

addenda

The University of Tennessee at Martin Faculty and Staff Newsletter | June 1, 2026

Memorial Day program honors service members



Retired Col. John Cooper, a 1989 UT Martin graduate in business administration, was the guest speaker at this year's Memorial Day Commemoration program May 22 in Watkins Auditorium in the Boling University Center. Originally scheduled to be held on the patio area between the Boling University Center and the Paul Meek Library, the event was moved indoors due to the threat of inclement weather.



Sarah Del Valle (left), a cell and molecular biology major from Union City, sang the national anthem at this year's Memorial Day Commemoration program. Kevon Finch (right), a music major from Milan, played taps to conclude the program.

YoUTMs

highlighting the excellence of our faculty and staff



Dr. Shalmali Bandyopadhyay (left), assistant professor of mathematics and statistics, was awarded a competitive Association for Women in Mathematics (AWM) Mentoring Travel Grant to support a research collaboration with Dr. Nsoki Mavinga (right) of Swarthmore College. The AWM Mentoring Travel Grant program is designed to help early-career women mathematicians develop long-term research and mentoring relationships with established researchers in their fields. The program supports a small cohort of awardees annually through a national competition. During the month-long funded collaboration, Bandyopadhyay and Mavinga investigated the existence of solutions to nonlinear boundary value problems using the method of sub- and supersolutions, a classical technique in nonlinear analysis and partial differential equations. The attached photograph shows Bandyopadhyay and Mavinga working together during one of their research sessions.

The news at news.utm.edu

[SOAR sessions to continue throughout summer](#)

[711 graduates participate in commencement exercises May 2](#)

[Computer science graduate wants to use education to benefit others](#)

UT MARTIN | NEWS

ORSP announces new competitive grant opportunity

The Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) announced the Skyhawk Research Development and Infrastructure Program, a new competitive grant opportunity designed to strengthen research and scholarly capacity at UT Martin.

Funded by the UT System and administered by the ORSP, this program provides strategic, catalytic funding to full-time UT Martin faculty who need a boost to pursue their research ideas.

Whether researching faculty members need equipment, student research assistants, faculty buyout time, travel support to present at

conferences, or resources to build collaborations across departments and campuses, this program is designed to support those research ideas and projects.

Key details include:

- Allowable uses of funds: Research equipment and infrastructure (like lab instruments, shared computing and field equipment).
- Student research assistants and limited technical personnel support.
- Course buyout or reduced teaching load to focus on scholarship.
- Travel to conferences, symposia or collaborating

institutions.

- Pilot studies and preliminary data collection for external grant proposals.
- Collaborative projects spanning UT Martin departments, regional centers or other UT campuses.

About \$100,000 will be available annually to fund awards, with up to \$75,000 for equipment and infrastructure expenses and up to \$25,000 for activity expenses (personnel, travel or pilot work).

Projects should run six to 12 months from the award date, for one competitive cycle per year, with annual cycles anticipated through 2031.

The deadline to apply is Thursday, Oct. 15.

All full-time faculty (tenured, tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty with research or scholarly expectations) based at UT Martin are eligible to apply. Faculty teams collaborating across departments, regional centers or UT campuses are strongly encouraged to apply.

To access the application and review the full program guidelines, visit [this website](#).

For more information, contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at orsp@utm.edu or call 731-881-7015.

[Send an RSVP for the June 10 Hawk Break by June 3!](#)

Smith to receive Higher Educator of the Year award

Dr. Clinton Smith, professor of special education, will be awarded the 2026 Higher Educator of the Year award from the National Education Association this July in Denver, Colorado.

Smith will be presented with the honor and a \$10,000 award funded by the NEA Foundation at the 2026 NEA Representative Assembly.

The Higher Educator of the Year award recognizes a postsecondary education professional who continually engages in outstanding student-centered professional practice, exemplary state or local labor-based advocacy, and robust community participation.

“Clinton embodies exactly what it means to be an educator, a role model and a leader for our students,” said NEA President Becky Pringle. “Clinton not only cultivates critical thinking

in his classroom and in his union work, but he empowers the voices of those around him.

“On behalf of the NEA’s three million members, we congratulate Clinton for the dedication and commitment he has shown to his students and community.”

