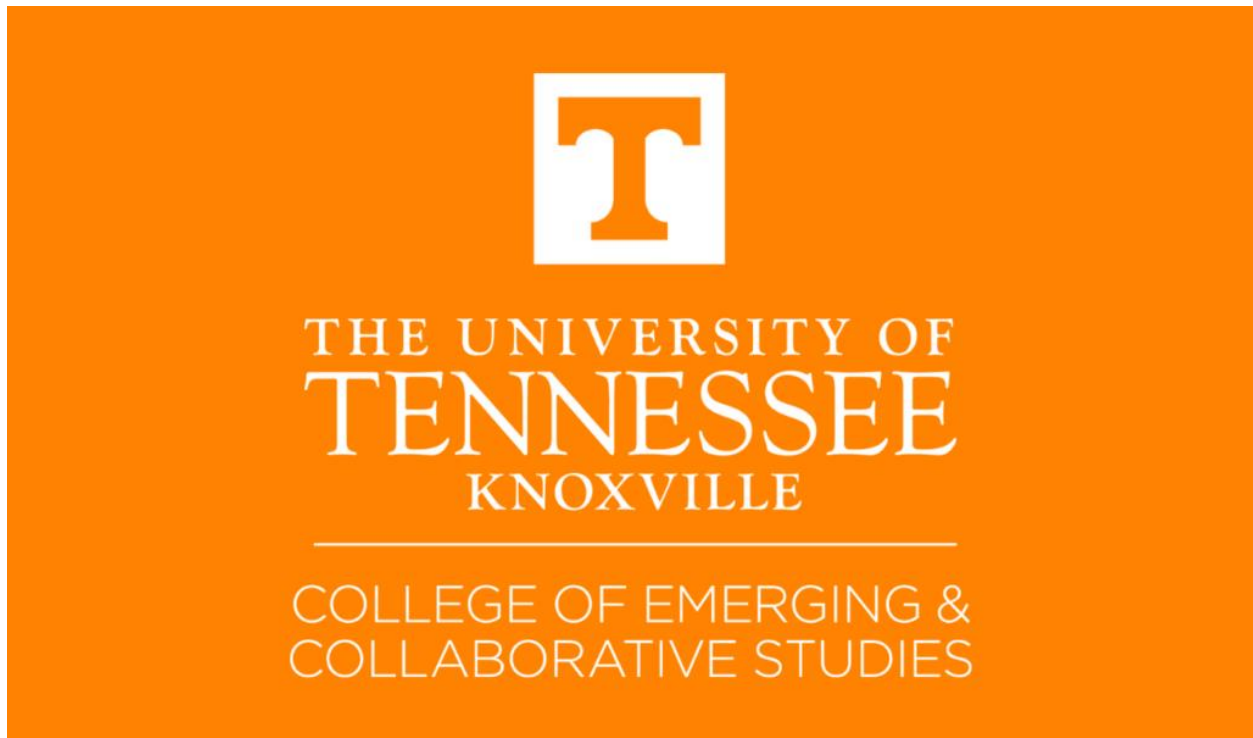


The College of Emerging and Collaborative Studies (CECS) Welcomes New Faculty, Announces Promotions, and Expands Staff as Momentum Builds



The [College of Emerging and Collaborative Studies](#) (CECS) is thrilled to announce several new additions to our dynamic and rapidly growing team. Fueled by strong enrollment, an expanding portfolio of innovative intercollegiate programs, and groundbreaking research success, CECS is at an exciting moment of momentum and impact.

As CECS continues to redefine what higher education looks like in the 21st century, the addition of these forward-thinking educators and professionals who are passionate about shaping the future of work, learning, and collaboration, will allow CECS to continue to shape the future of higher education and prepare all Tennesseans for the workforce of now and tomorrow.

“This is a transformative time for CECS,” said Vice Provost and Founding Dean Ozlem Kilic. “Our growth is a reflection of the bold ideas, collaborative spirit, and boundary-crossing work that define our college. We’re excited to welcome these new colleagues and promote existing members of the CECS team as we challenge conventions and support an expanded mission fueled by rising student interest, cross-sector collaboration, and the evolving needs of the state and region.”

Among the college’s most exciting emerging frontiers is [Medical Sciences](#), where CECS is building new opportunities at the intersection of health, technology, and society. With faculty expertise spanning biomedical research, health innovation, and data-driven care, CECS is

cultivating an academic environment where students can tackle urgent medical and societal challenges in new and collaborative ways.

