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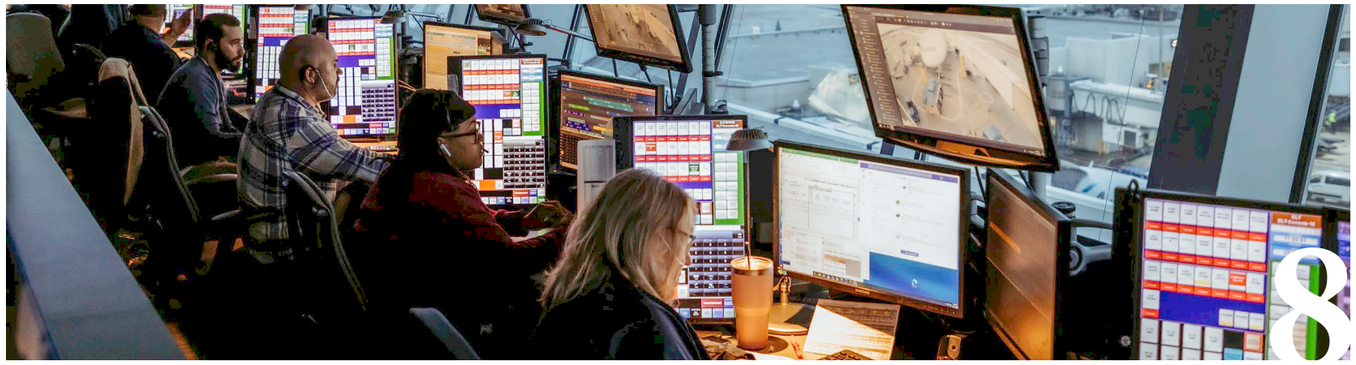
FALL 2026

Ideas in Motion



UTA College of Liberal Arts

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UTA College of Liberal Arts

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ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION
Ideas in Motion is published annually by the College of Liberal Arts at The University of Texas at Arlington. This publication celebrates the people, ideas, research, creative work, and global impact that define the College of Liberal Arts community.

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Austin Fields and Pàulla Scàvazzini's *Between Utopias and the Abyss* exhibit.

welcome

from the Dean



Ideas rarely remain where they begin.

A question raised in a classroom can become a research project. A research project can lead to a discovery. A performance can spark a conversation. An educational opportunity can shape a career. Over time, ideas move beyond their points of origin, gathering new meaning as they encounter different people, places, and perspectives. That movement is at the heart of this year's College of Liberal Arts magazine.

The stories in these pages reflect the many ways learning extends beyond the classroom. You will meet students, faculty, alumni, and community partners whose work demonstrates the power of curiosity, creativity, and scholarship in action. Their paths are remarkably different, yet each began with a willingness to ask questions, pursue new ideas, and engage deeply with the world around them.

You will meet the educator helping launch a new aviation pathway at UTA and creating opportunities for the next generation of industry leaders. You will learn about students working alongside law enforcement to help uncover answers in decades-old investigations. You will encounter artists and performers who use their craft to build connection and understanding. You will discover researchers exploring ancient landscapes, digital worlds, and the complexities of human experience. You will also meet alumni whose careers have taken them to Broadway stages, diplomatic posts, classrooms, communities, and organizations around the world.

Taken together, these stories offer a glimpse into what makes a liberal arts education distinctive.

At its best, the liberal arts encourage us to look beyond simple answers. They teach us to examine evidence, understand context, communicate across differences, and approach challenges from multiple perspectives. They remind us that the most important questions are often the ones without easy solutions.

That capacity to navigate complexity has never been more important.

Whether we are talking about public policy, emerging technologies, education, culture, or community well-being, the challenges we face rarely fit neatly within a single discipline. They require people who can think critically, collaborate effectively, adapt to change, and remain open to new ways of understanding. They require curiosity, empathy, and the ability to connect knowledge with action.

These qualities are reflected throughout the College of Liberal Arts. They are present in our classrooms, laboratories, studios, archives, field sites, and performance spaces. They are carried forward by our students and alumni as they pursue careers, serve their communities, and contribute to the broader world.

The theme of this issue, *Ideas in Motion*, recognizes that learning is never static. Ideas evolve as they are shared, challenged, refined, and applied. Their greatest impact is often found not where they begin, but where they ultimately lead.

As you explore this magazine, I hope you will see not only the accomplishments of the people featured here, but also the connections between them. I hope you will see how ideas move across disciplines, across communities, and across careers. Together, these stories reflect the vibrant ecosystem of inquiry, creativity, and engagement that defines the College of Liberal Arts.

Thank you for being part of that community. Whether you are a student, alumnus, donor, faculty member, staff member, or friend of the college, your support helps create the conditions in which new ideas can flourish and meaningful opportunities can take shape.

The stories that follow remind us that ideas are powerful not because they remain unchanged, but because they continue to move through people, across disciplines, and into the world.

Warm regards,

Elizabeth Newman

Elizabeth Newman, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Liberal Arts
The University of Texas at Arlington

Faces of COLA

The College of Liberal Arts is more than a collection of departments. It is an interconnected community of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and partners whose ideas move across disciplines and into the world. These are some of the faces shaping that story.



Gabriel Parker
Building community through performance, creativity, and connection



Jose Sparling
Using advocacy, preparation, and critical thinking to compete on a national stage



Dr. Mary Vaccaro
Bringing global scholarship from Arlington to the Louvre



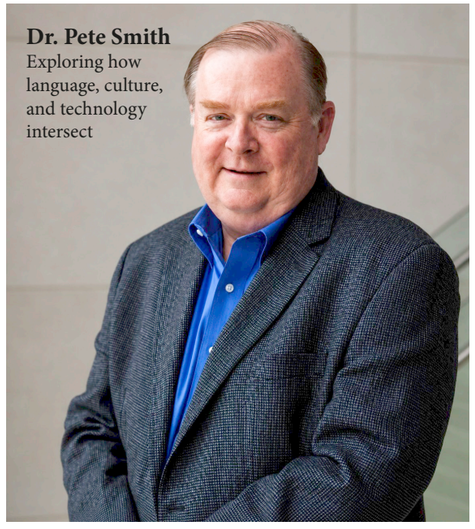
Christine Meyer
Representing the United States through global engagement and service



Jazmine Reyna
Discovering the past through fieldwork, research, and exploration



Dr. Fangzhou Wang
Examining trust, technology, and the human side of cybercrime



Dr. Pete Smith
Exploring how language, culture, and technology intersect



Dr. Sam Haynes
Using digital humanities to reimagine how we understand the past



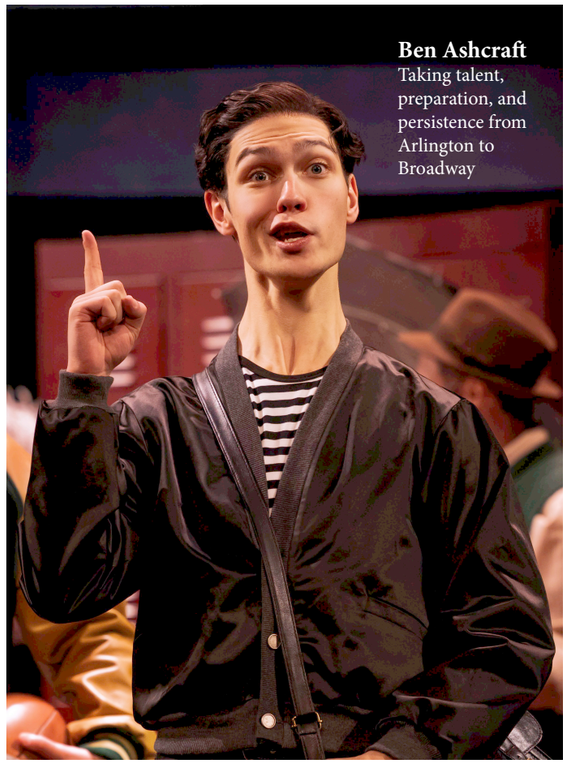
Danielle Beverly
Preserving history through documentary storytelling



Grace Wilkinson
Building a creative career recognized beyond campus



Marvin Diaz
Preparing the next generation to lead in one of the world's most dynamic industries



Ben Ashcraft
Taking talent, preparation, and persistence from Arlington to Broadway



Patricia Eddings
Transforming classrooms into opportunities for service and impact



Dr. Kelsey Hanson
Helping students uncover stories hidden within the landscape



Artificial intelligence is reshaping industries, accelerating innovation, and changing the way people work. Yet across aviation, language, cybersecurity, and public scholarship, COLA faculty are asking a different question: What human skills matter most in a world increasingly shaped by technology?

“The future of aviation won’t be built by pilots alone. It will be built by leaders.

Marvin Diaz

Beyond the Cockpit

How UTA’s Aviation Pathway Is Building the Next Generation of Leaders for an Industry in Motion

By Jayce K. Smith

Every day, more than 200,000 passengers move through Dallas Fort Worth (DFW) International Airport.

Pilots guide aircraft into the sky. Air traffic controllers coordinate arrivals. Operations managers monitor logistics. Safety specialists oversee compliance. Analysts track data flowing through one of the busiest transportation hubs in the world. Most travelers never think about them. Marvin Diaz does.

What happens at DFW Airport is only part of the story. The Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington Metroplex is home to the highest concentration of aviation-related businesses and manufacturers in the United States. Every day, thousands of professionals work behind the scenes to keep the industry moving—from airport operations and logistics to safety oversight, communications, data analytics, maintenance, public policy, and management.

"The future of aviation won’t be built by pilots alone. It will be built by leaders."

That’s the vision behind The University of Texas at Arlington’s new Aviation Studies, housed within the College of Liberal Arts.

“The need is now,” Diaz said. “We’ve heard directly from our aviation advisory group that airlines, airports, and support industries need a pipeline of talent. Our goal is

to prepare students to have exciting and impactful careers throughout the aviation ecosystem."

As Associate Professor of Practice and the program's founding director, Diaz sees the pathway as an opportunity to connect students with one of the nation's most dynamic industries while equipping them with the skills employers increasingly demand. Those skills may be more important than ever.

