



Pictured on the cover: ETSU College of Public Health Dean Dr. Randy Wykoff.

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FROM THE PROVOST AND SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS



For more than a century, East Tennessee State University has remained committed to a singular purpose:

to improve the quality of life for the people of Appalachia and beyond. There are few places where that mission is more visible than within our Academic Health Sciences Center.

Every day across our five health science colleges, students, faculty, staff, clinicians, and researchers work together to advance health in meaningful and measurable ways.

From caring for patients in rural clinics to conducting groundbreaking research and preparing the next generation of health care professionals, we remain steadfast in our commitment to improving the quality of life in our region while ensuring that people come first.

Many of the stories in this report reflect years of sustained leadership and partnership – and this year, we also recognize Dr. Randy Wykoff, founding dean of ETSU's College of Public Health, who will retire at the end of the academic year. Dr. Wykoff helped build the college from the ground up and shaped a legacy of rural health leadership, community engagement, and innovative, hands-on education that continues to elevate ETSU's impact across Appalachia and beyond.

Dr. Wykoff is evidence that rural health is not simply a focus at ETSU; it is part of our identity.

We understand the unique challenges facing Appalachia, and we are intentional about preparing our graduates to not only be capable but also compassionate, collaborative, and ready to lead through our robust interprofessional education efforts, hands-on clinical training, and deep community partnerships.

At the same time, our research enterprise continues to expand in scope and impact, whether through research focused on addressing substance use disorder and cardiovascular disease, improving maternal health, or advancing our understanding of pharmaceutical sciences.

As you will read in this report, our faculty earn national recognition. Our programs achieve elite rankings. Our students excel on their professional licensure exams. And most importantly, our graduates enter the workforce with the skills and knowledge necessary to make an immediate impact in their communities.

This year's annual report reflects the excellence and community impact that define ETSU Health and our Academic Health Sciences Center. Within these pages, you will meet some of our outstanding students, dedicated faculty, and visionary leaders who are transforming health care in Appalachia and beyond.

I hope you enjoy this collection of stories and witness, as I do each day, the extraordinary impact of ETSU's health sciences colleges.

Sincerely,

Kimberly D. McCorkle
Provost and Senior Vice President for
Academic Affairs

2025 Rankings Spotlight

RANKED NO. 2 in the nation among medical schools with the most graduates practicing in health professional shortage areas (U.S. News & World Report)



RANKED TOP 5 in the nation among accredited pharmacy schools for first attempt pass rate on the North American Pharmacist Licensure Examination and Multistate Pharmacy Jurisprudence Examination (National Association of Boards of Pharmacy)



#1 RN TO BSN PROGRAM in Tennessee (NursingProcess.org)



Nearly **4,000 STUDENTS ENROLLED** in ETSU's health sciences colleges in 2024-25



ETSU Health facilities provided **\$7.3 MILLION** in uncompensated care in 2024-25



ETSU Health clinics had **400,000+ PATIENT VISITS** in 2024-25



#7 ONLINE MASTER'S in human services in the nation (OnlineMasters.com)



ETSU Health has **300+ PROVIDERS** at 50 medical facilities across the region



ETSU's Interprofessional Education and Research Center brings together **STUDENTS FROM ALL FIVE** health sciences colleges to learn how to provide team-based, collaborative care



1 OF 2 COLLEGES of public health in the nation to earn the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health's top awards for community service, teaching excellence, and innovative curriculum



Farewell to the 'Most Interesting Dean in the World'



AFTER MORE THAN TWO DECADES AT THE HELM OF ETSU'S COLLEGE OF PUBLIC HEALTH, DR. RANDY WYKOFF – THE FIRST AND ONLY DEAN THE COLLEGE HAS EVER HAD – IS CALLING IT A CAREER.

Settling into the sofa in his office, Dr. Randy Wykoff smiles as he declares, “Yeah, we are kind of a big deal.”

Never mind that it’s the third time he’s repeated the line for a video shoot. If there’s an opportunity to brag about the college – its faculty and staff, its students, its impact – Wykoff will gladly take it.

After all, he has watched it grow from its humble beginnings as the state's first accredited college of public health to one of the university's defining strengths. As founding dean, Wykoff helped build the college from the ground up.

Nearly two decades later, it stands as a national leader in rural health, community engagement, and

innovative public health education. It is a legacy he speaks about with pride – and one he will soon hand off to someone else.

In January 2026, Wykoff announced his intention to retire at the end of the academic year, concluding his tenure as the nation's longest-serving dean of public health.

“I don’t think you ever know, for sure, when the right time to retire is,” said Wykoff. “However, after 20 years as dean, the college and university are on very solid ground, and I think this is a good time for the college to have a new leader.

“The college has great faculty and staff, and this is probably the best time for me to step back and spend more time with my wife and enjoying



“DR. WYKOFF’S WORK WILL CONTINUE TO MAKE AN IMPACT THROUGH THE PROGRAMS HE BUILT, THE PARTNERSHIPS HE STRENGTHENED, AND THE MANY LIVES HE INFLUENCED.”

ETSU President Dr. Brian Noland

the incredible quality of life we have in this region.”

Wykoff initially planned to practice medicine in Africa, but after taking a National Health Service Corps Scholarship to cover the cost of medical school, he found himself in South Carolina leading six county health departments.

He parlayed that experience into a long career with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and Project HOPE – an international health care nonprofit – before joining ETSU.

Under his guidance, the college has become a driver of rural health research through its numerous research centers, including the Center for Rural Health and Research, a nationally recognized leader in rural health in Appalachia and beyond. The college has also been recognized for its innovative

hands-on learning programs, such as Project EARTH and ETSU/ Eastman Valleybrook.

It’s one of the reasons the college is one of only two schools of public health in the nation to receive each of the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health’s top three awards for innovative curriculum (2005 and 2017), community service (2024), and teaching (2025).

“Without a doubt, I am most proud of the accomplishments of our faculty, staff, and students,” said Wykoff. “It has been incredibly rewarding to see the commitment and dedication they have.”

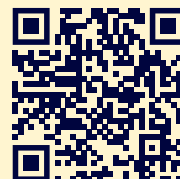
During his tenure, Wykoff oversaw the college’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, mobilizing ETSU’s expertise and resources to produce hundreds of educational videos, updates, and public service announcements to inform and protect the community.

He is also a 2022 inductee in the Tennessee Health Care Hall of Fame. Additionally, Wykoff is a recipient of the Surgeon General’s Medallion, the highest civilian award in the United States Public Health Service.

While the accolades tell the story of his impact, it’s his connection with students that sets him apart as the “Most Interesting Dean in the World,” a tongue-in-cheek parody of the “Most Interesting Man in the World” advertisements that began during the pandemic.

“Dr. Wykoff’s work will continue to make an impact through the programs he built, the partnerships he strengthened, and the many lives he influenced,” said ETSU President Dr. Brian Noland. “We wish him all the best in a well-earned retirement.”

By Jonathan Roberts



LEARN MORE ABOUT THE ETSU COLLEGE OF PUBLIC HEALTH



Quillen College of Medicine Ranks No. 2 in Nation for Underserved Care

East Tennessee State University's Quillen College of Medicine earned high marks in *U.S. News & World Report's* 2025 Best Medical School Rankings – particularly in primary care and impact in rural and underserved communities.

Since its founding more than half a century ago, the college has been committed to the betterment of health care in this region and beyond. And each year – fittingly, not long after the college's Match Day ceremony, where soon-to-be

graduates learn where they will head for residency – that commitment is reflected in the *U.S. News & World Report's* annual best medical school rankings.

2025 is no different.

In *U.S. News & World Report's* ranking of schools with the “Most Graduates Practicing in Medically Underserved Areas,” the Quillen College of Medicine ranked second in the nation. The Quillen College of Medicine was also designated



a “Tier 1” school in the “2025 Best Medical Schools: Primary Care” ranking, placing it inside the top 16 in the nation.

Both rankings were the best among colleges in Tennessee. This national recognition is a direct reflection of Quillen’s commitment to serving the Appalachian region and underscores why ETSU is the flagship institution of Appalachia – a university deeply rooted in its mission to uplift rural communities through education, health care, and service.

“I am always proud to see our commitment to serving our rural and underserved populations recognized,” said Dr. Bill Block, Dean of the college and ETSU Vice President for Clinical Affairs. “What makes these rankings so special is that they go beyond speaking of what the college has done and instead speak to the outsized impact our graduates have on the communities they call home after their time at Quillen – with many practicing in our region.”

Quillen has increased opportunities and pathways for admission for students hailing from rural areas, a true testament to the college’s commitment to serving the underserved. A hallmark of this commitment is the college’s EQUIP program, designed to identify and mentor students from rural and underserved areas interested in attending Quillen.

EQUIP is an acronym for Expanding Quillen to the Underserved through an Integrated Program. Additionally, the college hosts annual summer camps that are free of charge for students from rural areas to foster an interest in medicine through hands-on learning experiences, lectures, and admissions guidance.

Quillen is also home to a Rural Primary Care Tract, a specially designed experience embedded within the overall four-year curriculum for students interested in practicing primary care in rural or underserved areas. It provides opportunities with a small cohort of students to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to practice in communities with limited resources and increased health care disparities.

Each year, this program has approximately 15 participants and

has been a staple at the college for more than 30 years.

Dr. Thomas Kincer, Quillen’s Associate Dean for Rural and Community Programs, said more often than not, the students who participate in the Rural Primary Care Track are from rural areas and desire to return to those areas to practice.

“Training physicians to serve and excel in rural and underserved areas starts in those very communities – by inspiring the students from there to pursue a career in medicine,” said Kincer. “At Quillen, we have several programs to introduce them to careers in medicine, including summer camps that are free for students hailing from rural and underserved areas, EQUIP, and the Rural Primary Care Track.

“The Quillen College of Medicine is very intentional in mentoring students from these communities, who many times elect to return to those very underserved communities – or communities like it – to practice,” he continued.

The *U.S. News & World Report* rankings also spoke to the commitment to serving in rural areas and in primary care – ranking inside the top 50 nationally for “Most Graduates Practicing in Rural Areas” and “Most Graduates Practicing in Primary Care.”

“For more than 100 years, East Tennessee State University has been guided by its mission to improve the lives of people in this region and beyond,” said ETSU’s Dr. Kimberly D. McCorkle, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs. “The Quillen College of Medicine is a shining example of that mission.”

By Jonathan Roberts



Gatton College of Pharmacy Marks 20 Years of Impact, Service

A MAJOR MILESTONE FOR A COLLEGE THAT ROSE FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS TO BECOME A NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED INSTITUTION KNOWN FOR ITS COMMITMENT TO RURAL AND UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES.

IN THE EARLY 2000s, Northeast Tennessee faced a critical need: more pharmacists.

But, without financial support from the state, the challenge of building a college of pharmacy at East Tennessee State University fell squarely on the shoulders of the community.

Dr. Larry Calhoun, the college's first dean and one of the key players in the college's founding, recalled former Tennessee Gov. Phil Bredesen issuing a challenge to raise \$5 million in private funding for the school in three months.

It was a tall order, and the community delivered – a success story that can be attributed to the support from donors big and small, including the late Bill Gatton, for whom the college

is named, and the elected officials who fought to make it a reality.

“This community raised \$5 million and passed that goal in 58 days,” Calhoun said.

Calhoun said the idea for a local college of pharmacy began with Guy Wilson, a local pharmacist who helped plant the seed for the college with university leadership, recognizing the growing need for trained pharmacists in the region amid a nationwide pharmacist shortage. The late ETSU President Emeritus Dr. Paul E. Stanton, Jr., president of the university at that time, saw the need and championed the cause for a college of pharmacy at ETSU.

“But you know, really, the most important piece of this was those students in those first few classes who took a chance on us,” said Calhoun. “They didn’t know if we knew what we were doing or not, and there were over 600 applicants for those first 60 spots.” Two decades later, the college remains a powerful example of what’s possible when a region unites for a common purpose.

Celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2025, Gatton has grown into a nationally recognized institution, producing pharmacists committed to serving rural and underserved communities. Its mission is reflected in exceptional student outcomes – including top-five national rankings for licensure exam pass rates in 2023 and 2025 – and in its growing list of national accolades.

In 2022, the college received the Lawrence C. Weaver Transformative Community Service Award from the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy. The award, given to one school annually, recognizes a major institutional commitment to addressing unmet community needs through education, practice, and research.

“This is a tremendous honor to join the ranks of elite pharmacy schools across the country that have earned this award for service,” Dean Dr. Debbie Byrd said at the time. “Our student pharmacists and faculty serve our community and make a positive impact year-round on patients in some of the most rural and underserved areas of Appalachia. I am proud that our service-oriented college — founded in 2005 — has become a nationally recognized presence. I am excited to see where we grow from here.”

That impact includes thousands of COVID-19 vaccines administered during the pandemic, as well as the college’s longstanding leadership in substance use disorder prevention. Since 2013, student-led Drug Take Back efforts have collected more than 12,500 pounds of pharmaceutical waste, including over 500 pounds of controlled substances.

Service and innovation remain central to Gatton’s identity. In 2024, the college’s Greater Appalachian Transformation Effort (GATE) was named Team of the Year by the National Community Pharmacy Association. The initiative, part of the national Flip the Pharmacy program, is helping community pharmacies transition to patient-level care models that emphasize outcomes over transactions.

“The success of this program is due to the hard work of our partner pharmacies who together envision a new frontier for community-based pharmacy practice,” said GATE Lead Coach Dr. Jessica Robinson, a 2017 graduate of the college. “Their willingness to challenge the status quo of health care is opening new doors for pharmacist-provided patient care services.”

Support for the college remains strong, both from alumni and from the state. In 2023, Gatton received state funding for the first time, expanding access to pharmacy education in Appalachia. And in 2024, 97% of the graduating class and 100% of alumni who responded to the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy’s (AACP) Alumni and Graduating Student Survey said they would choose the college again.

“ETSU Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy was built by the people of this region, for the people of this region,” said Byrd. “It’s truly incredible to see the growth and impact this college has had in just 20 years, and it excites me to think of where we will be after the next 20 years.”

By Jonathan Roberts and Stephen Woodward



SCAN TO LEARN
MORE ABOUT
GATTON'S HISTORY



Where Learning Meets Care

AT ETSU HEALTH'S CENTER FOR OUTPATIENT REHABILITATION, ALSO KNOWN AS THE NAVE CENTER, STUDENTS DON'T JUST STUDY HEALTH CARE – THEY DELIVER IT.



Kennedy Horn always knew she wanted to be an audiologist.

Diagnosed with bilateral hearing loss at a young age, Horn will readily admit that she was a “terrible patient” as a child. Her appointments, she said, quite literally made her sick.

Now, years later, she's the one holding the otoscope – going from a child

who used to put buttons on her dolls to emulate hearing aids to a student clinician doing what she dreamed of.

A third-year audiology student at East Tennessee State University, Horn spends her days at the Nave Center, ETSU Health's Center for Outpatient Rehabilitation, working with patients who are navigating hearing-related issues just like she once did.

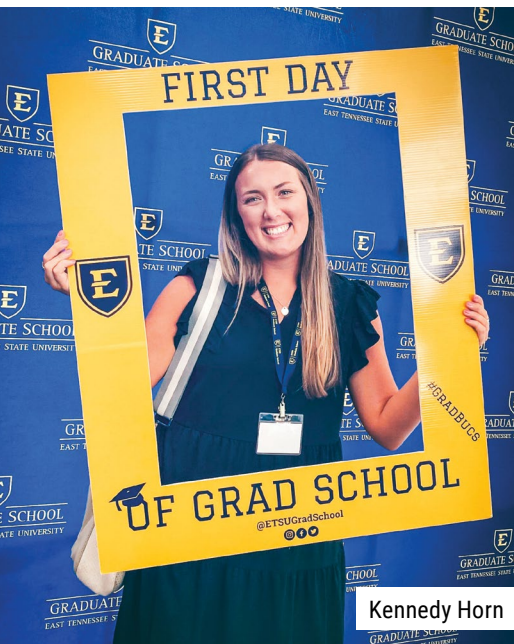
"I would throw up every time I came to the audiologist because I hated it, and I don't want that experience for my patients," said Horn, who wants to pursue a career in pediatrics. "I have been in their shoes, and I can use that to better relate to them, understand their frustrations, and guide them to where they need to be."

That transformation, from patient to provider, is exactly what the Nave Center is designed to foster.

Unlike programs that rely on external placements for clinical training, ETSU audiology and speech-language pathology students begin clinical work as early as their first semester, allowing them to move from lectures to real patient interactions, applying lessons learned in the classroom one day to a patient sitting across from them the next.



"It's rewarding when the pieces are clicking together – in the classroom and in the clinic," said Mya Mustafa, a first-year student in the speech-language pathology program. "It's helping me become a well-rounded student clinician because I feel more confident."



Kennedy Horn

Matthew Aubert, who is in his second semester of the audiology program, echoed Mustafa.

"That experience of having class and then immediately implementing what you're learning in class into the clinic has been extremely valuable," he said.

Though the Nave Center's clinical offerings have expanded in recent years to include physical therapy and pediatric occupational therapy, ETSU's audiology and speech-language pathology programs have long used the facility as a training ground for students.

Since July, there have been more than 4,700 patient visits at the Nave Center, the vast majority (3,564) of which have been for audiology and speech-language pathology.

"As a long-time preceptor, I see it as a symbiotic relationship between patient care, the quality of care that's provided, and the student education," said Dr. Shannon Bramlette, an audiologist and Center Director.

Bramlette said learning by doing helps students become well-rounded clinicians while honing their clinical interests. It's also an opportunity for students to learn in an interprofessional setting, often working with students and providers from other fields to provide holistic patient care.

"I think that helps our students leave with a better appreciation of what it's like to work holistically for a larger look at a patient's treatment plan, not just a silo of their specialty," said Bramlette. "I think it's really great for patient care, and I think it's a really good model for students."

Noah Cowley, a fourth-year extern in the audiology program, saw that play out first-hand while working with the center's Baby Steps Clinic, which offers support, assessment, and intervention for families that have had children exposed to substances before birth.

"It's very cool to see that team work together," said Cowley. "It's a very big practical application of true interprofessionalism."

Ultimately, what sets the Nave Center apart for students is the connections – whether with patients, faculty, or peers.

"I know that I have people I can rely on if I have questions," said second-year speech-language pathology student Katie Hamilton. "Truly, I think there's a great faculty-student connection, connections with students in other disciplines, and our cohorts are both very close."

Mustafa, sitting beside Hamilton, leapt at the opportunity to highlight the bond between first- and second-year students in the two-year program.

"Katie is a mentor to me," Mustafa said. "She has been able to walk me through what my second year will look like, how I can best prepare myself; it's just another opportunity to learn from my peers."

For Horn, it's the connections with faculty that stand out.

When she first arrived at ETSU, she wasn't planning to disclose that she had hearing loss. But Bramlette encouraged her to advocate for herself the same way she would need to one day advocate for her patients.

"That really stuck with me," said Horn. "If I can't advocate for myself, then how can I expect my patients to? Not only are our professors extremely intelligent, but they are also really kind, really patient, and genuinely want us to succeed in this program."

By Jonathan Roberts



A VOICE FOR STUDENT PHARMACISTS

Since its founding in 2005, nearly every student pharmacist at East Tennessee State University Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy has crossed paths with Steve Ellis.

Ellis, the college's assistant dean for Student Affairs, has been involved with the college since it was founded 20 years ago, officially assuming his current role in 2008. In that time, he's impacted the journeys of hundreds of students – an impact recognized earlier this year by the Tennessee Society of Student Pharmacists (TSSP).

It was a historic moment, as Ellis became the first non-pharmacist ever to receive the TSSP's Student Advocacy Award.

"I am truly honored to receive the Student Advocacy Award from the Tennessee Society of Student Pharmacists, and it is especially meaningful knowing that this recognition comes from students," said Ellis. "I love working with students to help them achieve their goals. Seeing their growth, success, and dedication to the profession of pharmacy inspires me every day."



Ellis was also honored in 2025 for 30 years of service to ETSU, and the college launched the Steve Ellis Scholarship in his honor.

QUILLEN'S POLAHA NAMED TO LEADERSHIP TENNESSEE



Leadership Tennessee has named East Tennessee State University's Dr. Jodi Polaha to its 2025-26 Signature Program Class XII. The statewide program brings together leaders from across Tennessee to examine critical challenges and develop solutions through non-partisan dialogue and collaboration.

Polaha directs the Institute for Integrated Behavioral Health at ETSU's Quillen College of Medicine and serves as a Washington County Commissioner.

"Participating in Leadership Tennessee will provide me the opportunity to grow knowledge, resources, and relationships that will benefit both my professional work in integrated behavioral health and my public service on the Washington County Commission," Polaha said.

CHS' ROBERTS NAMED TO '40 UNDER FORTY'



Ryan Roberts, Assistant Dean of Finance and Strategic Planning in ETSU's College of Health Sciences, was named to the Business Journal

of Tri-Cities TN/VA's "40 Under Forty" list, which highlights emerging leaders, entrepreneurs, public servants, and others who are shaping the region's future.

BARROSO NAMED DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CHAIR

Dr. Christina Barroso was named Chair of the ETSU College of Public Health's Department of Community and Behavioral Health in August 2025. Barroso was hired from the University of Texas School of Public Health, San Antonio, and brings a portfolio of more than 60 peer-reviewed publications and numerous conference and poster presentations.

DR. KYLE LEISTER FEATURED ON "WHY I TEACH" PODCAST

In August, Dr. Kyle Leister, Director of ETSU's Orthotics and Prosthetics program, sat down with ETSU Provost Dr. Kimberly D. McCorkle on the "Why I Teach" podcast.

Leister, an Assistant Professor in the College of Health Sciences, shares his unique journey into rehabilitative medicine – from treating NHL athletes with the Pittsburgh Penguins to working on Paramount Studios' medical team – as well as his passion for student mentorship and the human side of prosthetic and orthotic care.



SCAN TO LISTEN TO DR. KYLE LEISTER ON THE "WHY I TEACH" PODCAST

HEALTH SCIENCES FACULTY AND STAFF HONORED AT CELEBRATION OF RESEARCH

At ETSU's annual Celebration of Research Awards in October, three representatives from the university's health sciences colleges were honored for their work. Those recognized were:

HAZEL ROBINSON, Director of Research Operations at the College of Public Health, received the Distinguished Research Staff Award.

DR. DAVID CLUCK, Professor of Pharmacy Practice at ETSU Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy, received the Outstanding Faculty Scholar Award.



DR. BROOKE SCHMEICHEL, Assistant Professor of Biomedical Health Sciences in the Quillen College of Medicine, received the Early Career Scholar Award.

At right, Robinson, Cluck, and Schmeichel pose with their awards.

ETSU PROFESSOR JOINS STATE AGING INITIATIVE

East Tennessee State University's Dr. Jodi Southerland, an Assistant Professor in the ETSU College of Public Health, has been selected to serve on the Lifelong Tennessee Steering Committee, part of a multi-year initiative to ensure Tennesseans are well cared for and well supported while they age.

Led by Tennessee's Department of Disability and Aging, the committee is part of the Lifelong Tennessee: A Multisector Plan for Aging Well initiative.

"Supporting older adults and their families is something I care deeply about, and this initiative provides us with a platform to work together to make Tennessee a state where growing older means staying active, engaged, and supported," said Southerland, who also played a key role in helping ETSU secure the Age-Friendly University designation from the Age-Friendly University Global Network in 2025.