CECS offers a growing list of innovative degree programs that empower students to explore emerging disciplines, build versatile skillsets, and lead across industries. Current offerings can be found [here](#).

Each program is intentionally designed to equip students with future-ready knowledge and experience in high-demand, collaborative fields. With flexible learning pathways, industry engagement, and hands-on project opportunities, CECS students are uniquely positioned to thrive in rapidly evolving career landscapes.

CECS is also focused on expanding access by launching online undergraduate degree programs, including non-credit bearing workforce training with industry partners as part of the [CECS Online Academy](#), and ensuring seamless transfer pathways for community college students and veterans as part of the CECS Connections initiative.

“We look forward to introducing our new CECS team members and celebrating the energy they bring to the University community,” said Kilic, “together, we will continue to drive innovation in higher education—and empower students across Tennessee and beyond.”

NEW LEADERSHIP AND PROMOTIONS

Dr. Eric Lukosi, Assistant Dean for Curriculum Strategic Initiatives

Dr. Eric Lukosi joins CECS as the Assistant Dean for Curriculum Strategic Initiatives. In this role, he will oversee all aspects of faculty success and lead intercollegiate efforts to advance innovative academic programs. He will drive the continuous improvement and academic integrity of CECS offerings, ensure instructional excellence and alignment across programs, and play a central role in approving and launching new initiatives. He will also lead CECS’s accreditation and assessment efforts, ensuring the college maintains the highest standards of academic quality and impact.

Dr. Katie Cahill, Assistant Dean of Student Success and Workforce Pathways

Dr. Katie Cahill has been named Assistant Dean of Student Success and Workforce Pathways, a role that reflects her expanded leadership in preparing all Tennesseans for the future of work. She will align academic programs with emerging industry needs and drive workforce development through innovative learning opportunities that support reskilling, upskilling, and lifelong learning. Cahill will continue to oversee recruitment, advising, enrollment, and student success initiatives, while leading the development and launch of online degree programs and stackable certificates. She will also expand statewide access through partnerships with K-12 and TBR institutions. As part of her portfolio, she will launch non-credit, public-facing training through the CECS Online Academy, supporting executive education, digital literacy, and industry-recognized credentialing.

Dr. Elis Vllasi, Director of Academic Operations

Elis Vllasi has been promoted to the role of Director of Academic Operations. Vllasi previously served as an Associate Teaching Professor and Program Director in Applied Cybersecurity and Nuclear Deterrence for CECS. He is an experienced entrepreneur in academic programming and a program manager with a record of interfacing with senior government officials, private industry, and academia. In his new role, he will oversee all academic program coordination processes working closely with assistant deans and CECS fellows.

Sarah Kile, Director of Finance, Administration, and Operations

Sarah Kile has been promoted to the role of Director of Finance, Administration, and Operations. Kile previously served as the Business Manager and Financial Fiscal Officer and has been on staff at UTK since 2019 holding various financial roles. Prior to joining UT, she was an educator and Director of Bands within the public school system.

Alan Hill, Strategic Connections Advisor

Alan Hill joins CECS as Strategic Connections Advisor. He will also serve as Government Advisory Board Manager. Hill is the Founder and Strategic Connections Advisor for Hill Networks of Tennessee. With over 43 years of experience in Telecommunications and Information Technology, his background includes roles in sales, consulting, and public/government relations. He spent 37 years with AT&T/BellSouth, retiring in November 2024. During his final 15 years, he managed public and government relations for AT&T across East and Middle Tennessee.

Katherine Schroeder, Cybersecurity Program Manager

Katherine Schroeder joins CECS as Cybersecurity Program Manager. Prior to CECS, Schroeder worked at the National Institute of Standards and Technology with a research focus on cybersecurity measurement and metrics as well as cybersecurity risk analytics. While at NIST she also chaired the Federal Cybersecurity and Privacy Professionals Forum. Prior to her transition to cybersecurity, Schroeder had a career as a stage manager for theater and opera.