A Different Kind of Aviation Program

For many universities, aviation education begins and ends with flight training. UTA's approach is different.

The Aviation Studies pathway is designed for students who want to work across the aviation industry—not only in the cockpit, but throughout the organizations and systems that make modern air travel possible. That broader perspective is one reason the pathway is housed within the College of Liberal Arts and supported through Liberal Arts Applied Programs (LAAP), including the Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies (INTS) and the Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences (BAAS).

These flexible degree pathways allow students to combine aviation-focused coursework with complementary areas of study, creating educational experiences tailored to their interests, professional backgrounds, and career goals. For Dr. Sarah Lock, assistant dean of LAAP, the connection is a natural one.

"Students entering the workforce today are finding that employers are looking for durable skills such as problem-solving, communication, and flexibility," Lock said. "Interdisciplinary pathways help students develop those skills while learning to approach challenges from multiple perspectives."

Whether students are entering college for the first time, returning to complete a degree, or building on existing industry experience, LAAP's structure allows them to connect aviation with disciplines such as communication, leadership, public policy, technology, and organizational management.

"Choosing an interdisciplinary path usually means that a student is curious and motivated, disciplined and flexible, and likely to have a wider range of experiences than peers in more narrowly defined programs," Lock said.

Beyond Technical Skills

As the aviation industry is evolving at remarkable speed, global transportation demands continue to grow, data analytics shapes operational decisions, artificial intelligence accelerates research and problem-solving, and new technologies transforms everything from logistics and maintenance to customer experience and safety.

Yet for all the technological change, aviation remains fundamentally dependent on people.

"The aviation business is solely dependent on trust," Diaz said. "Everyone involved in owning, operating, maintaining, and manufacturing aircraft trusts that the person before them followed all the rules and procedures. Aviation depends on timely, reliable, and actionable communication."

That reality challenges one of the most common misconceptions about aviation careers.

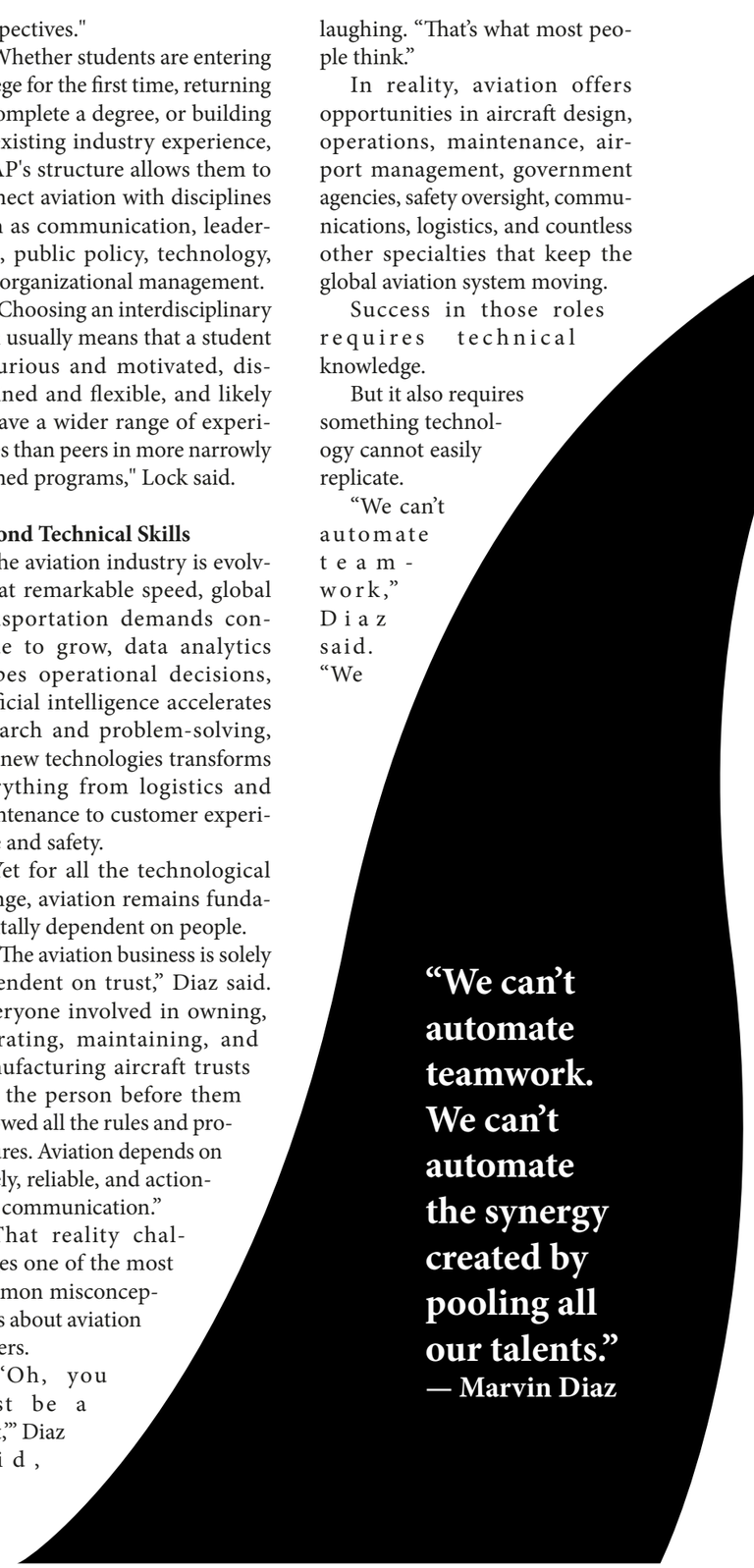
"'Oh, you must be a pilot,'" Diaz said, laughing. "That's what most people think."

In reality, aviation offers opportunities in aircraft design, operations, maintenance, airport management, government agencies, safety oversight, communications, logistics, and countless other specialties that keep the global aviation system moving.

Success in those roles requires technical knowledge.

But it also requires something technology cannot easily replicate.

"We can't automate teamwork," Diaz said. "We can't automate the synergy created by pooling all our talents. We can't automate the passion that drives people to keep looking for better ways to do things."



"We can't automate teamwork. We can't automate the synergy created by pooling all our talents."
— Marvin Diaz

The Liberal Arts Advantage

For some, the idea of an aviation program within a College of Liberal Arts may seem unexpected.

For Diaz, it's exactly where it belongs.

"Aviation Studies is housed in the liberal arts college because of the values instilled here," he said. "Critical thinking, problem solving, time management, communication, teamwork, and perhaps most importantly, personal ethical responsibility."

Those competencies are increasingly valuable in an industry where professionals must navigate changing regulations, emerging technologies, economic uncertainty, global events, and complex operational challenges.

Lock describes LAAP's philosophy as "yes, and."

"Yes, we're preparing students to think critically," she said. "And we're showing them what that looks like in applied contexts."

The pathway reflects a growing understanding among employers that technical expertise alone is no longer enough. Organizations need professionals who can communicate across teams, solve problems collaboratively, adapt to change, and lead in high-pressure environments.

Those are qualities liberal arts graduates have long been developing.

The Human Advantage

As conversations about artificial intelligence continue to reshape industries around the world, both Diaz and Lock believe the future belongs to people who can combine technological fluency with distinctly human strengths.

Students today have access to more information than any generation before them. The challenge is learning how to use it wisely.

"Students today need strong digital and media literacy skills," Diaz said. "They can go further and deeper in their studies than any generation before. But they have to remember they're the ultimate decision-makers."

Lock agrees.

"People who are skilled at metacognition, analysis, empathy, creativity, and nuanced communication are indispensable," she said. "The people best able to identify misinformation or challenge flawed assumptions are those who have learned to think deeply and ask better questions."

In many ways, those qualities mirror the demands of aviation itself. The industry values efficiency, but it depends on relationships. It embraces technology, but it succeeds because of people. It relies on data, but it requires judgment.

Preparing Mavericks for What's Next

The launch of the Aviation Studies pathway reflects more than the creation of a new academic offering.

It represents a broader vision for how higher education can prepare students for industries that are increasingly interconnected, fast-moving, and complex.

As career paths become less linear and workforce needs continue to evolve, employers are looking for graduates who can navigate uncertainty, communicate across disciplines, and lead through change.

Those are the very skills the College of Liberal Arts has been cultivating for generations.

For Diaz, the program's success ultimately won't be measured by enrollment numbers or course offerings. It will be measured by the graduates who leave prepared to make a difference.

He hopes they become "open-minded, fun-loving, positive-spirited individuals armed with the aviation knowledge to lead people in an aviation industry that is never the same from one day to the next."

In the nation's largest aviation market, UTA isn't simply creating another aviation program. It's building a talent pipeline. One grounded in communication, leadership, critical thinking, and ethical responsibility. One designed for an industry in motion.

And one ready for takeoff.

Beyond the Cockpit: Careers in Aviation

Operations
- Airport Operations
- Airline Management
- Logistics & Supply Chain

Safety & Regulation
- Aviation Safety
- Air Traffic Management
- Government & Regulatory Agencies

Innovation & Leadership
- Data Analytics
- Aircraft Manufacturing
- Public Affairs & Community Relations
- Aviation Communications

Trust, Power, and the Human Factor

Technology can process information at unprecedented speed.

It can automate tasks, generate content, and connect people across the globe.

But questions of trust, power, ethics, and human judgment remain.

Across disciplines, COLA faculty are examining how technology influences decision-making, shapes social systems, and creates new opportunitie and new vulnerabilities for individuals and communities.



Trust Under Pressure

Online financial crime has become one of the fastest-growing challenges of the digital era. From phishing schemes and romance scams to identity theft and cryptocurrency fraud, cyber-enabled financial crimes increasingly exploit both technology and human behavior.

Dr. Fangzhou Wang's research examines how offenders adapt to evolving digital systems and why victims become vulnerable in online environments.

