

# COAL

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND LETTERS  
**ANNUAL REPORT**





## LETTER FROM THE **DEAN**

As I reflect on my third year as dean of the College of Arts and Letters, I am extremely grateful for the support we've received from our community, alumni, and friends. Our students and faculty continue to achieve remarkable things, and I feel incredibly fortunate to work alongside such talented and dedicated individuals. Their accomplishments, which you'll discover throughout this annual report, make me proud to serve as their dean. What sets our college apart is the exceptional work of our faculty, who not only conduct groundbreaking research and create inspiring artistic productions, but also bring that expertise directly into their classrooms. Every day, I witness how this enriches our students' education and transforms their academic journey at Austin Peay.

I often describe our college as the “face” of the university – and for good reason. Through our performances, exhibitions, and presentations, we create countless opportunities for the public to engage with Austin Peay. This past year, we strengthened these community connections through our music concerts, theatrical productions, art exhibitions, and writers' seminars. Special initiatives like the Govs Creative Arts Festival and our community reception for *White Christmas* took these relationships to new heights. Our Center of Excellence for the Creative Arts (CECA) continues to be a driving force in enriching both our students' experiences and our region's cultural landscape.

Every year, we face new challenges. Change remains ever constant. Yet through it all, our focus remains on student success. We take pride in knowing that our graduates go on to become leaders in their communities, across Tennessee, and throughout the nation. Your continued support makes this possible, and for that, I am thankful.

**Dr. William “Buzz” Hoon**  
Dean, Austin Peay's College of Arts & Letters



PHOTO BY ART+ DESIGN PHOTOGRAPHY STUDENT





# FUN SLIDE

Enrollment  
**+9%**  
for Fall 2024  
over Fall 2023

**Retention 77.44%**  
(leading the university in retention)

Stay up-to-date with current activities  
and future events by following us on  
your favorite social media channels.

## SOCIAL MEDIA



@CoALAPSU



@artsandlettersapsu



Austin Peay State University  
College of Arts and Letters



@CoALatAPSU



@artsandlettersapsu

### Where to Find Us



Harned Hall Room 132  
P.O. Box 4534  
Clarksville, TN 37044



[apsu.edu/coal](https://apsu.edu/coal)

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Six outstanding students from the College of Arts and Letters were recognized for their exemplary leadership during the third annual Student Leadership Awards ceremony on April 17.

## STUDENT LEADERSHIP **AWARDS**

The 2024-25 Student Leadership Award recipients are:

**Ralph Acosta** (Art + Design) - A veteran who recently graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in graphic design, Acosta served as the Department of Art + Design's primary photographer, documenting countless university events and creating an impressive creative portfolio now featured in APSU's permanent collection.

**Michael Dangerfield** (Communication) - A standout presence in APSU-TV productions, Dangerfield distinguished himself through his versatile contributions both on and off camera, while maintaining a commitment to excellence and supporting his fellow students.

**Faith Sayle** (History and Philosophy) - As president of Phi Alpha Theta, Sayle revitalized APSU's chapter of the history honors society while maintaining academic excellence through her thesis work on the Scopes trial and serving as vice president of Sigma Delta Pi.

**Oliver Cates** (Languages and Literature) - Cates significantly enhanced the Zone 3 literary journal's online presence and led successful social media campaigns, including a GOVing Tuesday initiative that raised nearly \$5,000. He also served as editor for the Red Mud Review, the student literary magazine.

**Chloe DeLease** (Music) - A Presser Scholar Award recipient and principal clarinetist in the Wind Ensemble, DeLease demonstrated exceptional musicianship and teaching abilities, earning recognition for her leadership and dedication to musical excellence.

**Nicolas Sperandeo** (Theatre and Dance) - A junior earning a Bachelor of Fine Arts in musical theatre, Sperandeo has secured leading roles in multiple productions while contributing to the department's social media team and recruitment efforts.



