

STUDENT NEWSLETTER



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

EAST TEXAS A&M

FEBRUARY/MARCH
Newsletter

WHAT'S INSIDE

STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS

PAGE 02
Social Sciences

PAGE 03
Art

PAGE 04-06
School of Music

STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS

Political Science Student Selected for Public Policy Scholars Internship Program

"The Public Policy Scholars Program presents a significant opportunity for my professional development as an attorney; the experiences gained through this program, both academically and practically, will enhance my understanding of the political landscape and help prepare me for a future in the political field."



Jocalyn Leija
Political Science

East Texas A&M University is proud to announce that Jocalyn Leija, a Political Science major, has been selected to participate in the Public Policy Scholars Internship Program (PPSP) in Washington, D.C., during Fall 2026.

Jocalyn's selection marks an outstanding achievement and makes her the second Political Science student from ETAMU to be accepted into this prestigious program.

Originally from Paris, Texas, Jocalyn chose to pursue Political Science for its flexibility and the strong foundation it provides across multiple career paths in public service and law. She aspires to become either a civil rights attorney or an environmental attorney, fields in which she hopes to advocate for justice, policy reform, and community well-being.



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Leija shared that the PPSP experience will play a critical role in her professional development. Through the program, she will gain both academic and hands-on experience in the nation's capital, deepening her understanding of the political process while engaging directly with public policy in action.

Jacalyn also emphasized the value of the program's networking opportunities, which will allow her to connect with professionals in the field as well as fellow scholars who share similar goals.



The program offers students the opportunity to gain hands-on internship experience in Washington, D.C. while earning academic credit.

Participants in PPSP complete six hours of in-person coursework taught by distinguished Bush School faculty at the Bush School DC Teaching Site, located just blocks from the White House.

Jocalyn's selection reflects the strength of East Texas A&M University's Political Science program and its commitment to preparing students for meaningful careers in public service, policy, and law. Her achievement continues a growing tradition of ETAMU students earning national recognition through the Public Policy Scholars Internship Program.

Featuring



Art

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Visual Communication Arts Students Earn Top Honors at 2026 AAF ADDY Awards

The East Texas A&M University Visual Communication Arts program proudly celebrated an outstanding showing at the 2026 American Advertising Federation (AAF) ADDY Awards, with multiple students earning top honors for their creative excellence.

Accompanied by Dr. Josh Ege, Professor of Visual Communication, and Lee Hackett, Director of Visual Communication, students attended the ceremony and represented ETAMU among the region's best emerging designers.

The following award recipients are:

Hannah Kim — Gold ADDY

Abby Harris — Silver ADDY

Kiley McDougall — Silver ADDY and Honorable Mention

Emily Harthcock — Silver ADDY and Honorable Mention

Je'Wel Jones — Silver ADDY

Mckinlee Rash — Two Honorable Mentions

Emma Bergin — Honorable Mention

Kayla Brannon — Honorable Mention



Hosted annually by the American Advertising Federation, the ADDY Awards are the largest advertising awards competition in the United States, recognizing excellence in advertising, design, and creative communication.

Entries begin at the local level, such as AAF Dallas, where industry professionals evaluate work for Gold, Silver, and Honorable Mention distinctions. Winning entries may advance to district and national competitions, placing student work alongside top creative professionals across the country.

Faculty mentors Josh Ege and Lee Hackett have played an instrumental role in preparing students for success in the competitive creative industry. Professor Hackett, who has led ETAMU's award-winning Visual Communication program since 2005, and Professor Ege, an accomplished designer and educator, continue to guide students in building strong portfolios and professional confidence.

The awards ceremony not only recognized individual achievement but also highlighted the strength, mentorship, and industry relevance of the ETAMU Visual Communication Arts program. These honors reflect the creativity, dedication, and professional preparation of ETAMU students as they move forward into careers in advertising, graphic design, and visual media.

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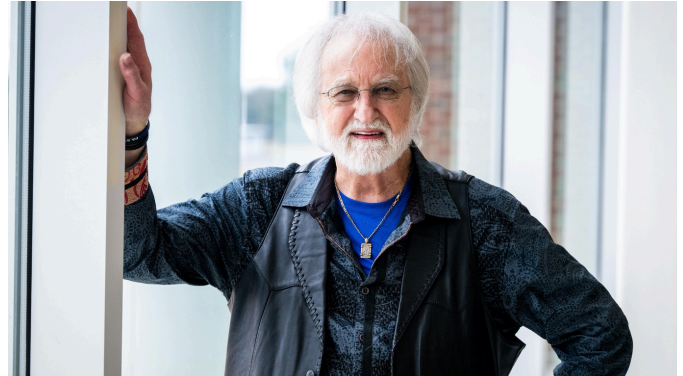
SCHOOL OF
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ETAMU Alumnus and Oak Ridge Boys Lead Singer Duane Allen Returns to Inspire Lion Music Students

East Texas A&M University was honored to welcome Duane Allen, distinguished alumnus and lead singer of the Grammy-winning group The Oak Ridge Boys, back to campus on January.