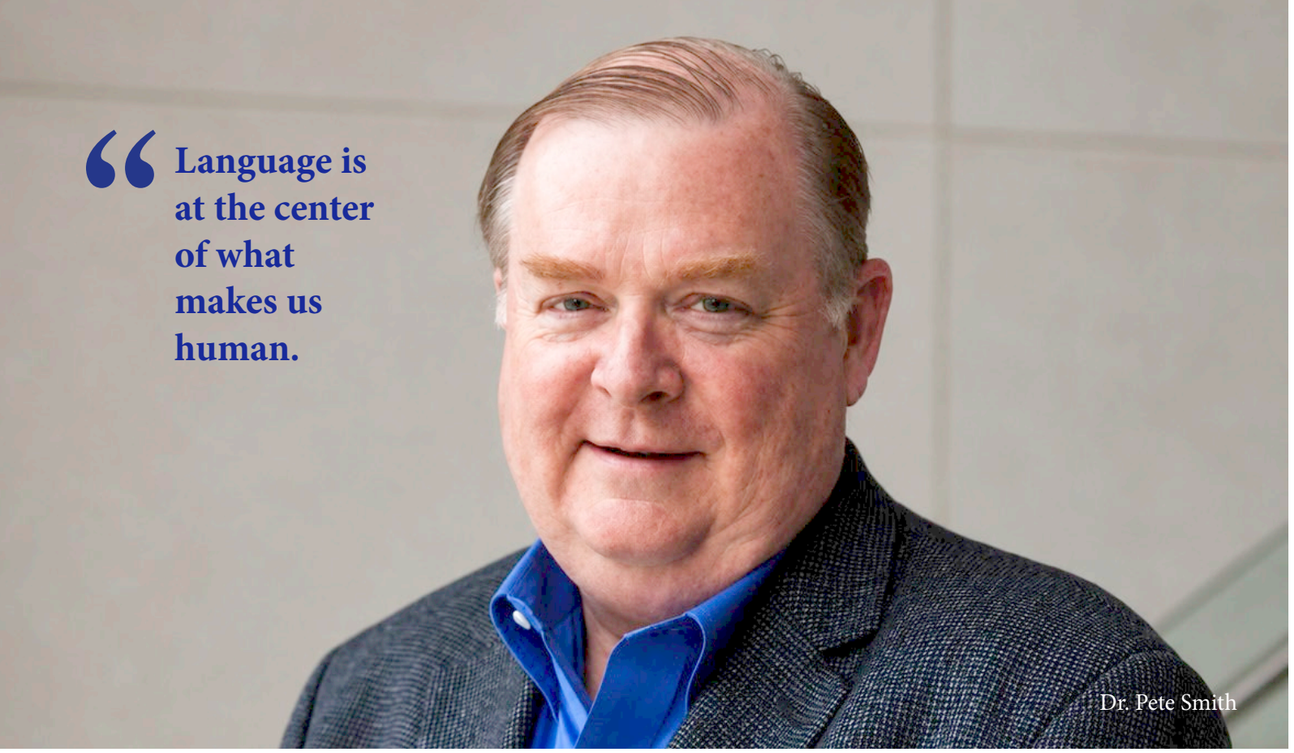
Her work emphasizes that many scams succeed not because people lack intelligence, but because offenders understand how to manipulate trust, urgency, fear, and emotion.

"Cyber-enabled financial crimes are fundamentally human problems as much as technological ones," Wang explained.

As artificial intelligence allows scammers to personalize and scale attacks, the ability to think critically and verify information becomes increasingly important.

For Wang, digital literacy is no longer simply a technical skill—it is a life skill.

Dr. Fangzhou Wang



Dr. Pete Smith

Language Beyond Code

Language is often treated as information: a collection of words, a system of rules; something that can be translated, categorized, and processed. Yet language is also culture, memory, identity, and human experience.

As large language models become increasingly sophisticated, faculty in UTA's Department of Modern Languages is asking a different question: What happens when technology encounters the complexity of human communication?

For Dr. Pete Smith, professor of modern languages and co-author of *Multilingual Artificial Intelligence*, the conversation extends far beyond technology itself. It is about how people communicate across cultures, how organizations connect with global audiences, and how language technologies shape access to information around the world.

While artificial intelligence can generate increasingly fluent text, Smith argues that communication is more than language alone.

"It is really more of a socio-cultural phenomenon," he explained. "Language is at the center of what makes us human."

Today, language technologies help billions of people access information, communicate across borders, and engage with global systems. Yet many of these tools are still built primarily around English-language data and Western cultural assumptions, creating challenges for speakers of thousands of other languages.

For Smith, this represents both a challenge and an opportunity.

As technology continues to evolve, he believes the future belongs not only to programmers and engineers, but also to linguists, cultural experts, and communicators who understand the people behind the language.

WHY MULTILINGUAL AI MATTERS

6,000+
Languages Worldwide

English
Dominates Most AI Development

Culture
Shapes Communication

Access
Influences Opportunity

Who Benefits?

> “Critical thinking means thinking against power.

While many conversations about artificial intelligence focus on innovation and productivity, Dr. David Arditi encourages students to ask a different question: who benefits?

Arditi's research explores the relationship between technology, labor, and power. He argues that emerging technologies are never neutral and that understanding their broader social and economic impact is essential.

His concept of "digital feudalism" examines how technology can concentrate power among a small number of organizations while reshaping expectations around work, creativity, and productivity.

"Technologies are never neutral," Arditi said. "They are created for a reason."

For Arditi, the role of the humanities and social sciences is to ensure that conversations about technology include questions of ethics, equity, and human well-being. As artificial intelligence continues to evolve, he believes critical thinking remains one of the most important skills students can develop.


Dr. David Arditi

What Endures

The technologies will continue to change. Industries will evolve. Algorithms will become faster and more sophisticated. Yet the qualities that matter most remain remarkably constant. The ability to think critically, to communicate across cultures, to evaluate information thoughtfully, to build trust, to lead responsibly. Those skills cannot be downloaded. They cannot be automated. They must be developed. And they remain at the heart of a liberal arts education.

Justice in Real Time



Members of UTA's criminology and criminal justice faculty, detectives from Arlington Police Department (APD) and the 15 students in the cold case class.

"The classroom became something more than a place to learn. It became a place to serve."



Photos of the victim, Cynthia Gonzalez, at the APD-UTA press conference.

For 34 years, a family waited for answers. In a new partnership between UTA's Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice and the Arlington Police Department, students helped bring new momentum to a decades-old murder investigation—demonstrating how education, service, and community impact can intersect in powerful ways.

As featured in

NBC NEWS NOW TOP STORY w/TOM LLAMAS

INSIDE EDITION

CBS TEXAS

The New York Times

USA TODAY

FOX 4 KDFW

KERA

TELEMUNDO

WFAA abc

A Name. A Family. A Case That Refused to Disappear

Original Reporting by Cristal Gonzalez

Students in The University of Texas at Arlington's Criminology and Criminal Justice Department have helped Arlington Police Department (APD) detectives break a 34-year-old homicide cold case.

In early November of 2025, at a joint APD-UTA press conference, police announced an arrest was made on Nov. 6 in connection to the 1991 murder of Cynthia Gonzalez—one of three cold cases being reviewed this fall by 15 students in Patricia Eddings' new cold case course.

On Sept. 17, 1991, 25-year-old Gonzalez was reported missing by her ex-husband. Five days later, police received reports of a deceased woman found in rural Johnson County, later confirmed to be Gonzalez. Detectives pursued numerous leads through the years, but never made an arrest.

"I was extremely shocked when the detectives told us an arrest had been made; it made me so happy to hear," said Jenna Lewis, a senior criminology and criminal justice and biology double-major. "When we first started working on this case and learning about the victim, a fire was lit in me. We just wanted to solve this case so badly for the victim and her family. Our whole class is extremely proud we were able to help them get answers and help them out in this way."

All the students spent class time, and often for hours before and after, reviewing their assigned case file in groups, which included witness statements, evidence and crime scene photos, and police and detective reports. They worked closely with APD detectives in



Jessica Roberts (left), the daughter of Cynthia Gonzalez, stands next to students in the cold case class at the APD-UTA press conference.

PHOTO COURTESY OF UTA MEDIA RELATIONS AND THE ARLINGTON POLICE DEPARTMENT



Detectives from APD meet with students in the cold case class on campus.

hopes of finding new leads to bring closure to families long seeking answers.

"It makes me tremendously proud to see my students do something like this. I can't express in words how proud I am," said Eddings, distinguished senior lecturer and director of the forensic applications of science and technology minor. "I've watched my students absorb so much and work very closely with detectives to help bring justice to these victims."

During Monday's press conference, Arlington Chief of Police Al Jones expressed his gratitude to Eddings and her students for the effort they put into breaking the case.

"When we launched our partnership with UTA, we always hoped that we'd get a moment like this," Jones said. "I want to thank the students for their work and their dedication to this case—you helped us get here. I also want to thank Professor Eddings and UTA for embracing this program. I hope we get more of these types of endings in the future."

APD and UTA will continue their partnership, and the course will be offered again to students pursuing a forensic science minor next semester.

"Partnerships like what we have just seen are at the very core of the mission of the University," said Dr. Rebecca Deen, senior associate dean for the College of Liberal Arts. "For our students to be able to experience this real-world training through our collaboration with APD had been life-changing for them. Most importantly, the victim's family finally has answers."

National Attention

What began as a classroom assignment became a national story.

15	3	10+
Students	Cold Cases	Media Outlets

Nov. 17, 2025
FOX 4 KDFW
KERA
WFAA abc

Nov. 18, 2025
NBC
NBC NEWS NOW TOP STORY w/TOM LLAMAS
TELEMUNDO

Nov. 20, 2025
CBS TEXAS

Nov. 21, 2025
The New York Times

Dec. 9, 2025
USA TODAY

Jan. 17, 2026
INSIDE EDITION

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

Justice takes many forms.

For some students, it means preparing for careers in law through Mock Trial and Moot Court. For others, it means advancing community health through research and public outreach. For Military Science cadets, it means developing the discipline, character, and leadership skills required to serve others.

Across COLA, students are learning that knowledge carries responsibility—and that leadership begins with service.