“Legacy is a gift you leave someone when you part. With their talents, abilities, and attitude, these students have provided Austin Peay with a gift that we are forever grateful for.”

- DR. WILLIAM “BUZZ” HOON,  
Dean of the College of Arts and Letters



# *Distinguished* **ALUMNI**

Each department within the College of Arts and Letters selects an outstanding alumnus annually to receive a Distinguished Alumni Award. These individuals are chosen for their exceptional achievements, significant contributions to their fields, dedicated service to their community and unwavering loyalty to the university.

“Our Distinguished Alumni represent the very best of what a CoAL education can inspire,” Dean Hoon said. “Each of these remarkable individuals has taken the foundation they built at APSU and created extraordinary careers that impact their communities and respective fields. We are honored to celebrate their achievements and proud to call them Governors.”



**Scotty Peek,**  
Department of Art + Design



**Mike Gotcher,**  
Department of Communication



**Jim Thweatt,**  
Department of History & Philosophy



**Thomas Murphy,**  
Department of Language & Literature



**Rich Ripani,**  
Department of Music



**Drew McCollum,**  
Department of Theatre & Dance







# EVENTS & Engagement



## CRUMBL BIRTHDAY COOKIES PROGRAM

Each month, Arts and Letters students celebrating birthdays gathered in Harned Hall for our signature Crumbl Cookie celebrations! These monthly events gave students a chance to enjoy a sweet treat while meeting Dean Hoon and fellow students.



## GOVS CREATIVE ARTS FESTIVAL

In partnership with the Center of Excellence for Creative Arts and the Community School of the Arts, we hosted our inaugural Govs Creative Arts Festival at the Clarksville Downtown Commons on Sept. 14, 2024, bringing arts education and entertainment to the Clarksville community! The festival, made possible through a \$15,000 Google Data Center Grant awarded to APSU's Community School of the Arts, showcased our commitment to accessible arts experiences. We offered free activities including live performances, painting classes, printmaking experiences, and an instrument petting zoo. APSU students and faculty presented opera, musical theatre, and spoken word productions, while interactive stations allowed community members to engage with various art forms!



## CHRISTMAS EVENTS (HAPPEAY HOLIDAYS & WHITE CHRISTMAS)

The Department of Music launched its first HapPEAY Holidays Showcase, establishing a new seasonal tradition at Austin Peay State University! The festive concert featured 14 of the university's premier musical ensembles performing holiday classics in the Mabry Concert Hall. The event demonstrated APSU's commitment to community engagement by offering admission in exchange for pantry donations to the S.O.S. Food Pantry, while encouraging audience participation through holiday attire and closing singalongs. The Department of Theatre and Dance brought holiday magic to campus with Irving Berlin's *White Christmas*. The production, directed by Victoria Matlock Fowler, showcased student talent through spectacular dance numbers,



period costumes, and beloved musical performances. The show exemplified the collaborative spirit between APSU's creative arts programs while providing valuable performance experience for theatre students. Following the performances, cast members connected with donors and friends at a reception in the Margaret Fort Trahern Lab Theatre.



## BASKETBALL NIGHT SPONSORSHIP

This year, the College of Arts and Letters sponsored the men's basketball game against North Alabama on Feb. 5 at F&M Bank Arena. The night consisted of free T-shirts for the first 400 guests, different department activities, *a Tick Tick... Boom!* preview performance, and recognition of Professor of Languages & Literature Karen Sorenson for LeadHer night.



## COMMENCEMENT

The College of Arts and Letters honored its graduating class with a series of celebrations in May! Graduate students received their academic hoods during a special ceremony on May 8, marking their advanced degree achievements. Following undergraduate commencement on May 9, the college community gathered for a festive celebration lunch in the Art + Design Building, bringing together graduates, their families, faculty, and staff to celebrate these academic milestones!