Allen spent time speaking with Lion music students and members of the university community, sharing stories from his remarkable career and reflecting on the foundation his ETAMU education helped build.



Founded in the 1940s and rising to national prominence in the 1970s and 1980s, The Oak Ridge Boys are one of the most influential vocal groups in American music history. Known for seamlessly blending gospel roots with mainstream country and pop, the group reached its commercial peak with iconic hits such as “Elvira,” while maintaining a strong connection to gospel traditions. Their enduring success has earned them multiple industry honors, including induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame.

A 1966 graduate of East Texas A&M University, Allen received formal training in operatic and quartet singing before joining the Oak Ridge Boys that same year. As the group’s lead vocalist, and later president and CEO, he has been the voice behind many of their most successful and enduring songs, such as “Elvira,” “Bobbie Sue,” “American Made,” “Thank God for Kids,” “Y’all Come Back Saloon,” “Fancy Free,” “Dream On,” and “Gonna Take a Lot of River.”



The Oak Ridge Boys’ evolution from Southern gospel roots to mainstream country and popular music helped define an era, “Elvira,” alone, has reached the Top 5 on the Billboard Hot 100. His individual accolades include induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame, the SGMA Hall of Fame, the Texas Gospel Music Hall of Fame, and the Texas Country Music Hall of Fame.



Allen’s visit served as a powerful reminder of how an ETAMU education can launch students onto national and international stages. Duane Allen’s return connected generations of Lions through music, mentorship, and a shared pride in East Texas A&M’s lasting impact on the music pathway.



Holiday Gala Fills Campus with Music, Joy, and Seasonal Spirit

The East Texas A&M University School of Music ushered in the holiday season with joy and celebration during its annual Holiday Gala, a beloved two-night concert held December 5 and 6 at the Jack and Lou Finney Concert Hall in Commerce. The performances delighted audiences with a rich variety of seasonal music, creating a festive atmosphere that truly captured the spirit of the holidays.

One of the most highly attended musical events of the year, the Holiday Gala brought together students, faculty, alumni, and community members for an evening of music and togetherness. Prior to each concert, alumni and special guests gathered for a holiday reception at the neighboring Welcome Center, adding to the sense of warmth and connection that defines the season.



Friday's performance included the Flute Choir, Jazz Ensemble I, Tuba/Euphonium Choir, Chamber Singers, Piano Division, Trombone Ensemble, Saxophone Choir, Instrumental Chamber Ensemble, Panimation Steel Drum Ensemble, and Wind Ensemble.

Saturday's concert featured the Clarinet Choir, Jazz Ensemble I, Horn Ensemble, Chamber Singers, Piano Division, Trumpet Ensemble, Panimation Steel Drum Ensemble, and Wind Ensemble.

From stirring choral selections to lively jazz and brilliant instrumental performances, the Holiday Gala spread cheer and showcased the hard work and artistry of ETAMU's student musicians. The annual tradition once again served as a joyful reminder of music's power to bring people together during the holiday season.

Each night featured an impressive lineup of ensembles, showcasing the depth and talent of the School of Music.

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ETAMU Students and Alumni Represent Lion Pride at Texas Music Educators Convention

Students and alumni from the East Texas A&M University School of Music proudly represented the university at the annual Texas Music Educators Association (TMEA) Clinic/Convention, held in San Antonio. Recognized as one of the largest music education events in the nation, the convention draws nearly 30,000 attendees each year, including music educators, students, performers, and exhibitors, for several days of professional development, performances, and networking.

For ETAMU students, the convention offered an invaluable opportunity to connect with composers and educators, explore career pathways, and engage with the broader music education community. Many documented their experiences traveling to San Antonio, participating in sessions, and reconnecting with peers and mentors across the state, proudly sharing their Lion pride using the hashtag #LionsAtTMEA.



The convention also served as a meaningful reunion for ETAMU Bands and Jazz alumni, with several former Jazz Ensemble members from the past decade reconnecting with faculty and each other. Among them was Taylor, a former student who is now serving as a United States Marine Corps musician, a testament to the strength and reach of ETAMU's music program. Faculty expressed pride in seeing so many alumni now working full-time in music education and performance, continuing the tradition of excellence they began at East Texas A&M.

The convention was equally meaningful for the ETAMU Flute Studio, as faculty and students reconnected with numerous ETAMU flutes alumni who are now flourishing in their professional music careers.



Along with the flute studio, Dr. Julee Kim Walker, Professor of Flute, also presented an outstanding performance at the convention with FlutAria, a professional flute trio she founded in 2016. Comprised of three North Texas flute professors, FlutAria is dedicated to educational outreach and advancing flute performance and pedagogy, further extending ETAMU's influence across the music education community.

Participation in TMEA continues to demonstrate East Texas A&M University's commitment to developing the next generation of music educators and performers, while celebrating the achievements of its alumni and faculty who are making meaningful contributions to the profession across Texas and beyond.