Learning the Law

UTA hosted more than 250 students from 16 universities during the American Mock Trial Association regional tournament, bringing together future attorneys, judges, and advocates from across Texas. The tournament provided students with opportunities to develop legal reasoning, courtroom presence, and professional confidence while engaging with peers and legal professionals from across the state. Led by Criminology and Criminal Justice Associate Professor Dr. Jennifer LaPrade, the event demonstrated UTA's growing leadership in experiential learning and trial advocacy while showcasing the collaborative efforts of faculty, staff, alumni, and legal professionals.

From left: Roberto Flores, Dev Aggarwal, Nayab Akhtar, Samantha McCain, Majd Doud, Luka Buksa



Top, from left: Prof. Julian Rodriguez, Dr. Karishma Chatterjee, Dr. Chyng-yang Jang, Dr. Vinicio Sinta, Dr. Grace Ellen Brannon
Bottom, from left: Dr. Thomas B. Christie (Emeritus), Dr. Charla Markham Shaw (Emeritus)

Building Trust Through Communication

Faculty in the Department of Communication are helping address health disparities through CDC-supported research focused on culturally responsive outreach and community engagement. Their work highlights how trust, communication, and local partnerships can improve participation in health research and strengthen public health outcomes for historically underserved communities.

Leadership Across Generations

Each year, UTA's Military Science Hall of Honor recognizes leaders whose commitment to service, leadership, and integrity continues to inspire future generations. The program serves as a bridge between past and future, connecting today's cadets with alumni whose careers reflect the values at the heart of both military service and liberal arts education. The 2026 ceremony honored LTC (Ret.) Mark D. Martin and Stephen C. Smith for lives dedicated to leadership and service.

"Knowledge carries obligation. Leadership carries responsibility."

From left: Marvis Mosley, LTC (Retired) Mark D. Martin



COL (Retired) Charles Feurbacher cutting a cake with the youngest Maverick Battalion Cadet, Leah Razo, an Army and Cadet Corp Alumni tradition.









From left: Vanessa Gonzalez, Yoanna Assad, Jose Sparling, Timothy Flach

From top: Jose Sparling, Timothy Flach

Finding Their Voice

National Recognition. Real-World Advocacy.

By Jayce K. Smith

Success in the courtroom begins long before a case is argued. It begins with preparation, research, critical thinking, and the ability to communicate under pressure.

This year, UTA's Moot Court program reached new heights, producing the No. 1 and No. 2 speakers at a regional competition and advancing to the semifinal round against some of the nation's top programs.

For students, the experience represents more than competition. It is preparation for careers in law, public service, advocacy, and leadership.



"Everyone was talking about our team."
— Judge Christopher Taylor

UTA's Moot Court teams' performance at the American Moot Court Association (AMCA) National Tournament in Lexington, Kentucky, produced the No. 1 ranked speaker in the nation and placing another competitor in the national top 10.

Jose Sparling was named the No. 1 Speaker in the nation, while Timothy Flach finished as the No. 8 Speaker nationally. Competing in a field that began with 512 teams nationwide, UTA also finished ranked 23rd overall, narrowly missing advancement to the second day of competition (top 16).

For a program competing at Nationals for the first time since its recent resurgence, the showing marked more than a milestone—it signaled a new era of excellence.

Even more striking was the individual recognition earned in Lexington:

- Jose Sparling – Ranked #1 Speaker in the Nation
- Timothy Flach – Ranked #8 Speaker in the Nation

Having two competitors finish in the national top 10 is rare at this level of competition—particularly for a program competing in the current, highly competitive format. Their recognition reflects the strength of preparation and advocacy cultivated throughout the season.

Leadership Behind the Revival

The team is coached by Judge Christopher Taylor, a full-time Tarrant County judge and adjunct instructor who volunteers his time to mentor UTA students for intercollegiate competition. His leadership has helped guide the program's revival and establish a renewed culture of excellence.

Under his mentorship, students refine appellate advocacy skills, legal reasoning, and professional presentation—experiences that extend well beyond tournament rounds.

The team's showing at Nationals marks a significant milestone for Moot Court within Liberal Arts Applied Programs. From resurgence to national recognition, the trajectory reflects both student dedication and the strength of experiential learning opportunities across the College of Liberal Arts.

As UTA continues to invest in hands-on academic experiences, achievements like these demonstrate what's possible when preparation meets opportunity.

For the students and their coach, Lexington was not just a destination—it was a turning point.

Closing Reflection

Justice is often imagined as a verdict, an arrest, or a decision handed down from a courtroom bench.

At COLA, justice also looks like students asking difficult questions. It looks like faculty creating opportunities for meaningful learning. It looks like partnerships that connect education to community needs.

And sometimes, it looks like helping bring answers to a family that has waited more than three decades to hear them.

BY THE NUMBERS

24 TEAMS

48 SPEAKERS

#1 SPEAKER

#2 SPEAKER

TOP 4 FINISH

#2 PRE-NATIONAL QUALIFICATION

STORYTELLING

ACROSS BORDERS

FROM DEEP ELLUM TO THE WORLD STAGE:

Gabriel Parker Bet on Music — *and Never Looked Back*

From Paris to Broadway, from documentary film to jazz performance, COLA artists, scholars, and performers are creating work that travels far beyond North Texas. Their stories remind us that art is more than expression—it is connection, conversation, and cultural impact.

> “Art helps us understand people we have never met, places we have never seen, and stories we might otherwise never hear.

Gabriel Parker

TAKING THE STAGE



For some students, the stage is a destination.

For Gabriel Parker, it became a launching point.

Before graduation, Parker found himself performing alongside jazz legend Vincent Herring at Arlington's Levitt Pavilion. Days later, he would take the stage again—this time alongside members of the Wu-Tang Clan. By the time he crossed the commencement stage, his journey already reflected the power of preparation, opportunity, and artistic excellence.

Water Your Own Grass

From Deep Ellum to the World Stage: Gabriel Parker Bet on Music—and Never Looked Back

By Jayce K. Smith

For some students, college is the beginning of a career.

For Gabriel Parker, it was the continuation of a dream that refused to let go.

While many of his friends were settling into nine-to-five jobs, spending weekends in Uptown Dallas and building lives that looked successful from the outside, Parker found himself drawn somewhere else entirely. Deep Ellum. The music. The stage. The possibility.

"I always wanted to go to Deep Ellum," he said. "Being around the music and being around the performance became not only something I did—it became a lifestyle."

Today, The University of Texas at Arlington music graduate has performed at Globe Life Field multiple times, shared stages with internationally acclaimed jazz artists, joined the Grammy voting body, launched viral music projects viewed by millions, and recently shared the stage with the legendary Wu-Tang Clan. Less than 48 hours later, he was back at UTA celebrating another milestone: graduation. But none of those accomplishments happened overnight. In fact, Parker's journey looked very different from the traditional college experience. "I had a late start in life," he said.

> **"I feel as if because COLA has so many disciplines that represent humanity, I got to immerse myself in what humanity really had to offer.**

As an older student balancing coursework, rehearsals, performances, and bills, Parker often found himself juggling responsibilities that many of his classmates had not yet encountered. While others focused solely on school, he was learning how to navigate adulthood and higher education simultaneously. There were sacrifices. Missed birthdays. Missed celebrations. Lost weekends. The same weekends musicians often spend performing while everyone else is making memories.

"You're putting on a show for somebody," Parker said. "But sometimes you miss out a little bit on your own life."

Still, he kept showing up, and UTA kept opening doors.

Parker quickly immersed himself in the College of Liberal Arts, where he discovered that his education extended far beyond the practice room. One day he might find himself discussing philosophy with classmates. Another day, talking politics with historians. On another, exchanging ideas with architects, writers, and researchers.

"I feel as if because COLA has so many disciplines that represent humanity, I got to immerse myself in what humanity really had to offer," he said.

That broader perspective shaped him not only as a musician, but as a storyteller. And music, particularly jazz, became his language. Unlike many genres, jazz demands spontaneity. It requires musicians to create in real time—to trust their instincts, training, and imagination.

"Here and now, I'm composing for you," Parker said. "I'm making melodies and harmonies up as I go along."

That ability to listen, adapt, and create in the moment would serve him well as his opportunities expanded. One of the defining moments came on the stage of Arlington's Levitt Pavilion. Backed by UTA's Jazz Orchestra and performing alongside acclaimed saxophonist Vincent Herring, Parker stepped onto one of the city's most visible stages and felt something shift.

"When you're about to perform on the stage and you're walking out, it's like the stage grows in size," he recalled. "I don't know how it got bigger, but it did."

Then he looked out. Thousands of people spread across the lawn. Waiting. Listening. Trusting him with their attention.

"You feel like a small piece of this grand thing," he said. "Almost like I'm on top of this altar, and we're about to have this ceremony for the people."

That idea—music as service—appears throughout Parker's story.

Whether performing jazz standards, singing at Globe Life Field, or sharing the stage with some of the biggest names in music, he sees every performance as an opportunity to represent something bigger than himself.

"I am representing my colleagues, my professors, my friends, my family," he said. "I am giving back to the community."

Perhaps nowhere is that more evident than through his passion project, *The Unlockable Characters*.

The series brings together musicians—many of them current UTA students and alumni—to reimagine music from cartoons, anime, video games, and pop culture. Some videos have generated millions of views online.

But the numbers are not what matter most. One performance, a recreation of music from the animated series *¡Mucha Lucha!*, connected deeply with audiences across the world. Viewers from Mexico, Venezuela, Canada, China, and beyond shared stories about what the music meant to them growing up. Then an underclassman approached Parker. The student explained how meaningful it had been to participate in a project that reflected his family's culture and experiences. In that moment, Parker realized the project had become something larger than a performance. It had become representation. Connection. Community.

"All the boxes were checked right there," he said.

The mentors who helped shape that perspective remain central to his story. He credits UTA faculty members Tim Ishii and Dr. Will Townsley for helping guide his development, but he also points to a pivotal encounter with internationally acclaimed trumpeter Ashlin Parker during the UTA Jazz Festival. The experience changed the way he viewed success.

"He taught me what it was like to be a top-notch musician, but also a wonderful educator and a friend of the community and the people," Parker said.

That lesson resurfaced years later when he found himself backstage meeting artists he once idolized. Instead of being overwhelmed by the moment, he found himself appreciating something deeper. The humanity behind the accomplishments.

