Jan. 8 to begin the spring 2026 semester. The weather was fairly mild, allowing students to enjoy walking through the quad. Classes for the semester will continue through Friday, April 24, followed by a week of final exams and the spring commencement on Saturday, May 2.

UTM Research Series begins spring '26 schedule

The UT Martin Research Series begins its spring semester schedule with a research presentation about the impact of land development on wildlife species by **Dr. Shalmali Bandyopadhyay**, assistant professor of mathematics.

The event is set for 4 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 22, in the Paul Meek Library, with a livestream broadcast and recording for later playback.

The presentation, "Finding Balance in a Fragmented World: How Competition and Dispersal Shape Species Coexistence," highlights mathematical models used to study species competition in so-called patchy landscapes.

"As humans reshape landscapes through agriculture, urban development, and deforestation, many species find themselves living in increasingly fragmented habitats — isolated patches surrounded by potentially hostile environments," Bandyopadhyay said.

This fragmentation affects which species survive, which disappear and which adapt to coexist.

Using accessible visualizations rather than complex equations, mathematical models demonstrate how the surrounding



Bandyopadhyay

environment affects species differently based on their movement behaviors and how these differences can enable coexistence even between unequally matched competitors.

Bandyopadhyay's work offers important insights for conservation biology and habitat management, some crucial for preserving biodiversity in our

increasingly fragmented world.

Bandyopadhyay joined the UTM Department of Mathematics and Computer Science in 2023. She holds a bachelor's degree in mathematics and computer science from the Chennai Mathematical Institute and earned her doctoral degree in computational mathematics at the University of North Carolina Greensboro.

She was selected by the Mathematical Association of America for the 2024 cohort of Project NEXT. This experience has reinforced her belief that effective mathematics education requires students to "do mathematics" through hand-on problem solving, collaborative discovery and reflective practice. Her research agenda focuses on nonlinear differential equations, mathematical models essential for describing

complex natural phenomena ranging from population dynamics to chemical reactions.

Bandyopadhyay has received research and travel grants from UT Martin, the American Mathematical Society, the Association of Women in Mathematics and the Simons Laufer Mathematical Sciences Institute.

The UT Martin Research Series is co-sponsored by the Division of Academic Affairs and the Paul Meek Library.

Other events in the spring 2026 series include:

- Tuesday, Feb. 10: **Dr. Charles Hammond**, Department of English and Modern Foreign Languages, "Sex, Gender and Procreation in Kafka," 4 p.m.

- Tuesday, March 10: **Dr. Abigail Shelton**, Department of Chemistry and Physics, "Heavy Metal Honeys: An Analysis," 4 p.m.

- Thursday, April 2: John Cole, Department of Agriculture, Geosciences, and Natural Resources, "From Factory Floors to Agricultural Academia: An Unconventional Engineering Journey," 4 p.m.

These free public events will be held in the Paul Meek Library. Registration is not required, but these and other events can be found on the library's Runway event page.

For more information, contact **Dr. Erik Nordberg**, dean of the Paul Meek Library, at 731-881-7070.



Taylor Burke (center), a senior veterinary science and technology major from Altona, Illinois, is shown receiving the fall 2025 Beth Maloan Outstanding Student Employee Award. Also shown are Mike Maloan (left), chancery court judge for Weakley and Obion counties, and Callie Smithson, business manager for the Department of Agriculture, Geosciences, and Natural Resources, who nominated Burke for the award.

Burke receives fall 2025 Beth Maloan Award

Taylor Burke, a senior veterinary science and technology major from Altona, Illinois, was named the recipient of the fall 2025 Beth Maloan Outstanding Student Employee Award.

The award was presented at the Department of Agriculture, Geoscience and Natural Resources (AGNR) graduation breakfast Dec. 13.

Burke is a student worker for the department and the West Tennessee Animal Disease Diagnostic Lab. Her main duties for the department are assisting the business manager, Callie Smithson, in various ways, including filing important documents, assisting with reconciling procurement cards and travel transactions, answering phone calls, providing campus tours for potential AGNR students and assisting professors and other staff as needed to prepare for events and classes.

Burke works 10 hours a week for AGNR and about 10 hours a week at the West Tennessee Animal Disease Diagnostic Lab. As a student worker at the diagnostics lab, her duties and responsibilities include performing necropsies on animals that are brought to the lab, routine care for the sheep, goats and other farm animals on the AGNR Teaching Complex, preparing

and organizing for the animal science lab and assisting the campus veterinarians and Veterinary Technology Lab instructors as needed in the veterinarian science and technology area.

"Taylor has taken initiative in streamlining the department's filing and document-management processes by organizing important financial and administrative records," said Smithson in her letter of nomination. "She ensured quicker retrieval, reduced errors and improved workflow for the business manager and faculty. Her attention to accuracy in reconciling procurement cards and travel documentation has minimized discrepancies and helped maintain compliance with university financial procedures.