Winners of the 2025 Distinguished Faculty Awards: Polichnowski, Gray, and Stoots

HEALTH SCIENCES COLLEGES SWEEP DISTINGUISHED FACULTY AWARDS

Faculty from three of East Tennessee State University's health sciences colleges swept the 2025 Distinguished Faculty Awards, claiming all three of the university's highest honors in the areas of teaching, research, and service.

Each honoree receives a one-of-a-kind, hand-blown glass piece and a \$7,500 honorarium provided by the ETSU Foundation.



Recognized for his exceptional contributions in the field of hypertension and chronic kidney disease, the **Distinguished Faculty Award in Research** was presented to **Dr. Aaron Polichnowski**.

Polichnowski is an Associate Professor in the Quillen College of Medicine's Department of Biomedical Sciences. To date, Polichnowski has secured approximately \$2 million in extramural funding for his research

from the National Institutes of Health, American Heart Association, and American Society of Nephrology.

Polichnowski is praised for his deep commitment to mentoring the next generation of scientists. He has guided over 35 undergraduate, graduate and medical students, as well as professional scientists in their early careers at ETSU and other institutions. Since 2017, he has directed ETSU's Medical Student Summer Research Program.



Dr. Jeff Gray, a Professor in the Department of Pharmacy Practice at Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy, won the **Distinguished Faculty Award in Service**. He has spent 16 years building collaborative partnerships that strengthen communities across the region.

Among his many service initiatives, Gray is especially known for the drug take-back operation he

helped establish in 2009. This collective effort brings together law enforcement agencies, local coalitions, students, educators, community members, and policymakers to provide a critical medication disposal service in the community.

Gray has also served as the founding chair of the Community and Rural Health Initiative, as the long-time director of Gatton College of Pharmacy's Continuing Education Program, and as the National Community Pharmacists Association student chapter faculty advisor for 16 years.



The **Distinguished Faculty Award in Teaching** was presented to **Dr. Mike Stoots**,

Professor in the College of Public Health's Department of Community and Behavioral Health.

Stoots has earned multiple national and state-level honors recognizing his impact, including the 2025 Teaching Excellence Award from the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH).

He also played a role in the ETSU College of Public Health securing the ASPPH's Harrison C. Spencer Award for Community Service in 2024 and received the ASPPH's Delta Omega Award for Innovative Curriculum in 2017 for his pioneering work with Project EARTH.

In his nomination packet, colleagues and students celebrated Stoots' unique and student-focused approach to education.

By Melissa Nipper

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE DISTINGUISHED FACULTY AWARD WINNERS BY SCANNING EACH QR CODE.

ETSU FACULTY EARN NATIONAL HONORS FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Two East Tennessee State University faculty members earned national recognition for their excellence and innovation in teaching, further solidifying East Tennessee State University's reputation as a leader in health sciences education.



Dr. Ashana Puri, Associate Professor of Pharmaceutical Sciences at ETSU Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy, received the 2025 Innovation and Teaching Excellence Award from the Pharmaceutics Section of the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy. Puri was honored for incorporating Process-Oriented Guided Inquiry Learning and simulated

medications into her curriculum, promoting active, hands-on learning and real-world application of complex pharmaceutical principles.



Meanwhile, **Dr. Mike Stoots**, Professor in the College of Public Health's Department of Community and Behavioral Health, was selected for the 2025 Teaching Excellence Award from the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health. Chosen from more than 11,000 public health faculty nationwide, Stoots was recognized for his outstanding mentorship

and his innovative work with Project EARTH, a hands-on program preparing students to address health challenges in resource-limited settings.

Together, these awards reflect ETSU's commitment to transformative, student-centered education, equipping future health professionals with the knowledge, skills, and compassion needed to improve lives in Appalachia and beyond.

By Jonathan Roberts and Stephen Woodward



DR. KAREN SCHETZINA HONORED FOR "GROWING STRONGER TOGETHER" PODCAST

ETSU Health pediatrician Dr. Karen Schetzina was honored last year with the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth's John Seigenthaler Media Award for her podcast, "Growing Stronger Together."

The award recognizes journalists, newspapers, radio and television stations, new media producers, and other members of the media whose contributions have educated and enlightened Tennesseans about the problems and issues facing children in Tennessee. Past recipients of the award include Dolly Parton.

"Growing Stronger Together" was developed by faculty at ETSU, including members of ETSU Health Pediatrics, the ETSU Center for Early Childhood Learning and Development, and the ETSU Child and Family Health Institute.

A NEW ADMISSIONS PATHWAY FOR VETS

ETSU's Quillen College of Medicine, often boasting one of the nation's largest populations of veteran students among medical schools, has launched a new partnership to provide veterans with more opportunities to attend medical school in Northeast Tennessee.

Through a unique admissions pathway with Special Operations Forces to School of Medicine (SOFToSOM), the Quillen College of Medicine will guarantee interviews to qualifying candidates and provide direct admission to up to three candidates per cycle who meet the set qualifications.

'WHITE COAT RADIO' EARNS HIGH MARKS

"White Coat Radio," the official podcast of ETSU Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy, made waves in 2025, landing top spots on multiple national and state charts for pharmacy and education podcasts, including:

- No. 41, "Best Pharmacist Podcasts" (MillionPodcasts)
- No. 20, "Best 40 Pharmacology Podcasts" (MillionPodcasts)
- No. 18, "Best 40 Clinical Pharmacy Podcasts" (MillionPodcasts)
- No. 7, "20 Best Tennessee Education Podcasts" (FeedSpot)

Recorded in Johnson City, Tennessee, the show launched in 2022 and has grown to include a global audience with over 2,000 downloads.



SCAN TO LISTEN TO
"WHITE COAT RADIO"

ETSU HEALTH, BALLAD HEALTH EXPAND PARTNERSHIP



In March 2025, ETSU Health and Ballad Health announced an enhanced

partnership in cardiology services to strengthen physician training and expand access to advanced heart care across the region.

ETSU Health's adult cardiology specialists joined Ballad Health's CVA Heart Institute in Johnson City, creating expanded learning opportunities for medical students, residents, and fellows while ensuring patients receive comprehensive, high-quality cardiovascular care through a nationally recognized network.

CENTER PROVIDES NURSING WORKFORCE INSIGHTS



The Tennessee Center for Nursing Advancement, housed in the ETSU College of Nursing, recently launched new dashboards offering insights into the state and regional nursing workforce.

Integrating multiple public and semi-public data sources, the dashboards highlight key workforce indicators alongside community-level factors such as social drivers of health. Users can explore local trends, identify areas of need, and better understand the broader context in which nurses live and work.



SCAN TO VIEW
THE DASHBOARDS

EXERCISE IS MEDICINE INITIATIVE BUILDS MOMENTUM



ETSU's Exercise is Medicine initiative, which seeks to foster a culture of wellness on campus, saw great turnout for the American College of Sports Medicine's One Day Walking Challenge in October.

More than 220 students, faculty, and staff participated, logging more than 1.7 million steps – equal to roughly 880 miles, placing ETSU 4th among 54 registered schools. ETSU is on track to receive its fourth gold-level recognition from Exercise is Medicine®-On Campus in May 2026.

INVESTING IN RECOVERY



After being awarded millions of dollars in grant funding from the Tennessee Opioid Abatement Council (OAC) in 2024, East Tennessee State University – along with its regional partners – set out to bolster Northeast Tennessee's addiction recovery ecosystem.

In total, the Regional Recovery Ecosystem Advisory Council, established in 2022 by the ETSU College of Public Health's Addiction Science Center and Frontier Health, received \$7.4 million from the OAC. ETSU alone received roughly \$4 million in funding.

Already, that money is making an impact on the region.

In April 2025, ETSU launched the next phase of this work by deploying some of those dollars to fund several Northeast Tennessee Behavioral Health Workforce Scholarships in key, high-impact programs in the College of Nursing and the College of Health Sciences.

"Our 10-county Northeast Tennessee region trails the nation and state in the number of social workers, counselors, psychologists, and psychiatric nurse practitioners per capita," said Dr. Mary Brannock, ETSU's Director of the Behavioral Health Workforce initiative. "The OAC grant provides scholarships to lower the barriers to entry for students who want to pursue those degrees."

College Updates

QUILLEN STUDENTS SELECTED FOR PRESTIGIOUS LEADERSHIP PROGRAM



Two students in ETSU's Quillen College of Medicine, Connor Belcher and Allison Franklin, were among only 30 medical students and residents nationwide to receive scholarships for the Family Medicine Leads Emerging Leader Institute, a prestigious year-long program hosted by the American Academy of Family Physicians.

Belcher and Franklin are both passionate about primary care and plan to pursue careers in family medicine.

ETSU STUDENT PHARMACIST ELECTED TSSP PRESIDENT



Kaysi Brock, a first-generation student pharmacist at ETSU Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy, was elected president of the Tennessee Society of Student Pharmacists in 2025. Her two-year term began in February 2026.

Brock, a native of Hampton, will represent student pharmacists from across Tennessee as a member of the Tennessee Pharmacists Association Board of Directors.

"As a Tennessee native, my love for this state and its people inspired me to pursue pharmacy," said Brock, who also earned her undergraduate degree at ETSU. "I'm truly passionate about giving back to Tennessee and hope to be a servant leader who fosters positive, lasting change."

ETSU'S INAUGURAL OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY COHORT CROSSES THE STAGE

After completing her undergraduate degree at East Tennessee State University in 2022, Madilyn Guerard knew she wanted to pursue a career in occupational therapy.

When Guerard was 12, she broke both of her elbows at the same time – enduring surgery on each elbow and weeks in casts and splints to allow healing. That experience opened her eyes to the field of rehabilitation health sciences.

"I knew I wanted to help others the way I was helped, and I loved how occupational therapists treat their clients holistically, addressing all their needs and occupations," said Guerard, who wanted to remain in East Tennessee after completing her undergrad degree.

Fortunately, ETSU's College of Health Sciences had just announced the

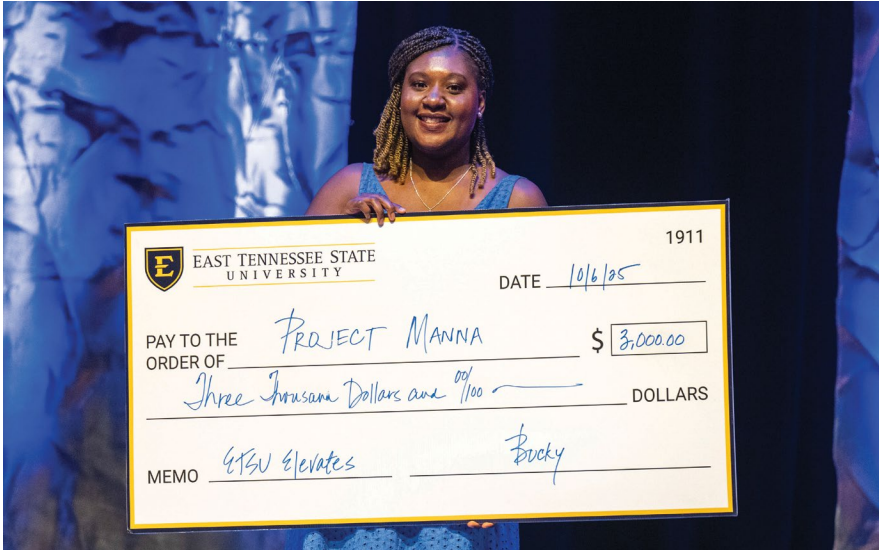


establishment of a new Doctor of Occupational Therapy (OTD) program, which would be housed in a newly renovated wing of Building 2 on the James H. Quillen VA grounds.

In May 2025, Guerard earned her degree and made history as a member of the program's first

graduating class, along with 15 others who took a chance on a brand-new program in 2022. It capped a milestone academic year for the program, which also received its accreditation from the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education in 2025.