"We broke bread. We ate. We hung out," he said. "I got to see them as people."

As graduation arrives, Parker's future is already accelerating. There are tours. Commercial music projects. New collaborations. New stages. Yet despite everything that lies ahead, the lesson he carries from UTA is surprisingly simple. Persevere.

As a student in his thirties, there were moments when balancing school, work, performances, and everyday responsibilities felt impossible. But he learned to trust the process.

"Tomorrow comes," he said. "And the next day. And the next day. So long as I stand firm and I do what I need to do the best that I can do it, tomorrow is going to be a lot brighter." It's a lesson reflected in the words engraved inside his class ring. A reminder of the journey that brought him here. A reminder of the stages still waiting ahead.

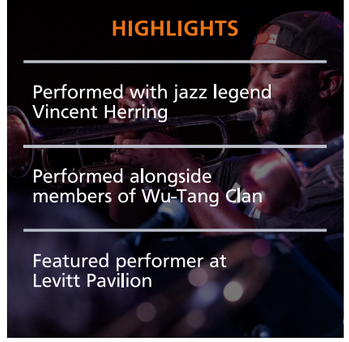
"The grass is always greener where it is watered," Parker said.

Then he smiled.

"Water your own grass."

MUSIC BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

HIGHLIGHTS



Performed with jazz legend Vincent Herring

Performed alongside members of Wu-Tang Clan

Featured performer at Levitt Pavilion



Stories That Travel

Art and scholarship often begin with a question. The most influential work travels beyond the classroom, inviting broader audiences into conversations about history, culture, identity, and memory.

LICENSED BY ADOBE STOCK

DR. MARY VACCARO

From Arlington to the Louvre

Original Reporting by Jeff Caplan

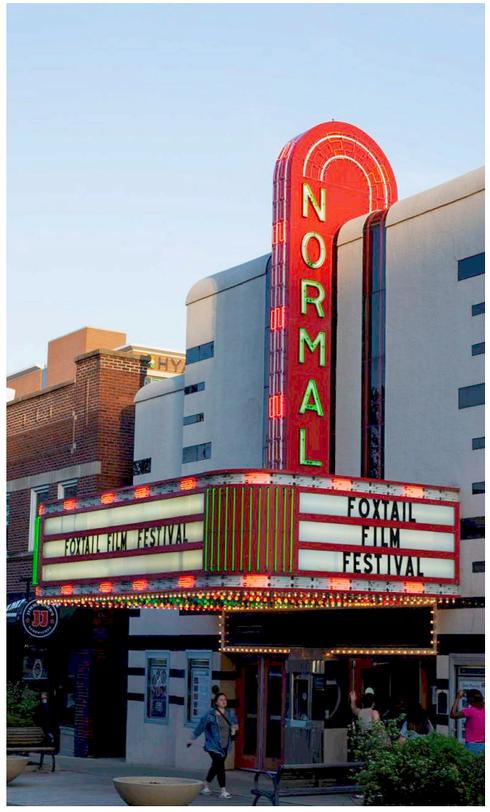
"I was proud to bring UT Arlington into that global scholarly space and to demonstrate that rigorous, internationally engaged research is very much happening here."

When the Musée du Louvre convened leading scholars and museum curators for *Carracci: Thoughts and Unthoughts of the Ceiling*, Dr. Mary Vaccaro was invited as the only representative from a U.S. research university. The invitation recognized decades of scholarship on Italian Renaissance art and positioned UTA within an international conversation about artistic collaboration, attribution, and creative process.

For Vaccaro, the experience was both professionally rewarding and personally meaningful.

"I was proud to bring UT Arlington into that global scholarly space and to demonstrate that rigorous, internationally engaged research is very much happening at UTA."

Her research explored how artists worked together, shared ideas, and shaped artistic movements that continue to influence the study of art today. Whether examining centuries-old drawings or speaking at one of the world's most prestigious museums, Vaccaro's work demonstrated how scholarship can travel across borders and generations.



DANIELLE BEVERLY

Preserving Stories Through Film

Original Reporting by COLA Communications

Some stories refuse to fade with time.

For documentary filmmaker and UTA faculty member Danielle Beverly, storytelling serves as both creative practice and historical preservation. Beverly recently received the Leibner Cooper Grant for Creative Productions on the History of Media for *Eyes on the Prize Reclaimed*, a project examining the legacy of the landmark civil rights documentary series *Eyes on the Prize*.

Originally viewed by more than 20 million people, the series helped shape public understanding of the Civil Rights Movement. Beverly's work revisits that impact, exploring how documentary storytelling continues to influence education, media, and collective memory.

With more than 25 years of filmmaking experience and multiple PBS productions to her credit, Beverly's work reflects COLA's commitment to scholarship that engages audiences beyond the classroom while preserving stories that remain vital today.



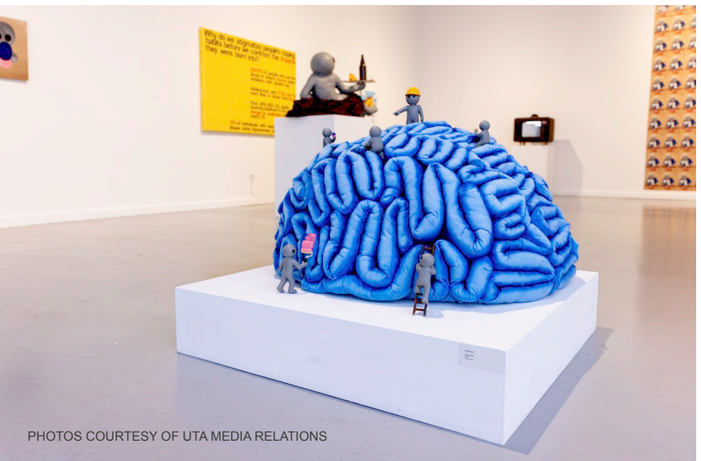
"Some stories refuse to fade with time."

THE NEXT ACT

Creative careers rarely follow a straight path. For COLA students and alumni, artistic practice becomes a foundation for innovation, entrepreneurship, and lifelong storytelling.







PHOTOS COURTESY OF UTA MEDIA RELATIONS

Turning Life into Art

Original Reporting by Cristal Gonzalez

Paula Currie has spent much of her life caring for others—as a military wife, mother, grandmother, and educator. Six years ago, she added another title to that list: student.

In spring '26, Currie earned her Master of Fine Arts degree from UTA, completing a journey that began when she returned to finish her bachelor's degree in 2020. Along the way, she became a McNair Scholar, transitioned directly into graduate school, and developed a body of work exploring intergenerational trauma, memory, and healing.

A mixed-media artist working across paint, clay, glass, and other materials, Currie transformed personal experiences into artwork designed to make complex emotional topics accessible and approachable—even for children.

As she looks toward a future in teaching and continued artistic practice, Currie hopes her story serves as a reminder that it is never too late to pursue a dream.

Recognition Beyond Campus

Original Reporting by COLA Communications

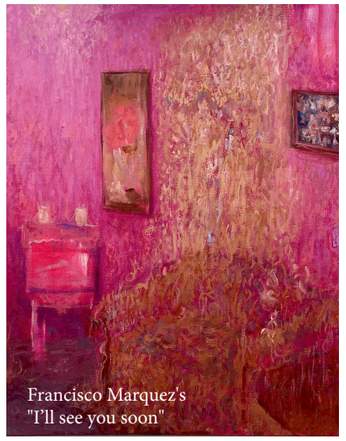
Recent UTA painting alumni Grace Wilkinson and Francisco Marquez were named recipients of the Dallas Museum of Art's 2025 Awards to Artists, recognizing emerging talent across Texas.

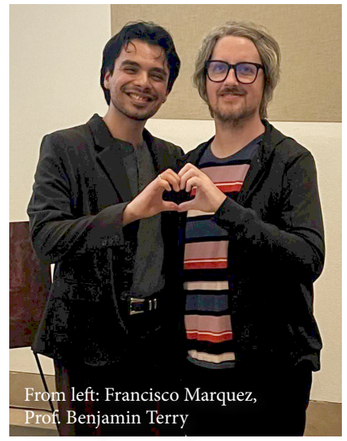
Selected for the Arch and Anne Giles Kimbrough Fund Awards, both artists were recognized for work that reflects the creativity, experimentation, and cultural exploration fostered within UTA's Studio Arts program. Their recognition places them among a distinguished group of contemporary artists helping shape the future of Texas art.


Grace Wilkinson



Grace Wilkinson's "Catch and Release"


Francisco Marquez's "I'll see you soon"


From left: Francisco Marquez, Prof. Benjamin Terry

From Classroom to Center Stage

Original Reporting by COLA Communications



Students from UTA's Department of Theatre Arts and Dance earned multiple honors at the 2026 American College Theatre Festival, highlighting the strength of the university's creative programs.

Among the festival's standout achievements was Toni Colbert's original play, *The Job*, which was selected for production through ACTF's Playwriting Program. Additional recognition was awarded to students and faculty involved in *Miss You Like Hell*, including honors for ensemble performance, musical direction, and acting.

Together, these accomplishments reflect a program committed to developing artists whose work resonates both on stage and beyond it.

Stories have always crossed borders.

A painting, a film, a performance, a piece of music, or a scholarly insight can travel across cultures, generations, and communities. At COLA, students and faculty continuously demonstrate that creativity is not simply about making something new—it is about helping others see the world differently.

MAPPING HUMANITY

From ancient rock art and Maya cosmology to interactive maps of nineteenth-century Texas, COLA scholars are uncovering stories hidden in landscapes, archives, and communities. Their work helps us understand where we came from—and why those stories still matter.

> “The past is not behind us. It is all around us.

From left: Irene Flores, Dr. Kelsey Hanson, Alister Robles



From left: Dr. Kelsey Hanson, Nichole Clemmons, Alister Robles



Counterclockwise: Prabhashi Jayawardhana, Maya McKnight, Jazmine Reyna, Kayleana Ramirez Salazar, Amber Lewis





PHOTOS COURTESY OF UTA MEDIA RELATIONS AND LICENSED BY ADOBE STOCK

Reading the Landscape

Original Reporting by Cristal Gonzalez

In Central Texas near Paint Rock, just north of the Concho River, a 70-foot limestone cliff stretches across the landscape, covered in more than 1,500 vivid images of animals, people, and symbols. Known as the Painted Rocks Historical Site, it is the largest rock art site in Texas and preserves stories painted thousands of years ago.