"One thing that I have found very important and impressive with Taylor is the cross-departmental collaboration that she has created. By working effectively in two different departments, Taylor bridges academic and laboratory operations. Her ability to manage tasks in both settings ensures stronger coordination between the AGNR department and the diagnostic lab, enhancing overall efficiency in both units."

The Beth Maloan Outstanding Student Employee Award is named for the late

Beth Maloan, longtime UT Martin director of budgeting and payroll, who was a strong advocate of student employment. It recognizes exemplary work ethic and commitment to the university.

The award is given each semester to a student nominated by his or her supervising office or department. The award includes a \$1,000 cash award and an engraved plaque.

To be eligible for this award, the student must have been employed at the university for a minimum of one year, must be a full-time undergraduate and must carry a minimum cumulative grade-point average of 2.5.

The recipient is selected based on problem-solving and decision-making skills, dependability, interpersonal skills and communication, teamwork, customer service, productivity, self-motivation and on- and off-campus working relationships.

The award was established by the university in May 2001 soon after Maloan died after a long bout with cancer. Maloan worked at UTM from 1976 to 2001 and served as the director of finance and budgeting from 1988 to 2001. She also taught classes in what is now the College of Business and Global Affairs.

Office of Ombuds Services offers seminars

Merry Brown of the UTM Office of Ombuds Services announced that the Office of Ombuds Services will offer several seminars this month.

- “Navigating Difficult Conversations.”

Conflict is a normal part of working and learning together. When addressed well, it can strengthen relationships, deepen trust and spark collaboration. This interactive two-part series helps faculty and staff build confidence and learn practical steps to prepare for, initiate and navigate difficult conversations with clarity and respect.

The first presentation of the seminar will be held from noon to 1 p.m., Wednesday, Jan. 14 (Part 1), and Wednesday, Jan. 21 (Part 2), in Room 206 Boling University Center.

The second presentation will be held via Zoom from noon to 1 p.m., Wednesday, March 4 (Part 1), and Wednesday, March 11 (Part 2).

Registration for this seminar



Brown

can be found [at this site](#).

- “Collegiality: What It Is, Why It Matters and How To Practice It.”

Collegiality is an essential skill for working effectively within a complex university community. This seminar invites participants to consider what it means to work well with others and offers practical guidance for building, maintaining and strengthening collegiality.

The first program of the series was presented Jan. 7.

The next program is scheduled for 3:30 to 4:30 p.m., Thursday, Jan. 15, in Room 230 Boling

University Center, while the third of the series will be held from noon to 1 p.m., Thursday, Jan. 22, via Zoom.

Registration for this seminar can be found [at this site](#).

- “Navigating Difficult Conversations for Managers.”

Holding difficult conversations is a normal part of leadership. How leaders respond when performance or behavior falls short can define a team’s culture for years to come. This two-part training equips supervisors and managers with a five-step process for holding difficult conversations with fairness, clarity and respect. Participants will learn how to address concerns early, before they escalate, while maintaining professionalism and dignity for everyone involved.

The first presentation will be from noon to 1 p.m., Tuesday, Jan. 20 (Part 1), and Tuesday, Jan. 27 (Part 2), in Room 206 Boling University Center.

The second presentation will

be given via Zoom from noon to 1 p.m., Thursday, March 12 (Part 1), and Thursday, March 19 (Part 2).

Registration for this seminar can be found [at this site](#).

The Office of Ombuds Services was established to provide an informal channel for conflict resolution and to assist people in navigating organizational concerns, challenges and conflicts that may arise in the workplace.

The office is independent, impartial, informal and confidential and works with faculty and staff to:

- Provide a safe and confidential space to talk about issues or concerns,
- Explore options to help resolve conflicts, and
- Bring systemic concerns to the attention of the university.

For more information about the Office of Ombuds Services, visit [this site](#).

To make an appointment, call 731-881-7056, email ombuds@utm.edu or visit [this site](#).

Parents as Teachers program serves area families

The Parents as Teachers program at UT Martin is a free and voluntary evidence-based home visiting program serving families in Henry, Carroll, Obion and Weakley counties.

Parents as Teachers may serve families prenatal through kindergarten entry, based on income eligibility. It is designed to support all members of a family who play a role in caregiving for children.

Families enrolled in Parents as Teachers may experience outcomes such as:

- Increased knowledge of early child development

- Early detection of developmental delays and connection to services

- Improved parent, child and family health and well-being

- Increased school readiness and long-term success

- Strengthened community capacity and connectedness

The family’s assigned parent educator provides personal visits, health and development screenings, resource referrals and group connections.

Parent educators are highly trained professionals with expertise in child

development who provide personalized guidance, use evidence-based practices, empower parents and promote children’s growth and development.

All services, including visit frequency, are tailored to each family’s interests, concerns and circumstances through the Parents as Teachers curriculum.

Those interested in the program may submit a referral [at this site](#).

A short video that provides additional information about the program can be found [at this site](#).

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