PUBLIC HEALTH STUDENT WINS FIRST PLACE IN ETSU ELEVATES



Aliyah Smith-Gomis of Mobile, Alabama, took home first prize in the annual ETSU Elevates pitch competition for Project MANNA, which aims to connect Black farmers in Appalachia with Black mothers, nourishing families while empowering local agricultural communities.

Smith-Gomis is a doctoral student at the ETSU College of Public Health.

ETSU Elevates features collaborative community engagement projects between ETSU students and regional partners that address economic, social, or environmental issues. Students present their pitches to a live audience and three judges.



SCAN TO LEARN MORE ABOUT PROJECT MANNA

ETSU COLLEGE OF NURSING LAUNCHES ACADEMIC STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER

Nursing school is rigorous and demanding – but no student should navigate it alone.

The ETSU College of Nursing has launched a new Academic Student Success Center dedicated to supporting students throughout their nursing education. Designed to complement academic advising, the center offers hands-on support that helps students master coursework, build confidence, and stay on track to graduate.

“This center advances our mission by ensuring every nursing student has the tools, guidance, and encouragement to excel, and to carry that excellence into the communities they serve,” said Dr. Dena Evans, Dean of ETSU’s College of Nursing.

BISHOP NAMED 2025 ETSU HONORARY ALUMNA



Dr. Wilsie Bishop, a lifelong advocate for ETSU and leader in health professions education, was named the 2025 ETSU Honorary Alumna by the ETSU National Alumni Association.

Joining ETSU in 1978, Bishop rose from temporary faculty member to serve as provost and led significant growth in interprofessional education, including the creation of Bishop Hall and the ETSU Health brand. A nationally recognized nursing leader, Bishop retired in 2021 after 43 years of transformative service under six university presidents.



SCAN TO LEARN MORE ABOUT DR. BISHOP

NEW MASTER OF SCIENCE IN ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH, AND DISASTER SCIENCES



ETSU's colleges of Public Health and Arts and Sciences are in the process of establishing a new Master of Science in Environment, Health, and Disaster Sciences.

The program brings together geosciences, environmental health, epidemiology, and disaster science to address increasingly complex challenges facing communities and industries in responding to disaster situations.

According to federal and state data, demand for environmental scientists and specialists is expected to grow 7% nationally and 16.8% in Tennessee over the next decade. Graduates of the proposed program would be prepared to serve in governmental agencies, research institutions, and industry roles, where they would lead environmental health efforts, develop sustainable practices, and strengthen resilience to extreme weather and other disaster events.

COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES LAUNCHES BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN EXERCISE SCIENCE



In fall 2025, the College of Health Sciences created a new Bachelor of Science in Exercise Science, combining curricula in physiology, kinesiology, and more.

Born out of the university's 2024 academic

restructuring, the degree has more than 380 students and is the college's largest undergraduate major. It provides pathways in physical therapy, occupational therapy, athletic training, medicine, cardiac rehabilitation, strength and conditioning, fitness/wellness, and more.

QUILLEN COLLEGE OF MEDICINE EXPANDS CLASS SIZES

ETSU's Quillen College of Medicine will admit its largest-ever class in 2026, supporting the college's mission to serve the underserved and respond to a growing nationwide need for physicians.



The Class of 2026 will have 100 students, up from the 78-member classes the college has welcomed since 2021. Quillen remains one of the smallest class sizes in the nation, with a 2:1 faculty-to-student ratio.

The Quillen College of Medicine last expanded its class size in 2021, when it increased from 72 students. In the 2025-26 application cycle, the college received a record number of applications with 4,009.

ETSU Health Clinical Service Locations

JOHNSON CITY

Ballad Health Cancer Center

1 Professional Park Drive, Suite 21
oncology, hematology

Ballad Health CVA Heart Institute

2428 Knob Creek Road, Suite 201
cardiology

Behavioral Health and Wellness Clinic

166 DeRosier Drive
individual, couple, group, and
family therapy; ADHD, autism, and
psychoeducational assessments

BucSports Physical Therapy

Highlands Sports Medicine BucSports
1043 Jack Vest Drive
orthopedic sports medicine, physical
therapy

Community Counseling Clinic

128 David Collins Way
individual, couple, and family
counseling

Dental Hygiene Clinic

156 S. Dossett Drive
Lamb Hall Breezeway

Family Medicine Johnson City

917 W. Walnut Street
acute and chronic care, behavioral
health, clinical pharmacy, adult and
pediatric care, preventive care, sports
medicine, women's health

ETSU Health

325 N. State of Franklin Road
Internal Medicine: internal medicine,
endocrinology, behavioral health,
clinical pharmacy

OB/GYN: general OB/GYN, high
risk obstetrics, minimally invasive
gynecologic surgery, behavioral health

Surgery and Ophthalmology: general
surgery, hepatobiliary surgery, general
and pediatric ophthalmology, pediatric
surgery, plastic and reconstructive,
trauma and critical care, surgical
oncology

Pediatrics: general pediatrics,
adolescent medicine, critical care,
genetics, hospital medicine, infectious
diseases, neonatology, behavioral
health, clinical pharmacy

Fertility and Urogynecology

1319 Sunset Drive, Suite 103

Infectious Diseases

615 N. State of Franklin Road

Johnson City Community Health Center

2151 Century Lane
behavioral health, preventive
and restorative dental, family
medicine, newborn and pediatric
care, onsite pharmacy, pre-natal care,
radiography, mammography and
sonography, substance use services,
women's health

Johnson City Downtown Day Center

202 W. Fairview Avenue
behavioral health, family medicine,
substance use services, case
management, homeless social services

Niswonger Children's Hospital Pediatric Subspecialties

408 N. State of Franklin Road, Suite 31B
clinical pediatric pharmacy,
endocrinology, gastroenterology,
hospital medicine, neurology,
rheumatology and pulmonology,

Psychiatry

2 Professional Park Drive, Suite 21
VA Medical Center Campus
adult psychiatry, child and adolescent
psychiatry, general psychiatry,
individual and family therapy

Rheumatology and Pediatric Cardiology

329 N. State of Franklin Road

St. Jude Tri-Cities Affiliate Clinic (Niswonger Children's Hospital)

400 N. State of Franklin Road
neonatology, pediatric hematology,
pediatric oncology, pediatric critical
care

Support Clinic

2 Professional Park Drive, Suite 11
substance use disorder and behavioral
addiction care, behavioral health, case
management, certified peer recovery
specialist, Hep-C treatment

University Health Center

365 Stout Drive, Roy Nicks Hall, Suite 160
behavioral health, immunizations,
medication management, physicals,
primary care, women's health

University School Clinic

68 Martha Culp Drive

KINGSPORT

Family Medicine Kingsport

102 E. Ravine Road
acute and chronic care, adult care,
addiction medicine, behavioral
health, clinical pharmacy, newborn
and pediatric care, preventive care,
women's health including OB, sports
medicine

Infectious Diseases Kingsport

105 W. Park Drive, Suite 2A

Internal Medicine Kingsport

Four Sheridan Square, Suite 200
behavioral health, endocrinology,
internal medicine, rheumatology,
psychotherapy

BRISTOL

Family Medicine Bristol

208 Medical Park Boulevard
acute and chronic care, adult care,
addiction medicine, behavioral
health, clinical pharmacy, newborn
and pediatric care, preventive care,
women's health including OB, sports
medicine

ELIZABETHTON

Center for Outpatient Rehabilitation

1000 Jason Witten Way
audiology (adult and pediatric),
speech-language pathology (adult and
pediatric), pediatric feeding program,
adult balance assessment/treatment,
pediatric occupational therapy, and
adult physical therapy

Gary E. Shealy Memorial ALS Clinic

1000 Jason Witten Way

OB/GYN Elizabethton

1505 W. Elk Avenue, Suite 1
high-risk obstetrics, minimally invasive
gynecologic surgery, behavioral health

Pediatrics Elizabethton

1505 W. Elk Avenue, Suite 2b
general pediatrics, behavioral health

GREENEVILLE

Ballad Health CVA Heart Institute

1410 Tusculum Blvd., Suite 1500
cardiology

SNEEDVILLE

Hancock County Elementary School-Based Health Center

391 Court Street
behavioral health, family medicine,
pediatrics

Hancock County Middle/ High School-Based Health Center

2700 Main Street
behavioral health, family medicine,
pediatrics

MOUNTAIN CITY

Ballad Health CVA Heart Institute

1901 S. Shady Street, Suite 1
cardiology



CRISTAL DIAZ
VOMEDICAL GRADUATE



Research with a Regional Purpose:

How ETSU's Health Sciences Colleges are Impacting Appalachia Through Research

ACROSS MEDICINE, PUBLIC HEALTH, NURSING, PHARMACY, AND HEALTH SCIENCES, ETSU RESEARCHERS ARE TACKLING CHRONIC DISEASE, BEHAVIORAL HEALTH, WORKFORCE SHORTAGES, AND ENVIRONMENTAL RISK IN APPALACHIA. WITH RISING RESEARCH EXPENDITURES AND EXPANDING FEDERAL PARTNERSHIPS, THE UNIVERSITY IS STRENGTHENING ITS POSITION NATIONALLY – WHILE KEEPING ITS WORK GROUNDED IN REGIONAL NEED.

By Jonathan Roberts

It's easy for a university to be convenient and unremarkable.

That short phrase resonated with Dr. Nick Hagemeyer, East Tennessee State University's Vice Provost for Research, who read it recently in a book by Richard Muma, President of Wichita State University.

Hagemeier doesn't say that as a criticism, but as a warning. For a regional public institution, convenience can be comfortable, but comfort doesn't maximize problem-solving.

And in Appalachia, often those problems are too urgent to sit back and be comfortable.

"If we do not bring solutions and meet needs for our part of Appalachia and Tennessee, no one else will," said Hagemeier, who also serves as ETSU's Chief Research Officer. "It's going to have to be us."

That mindset speaks to the broader research culture at ETSU, where commitment and responsibility to serving the region are central.

"Our desire is for ETSU to pursue excellence in teaching, research, engagement, and clinical care," said Hagemeier. "If we do those things, most importantly, our students and the people of the region will benefit. We want ETSU to be exceptionally remarkable for the benefit of the people who call Northeast Tennessee home."

Building Momentum

Across ETSU's Academic Health Sciences Center – which encapsulates the university's five health sciences colleges – that shift is tangible.

From 2015 to 2025, the dollar amount of sponsored awards at ETSU has nearly doubled, rising from \$38.4 million to \$64.8 million. Between FY2020 and FY2024, research expenditures have increased by more than 250%, totaling \$42.5 million in FY2024. Notably, among nearly 500 regional public institutions in the U.S., ETSU ranks in the top 10% in research expenditures.



"The momentum is palpable," Hagemeier said. "Health has always been part of our identity, but we have institutional momentum here in the last few years that we just didn't have before."

Of that \$64.8 million in sponsored awards in 2025, almost \$41 million of that came from the university's five health sciences colleges in health sciences, nursing, medicine, pharmacy, and public health.

Those numbers tell part of the story, but behind each dollar is a question someone is trying to answer.

For some researchers, that work happens in a lab, analyzing how cells react to novel treatments for liver disease or seeking to better understand the role certain parts of the human body play in memory and cognition. For others, it happens in clinics, classrooms, pharmacies, or health departments.

The problems they seek to solve are rarely simple. Appalachia faces higher rates of chronic

disease. Access to specialty care remains limited in more rural parts of the region. Substance use disorders continue to impact families and communities.

Research Rooted in Regional Need

ETSU's Academic Health Sciences Center is responding to these challenges in different ways, from basic science to community-engaged research, each contributing a piece to a larger solution.

At the Quillen College of Medicine, that momentum is visible in a stellar year for its Department of Biomedical Sciences, which secured millions in federal funding for a variety of research projects in 2025.

Quillen's success in securing major federal grants is rooted in both mission and investment. Faculty are pursuing research aimed at curing or better treating diseases that disproportionately affect the region, such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and substance use disorder. At the same time, the college has made deliberate

investments in recruiting high-caliber investigators and building the infrastructure necessary to support competitive science.