During spring break, Dr. Kelsey Hanson, assistant professor of anthropology and a fellow with the Center for Greater Southwestern Studies, brought her "Archaeology of Rock Art" students to Paint Rock to experience archaeology beyond the classroom.

"Paint Rock is an incredible place where there's a huge diversity of styles, colors and mediums of rock art," Hanson said. "Much of it is clearly meant to document important cosmological events, with sunlight and paint used to mark and tell stories during equinoxes and solstices."

For many students, it was their first opportunity to conduct fieldwork, documenting and mapping pictographs as part of a research team.

"When we learn about archaeology in the classroom, we're learning about everything that can be done out in the field, but we can't have those experiences just sitting down," said anthropology major Prabhashi Jayawardhana. "The overall feeling of being in the field really solidified this career path for me."

The experience also connected directly to Hanson's research. Working with colleagues, she has begun analyzing the composition of paints used at the site through non-destructive techniques that preserve the fragile artwork while revealing how ancient communities created color.

"In some early data we got to see, we saw a consistent use of beeswax as a binder," Hanson said. "That's really significant because of the cultural identity around honey and beekeepers for the Comanche."

For Hanson, the significance of Paint Rock extends far beyond archaeology.

"I think one of the most significant parts of Paint Rock is how many different communities are represented there and how many different stories and histories can be found on the site," she said. "Keeping a strong record of the site is not only valuable to archaeologists, but also extremely valuable to descendant communities."

"Keeping a strong record of the site is not only valuable to archaeologists, but also extremely valuable to descendant communities."

The field experience reflects a core principle of anthropology: understanding the past requires engaging directly with the landscapes, people, and stories that continue to shape the present.

Learning Beyond the Classroom

- Field Research
- Archaeology
- Public Scholarship
- Experiential Learning



> **“I wanted something that would help me understand Native American activity, and particularly conflict involving white and Mexican settlers.**

Reimagining Texas History

Original Reporting by Andrew Branca

The stories that define a place are rarely simple. Through digital humanities, historical research, and public scholarship, COLA faculty and students are finding new ways to visualize the conflicts, communities, and events that shaped Texas.

PHOTO COURTESY OF UTA LIBRARY

History is rarely neat. It unfolds through people, places, conflicts, and decisions that continue to shape the world long after they occur.

For nearly a decade, Dr. Sam Haynes, historian and director of the Center for Greater Southwestern Studies, has been working to better understand one of the most complex periods in Texas history.

“I wanted something that would help me understand Native American activity, and particularly conflict involving white and Mexican settlers,” Haynes said.

What began as a research question evolved into Texas in Turmoil, a collaborative digital humanities project that maps thousands of incidents of interethnic conflict across Texas between 1821 and 1879.

Working alongside UTA Libraries, the Day Family Research Lab, digital scholarship specialists, web developers, and student researchers, Haynes helped transform historical records into an interactive public resource. Visitors can explore incidents by geography, time period, ethnicity, and conflict type, creating new ways to understand the forces that shaped Texas.

The project demonstrates how technology can expand access to historical scholarship while revealing patterns that would be difficult to recognize through traditional research methods alone.

The Day Family Research Lab played a critical role in the effort. Data Visualization Librarian Rubab Shahzad developed visualizations and interactive mapping tools that allow users to explore more than a century of conflict through dynamic timelines and geographic analysis.

Students have been central to the work as well. Researchers at the Center for Greater Southwestern Studies helped identify records, analyze historical sources, and contribute to the development of a resource that continues to grow. Today, Texas in Turmoil demonstrates how historians, librarians, technologists, and students can work together to make the past more accessible, understandable, and relevant to the present.



UTA Anthropology students at the Painted Rock Historical Site.

Preserving Human Stories

History survives because people choose to preserve it. Across disciplines, COLA researchers are uncovering ancient knowledge, documenting cultural resources, and creating new opportunities for public engagement.

The Maya Cosmos

A new study published in *Science Advances* revealed that Aguada Fénix in Tabasco, Mexico—the oldest and largest monumental architectural center in the Maya world—was constructed as a vast landscape-wide cosmogram more than 3,000 years ago.

Assistant Professor of Anthropology Dr. Kelsey Hanson contributed to the research by leading pigment analysis from a central cruciform cache discovered at the site. Her work identified the earliest known example of directional color symbolism in the Maya world and the earliest documented use of azurite, offering new insight into Maya cosmology, ritual practice, and technological innovation.

The discovery attracted international attention from outlets including CNN, Scientific American, Nikkei, El País, and Live Science, highlighting the global significance of the research.

> **“Each pigment corresponded with a cardinal direction.**

Featured In

CNN · SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN · NIKKEI · EL PAÍS · LIVESCIENCE

Learning Through Preservation

Original Reporting by Kelsey Hanson

BY THE NUMBERS

- **1,500+** PICTOGRAPHS AT PAINTED ROCK
- **9-** KILOMETER MAYA COSMOGRAM
- **1821-1879** CONFLICT DATA
- **3,000+** TEXAS CONFLICT SITES DOCUMENTED

Archaeological preservation depends on people trained to protect the places and stories that connect communities to their past. To help address a growing shortage of qualified cultural resource management professionals, Dr. Kelsey Hanson partnered with the Crow Canyon Archaeological Center to create UTA’s Cultural Resource Management Field School. The intensive program gives students hands-on experience documenting archaeological sites, conducting field surveys, using digital mapping tools, and applying cultural resource protection laws in real-world settings. Students learn more than technical skills.

During the 2025 field season, participants documented new vandalism at a previously recorded rock art site, witnessing firsthand how quickly cultural resources can be lost and why preservation matters. The field school has proven remarkably effective. Since its launch in 2024, 80 percent of graduates who completed their degrees have secured entry-level positions in cultural resource management with private firms or government agencies. By combining classroom learning with field-based practice, the program prepares students not only for careers, but for the responsibility of preserving the stories and places that help define our collective history.

> **“Since its inaugural 2024 season, 80% of graduates who completed their degrees now hold entry-level CRM positions.**

Closing Reflection

Maps do more than tell us where we are. They reveal where we have been. Whether studying ancient rock art, documenting cultural resources, or reexamining the conflicts that shaped Texas, COLA scholars remind us that understanding the past requires curiosity, context, and care.

The more we understand the people who came before us, the better equipped we are to navigate the future.



> A smile and an extended hand open doors.

A LIFE IN DIPLOMACY

CHRISTINE E. MEYER

Chargé d'Affaires, a.i.
U.S. Embassy Asmara, Eritrea

From Arlington to Eritrea, Christine E. Meyer has spent her career building bridges, understanding cultures, and representing the United States around the world.

By Jayce K. Smith

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRISTINE E. MEYER

The impact of a liberal arts education does not end at graduation. Across industries, communities, and continents, COLA alumni are applying what they learned at UTA to lead, create, serve, and inspire.

When Christine E. Meyer arrived at The University of Texas at Arlington, she thought she would become an architect. It didn't take long to realize her strengths lay elsewhere. "I realized I was more of an analyst than a creator," she said. "Once I switched to Art History, I knew I was in the right place." That decision became the foundation for a career that has taken her around the world.

Today, Meyer serves as Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. at the U.S. Embassy in Asmara, Eritrea. As a member of the Senior Foreign Service, she has represented the United States across Latin America, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, with diplomatic assignments in Hong Kong, Venezuela, Colombia, Argentina, Jerusalem, Egypt, Guyana, Saudi Arabia, Washington, D.C., and now Eritrea. For Meyer, the study of art history was never simply about paintings or sculpture.

"Art history is really the history of commerce, society, diplomacy, science, war, and peace—told through buildings, paint, canvas, and sculpture." She credits UTA faculty, particularly Distinguished Research Professor Dr. Mary Vaccaro, with helping her see how art reflects the social and historical forces that shape cultures and societies. Those lessons continue to influence her work today.

"There is no 'one size fits all' approach to work or life," Meyer said. "We have to find common ground by communicating and exploring how our past experiences, backgrounds, and values can inform the future, while also being open to change." That perspective has guided her throughout a career built on relationships. She often recalls journalist Edward R. Murrow's observation that diplomacy happens in "the last three feet"—the distance bridged by one person speaking directly with another. "A smile and an extended hand open doors," she said. One of her earliest diplomatic experiences reinforced that belief.

After giving a presentation at a university outside a foreign capital, a student approached her with a simple observation. "You're the first American I've ever met," the student said. Then she added: "You're nice." For Meyer, that brief interaction represented something much larger.

"I knew in that moment there had been a mind shift," she said. "By being present and accessible, I had changed her mind about what an American was."