# 42

## GUEST ARTISTS

Musicians  
Writers  
Visual Artists  
Performers

# 50

## EVENTS

Unique Events

# 11

## EXHIBITIONS

1 Student Exhibition  
4 New Gallery Exhibitions  
6 Terminal Gallery Exhibitions

## Art + Design

- > Over 2,100 Attendees
- > Over 7,500 New Gallery Visitors

## Creative Writing

- > New Literary Festival
- > 4 Visiting Writers
- > Over 500 Attendees

## Music

- > Over 2,000 Attendees

## Theatre & Dance

- > Over 1,400 Attendees
- > 2024-25 Acuff Chair of Excellence Season





Since 1985, the Center of Excellence for the Creative Arts (CECA) has been providing students, the Clarksville community, and the Middle Tennessee region with engaging experiences through the Art + Design, Creative Writing, Music, and Theatre and Dance programs at APSU. CECA supports students, faculty, and the regional community by providing enriching educational and artistic experiences, and by hosting emerging, nationally and internationally recognized artists.

During the 2024-25 academic year, CECA sponsored 103 distinct events— some of them encompassing multiple activities, repeat performances, and several days. A vast majority of these events included guest artists going beyond lecture or performance, offering workshops, discussions, lessons, and masterclasses to hundreds of APSU students, faculty, staff, and regional community members. Total attendance at CECA-sponsored programming and events during the 2024-25 academic year exceeded 13,500 people.

### Google Grant & Tennessee Arts Commission Grant

This year, CECA received a \$10,000 Google grant to support initiatives that improve accessibility in the arts, ensuring that individuals with different abilities have equitable access to creative spaces, programming, and participation. The goal is to foster a more inclusive arts community where all individuals can engage fully as artists, audiences, and participants.

Additionally, CECA received \$9,300 from the Tennessee Arts Commission to help facilitate the loan of sculptures, including those by Tennessee-based artists, to be on display in the Arts Quad, located on the Austin Peay campus on the corner of Henry Street.





# COMMUNITY SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

Established in 1990, the Community School of the Arts (CSA) at APSU offers a variety of arts classes for children and adults, from beginning to advanced levels, in the areas of dance, theatre, music, creative writing, and visual art. In addition to arts courses offered throughout the academic year, the CSA also hosts two weeks of summer arts camps for children ages 8-15.

The CSA is managed by the Center of Excellence for the Creative Arts at Austin Peay. This year, the organization offered 63 classes, 14 workshops, and three youth programs, serving 1,052 students.

## Google Grant

In 2025, the CSA received a \$21,500 Google Tides Grant to continue creating accessible arts experiences, focusing on three main projects and partnering with community organizations. The first partnership began with the Customs House Museum & Cultural Center and will continue offering free monthly adult painting classes. These classes, which require registration due to high demand, are held at the museum, with CSA providing the instructor and supplies. The second partnership started in Fall 2024 with the Clarksville- Montgomery County School System and provides free after-school arts classes in low-income schools. The final partnership includes a collaboration with the College of Arts & Letters, the Center of Excellence for the Creative Arts, and Montgomery County Parks and Recreation to organize and host a free community event at

the Downtown Commons—the Gavs Creative Arts Festival. In 2024, this event featured live performances by APSU faculty, students, and alumni, along with arts activities. The second Gavs Creative Arts Festival was hosted in September 2025.





INSTITUTE *for the* PUBLIC  
**HUMANITIES**  
*at* Austin Peay State University

The Institute for Public Humanities (IPH) continued its community engagement through several key initiatives in the 2024-25 academic year. On Oct. 29, 2024, IPH hosted “20th Century Humanities in Clarksville” at the Customs House Museum and Cultural Center, featuring a panel discussion about influential local artists and writers. Moderated by Dr. Linda Crenshaw, the event explored the legacies of Tom Malone, Peg Harvill, and Tom Mabry through conversations with family members Charlsie Halliburton, Kitty Harvill, and Lawson Mabry. Throughout the year, IPH also produced its “Humanscape of Clarksville Podcast,” exploring the impact of the humanities on everyday life.