“A DEFINING FEATURE OF OUR RESEARCH IS ITS DIRECT IMPACT ON COMMUNITIES.”

Dr. Saurabh Mehta

Dr. Aaron Polichnowski, the 2025 Distinguished Faculty Award in Research recipient, is one of those faculty members. In 2025, Polichnowski began a research project focusing on the impact of forever chemicals on the kidneys to determine how they directly damage kidney tissue and why certain individuals are more susceptible to exposure.

Of course, research at Quillen is not confined to laboratories but is integrated into medical students' education. In fact, one of Polichnowski's co-investigators in that study is a medical student.

“It is very important for medical students to have research experience, as a good physician needs to understand research methodology and how research can benefit patient care,” said Dr. Eric Beaumont, Quillen's Associate Dean for Research.

Nearly every Quillen student participates in research following their first year of medical school, gaining hands-on experience in experimental design, data analysis, and manuscript preparation. That work strengthens residency applications and reinforces a deeper understanding of how evidence informs clinical decision-making.

From Discovery to Community Impact

That commitment to support current and future generations of researchers at ETSU is not about prestige, but rather a laser-focused desire to better the communities it serves.

Across ETSU's health sciences colleges, research aims to meet those challenges head-on.

In partnership with Virginia Tech, ETSU researchers are helping lead a \$3.7 million National Institutes of Health study examining whether simple countertop water filters can reduce gastrointestinal and other waterborne illnesses among rural Appalachian households that rely on private wells and springs.

The randomized controlled trial will enroll roughly 480 households across Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia to test whether affordable filtration systems can meaningfully improve health outcomes.

That study reflects a pattern across campus: research that begins with local realities and scales outward. In the College of Public Health, that approach is foundational.

“When you couple purpose-driven altruism with strategic investments in research infrastructure, faculty and staff development, strong leadership, and a little bit of being in the right place at the right time, good things happen,” said Dr. Nathan Hale, Associate Dean of Research in the ETSU College of Public Health.

Scholarship in the college is driven by its numerous research centers, including ones focused on addiction science, cardiovascular health, rural health, and women's health. Much of it is intentionally practical – designed to produce programs,

policies, and interventions that can be implemented in real time.

Over time, that approach has translated into more than \$53 million in external research funding since 2009 – supporting graduate assistantships, hands-on student training, and sustained partnerships across the region.

That integration of science and service extends beyond public health.

Dr. Laura Hunt Trull, faculty at both the College of Health Sciences and Quillen College of Medicine, recently received a grant to connect older adults with behavioral health conditions with local senior meal programs. The project aims to enhance nutrition, reduce loneliness, and improve overall well-being.

“It's not worth very much to know about a challenge if you're not willing to bring your resources to bear on addressing the challenge,” said Trull.

Research at the College of Health Sciences often bridges clinical practice and community needs.

“A defining feature of our research is its direct impact on communities,”



said Dr. Saurabh Mehta, Associate Dean for Research in the college. “From enhancing communication and mobility to improving developmental outcomes and strengthening behavioral health systems, our studies consistently prioritize real-world application and regional relevance.”

From refining rehabilitation models to studying tinnitus mechanisms to developing telehealth strategies for substance use disorder treatment, the goal is not simply publication, but stronger systems of care in Appalachia and beyond.

At ETSU Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy, research has evolved alongside the college itself. Dr. Stacy Brown, an inaugural faculty member of the college and Chair of the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, has seen that evolution first-hand.

When it was founded two decades ago, the faculty were busy building curricula and securing accreditation and lacked dedicated research facilities. Over time, investments in infrastructure and faculty development have transformed the landscape of research in the college,

not just for research faculty, but for students who now have research electives and an optional research track available to them.

“Education occurs not only in classrooms, but also through hands-on engagement in inquiry and discovery,” said Brown, who serves as the college’s representative at university-wide research meetings. “The evolution of the college has strengthened research productivity among faculty while also building pathways for students to engage in scholarly work.”

In the College of Nursing, research stretches from bedside care to statewide workforce strategy. Home to the Tennessee Center for Nursing Advancement (TCNA) – the state’s hub for workforce data and policy analysis – College of Nursing faculty and students research workforce pipeline development, nurse retention, and access to care across Tennessee.

Dr. Dena Evans, Dean of the College of Nursing, said nurse scientists often bring a unique blend of scientific rigor and lived experience to research endeavors that are designed to meet real patient needs.



Dr. Nick Hagemeyer, ETSU's Vice Provost for Research.

“Together, the College and TCNA show that nursing research goes far beyond the bedside – it informs systems, strengthens communities, and shapes the future of the profession,” said Evans. “Nurse scientists are not just producing knowledge, they are building the foundation for a more equitable, accessible, and patient-centered health system.”

More Than a Designation

Together, these efforts reflect what Hagemeyer calls “missional” research – scholarship anchored in place and purpose. They also position the university near the threshold of Carnegie R1 designation, a classification reserved for institutions with the highest levels of research activity.

For Hagemeyer, the label matters a lot less than what it represents.

“Would I be proud of us for making R1? Maybe,” said Hagemeyer. “But I’m more proud of the impact our researchers and students are making here.”



A Turning Point in Human Evolution

NEW RESEARCH SUGGESTS DIETARY SHIFTS SHAPED THE EARLIEST MEMBERS OF THE HUMAN GENUS.

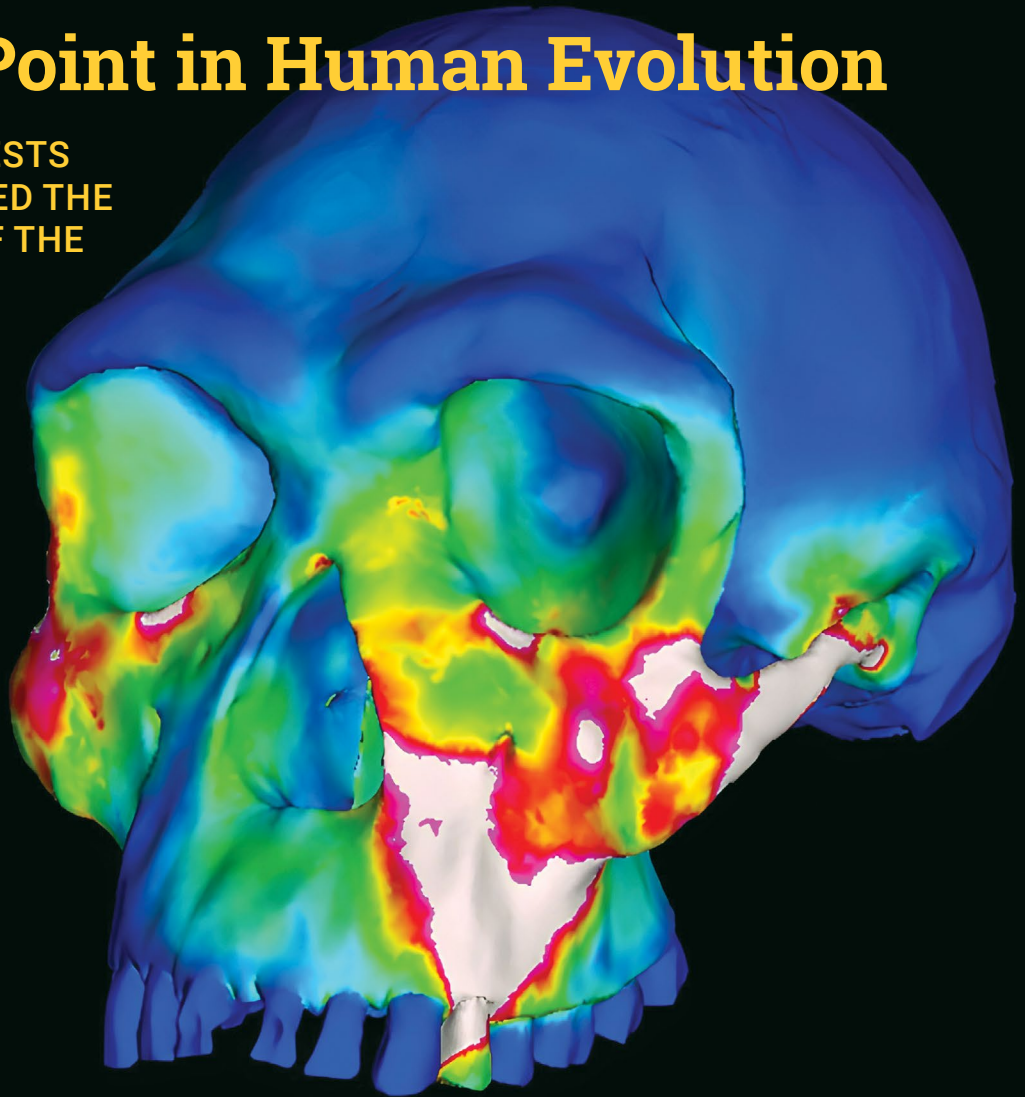
In April 2025, an international team of researchers – led by East Tennessee State University’s Dr. Justin Ledogar – published a new study that suggests the earliest human ancestors may have ditched hard foods earlier than previously believed.

By utilizing advanced computer simulations, researchers were able to compare bite force mechanics of earlier human ancestors, recent modern humans, modern chimpanzees, and *Homo habilis* – the earliest member of the genus *Homo* – by creating biomechanical models of their skulls.

Results show that *Homo habilis* was structurally constrained in its ability to crunch into hard foods with its molars, a limitation that persists in modern humans and offers fresh insight into the dietary adaptations and evolutionary developments that helped shape the human lineage.

The findings were published in the April 2025 edition of *Royal Society Open Science*.

“Our results point to a fundamental change in feeding behavior with the appearance of *Homo habilis*,” said Ledogar, an Assistant Professor in the College of Public Health’s Department of Biomedical Health Sciences. “The ability to process exceedingly hard or tough foods with high bite forces was reduced in *Homo habilis* compared with earlier hominin species.”



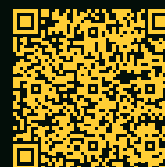
The study challenges the predominant view that a reduced ability to chew hard foods first evolved in *Homo erectus*, a later human ancestor. Modern humans face the same challenge as our earlier ancestors, which may help explain the prevalence of jaw joint pain today.

“*Homo habilis* probably couldn’t crack nuts or chew hard roots and tubers the way its predecessors could,” said Ledogar. “And that’s a kind of big deal – it suggests a major dietary shift was already underway at the dawn of our genus.”

The study’s implications extend beyond diet.

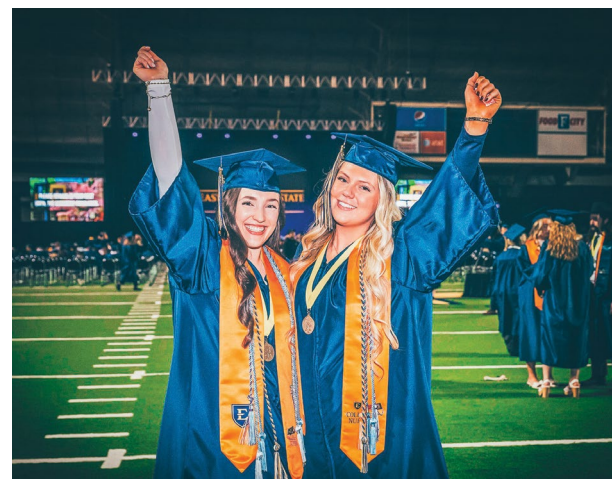
As human skulls evolved away from high bite force production, it could have opened the door to changes elsewhere, potentially influencing speech, facial expression, or brain expansion.

By Jonathan Roberts



SCAN TO VIEW
THEIR FINDINGS

Year in PHOTOS





Advancing Health Care Close to Home

IN 2025, ETSU HEALTH EXPANDED BOTH SPECIALTY AND PRIMARY CARE, BRINGING ADVANCED TREATMENTS AND TRUSTED PROVIDERS CLOSER TO WHERE FAMILIES NEED THEM MOST.