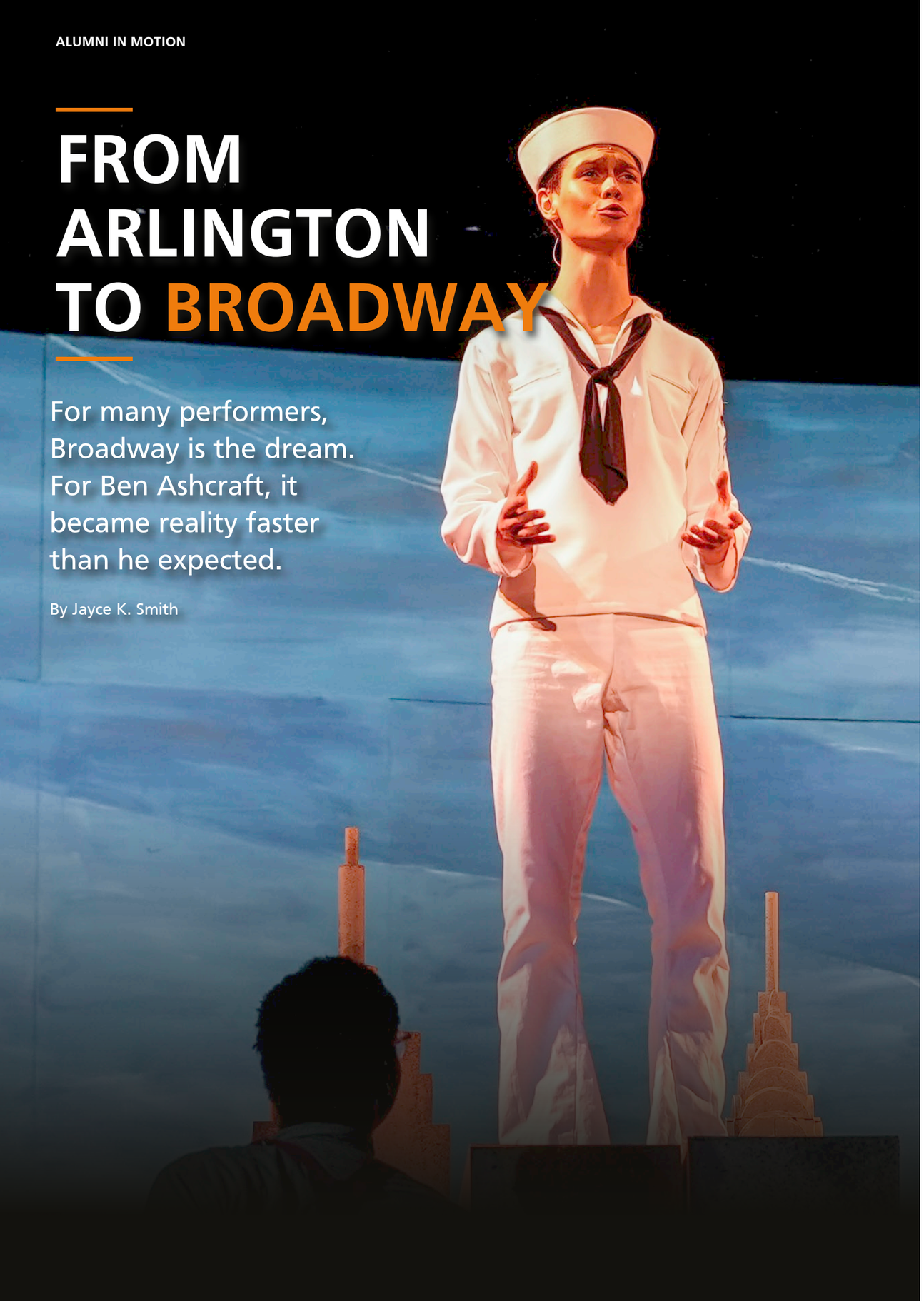
Today, as she represents the United States abroad, Meyer continues to draw on the communication, critical thinking, and cultural understanding she first developed as a UTA student. "I wanted to contribute to something bigger than myself," she said. "It is an honor to wake up each morning and represent the United States."

A GLOBAL CAREER IN PUBLIC SERVICE

- Hong Kong SAR, China
- Caracas, Venezuela
- Bogotá, Colombia
- Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Jerusalem, Israel
- Cairo, Egypt
- Georgetown, Guyana
- Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
- Waghington, D.C. Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs
- Asmara, Eritrea Chargé d'Affairs, a.i.

> It is an honor to wake up each morning and represent the United States.

FROM ARLINGTON TO BROADWAY



For many performers, Broadway is the dream. For Ben Ashcraft, it became reality faster than he expected.

By Jayce K. Smith

Only months after graduating from UTA's Department of Theatre Arts and Dance and relocating to New York City, Ben Ashcraft ('25) landed a role in one of Broadway's most anticipated productions: ***Stranger Things: The First Shadow***.

The opportunity arrived almost immediately. In fact, it was the very first audition he attended after arriving in New York.

Ashcraft earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre with a concentration in musical theatre and a minor in dance. During his time at UTA, he built a reputation as a versatile performer, appearing as Gabey in *On the Town*, Dolokov in *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812*, and Josh in *9 to 5*. Those experiences helped prepare him for the realities of professional theatre. "I never expected to be so comfortable and prepared when stepping into a Broadway rehearsal room," Ashcraft said. He credits UTA faculty and mentors for teaching him how to navigate auditions, rehearsals, and the demands of a professional performing career. When he received the offer, his first call was to his mother.

"I called my mom," he said. "She was always the first person to push me and help me grow in this art form. I owe a lot of who I am today as a performer to her."

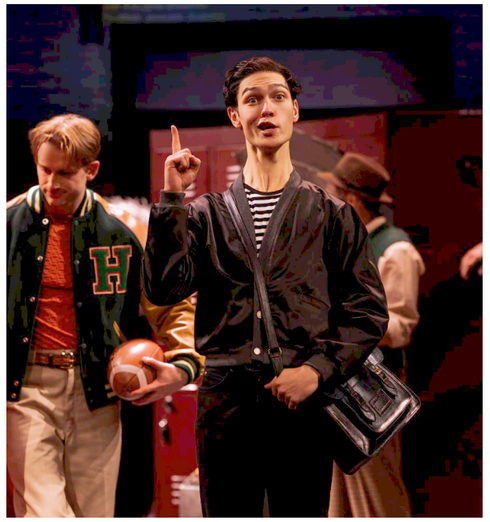
Today, Ashcraft joins a growing list of Theatre Arts and Dance alumni finding success on stages across the country and around the world. His Broadway debut serves as a reminder that talent, preparation, and persistence can open doors in unexpected ways.

> **"I never expected to be so comfortable and prepared when stepping into a Broadway rehearsal room.**

THEATRE ALUMNI IN MOTION

Recent graduates can be found:

- On Broadway
- Dallas Theatre Center
- Zach Theatre Austin
- Glimmerglass Theatre New York
- Disney Cruiseline
- Norwegian Cruise Line
- National Touring Productions



Ben Ashcraft playing the role of Alan Munso in *Stranger Things: First Shadow* on Broadway.



Ben Ashcraft playing the role of Gabey in *On the Town*.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BEN ASHCRAFT

Festival of IDEAS

For one week each spring, the College of Liberal Arts becomes a gathering place for conversations, performances, exhibitions, and discoveries that bring the campus and community together. The Festival of Ideas reflects the spirit of COLA at its best: curious, collaborative, and open to new perspectives. Each year, nationally recognized thinkers join students, faculty, alumni, and community members to explore ideas that challenge perspectives, inspire curiosity, and remind us that discovery often begins with wonder.

THEME
AWE

Inspired by Dr. Dacher Keltner's bestselling book *Awe: The New Science of Everyday Wonder and How It Can Transform Your Life,* this year's Festival explored how moments of wonder inspire curiosity, connection, and discovery.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER
Dr. Dacher Keltner

Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Berkeley. Scientific consultant for Disney and Pixar's *Inside Out* films.

ESTABLISHED
2005

Created through the generosity of UTA alumnus Mustaque Ahmed ('81) as an endowed celebration of the arts, humanities, and social sciences.

FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS

- Keynote conversation
- Student research competition
- Faculty presentations
- Community dialogue
- Creative exhibitions

> **Awe reminds us that discovery begins with wonder.**
> *— Dr. Dacher Keltner*





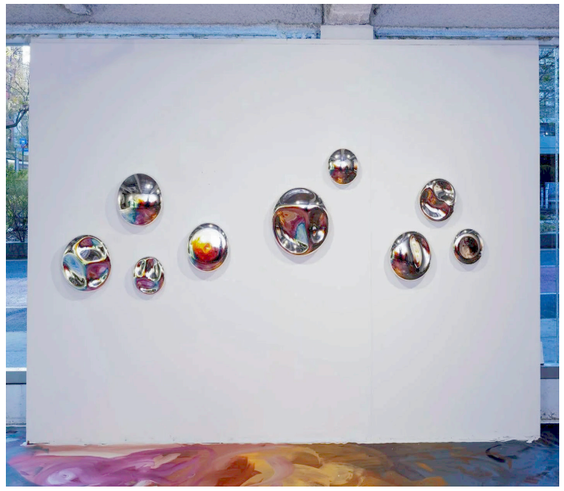






Curiosity at Work

Discovery takes many forms. Sometimes it emerges through artistic experimentation, sometimes through storytelling, and sometimes through the pursuit of new ideas and experiences. Across COLA, students and alumni continue to transform curiosity into creative work, professional achievement, and national recognition.



Austin Fields
Glass, Light, and Recognition

UTA Glass program alumnus Austin Fields (BFA, Studio Art – Glass, '17) was featured in the two-person exhibition *Between Utopias and the Abyss* at Kaliner Gallery in New York City, where her work received national recognition in a review published by The New York Times.

Critic Seph Rodney highlighted Fields' blown-glass sculptures for her ability to explore elemental forces through material experimentation, describing the works as "shiny and reflective" forms that respond to "the weight of a stone" and "the grasping desire of fire." The review positioned the exhibition within a broader conversation about contemporary installation art and praised its immersive approach to storytelling and experience.

Fields' success reflects the strength of UTA's Glass program, where students and alumni continue to explore the technical and conceptual possibilities of glass as a contemporary artistic medium.

> **"This is immersion done right.**
> *— The New York Times*



Cane Wilson & Wesley Reed
Stories That Matter

UTA Cinematic Arts graduates Cane Wilson and Wesley Reed recently shared their thesis films with audiences during a screening and discussion, celebrating the culmination of their MFA journeys.Though their filmmaking styles differ, both artists draw from deeply personal experiences to explore themes of family, identity, memory, and resilience. Wilson's work examines inherited trauma and the search for belonging, while Reed's films blend genre storytelling with reflections on family history and personal vulnerability.

The screening highlighted not only the growth of two emerging filmmakers, but also the collaborative environment that defines UTA's Cinematic Arts program. Through mentorship, experimentation, and creative risk-taking, both artists developed voices uniquely their own while contributing to a community built on storytelling and shared discovery.