NEW FACULTY

Dr. Candice Adams, Teaching Associate Professor, Online

Dr. Candice Adams joins CECS as a Teaching Associate Professor from the Center for Disease Control, where she was a lead data scientist for the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities (NCBDDD). With over 15 years of experience in software engineering, data security, data science, and project management, she is an expert in full-stack development, system architecture, data processing, business intelligence, data analytics, data security, and algorithm design. She was previously at Northrop Grumman, where she gained expertise as a programming analyst and software developer. She holds a PhD in Computer

Science from Auburn University, where she also earned her Master's and Bachelor's degrees in Software Engineering. Adams has over a decade of experience teaching online courses for Southern New Hampshire University.

Dr. Art Sedighi, Teaching Associate Professor, Online

Dr. Art Sedighi joins CECS from Amazon Web Services, where he was a Generative AI Specialist and Senior Partner Solutions Architect. With over 20 years of experience planning, designing, developing and having end-to-end ownership of large enterprise-wide solutions for financial services industry world-wide, he has spent most of his career as a Wall Street Technology Executive. He was the founder and CTO of a dense-computing systems company, which was acquired by Univa, he then became the Global Head of HPC and Grid Engineering at Bank of America/Merrill Lynch, then moved to Morgan Stanley, he then joined Noble Markets as the VP of engineering. He has a PhD from Texas Tech University, focusing on fairness in shared computing environments, and second PhD from Iowa State University, focusing on quantum safe cryptography. He holds a Masters in Bioinformatics from the Johns Hopkins University, and a Masters in Computer Science from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Sedighi also has experience teaching online for Johns Hopkins University and Purdue University Global.

Dr. Aubra Anthony, Teaching Assistant Professor, Online

Dr. Aubra Anthony joins CECS from Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, where she was a scholar in the Technology and International Affairs Program working to analyze the global development and adoption of technology. She was previously with USAID, where she led research and published findings on responsible use of artificial intelligence and machine learning, subsequently leading the translation of this research into USAID's first-ever AI Action Plan. Anthony received her PhD in physics from the University of Texas at Austin, working with a Nobel-prize-winning international neutrino physics experiment. As a postdoctoral researcher with the University of Colorado, she served as data analysis coordinator on an international observational cosmology collaboration before turning to technology policy as a research affiliate with the Center for Science and Technology Policy Research.

Dr. Jimmy Ardiansyah, Teaching Assistant Professor, Online

Dr. Jimmy Ardiansyah joins CECS from IBM where he was a Senior Managing Strategy Consultant and is an expert in the design and implementation of innovative, scalable solutions across diverse technological ecosystems. He has over 20 years of experience working with esteemed Fortune 100 companies, including IBM, UnitedHealthcare, and Cigna. He has an extensive portfolio of professional certifications in cloud architecture, including advanced certifications for leading platforms like Microsoft Cloud, Amazon Web Services (AWS), Oracle, IBM, Google, HashiCorp, and Salesforce. He holds a Doctor of Science in Information Technology from Middle Georgia State University and a Master of Science in Information

Technology from Arkansas Tech University. Ardiansyah has experience teaching at the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Virginia in Charlottesville.

Dr. Emam ElHak Abdel Fatah, Assistant Professor of Practice

Dr. Emam Fatah joins CECS as an Assistant Professor of Practice. With over two decades of experience at the intersection of academia and industry in medical device research and development, his work is driven by a deep passion for innovation, translational science, and academic inquiry. Fatah has led the development of multiple novel medical technologies, guiding them from early research through to regulatory approval and clinical impact. His research focuses on medical imaging, artificial intelligence applications in healthcare, and the mathematical and statistical modeling of anatomical structures with applications in both medicine and anthropology.

Dr. Nahom Kidane, Teaching Assistant Professor

Dr. Nahom Kidane joins CECS as a Teaching Assistant Professor. He earned his Ph.D. in Modeling and Simulation Engineering from Old Dominion University and worked as a Research Scientist in the medical imaging industry, where he contributed to the development of AI-powered tools for surgical planning and diagnostic support. His current research focuses on 3D anatomical modeling, clinical decision support, and applied machine learning.

Dr. Mahmoud Jahanshahi, Teaching Assistant Professor

Dr. Mahmoud Jahanshahi joins CECS as a Teaching Assistant Professor at the College of Emerging and Collaborative Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Prior to his faculty appointment, he was a PhD researcher in Computer Science at UTK under supervision of Dr. Audris Mockus, where he contributed to large-scale infrastructure projects such as World of Code. He also has several years of industry experience at the Mobile Communications Company of Iran (MCI).