Through intentional growth across specialty and primary care, ETSU Health has expanded access to fellowship-trained expertise, welcomed more than 30 new physicians in 2025, and strengthened the system of care serving the region.

Among the year's notable growth were six new primary care providers – additions who strengthen the foundation of community health.

The following new primary care physicians joined ETSU Health in leading team-based care alongside residents, embedded specialists, and other health care professionals.

- ♦ **Dr. Katie Masters**, Internal Medicine (Kingsport)
- ♦ **Dr. Tu Nguyen**, Internal Medicine and Sleep Medicine (Kingsport)
- ♦ **Dr. Alora Ricker**, Internal Medicine (Johnson City)

- ♦ **Dr. Stephen Sauer**, Internal Medicine (Johnson City)
- ♦ **Dr. Jason Soong**, Family Medicine (Kingsport)
- ♦ **Dr. Joshua Starkey**, Pediatrics (Johnson City and Elizabethton)

Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, and Pediatrics clinics across Bristol, Johnson City, Kingsport, and Elizabethton are accepting new patients, improving access at a time when primary care shortages continue to challenge communities nationwide.

ETSU Health's primary care locations are nationally recognized as Patient-Centered Medical Homes, placing patients at the forefront of team- and evidence-based care. These clinics focus on prevention, chronic condition management, and long-term relationships that keep communities healthier.

"Primary care is at the front door to a healthy community," said ETSU Health CEO Dan Bragg. "Our growth reflects ETSU Health's ongoing commitment to serving our community and responding directly to primary care shortages across the region. By welcoming these physicians, we are strengthening care for families and individuals at every stage of life. We are also bringing to life our vision of being the provider of choice for patients who value quality, accessibility, and a truly patient-centered experience."

EXPANDING PEDIATRIC SURGICAL ACCESS

In addition to strengthening primary care, ETSU Health continued investing in advanced specialty services for the region's families.

Working in collaboration with Ballad Health's Niswonger Children's Hospital, ETSU Health recruited

fellowship-trained pediatric surgeons Drs. Corey Iqbal and Alexis Bowder — additions that have significantly expanded pediatric surgical care in the region.



“This growth represents more than adding providers; it’s about responding to real needs in our region,” Bragg said. “By expanding specialized services, we are ensuring patients can access high-quality, comprehensive care close to home while strengthening our role as the provider of choice for our community.”

This surgical team’s presence helps ensure children with both routine and rare surgical needs can receive care without traveling long distances. Iqbal’s expertise in treating *pectus excavatum* — commonly known as sunken chest — has already drawn families seeking specialized care closer to home.

A few years ago, only one pediatric surgeon served in the region east of Knoxville. Thanks to ETSU Health and Ballad Health’s partnership in recruitment, six ETSU Health pediatric surgeons serve children and families across Northeast

Tennessee, reflecting a shared commitment to strengthening regional access.

ADVANCING CANCER CARE

ETSU’s academic partnership with Ballad Health also supported recruitment for advanced cancer care in the region, including ETSU Health hematologist-oncologist Dr. Bradley Beeler.

Beeler is a former lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Air Force who served more than 10 years providing oncologic care to active-duty service members, veterans, and their families.

At Ballad Health Cancer Center—Johnson City, Beeler provides comprehensive care for patients at all stages of oncological malignancies and across the full spectrum of hematological conditions. His clinical expertise encompasses the management and treatment of both benign and malignant hematologic disorders, bone marrow failure syndromes, transfusion support, and advanced cellular therapies. With specialized training in hematopoietic stem cell transplantation and cellular therapy, he offers advanced options tailored to eligible patients.

Cancer services were further strengthened with the arrival of surgical oncologist Dr. Jennifer Whittington to ETSU Health Surgery. Her fellowship training allows ETSU Health to offer highly specialized cancer surgeries close to home.

A graduate of Quillen College of Medicine, Whittington specializes in complex cancers of the pancreas, liver, stomach, colon, and rectum, as well as melanoma and sarcoma. She also provides regional therapies,

including heated intraperitoneal chemotherapy (HIPEC) and hepatic artery infusion, targeted treatments that help protect other systems from the side effects of chemotherapy.

For patients facing difficult diagnoses, these services mean remaining near family and support systems while receiving advanced care that previously may have required referral to distant academic centers.

GROWTH ACROSS SPECIALTIES

Additional investments within specialty offerings throughout the year included eight rheumatology providers, four new psychiatry providers, two new sports medicine providers, an additional trauma surgeon supporting emergency and critical care needs, and ETSU Health’s first sleep medicine specialist — expanding access for patients with complex sleep disorders.

With more than 300 providers practicing across 50 locations, ETSU Health continues to respond directly to evolving regional needs — expanding access to advanced cancer therapies, strengthening pediatric surgery, and building primary care capacity for families at every stage of life.

The result is more than growth. It is a health system rooted in academic excellence, strengthened by partnership, and committed to delivering comprehensive, compassionate care.

By Kristen Early



SCAN TO
SCHEDULE AN
APPOINTMENT
OR LEARN MORE



Kwasigroch Inducted into Tennessee Health Care Hall of Fame

East Tennessee State University's Dr. Tom Kwasigroch, a renowned educator in the Quillen College of Medicine's Department of Medical Education, is a member of the 2025 class of inductees for the Tennessee Health Care Hall of Fame.

With a mission to honor those who have made significant and lasting contributions to the health and health care industries, the Hall of Fame was created in 2015 by Belmont University, the McWhorter Society, and the Nashville Health Care Council, a founding partner.

Kwasigroch is one of four inductees in 2025.

It's a testament to a decades-long career that's earned him numerous accolades for his approach to teaching and dedication to his students, including ETSU's 2024 Distinguished Faculty Award in Teaching, the Alpha Omega Alpha

Robert J. Glaser Distinguished Teacher Award, and the McCann National Award in Teaching and Mentoring.

He is also a 15-time recipient of the Quillen Course of the Year award and a 16-time recipient of the Quillen Professor of the Year award, and he was honored as Hooder by 16 graduating classes.

As an original faculty member, Kwasigroch has played a role in shaping every single physician who has walked through the doors of Quillen – as well as assisting in teaching ETSU's occupational therapy and physical therapy students.

He spearheaded the creation of ETSU's Center for Surgical Innovation and Training, a state-of-the-art training lab that offers students and medical residents an opportunity to learn and practice surgical procedures on anatomical donors.

Kwasigroch is also responsible for the creation of the college's Student Study Center.

A Vietnam veteran, Kwasigroch earned a Purple Heart, Bronze Star, and Army Commendation Medal for his service.

He is the fourth inductee in the Tennessee Health Care Hall of Fame with ties to ETSU, highlighting the university's excellence in health care education.

"I have been incredibly blessed by having the opportunity to teach amazing students over the years," said Kwasigroch.

By Jonathan Roberts



SCAN TO HEAR MORE FROM DR. TOM KWASIGROCH

ETSU Nursing Faculty Honored with Statewide Excellence Awards



Dr. Florence Weierbach



Dr. Jean Hemphill

Two East Tennessee State University College of Nursing faculty have been recognized with top honors from the Tennessee Nurses Association (TNA) for their exceptional contributions to nursing.

Dr. Florence Weierbach was honored with the 2025 Nursing Excellence Award – Nursing Research for her scholarship, publications, mentorship, and service at the district, state, and national levels. Her work in advancing nursing science has significantly improved patient care and the professional development of nurses across the region.

Dr. Jean Hemphill was honored with the 2025 Nursing Excellence Award – Nursing Education, recognizing her dedication to preparing the next generation of nurses through innovative teaching, mentorship, and leadership. Her commitment to excellence in nursing education has elevated student success and inspired future leaders in health care.

“These awards represent the highest standards of professional recognition within nursing,” said Dr. Dena Evans, Dean of the ETSU College of Nursing. “We are proud of Dr. Weierbach and Dr. Hemphill for their leadership and commitment to advancing nursing through research and education. Their achievements reflect our mission to improve health outcomes in our community and beyond.”

The TNA Nursing Excellence Awards honor exceptional performance in clinical nursing practice, nursing education, advanced practice, research, and administration, including professional leadership and service to TNA at the district, state, or national levels.

By Logan Mink



SCAN TO LISTEN TO DR. FLORENCE WEIERBACH ON THE “WHY I TEACH” PODCAST

Six Health Sciences Students Named to 1911 Society

Six health sciences students representing the colleges of Health Sciences, Public Health, and Medicine were among the 11 named to the prestigious 1911 Society, which honors some of East Tennessee State University's most notable graduates.

Established in 2020 and named in commemoration of the year ETSU was founded, the 1911 Society recognizes students who have distinguished themselves for academic excellence, service, and leadership.

THE HONOREES INCLUDE:



KATHRYN "LIZ" GODWIN of Roxboro, North Carolina, is a dual M.D./MPH candidate from the Quillen College of Medicine and College of Public Health.



ALIYAH SMITH of Mobile, Alabama, is a doctoral candidate in community and behavioral health in the College of Public Health.



JOSEPH HERNANDEZ of Morrison, Tennessee, is a student in the College of Public Health, and will complete a B.S. in microbiology and biomedical health sciences in May 2026.



NATALIE VAUGHN of Knoxville, Tennessee, will earn a B.S. in psychology and social from the colleges of Arts and Sciences and Health Sciences with a minor in American Sign Language in May 2026.



LEAH LOVEDAY of Sevierville, Tennessee, will graduate in May 2026 with a B.S. in public health from the College of Public Health.



AASHI VORA of Knoxville, Tennessee, is a biology major in the College of Arts and Sciences with a minor in culture and health through the Quillen Honors Scholars B.S./M.D. program.

Making the Most of Every Opportunity

FROM UNDERGRADUATE SCHOLAR TO FUTURE RURAL PHYSICIAN, MORGAN DRISKILL'S JOURNEY REFLECTS QUILLEN'S MISSION TO SERVE APPALACHIA.

Roan Scholar Morgan Driskill helped lead genetics study sessions, pitched a regional health care guide, and studied abroad – all before graduating *summa cum laude* from East Tennessee State University in 2025 with a double major in biology (Arts and Sciences) and health sciences (Public Health), plus a minor in culture and health.

Now a student at ETSU's Quillen College of Medicine, Driskill is continuing the journey she began when she first arrived at ETSU, one rooted in service to Appalachia and a commitment to rural health.

As an undergraduate, Driskill participated in ETSU Quillen College of Medicine's EQUIP program, which provides mentoring and job shadowing opportunities to students who wish to become primary care physicians committed to rural and underserved communities.

The experience helped ease her transition into medical school by introducing her to campus and faculty early and creating a shared community with peers who are now her classmates.

"Learning the ins and outs of medical school is like learning a new language," Driskill said. "EQUIP helped bridge the gap."

That sense of support has continued as she's moved through her first year of medical school, with Driskill lauding the culture at Quillen.

"Quillen truly fosters an environment of collaboration instead of competition, and my class has worked hard to support, challenge, and encourage each other to

continue learning and growing together," said Driskill.

Quillen's focus on rural health ultimately solidified her decision to stay at ETSU for medical school. Through opportunities like the Rural Primary Care Track, she has gained additional insight into health in Appalachia through targeted coursework and direct service, while precepting in surrounding counties.

"Because of Quillen's mission and commitment to rural health and primary care, opportunities for community engagement and hands-on learning are abundant," Driskill said. "I knew I wanted to serve the people of Appalachia, and Quillen has opened doors for me to do that now."

By Jennifer Hill



From Ghana to Appalachia and Beyond

THROUGH CLINICAL TRAINING, GLOBAL LEARNING, AND FACULTY MENTORSHIP, ALEX MONTGOMERY FOUND HIS CALLING – AND THE CONFIDENCE TO PURSUE A CAREER IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY.