Smith received a Bachelor of Science in Education degree from Arkansas State University, a Master of Arts in Religion and Education from Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary and a Master of Science and a Doctor of Education from the University of Memphis.

“As a faculty member at the University of Tennessee at Martin, Dr. Smith has cultivated a learning environment that is both rigorous and deeply supportive,” said Tennessee Education Association President Tanya T. Coats. “His passion for teaching extends



Smith

beyond the classroom, where he intentionally fosters meaningful connections with students and empowers them to reach their fullest potential.

“His approach reflects not only academic excellence but also a genuine investment in the holistic development of every student he serves.”

Smith has been a professor of special education at UT Martin since 2012. His students are the state’s future special-education

teachers, and they come to him for essential lessons on “how to change outcomes for the most vulnerable students,” said Dr. Amanda Batts, associate professor who nominated Smith for NEA’s award.

Before Smith came to higher education, he taught students with disabilities for more than a decade at Shadowlawn Middle School in Bartlett.

“This recognition reflects not only exceptional teaching, but a lasting commitment to student success, academic excellence and leadership in higher education,” said Dr. Matthew Bice, dean of the UT Martin College of Education, Health and Behavioral Sciences. “Being named the Higher Educator of the Year is a testament to passion, innovation and dedication to the students we serve. I could not be happier for Dr. Smith.”

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Grant opportunities announced by ORSP

Several grant opportunities that might be of interest to UT Martin staff and faculty have been released by the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs.

Those wanting assistance in applying to one of these programs or in finding other types of funding for ideas should contact the ORSP at orsp@utm.edu or 731-881-7015. All grants and sponsored programs must receive approval through the ORSP before submission to a sponsor.

Summaries of these grant opportunities include:

- **Healthy Active Rural Tennessee Request for Application - Tennessee Department of Health**

The Tennessee Department of Health is offering Healthy Active Rural Tennessee grants through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Rural Health Transformation Program to support built environment projects that improve health outcomes in Tennessee’s rural and suburban counties.

The program focuses on reducing chronic

disease and promoting health equity by funding projects such as community planning, assessments, placemaking and enhancements to infrastructure that encourage physical activity and community resilience.

Projects must focus on improving health equity and community resilience through built environment initiatives that promote physical activity, healthy living and chronic disease prevention, particularly for historically underserved populations.

Award up to \$150,000.

Performance period: Aug. 1, 2026-June 30, 2028.

Deadline: June 22 at 2 p.m. CT.

Additional information [at this site](#) under the “Rural Health Transformation” tab.

- **Equipment Grants Program - National Institute of Food and Agriculture**

The Equipment Grants Program serves to increase access to shared-use special purpose equipment or instruments for fundamental and applied research for use in the food and agricultural sciences programs at

institutions of higher education, including state cooperative extension systems.

The program seeks to strengthen the quality and expand the scope of fundamental and applied research at eligible institutions by providing them with opportunities to acquire one shared-use piece of equipment or instrument that supports their research, research training and extension goals that may be too costly or not appropriate for support through other National Institute of Food and Agriculture grant programs.

The program emphasizes shared-use instrumentation that will enhance the capabilities of researchers, educators, and extension specialists both within and outside the proposing organization.

Maximum award amount: \$500,000.

Minimum award amount: \$25,000.

Application deadline: June 25.

Additional information: [USDA.gov](https://www.usda.gov).

- **Maternal/Infant and Child Health Healthcare Resiliency Program Request for Application - Tennessee Department of**

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Chris Virgin (left), the recipient of the spring 2026 Outstanding Employee Award for exempt employees, and Darren Ray (right), the recipient of the spring 2026 Outstanding Employee Award for non-exempt employees, are shown with Chancellor Yancy Freeman Sr. at the Spring Clerical and Support Staff Coffee on April 23 at the Boling University Center.

Virgin, Ray named spring Outstanding Employees

Chris Virgin and Darren Ray were selected as recipients of the spring 2026 Outstanding Employee Awards, which were presented April 23 at the Spring Clerical and Support Staff Coffee at the Boling University Center.

Virgin, a landscaping manager on the grounds team in the Physical Plant, received the award for exempt employees and staff.