## 2024-25 IPH BOARD

**Professor Kathy Heuston** (Coordinator)  
Department of Communication

**Dr. Robert Baron**  
Department of Communication

**Dr. Emily Crane**  
Department of Music

**Dr. Linda Crenshaw**  
Department of Languages and Literature

**Professor Angie Hernandez-Scoggins**  
Department of Art + Design

**Dr. Cate LiaBraaten**  
Department of History and Philosophy

**Dr. James Zhang**  
Department of Communication





## IN THE NEWS

### Araan Schmidt's *Cracked Earth* installed on Arts Quad

The Department of Art + Design, in collaboration with the Center of Excellence for the Creative Arts and the College of STEM, marked a significant milestone with the installation of *Cracked Earth* by sculptor Araan Schmidt on the Arts Quad. This outdoor public sculpture, the first installation since 2018, represents the beginning of an initiative to transform the campus into a public sculpture park.



### Arts and Letters student earns top scholarship to Princeton Theological Seminary

Sara Lusk, a recent graduate with a double major in philosophy and classics, earned a prestigious scholarship to Princeton Theological Seminary. An active campus leader who served as Sigma Kappa Sorority president and participated in multiple honor societies, Lusk plans to pursue graduate studies in women's ministry and world religion at one of the oldest and most distinguished seminaries in the United States.



### Breaking New Ground in Sports Broadcasting

APSU sports communication students produced live broadcasts for the inaugural season of Govs Hockey Club at the Ford Ice Center, marking a new partnership between the university and Nashville hockey. The initiative, which included mentorship from Nashville Predators' announcer Pete Weber, prepared students for the growing hockey market in Clarksville.



### Folk Music Meets Rap at F&M Bank Arena

APSU's student folk ensemble Fiddlin' Peayple won first place in the Battle @ Browning competition, earning them the opportunity to open for platinum-selling rapper Moneybagg Yo at F&M Bank Arena. The ensemble captivated thousands with their unique folk arrangements of popular songs at the inaugural Peayple's Concert.



## ALUMNI STORIES:

### Maggie Lehtola ('25)

Maggie Lehtola transformed her life after watching a Shakespeare performance that rekindled her passion for theatre. After returning to APSU's Department of Theatre and Dance, she excelled academically while earning multiple scholarships and certifications, including stage combat training in six weapons forms. Her dedication and talent earned her acceptance to London's Rose Bruford College, where she will pursue a Master of Fine Arts in acting. Through APSU's study abroad programs and faculty mentorship, Lehtola discovered her calling to bridge theatrical work between the U.S. and U.K., with aspirations to work for the Royal Shakespeare Company and National Theatre.

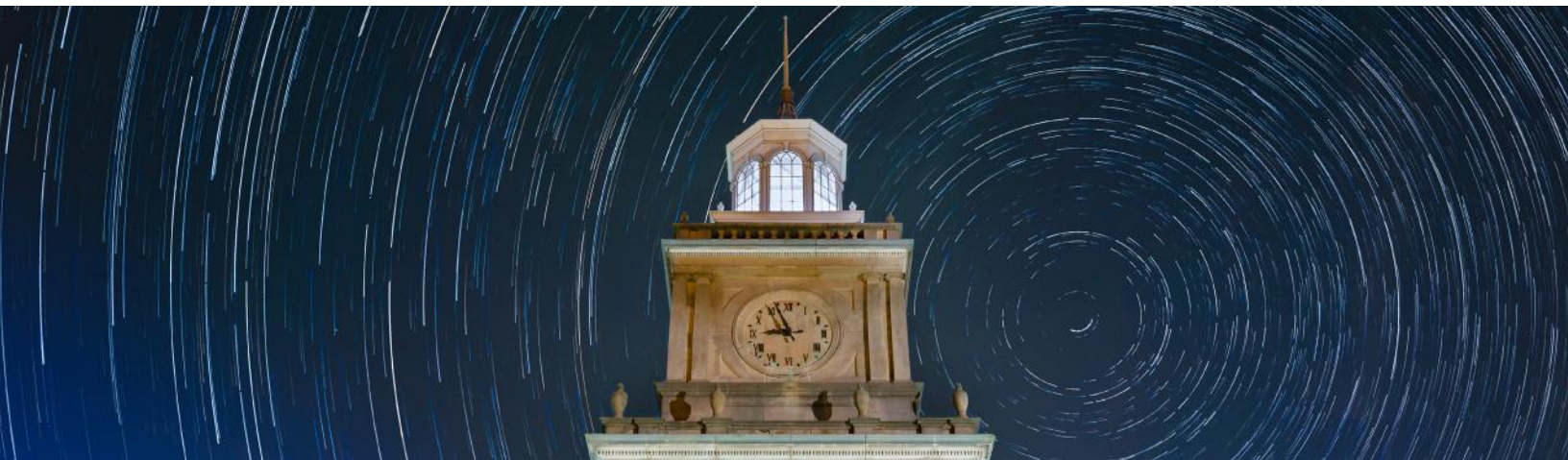
*"This program has helped me really find my feet. It's not just about the major – it's about exploring and being open to possibility"*