Alex Montgomery has learned a lot about himself, the world around him, and the impact he wants to make in ways he never thought possible – and it's all thanks to the countless opportunities offered at East Tennessee State University.

The rehabilitative health sciences major didn't start his ETSU journey knowing what he wanted to do. In fact, he didn't know much about occupational therapy at all before coming to ETSU and taking a first-year experience course.

"Every professor has been caring and incredibly intelligent," he said. "It was only after changing my major three times that occupational therapy ignited a spark in me."

After being able to get hands-on and interact with patients in the field, that spark doesn't seem to be going anywhere.

"I completed an internship at Mini Miracles Pediatric Therapy in Johnson City last spring," said the Knoxville native. "It was there that I found my joy for working in pediatrics."

The experience was so impactful, Montgomery plans to start working toward his Doctor of Occupational Therapy degree after he graduates next spring. Thanks to the combination of rich experiences he's gained, both in and out of the classroom, he has the tools to thrive in OT school and the career that follows.

Among those experiences was the opportunity to travel to Ghana with ETSU's Center for Global Engagement in May 2025.



Montgomery is already applying what he learned abroad back home. As an Expedition Leader with the Office of Undergraduate Admissions, he's constantly working with his peers to introduce new people from different walks of life to ETSU.

"I meet and talk with so many families who are in a season that can be so overwhelming," he said. "It is so rewarding to share not only our

campus's culture with prospective students and families, but also how they can find a place and home here."

Whether working with pediatric patients in Johnson City or learning alongside families abroad, Montgomery's journey reflects ETSU Health's commitment to preparing students to make an impact locally and globally.

By Sammy Asbury

Inspired By Science, Driven By Service

WHEN THE WORLD SHUT DOWN DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, ARIANNA POND FOUND HER CALLING – AND A DESIRE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

Arianna Pond didn't always know she wanted to study public health.

But once the COVID-19 pandemic brought it straight to her TV in 2020, it didn't take her long to realize she, too, wanted to make a difference in public health.

"I ended up choosing public health from watching the news, and hearing these scientists give us the facts," she said, "and thinking I want to be able to do that, to help people in that way."

Pond toured several schools while deciding where she'd earn her bachelor's degree. One in particular stood out among the rest.

"ETSU was the last place I toured," Pond said. "Looking into the public health program, I knew I'd be able to make something of myself."

The Memphis native felt prepared for the workforce when she graduated in May 2025. She'd gained hands on experiences in and outside of the classroom, crafted a strong skill set, and formed relationships with program faculty, but an interest in epidemiology pushed her toward a master's degree.

She once again chose ETSU so she could continue building those relationships she cultivated with faculty and classmates.

"The faculty made me want to stay," said Pond. They really care. They are the ones who make us feel confident that we're ready for this."

And with each semester she's spent as a Buccaneer, she's realized she truly did find something special on that final campus tour as a high school senior.

"I've been to several conferences, and when I say I'm from ETSU, people's eyes widen," Pond said. "ETSU lays a good foundation for community-based public health. There's so much more to health than the hospital."

By Sammy Asbury



Corinne Geffen Leads with Purpose at ETSU

FROM SNA PRESIDENT TO POLICY ADVOCACY, CORINNE GEFFEN'S JOURNEY REFLECTS LEADERSHIP, SERVICE, AND DEDICATION TO NURSING.



Corinne Geffen, a graduating senior from Richmond, Virginia, has made the most of her time at ETSU inside and outside the classroom.

When she's not studying or serving in leadership roles, Geffen enjoys running, skiing, and spending time outdoors. She brings the same energy and determination from her personal life to nursing.

During her time at ETSU, Geffen has been active across campus, currently serving as the third officer on her cohort's Student Advisory Council and, in fall 2025, as president of ETSU's Student Nursing Association (SNA). She is also a member of the Undergraduate Research Honors Program, further demonstrating her commitment to academic excellence and professional growth.

Leadership and advocacy have been essential to Geffen's journey. SNA, in particular, has played a significant role in shaping her experience. Through SNA, she has had the opportunity to serve her community, support her

peers, and grow as a leader. What began as involvement in a student organization quickly became a pathway for impact, allowing her to strengthen her voice as an advocate for nursing and for patients.

Geffen also traveled to Tennessee's capitol for Tennessee Nurses Association Day on the Hill, where she met with state legislators and gained firsthand insight into how health policy influences the nursing profession and patient outcomes. Experiences like these expanded her understanding of nursing beyond the bedside and reinforced the importance of advocacy at every level.

In recognition of her leadership, she was accepted into the National Student Nurses' Association Leadership University Honor Society, an achievement that reflects her dedication, initiative, and passion for the profession.

Geffen said, "My experience in nursing school is more than just a degree, but an individualized experience where I get to help write my own story."

By Logan Mink

Learning Here, Serving Home

AFTER MAKING THE MOVE FROM HIS NATIVE PUERTO RICO TO TENNESSEE, STUDENT PHARMACIST ABDIEL VILLAFANE FOUND A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY, AND A CLEAR PATH FORWARD.



Before he heard about ETSU Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy, Abdiel Villafane had never been to Tennessee. But when a friend told him how much they loved it, the Puerto Rican native knew he had to check it out.

“He was telling me all these great things, how they had excellent facilities here. So, I decided to take a look for myself,” he said.

Villafane liked what he saw, so he made a big move to Johnson City. Although he quickly found a community, a support system, and even a cost of living similar to what he had back home, living here was a bit different than what he was used to on the island.

“Johnson City is a very quiet area. You don’t have a lot distracting you,” he said. “Don’t get me wrong – you can still go out and have fun on the weekends.”

Villafane says the Gatton faculty have truly made his experience, every step of the way.

“The faculty here are very supportive of the students. They have open-door policies, reviews of exams,” he said.

Classes are even recorded with subtitles, which helped him overcome the language barrier he faced early on and get the most out of his pharmacy degree.

After he graduates in 2027, Villafane will take everything he’s learned right back home.

“Before I came here, I used to work as a certified pharmacy technician. I’m planning on going back to where I used to work as a tech,” he said.

Villafane encourages other Puerto Rican students to visit campuses in person, meet faculty, and carefully consider both tuition and the cost of living. In addition to Gatton’s affordability and the region’s low cost of living, Villafane said the deciding factor was something less tangible.

“Here at Gatton, you are not just a number,” he said. “They will know you by name, and you will be taken care of.”

By Sammy Asbury



SCAN TO HEAR MORE FROM VILLAFANE AND HIS FELLOW PUERTO RICAN STUDENT PHARMACISTS

Student Pharmacists Make an Impact Inside and Outside the Classroom

ETSU HONORED FOR SUBSTANCE MISUSE EDUCATION

By Stephen Woodward

SINCE BEING ESTABLISHED IN 2012, East Tennessee State University Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy's Operation Substance Use Disorders committee has been more successful than any other chapter in the nation.

In 2025, those student pharmacists added another feather to their cap.

Operation SUD, part of the American Pharmacists Association-Academy of Student Pharmacists (APhA-ASP), earned the 2024-25 APhA Chapter Achievement Award — the top national honor for service organizations addressing substance use.



It's the 12th consecutive year the chapter has received national or regional recognition, and it has been named the winner six times in the category. The chapter is the most nationally recognized SUD APhA-ASP patient care committee in the country.

"Their efforts are making a real difference — saving lives, reducing opioid overdose rates, and strengthening community health," said Dr. Sarah Thomason, Chair of the Department of Pharmacy Practice. "They are true agents of change, leading the way in addressing this critical public health crisis."

Third-year student Christina Tarasidis, Chair of Operation Substance Use Disorder, was ecstatic.

"Receiving this national award is an incredible honor," said Tarasidis. "Operation Substance Use Disorder holds deep meaning not only for me, but also for our dedicated co-chairs and liaison and committee members who worked

endlessly to serve our community through harm reduction initiatives and patient advocacy.

"I'm truly grateful for the opportunity to make an impact by reducing stigma, promoting safe medication practices, and expanding access to lifesaving resources like naloxone."

Highlights from the 2023-24 academic year include providing naloxone training at local Remote Area Medical clinics and the Bristol Juvenile Detention Center, for Residential Advisors, and in several other community settings. The team also collaborated with local high schools to promote safe medication use to pre-pharmacy students.

"We are so proud of these students for their dedication to serving the rural and underserved, the mission of our college," said Dr. Debbie Byrd, Dean of ETSU Gatton College of Pharmacy.

Lessons That Extend Far Beyond the Classroom

In Belize's rural Cayo District, student pharmacists joined medical students to provide free care to more than 350 patients across five underserved villages. They consulted on medications, supported home visit teams, and adjusted treatment plans when refrigeration, follow-up care, or certain medications were limited.

"One of the most important lessons I took away from this experience was the value of meeting patients where they are," said fourth-year student pharmacist Whitley Hudson. "We had to think creatively and adapt treatment plans that were practical for each patient."

Working from backpacks filled with supplies, students saw firsthand how collaboration and flexibility shape patient outcomes, lessons directly applicable to rural Appalachia.

Back home at ETSU/Eastman Valleybrook, an ETSU College of Public Health facility, students in the Rural and Underserved Pharmacy Care Track faced another challenge: designing safe medication storage solutions for families in South Africa and Rwanda. In environments where heat threatens insulin stability and refrigeration is scarce, students proposed low-cost, culturally relevant solutions — from water-based cooling methods to repurposed containers for safe sharps disposal.

"My experience at Valleybrook taught me that solutions to complex problems don't always have to be complicated or expensive," said Yvonne Asomaning Sakyi. "Practical, low-cost solutions can significantly improve people's lives when applied thoughtfully."



Across simulations, global outreach, and rural health innovation, ETSU student pharmacists learn to lead, adapt, and serve. Whether managing a team, conducting a home visit, or engineering solutions in resource-limited settings, they graduate prepared not just to practice pharmacy, but also to make a meaningful impact wherever they are needed most.

Trained to Adapt. Prepared to Serve.

At ETSU Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy, hands-on learning is more than a teaching strategy. It's how future pharmacists are shaped.

In one classroom, third-year student pharmacists raced against the clock to build a mystery Tinkertoy structure. With only one teammate allowed to view the model, success depended on communication, delegation, and trust. The exercise challenged students to rethink leadership in pharmacy practice.

"This activity taught me that every person has a role in bringing a project to fruition," said Sean Kimball. "As I go into the fourth year and residency, I will bring forward some of these concepts into any projects I will have to lead."



Gatton's Class of 2025 Ranks Among Nation's Best

If you are looking for elite pharmacy training, look no further than ETSU Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy.

Once again, the college ranks among the top accredited pharmacy schools in the nation, based on the latest results from the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP) for both the North American Pharmacist Licensure Examination (NAPLEX) and Multistate Pharmacy Jurisprudence Examination (MPJE).

ETSU Gatton College of Pharmacy's Class of 2025 achieved an incredible 97.7% first attempt pass rate on the NAPLEX exam, which graduating pharmacists must pass to receive their licensure.

It places the college among the top five accredited pharmacy schools nationwide.

Gatton's Class of 2025 posted the highest pass rate in Tennessee and No. 2 in the Southeast. Nationally, pharmacy graduates in 2025 averaged an 85.7% pass rate.

They also ranked No. 4 in the country among accredited pharmacy schools on the MPJE, which is required for licensure in most states, including Tennessee, and is designed to assess knowledge of pharmacy laws and regulations. That pass rate was also tops in Tennessee.

"I am so proud of our Class of 2025 for these stellar results, and I cannot wait to see how far they go in the profession of pharmacy," said Dr. Debbie Byrd, Dean of the college. "These scores prove that our students are not only receiving a top-tier education, but they're graduating ready to make an exceptional impact for patients."

ETSU's Class of 2025 NAPLEX scores surpass those of the Class of 2023,



which ranked No. 2 in the country for accredited pharmacy schools.