He was nominated for his exemplary work for the beautification of the campus as well as for his positive and professional attitude.

“His cool-headed approach to leadership and intelligent planning helps his employees better understand the scope of their jobs and how their work impacts the whole campus community,” said **Chancellor Yancy Freeman Sr.** in presenting the award.

“Always caring and optimistic, Chris takes great care to ensure his team has what it needs to perform their jobs well to make the campus safe for our students, faculty and staff. Grounds work is often done behind the scenes, yet it’s the first thing people notice when they come to campus.”

Virgin also received the MVP Award for his work following the winter snow event in late January.

“He worked on campus every day and many extra hours, even on weekends, while experiencing difficulties with the snow equipment – and amid personal sickness and cold and difficult work conditions – to clear the ice and snow,” Freeman said. “He used his personal vehicle to pick up employees at their homes who weren’t able to drive and brought them to work and took them back home at the end of the day. He even pulled one of his employees out of an icy driveway.”

Ray, a custodian supervisor in the Physical Plant, received the award for non-exempt employees and staff.

He was nominated for his outstanding work in maintaining the UT Martin sports venues for more than 180 sports events throughout the academic year.

“Darren Ray is the consistent, dependable worker who is behind the successes of all those events,” Freeman said in presenting Ray with the award. “Darren is responsible for ensuring all locker rooms are cleaned, public restrooms are stocked with supplies, benches are set and organized, and courts are cleaned.

“In addition to athletics events, Darren

also manages custodial duties of special events such as commencement, concerts, the Harlem Globetrotters basketball game, Preview Day, Freshman Welcome Weekend, Homecoming events like Pyramid and NPC Step Show, and Greek Week activities like Line Dance and IFC Step Show.”

The UT Martin Outstanding Employee Awards program was instituted on Oct. 27, 1987, by then-Chancellor Margaret Perry. The first recipients of the award in fall 1987 were Steve Rogers of the Paul Meek Library (exempt) and Linda Keene of the Department of Biological Sciences (non-exempt).

The program, now in its 39th year, is intended to recognize and express appreciation to employees who daily demonstrate outstanding human relations skills and a commitment to the “Campus That Cares” philosophy.

The selection process is based not only on outstanding job performance but also on attitude, relationships with various university constituents, initiative and dedication to the university. Recipients are nominated by their coworkers and chosen by a selection committee.

University announces creation of excellence award

Chancellor Yancy Freeman Sr. announced the establishment of the Skyhawk Summitt Award, a prestigious presentation to honor leadership, excellence, success and service among faculty, staff and students.

The Skyhawk Summitt Award – named for Pat Head Summitt, who played basketball at UT Martin and graduated from the university in 1974 before earning fame as a women’s basketball head coach at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville – will be presented to up to six people: one faculty member, one non-exempt staff member, one exempt staff member and three students. The inaugural ceremony is planned to be held during I Heart UTM Week in April 2027.

“Coach Pat Head Summitt is arguably the most famous alumna from the University of Tennessee at Martin,” said Chancellor Yancy Freeman Sr. “She is also one of the most iconic and influential figures in the history of sports and education.

“Her reputation and success were built on characteristics such as purpose-driven leadership, integrity, resilience, discipline, dedication to excellence, mentorship, character and accountability. This honor is reserved for individuals whose leadership reflects not just talent but character and, like Pat Head Summitt, leave an enduring impact on those they lead.”

The annual award will be presented to those who:

- Lead with courage, purpose, integrity and compassion.
- Demonstrate unshakable resilience and discipline.
- Commit to high standards of excellence in academics, leadership and service.
- Invest in the growth and success of



Pat Head Summitt, a 1974 UT Martin alumna famed for her women’s basketball leadership as a player and coach, is shown with the eight NCAA national championship trophies won by her teams at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Summitt is the namesake of a new, prestigious award created by UT Martin.

The Skyhawk Summitt Award will honor faculty, staff and students who demonstrate leadership, excellence and service as well as talent and character.

others, serving as a mentor, advocate and role model.

- Embody strength of character and accountability in every aspect of life.
- Believe in service to team before self and uplift their community through commitment and consistency.

Along with these ideals, each recipient has other standards to meet.