### Ethan Schmidt ('17, '20)

Ethan Schmidt has come full circle at Austin Peay, joining the Department of Communication as a visiting professor after establishing himself as a successful sports broadcaster. A two-time APSU graduate who began his career calling Clarksville High School football games, Schmidt went on to work as a sports anchor in Michigan and Missouri, covering major events including the AFC Championships. Now back at his alma mater, he combines teaching with broadcasting APSU games on ESPN+ while serving as the wide receivers coach at Clarksville High School.

*"I always feel at home at Austin Peay, whether I'm in a classroom, an arena, or a meeting. I met my wife here, and this school has been a huge part of who I am. Coming back after a pandemic when the world seemed bleak, the light and hope for me was always that Austin Peay was here."*





## NEW ENDOWMENTS

### **Joe W. Giles Endowed Fund of Excellence**

Supports the College of Arts and Letters, Department of Music, and the Center of Excellence for the Creative Arts (CECA). Funds student scholarships, faculty support, research, conference travel, equipment needs, and CECA programming. Established by Joe W. Giles, a nationally recognized leader in arts education and founder of the Tennessee Arts Academy.

### **Dr. Sara Gotcher Theatre and Dance & Dr. Mike Gotcher Communication Distinguished Professorships**

Two distinguished professorships supporting student-centric initiatives in the Department of Theatre and Dance and the Department of Communication. Funds faculty-driven projects, student development, equipment purchases, travel, research, and scholarships to enhance departmental growth and student success.

### **Betty Joe Wallace Lectureship Endowment**

Honors Professor Betty Joe Wallace's legacy through lectures focusing on American history, African American history, and women's history. Endowed in 2024 by John Chapman, supporting speaker expenses and programming. Wallace was instrumental in developing APSU's African American studies and women's studies programs.

### **Marcus Hayes Theatre and Dance Endowed Scholarship**

Supports theatre and dance majors/minors, with consideration for other arts programs. Open to all class levels, renewable based on criteria, with emphasis on student talent and experience.

### **Music Heals: Henry Rives Memorial Endowed Scholarship**

Established in memory of Henry Knox Rives, this scholarship supports students pursuing music therapy or music education. Honors Rives' legacy as a beloved musician and APSU alumnus who impacted the Clarksville/Nashville community.

### **Morris Stevens Memorial Music Scholarship**

Prioritizes Montgomery Central High School graduates pursuing music studies, with expanded eligibility for CMCSS graduates and other incoming music students. Recipients must demonstrate financial need.

### **Rosemary K. Norris Dance Scholarship Endowment**

Established by Mandy Norris Smith in honor of her mother, a prominent Clarksville dance instructor. Supports incoming freshman dance majors showing exceptional talent and motivation in dance activities.