> **"I found survival in film.**
> *— Wesley Reed*


Cane Wilson


Wesley Reed

PHOTOS COURTESY OF AUSTIN FIELDS, PÁULLA SCÁVAZZINI, CANE WILSON, WESLEY REED, UTA DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION





From left: Mercedes Garcia, Cloie Olson, Emily Robinson, Jay Jacinto

UTA Radio
On the Air

UTA Radio earned national recognition at College Media Association's MediaFest 2025, receiving three Pinnacle Awards, including first place for Best Audio Public Service Announcement, second place for Best Audio Advertisement, and second place for Audio Outlet of the Year.

The awards recognize excellence in collegiate journalism, media production, and organizational achievement, placing UTA Radio among the nation's top student-run broadcasting programs.

For the students who attended MediaFest in Washington, D.C., the experience extended beyond the awards themselves. Through networking opportunities, professional development sessions, and conversations with industry leaders, students gained valuable insight into careers in broadcasting and digital media.

"The fact we were the second-best radio station out of all the colleges in America really shows how successful our station is and how well-run we are from top to bottom," said sports director Jay Jacinto. The recognition reflects the creativity, collaboration, and professionalism that continue to define student media at UTA.

CREATIVE MOMENTUM

Creativity extends far beyond the finished work. It grows through experimentation, collaboration, and the confidence to share ideas with audiences beyond campus.

Across the College of Liberal Arts, students and faculty continue to create work that earns recognition while strengthening the creative community around them.

ART IN PRACTICE

The *Faculty Biennial* celebrates the creative scholarship of UTA's Art and Art History faculty, bringing together diverse artistic practices that explore centemporary ideas through painting, sculpture, photography, glass, ceramics, digital media, and installation.

The exhibition reflects the same spirit of experimentation and inquiry that faculty cultivate in the classroom, demonstrating that artistic practice remains an active form of research, discovery, and public engagement.



Sitar Balaban's mouth blown glass work, *No Place to Swim*, 2025 (left) and *I Need Some Drink* (right), 2025



PHOTO COURTESY OF UTA'S DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE ARTS AND DANCE

Caiden Garcia and Jolie Lambert in *Bright Star*

TAKING THE STAGE

Students from UTA's Department of Theatre Arts and Dance earned recognition at the American College Theater (ACT) Festival, where performances, design work, and original productions were celebrated alongside peers from across the region.

Participation in ACT provides students with professional feedback, networking opportunities, and exposure to industry professionals while reinforcing the department's commitment to experiential learning through performance.

THE CREATIVE PROCESS

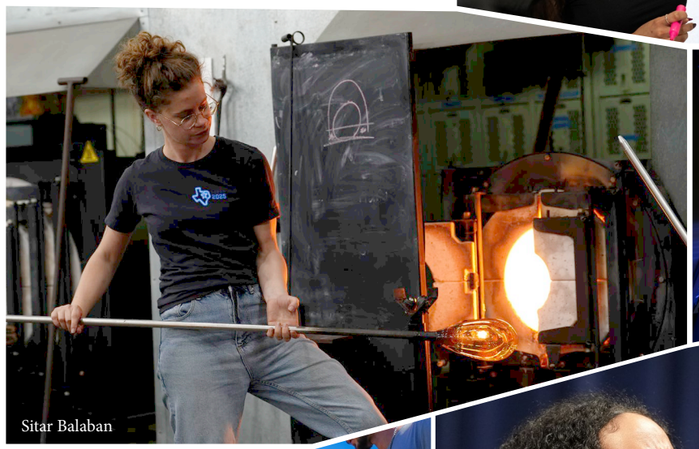
Across COLA, creativity is as much about process as it is the finished work. These moments reveal the experimentation, collaboration, and craftsmanship behind every performance, exhibition, film, and work of art.



Denise Faz and Betsaida Cubillos



Alma Ramirez Perez and Jesus Trujillo



Sitar Balaban





Kyle Wagner



Alexis Lopez



Chania Hooper

MOMENTS THAT MOVED US

A YEAR IN MOTION

The Faces Behind the Stories

Curiosity
Webb Lecture Series

Creativity
Glass Art Sale

Tradition
Pumpkin Chunkin'

Achievement
Hooding Ceremony

Community
Pre-Law Day

Discovery
Criminology and Criminal Justice

Performance
UTA Jazz Ensemble

Exploration
Anthropology Fieldwork

Opportunity
Pre-Law Banquet

Collaboration
Faculty & Student Connections

No single story can capture a year in the College of Liberal Arts. Together, these moments reflect the curiosity, creativity, collaboration, and community that define COLA and remind us that ideas are always in motion because people are always moving them forward.

COLA BY THE NUMBERS

THE NUMBERS BEHIND THE STORIES

From student support and academic excellence to global experiences and community impact, these numbers reflect the people, programs, and partnerships that define the College of Liberal Arts.

53%
FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS

70%
RECEIVING NEED-BASED FINANCIAL SUPPORT

398
SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED

450+
DONORS SUPPORTING COLA

12
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS

$690,763
IN SCHOLARSHIPS AND FELLOWSHIPS AWARDED

65
STUDY ABROAD PARTICIPANTS
22% OF ALL UTA STUDY ABROAD STUDENTS

158
TENURE-TRACK FACULTY

270+
GRADUATE STUDENTS

UTA College of Liberal Arts

RECOGNIZED FOR EXCELLENCE

Our students, faculty, and programs continue to earn national recognition for academic quality, social mobility, innovation, and impact.

#2



UNIVERSITY FOR SOCIAL MOBILITY IN NORTH TEXAS

U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT, 2026

#1



LEAST DEBT AMONG GRADUATES IN DFW

U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT, 2026

#1



MOST INNOVATIVE UNIVERSITY IN THE DFW METROPLEX

U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT, 2025

R1



RESEARCH UNIVERSITY (HIGHEST RESEARCH ACTIVITY)

CARNEGIE CLASSIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION, 2026

94%



OF COLA ALUMNI ARE EMPLOYED OR IN GRADUATE SCHOOL

UTA FIRST DESTINATION SURVEY, 2025

TOP 10%



NATIONALLY FOR GRADUATING LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT, 2025

LEARNING IN ACTION

500+ Global Seals of Biliteracy Awarded
Across more than 40 languages

#1 National Moot Court Speaker
Jose Sparling, American Moot Court Association

Three National Pinnacle Awards
Earned by UTA Radio at MediaFest

Broadway
Alumnus Ben Ashcraft joined Stranger Things

Beyond Arlington

Learning doesn't stop at the edge of campus. Across four countries and three continents, COLA students expanded their education through language, culture, research, storytelling, and global engagement—bringing new perspectives back to Arlington.

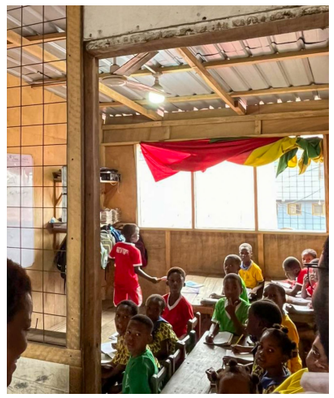


GHANA

For Danielle Quaye, traveling to Ghana was about more than studying abroad. It was an opportunity to contribute new knowledge to a field that has historically overlooked many of the world's languages.

A fifth-year doctoral candidate in Linguistics and TESOL, Quaye spent the summer conducting dissertation research on Gã, a lesser-studied language spoken in Accra. Her work examines how speakers produce and perceive speech sounds that challenge long-standing assumptions in phonetics and phonology while highlighting the importance of including minority and Indigenous languages in linguistic research. While in Ghana, Quaye also collaborated with researchers from Yale University and The Ohio State University to collect Electromagnetic Articulography (EMA) data at the Bureau of Ghana Languages. The advanced methodology captures the movement of the tongue, lips, and jaw during speech production, making the project one of only a handful of its kind conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa.

For Quaye, the experience carried personal meaning as well as academic significance. As a member of the Ghanaian diaspora, the opportunity allowed her to reconnect with her heritage while conducting research that supports greater representation, linguistic preservation, and scientific understanding.





> **"I hope to gain a deeper understanding of Ghana's rich and complex multilingual landscape, including the ways languages are maintained, adapted, and used in everyday life.**



ACCRA, GHANA
West Africa



SPAIN

Tania Leon
Language in Context

Spanish Translation and Interpreting major Tania Leon spent the summer in Spain studying Hispanic language and literature. Living in the language she studies every day allowed her to deepen her understanding of Spanish culture while experiencing firsthand the history, traditions, and perspectives that shape the language beyond the classroom.



MADRID, SPAIN
Europe



SOUTH KOREA

Elise Johnson
New Perspectives

Critical Languages and International Studies major Elise Johnson explored language and culture in South Korea, experiencing daily life in one of the world's most dynamic societies while strengthening the intercultural skills that define global citizenship.



BUSAN, SOUTH KOREA
Asia



JAPAN

Isaias Martinez
Stories Across Cultures

Communication Technology major Isaias Martinez studied Multimedia Travel Stories in Japan, exploring how technology, media, and culture intersect while documenting experiences through visual storytelling.



TOKYO, JAPAN
Asia

DIFFERENT DESTINATIONS. SHARED CURIOSITY.

IDEAS IN MOTION

THE FINAL CHAPTER: STILL IN MOTION

The faces in this magazine represent only a small portion of the students, faculty, staff, alumni, and supporters who make up the College of Liberal Arts. Their experiences are unique, but together, they reflect a community defined by inquiry, creativity, service, and discovery. And that community continues to grow.

Every opportunity created for a student, every idea given room to develop, and every experience that expands what someone believes is possible helps shape what comes next. Alumni, friends, and supporters of the College are an important part of making those opportunities possible.

You can help write what comes next.

By supporting the College of Liberal Arts, you can help create opportunities for students, strengthen the work of our faculty, and ensure that future Mavericks have the resources to discover where their own curiosity might lead. The next chapter has not yet been written.

Stay connected. Make an impact. Keep the story in motion.

STAY CONNECTED

UTA's Fall Activity Fair

UTA College of Liberal Arts

OFFICE OF THE DEAN
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS
Box 19617
Arlington, TX 76019-0407



Amelia Spence standing next to her artwork, "Left Behind," made out of chicken wire, clay, plaster, acrylic paint, and resin, at the Arlington Museum of Art's second Annual Juried Exhibition.