- Faculty members must be full-time instructors, have been employed at UT Martin for a minimum of 12 months and be

in good standing with the university.

- Staff members must be employed full-time, have been on staff at UT Martin for a minimum of 12 months and must be in good standing with the university.

- Students must have earned at least 30 credit hours, have a minimum grade-point average of 2.5 and be in good standing with the university.

The nominations process for the Skyhawk Summitt Award will be announced this fall.

You Tell Me

• **Question** – A walk-in safe was previously located in the Hall-Moody Administration Building. It was located on the first floor in the Office of Academic Records and contained the university’s archived academic records. If this is accurate, what happened to that safe in the building upgrade, and where are those records now kept since the office moved to Clement Hall?

• **Answer** – In the upgrade to Hall-Moody, the old vault area – which was just a room with a steel door – is being converted into a mechanical room for the air handler that will serve the east end of the first floor. Access to that room will now be from the outside only, and the wall where the steel door was located will be enclosed so as not to disrupt the future occupants, which is the Office of Business Services. Because of space and weight limitations, not all the historical gradebooks made the move to Clement Hall. The Paul Meek Library accepted a majority of those records and keeps them in the secured records section. The permanent record cards (physical student transcripts before digital records) are kept in the Office of Academic Records on the third floor of Clement Hall.

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

SOAR opens 2026 season with full sessions



Captain Skyhawk (bird in jacket at left) joined in the first 2026 session of UT Martin's Summer Orientation And Registration, also known as SOAR, on May 18 at the Boling University Center. First-time students have filled two of the first three sessions, including the upcoming June 5 session. SOAR enables first-time students to get acclimated to the campus, visit with potential instructors and register for their fall classes. First-time UT Martin students are required to attend SOAR, either at in-person sessions or in a virtual session. There are a total of eight SOAR sessions at UT Martin this summer. More information about SOAR can be found at www.utm.edu/soar.

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Smith said that receiving the recognition is humbling and not about recalling past accomplishments but rather “about shining a light on the incredible potential of the students and future educators I am privileged to work with every day.”

“No one reaches a moment like this alone,” Smith added. “I

am profoundly mindful of the dedicated teachers, visionary leaders and selfless mentors who have poured into me throughout my life and career.

“They modeled what true advocacy looks like, challenged me to grow, and ignited my passion for this field. This recognition is a direct reflection of their investment in me, and it is a privilege to pass that

torch to the next generation of professionals.”

Smith also serves as chair of the UT Martin Department of Educational Studies and co-creator of the Skyhawks Achieving In Life (SAIL) program through a Tennessee Believes grant.

The NEA is the nation's largest labor union, representing

nearly three million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators, students preparing to become teachers, health-care workers and public employees. Learn more at www.nea.org.

(Portions of this story come courtesy of the National Education Association.)

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Health

The Tennessee Department of Health is seeking applications for projects that strengthen maternal, infant and child health systems of care in rural communities through expanded services, targeted interventions, training, education and improved access to quality care.

This funding opportunity supports initiatives designed to address gaps in care, improve coordination and continuity of services, and advance health outcomes for women, infants,

children and youth with special health care needs across Tennessee.

Maximum award: \$12,500,000.

Performance period: Aug. 1, 2026-June 30, 2031.

Application deadline: June 29 at 2 p.m. CT.

Additional information: [At this site](#) under the “Rural Health Transformation” tab.

• **Professional Formation of Engineers-National Science Foundation**

The Professional Formation of Engineers (PFE) initiative

integrates engineering research and education to improve and expand the nation's engineering workforce.

PFE is defined as the formal and informal processes and value systems by which people become engineers. The goal of PFE is to create an ethical engineering workforce with a global outlook and the ability to adapt to the rapidly evolving technical environment.

This will help build a future engineering workforce with the skills to compete in the global

marketplace, support emerging technologies and grow U.S. industry.

Areas of interest include engineering workforce development, mentoring, internships, credentialing pathways, professional development and the integration of engineering and social science perspectives to improve engineering education and practice.

Proposal accepted at any time.

Additional information: [At this site](#).

addenda

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Randy Boyd – President, University of Tennessee System • Dr. Yancy Freeman Sr. – UTM Chancellor • David Snow – Addenda Editor

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