**ROAD SHOW**  
**+** GET READY  
**TO GOV**





We had another great year at the Be A Gov! Tour, visiting six major Tennessee cities in Spring 2025! These events featured President Mike Licari and university leaders meeting directly with prospective students and their families. Arts and Letters alumna Celeste Malone shared her APSU experience with future Governors. The tour, which included stops in Antioch, Murfreesboro, Chattanooga, Memphis, Gallatin, and Bellevue, highlighted APSU's academic programs while awarding scholarships and prizes to future Governors!

The university also hosted Get Ready to Gov, an on-campus experience for high school underclassmen. This program allowed prospective students to explore academic programs across all colleges, engage with faculty and current students, tour facilities including residence halls, and learn about campus life and organizations.



## FACULTY RESEARCH SPOTLIGHTS with Tony Morris

The Faculty Research Spotlight series, led by Associate Dean Dr. Tony Morris, brought another year of fascinating academic presentations to campus. Each month, College of Arts and Letters professors shared their innovative research and creative projects with the campus community. The series showcases the diverse scholarly work happening within our college.



**Sept. 30, 2024: Antonio Thompson,**  
“Feels, Big Deals, and Free Meals: a journey through POW,  
foreign policy, and Popular Culture Studies”

**Oct. 28, 2024: Darren Michael,**  
“When Struggle becomes Voice, or Finding My Yawp:  
an artist comes to terms with what the artist process does for them”

**Jan. 27, 2025: Kakali Chakrabarti,** “Challenges in Health  
Risk Perception and Value of Culture-Centered Risk Communication”

**Feb. 24, 2025: Steve Kershner,** “Healing Rome’s Soul-Sickness:  
Epicurean therapy in Vergil’s Georgics”

**March 31, 2025: Michael Chandler,** “Orff Schulwerk and  
Its Transformation of Music Education”

**April 21, 2025: Tamara Smithers,**  
“Raphael & Michelangelo as gods of art”



CONFERENCE TALKS:

**83 talks**  
in 22 states,  
4 countries,  
and 2 virtual



EXHIBITIONS:

**7 solo and  
41 group  
exhibitions  
across  
13 states**

INVITED LECTURES:

**42 talks  
in 8 states,  
2 countries,  
and 3 virtual**

MASTERCLASS:

**2 masterclasses  
in 2 states**

PERFORMANCES:

**11  
performances  
in 2 states**

PUBLISHED  
ARTICLES/BOOK  
CHAPTERS

**46**

(26 published,  
10 accepted,  
and 10 submitted)

CONCERTS:

**70 concert  
performances  
in 14 states  
and  
7 countries**

CLIENT WORKS:

**81 works for  
50 unique  
clients**

INTERNAL GRANT FUNDING:

**\$10,741**

EXTERNAL GRANT FUNDING:

**\$68,200**

IN-PROGRESS,  
LONG TERM PROJECTS:

**33**

CONFERENCE PANEL  
ORGANIZER:

**1**

SHEET MUSIC PUBLICATIONS:

**9**

VISITING SCHOLAR:

**1**

ARTISTS-IN-RESIDENCE:

**5**

PUBLISHED BOOKS:

**6**





## GOVS ON THE **GO**

The College of Arts and Letters podcast “Govs on the Go” continued its successful run with both alumni and faculty episodes, while launching an exciting new Legacy Series featuring distinguished retired faculty. This expansion brought the stories of Drs. Solie Fott, Dr. Jim Diehr, and Dr. Ellen Kanervo to audiences, with more episodes featuring Dr. Joe Filippo, Drs. Sharon and George Mabry, and Dr. Dewey Browder in the spring. The college hosted live recordings on campus, inviting the community to be part of these historic conversations.

Listen to “Govs on the Go” anywhere you get your podcasts, or watch on YouTube (@artsandlettersapsu).

Production team: Professor Karen Bullis from the Department of Communication leads a team of undergraduate students, graduate students and alumni to produce the podcast.







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