These scores reflect recent changes ETSU Gatton College of Pharmacy has made to its curriculum and support services for students, including a revised curriculum, a revamped NAPLEX exam preparation process, faculty mentorship, new student success coordinators, and a director of student success.

Designed for the Future of Nursing



Health care is changing, and so is East Tennessee State University's College of Nursing.

Through strategic investments in cutting-edge technology, modernized learning spaces, and expanded student support services, the college is strengthening its commitment to preparing nurses who are confident, compassionate, and practice ready.

In recent months, the college updated offices in Nicks Hall with fresh paint and new furniture, created a new Academic Student Success Center, reimagined simulation spaces to enhance hands-on learning, and established a dedicated wellness space.

One of the most notable additions is the Anatomage Table. This revolutionary 3D visualization tool presents real human bodies in a digital format, offering highly accurate representations of anatomy, physiology, and pathology.

The Anatomage Table opens new educational opportunities for students, allowing them to take learning beyond traditional simulation and gain a deeper, more immersive understanding of the human body and its functions.

The College of Nursing's investments extend beyond ETSU's main campus and include enhanced simulation equipment and modernized learning

spaces at the college's Sevierville and Kingsport locations.

Nursing students at ETSU's Sevierville location now have access to new state-of-the-art simulation equipment, while nursing classes in Kingsport moved from Allandale to the Kingsport Center for Higher Education, which offers larger, more modern classrooms designed to better support student learning.

Together, these investments reflect the College of Nursing's commitment to preparing the next generation of nurses as they enter an evolving health care landscape.

By Logan Mink

Fueling Greatness

Some careers begin with a plan. Lisa Everhart's began with a newspaper.

Growing up in the Chattanooga area, Everhart was an athlete and always had an interest in a career in sports. Initially, that pathway led her to study athletic training at Tennessee Wesleyan University (then College).

But after reading about a sports dietitian in the local newspaper, Everhart found a new passion and pivoted from athletic training – a decision that would carry her from Tennessee to Utah and the NBA.

Everhart transferred to the University of Tennessee-Knoxville to study nutrition, then matched into ETSU's Master of Science in Clinical Nutrition and Dietetic Internship program.

"It was ironic how it all happened," said Everhart, who graduated from ETSU in 2017. "I just thought it was really cool, and reading that article got me interested."

Now Director of Performance Nutrition for the Utah Jazz, Everhart was inducted into the ETSU College of Health Sciences' Hall of Fame in 2026 – an honor she said was a "pure shock" when she first heard about it.

"You don't often realize the impact you have when it's happening," she said. "It's the impact over time that makes a difference. It's truly such a huge honor to be nominated, and I feel like I left my mark to better the field."

At ETSU, she said, relationships and responsibility helped shape her path.

"My professors let me have autonomy and helped me build at ETSU," Everhart said. "Even if it was on a very small scale, it was huge for me."

That hands-on foundation followed her out west to the University of Utah, where, as Director of Football Nutrition, she was part of a historic run that included the program's first PAC-12 championship and Rose Bowl appearance.

Relationships she forged in her college days opened the door to join the Utah Jazz as a performance dietitian in 2022 before rising to her current role.

"It was right place, right time," Everhart said. "People wait a lifetime to get these opportunities.

I hoped and dreamed I would get an opportunity like this, but I never thought it would come so early in my career."

Even now, she credits ETSU and the people she met on campus with helping her grow into adulthood – professionally and personally.

"I feel like I started real life there," Everhart said of her time at ETSU. "I was on my own, I got my first dog, met a lot of great people, and started my first job in the field."

By Jonathan Roberts





Leading Where Her Life Began

SOME CAREERS come full circle.

For Dr. Elizabeth Jackson, that circle began in the hospital room where she took her first breath – the same hospital she now serves as chief medical officer.

"It's ironic," said Jackson, "but it's an honor."

A 2009 graduate of East Tennessee State University's Quillen College of Medicine, Jackson has built her career in the same community that helped shape her as a physician.

Jackson was named Chief Medical Officer at Ballad Health's Johnson City Medical Center in December 2025 after spending four years serving the same role at Holston Valley Medical Center and Indian Path Community Hospital.

In her new role, Jackson oversees clinical operations and is responsible for delivering high-quality care and

enhancing patient outcomes for the region's Level I Trauma Center, while continuing to practice clinically as a surgeon.

"This community is so important to me," Jackson said. "I'm raising my children in this community, and I want to always instill in them the value of purpose and community.

"It's a real honor to be able to be in a facility where we can continue to work toward providing the best care we can to as many people as possible," she continued.

After graduating from Science Hill High School, Jackson earned her bachelor's degree at Milligan College (now Milligan University) before attending medical school at Quillen.

"It sounds very cliché, but from the beginning, I knew I wanted to go into something that worked with people and helped people," said Jackson, who also completed her surgical residency with the college in 2014.

With deep connections to this region, Jackson had little desire to go elsewhere after completing her undergraduate degree, thanks in part to the relationships she built with college staff who "really solidified that medicine was the right choice for me."

"It wasn't even a consideration; it was my top choice," Jackson said of Quillen. "It was always where I wanted to be, and I was fortunate enough to get in."

Jackson is now several months into her role, and though there's always a learning curve when moving into a new job, she credited those around her for facilitating a smooth transition.

"It's been wonderful," Jackson said. "Everyone here has been more than accommodating and welcoming. The team members here, the medical staff here are great, and of course, the patients are very similar to where I came from, so all of that has been wonderful and it's been a very exciting time."

By Jonathan Roberts

How Can a Film Help Shape the Next Generation of Nurses?



At some point in life, nearly everyone relies on a nurse. In moments of fear, uncertainty, or celebration, nurses are there — listening closely, advocating fiercely, and delivering compassionate care.

Often juggling multiple patients and complex needs, they work tirelessly to ensure each person receives the attention and dignity they deserve. Nurses stand beside families during life's most joyful milestones — welcoming newborns into the world, when a patient rings the bell to celebrate being cancer-free, and countless others.

"THESE STORIES ARE A GREAT REMINDER THAT WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER, WE ALL HAVE A STORY TO SHARE, AND WE CAN ALL BE THERE FOR EACH OTHER."

Dr. Kacie Hauldren



Yet not every story ends in celebration. Nurses carry the weight of difficult days long after their shifts conclude. Through shared stories and honest reflection, however, they find strength in one another — building connection, understanding, and resilience.

The Nurse Narratives Initiative, a collaboration among **Ballad Health**, the **Tennessee Center for Nursing Advancement**, the **ETSU College of Nursing**, **StoryCollab**, and the **ETSU Research Corporation**, serves as a platform for nurses to share their stories, spotlighting over 70 from our region.

The Tennessee Center for Nursing Advancement at ETSU was created by the Tennessee Legislature through a \$10 million commitment from Ballad Health to search for innovative solutions and ways to support nurses across the region and throughout Tennessee.

The film “NURSE: Empathy Heals,” created by Emmy Award-winning filmmaker Chusy of Plan A Films, explores the power of empathy through real, first-person stories from

four nurses. The film premiered at the ETSU Martin Center for the Arts on January 8.

So, how can a film help shape the next generation of nurses?

If the premiere of “NURSE: Empathy Heals” highlighted anything, it was the profound impact of empathy and the healing power of human connection.

Following the film, a panel discussion featuring nurses and project collaborators reinforced that message.

Dr. Kacie Hauldren, Executive Director of Academic Success and Clinical Instructor in the College of Nursing, said: “These stories remind us that we’re not alone. Sometimes, as a nurse or as a nursing student, you feel like you’re the only one going through something. These stories are a great reminder that we’re all in this together, we all have a story to share, and we can all be there for each other.”

During the discussion, panelists shared how best to support young

nurses given the growing number who leave the profession within two years of graduation.

The College of Nursing is addressing this challenge by leading efforts to embed empathy and human connection into nursing education, revising its curricula at both undergraduate and graduate levels to integrate empathy as a core clinical competency.

This approach, which uses interactive learning, peer-to-peer engagement, reflective practice, and narrative-based exercises, reaffirms that empathy is not a “soft skill” but an essential component of safe, effective, and compassionate patient care.

“Nurses carry the stories of humanity, and through empathy, they help heal the world,” said Dr. Dena Evans, Dean of the College of Nursing. “The Nurse Narratives Initiative reminds us of the profound courage and compassion within this profession.

“At the ETSU College of Nursing, we are proud to nurture that spirit—preparing nurses who lead with heart, rise to every challenge, and transform lives through the simple, powerful act of caring,” Evans continued.

There has never been a more challenging time to be a nurse — but the ETSU College of Nursing is meeting the moment, remaining steadfast in its commitment to preparing the next generation of nurses with the skills, compassion, and resilience needed to succeed.

By Logan Mink



SCAN TO WATCH
STORIES FROM
THE NURSE
NARRATIVES
INITIATIVE

ETSU Nursing First in Tennessee for Workplace Recognition

East Tennessee State University celebrated the fifth anniversary of the ETSU/Ballad Health Strong BRAIN Institute (SBI) and a landmark achievement by the ETSU College of Nursing, which has earned Silver Recognition status from the Better Workplaces Tennessee program for its commitment to trauma-informed workplace practices.

The ETSU College of Nursing is the first and only college in the state to receive this Silver-level recognition, an acknowledgment of its intentional work to foster a safe, supportive, and resilient environment for faculty, staff, and students.

“This recognition reflects ETSU’s continued leadership in trauma-informed care, not just in how we

serve the community but in how we treat one another,” said ETSU President Dr. Brian Noland.

Founded in 2020, the ETSU/Ballad Health Strong BRAIN Institute (Building Resilience through ACEs-Informed Networking) has become a hub for research, policy, and training around the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma.

“Our vision for the ETSU/Ballad Health Strong BRAIN Institute has always been to lead through education and collaboration,” said SBI Director Dr. Wally Dixon.

Ballad Health, the founding partner of the SBI, reaffirmed its commitment to advancing trauma-informed care.

“Ballad Health and ETSU were among the first to create an academic institute for researching, teaching, and implementing trauma-informed care,” said Ballad Health Chairman and CEO Alan Levine. “This milestone recognition is one example of the opportunity for ETSU to lead this nationally.”

Silver Recognition represents the Pre-Implementation phase of the Better Workplaces Tennessee program, guided by the SBI in collaboration with the Office of Injury Prevention in the Tennessee Department of Health. The Silver level focuses on leading and communicating, hiring and orientation practices, establishing a safe work environment, and reviewing policies and procedures.

The College of Nursing’s efforts included developing a Strategic Synergy Plan, forming cross-functional leadership teams, and implementing best practices that emphasize empathy, transparency, and safety. These steps create the foundation for advancing to the Gold level, the implementation phase.

“Being trauma-informed means we don’t just teach care, we model it,” said College of Nursing Dean Dr. Dena Evans. “This recognition affirms our deep commitment to cultivating a workplace where people feel safe, heard, and valued.”

As ETSU looks to the future, the SBI will continue guiding institutions, businesses, and communities in creating cultures of resilience and wellness across Tennessee and beyond

By Logan Mink





College of Public Health

etsu.edu/cph
(423) 439-4243 publichealth@etsu.edu

- › Bachelor of Science in Public Health–Community Health
- › Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Health Sciences
- › Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences
- › Bachelor of Science in Health Administration
- › Bachelor of Science in Microbiology
- › Bachelor of Science in Environmental Health
- › Minors in Emergency/Disaster Response Management, Environmental Health, Epidemiology, Global Health and Development (includes Peace Corps Prep program), Health Administration, Health Sciences, Microbiology, Public Health, and Safety
- › Master of Public Health–Biostatistics, Community Health, Environmental and Occupational Health, Epidemiology, Public Health Leadership and Policy
- › Master of Health Administration
- › M.D./MPH dual degree programs
- › Pharm.D./MPH dual degree programs
- › Doctor of Public Health (DrPH)–Community Health, Epidemiology, Health Management and Policy
- › Graduate certificates in Biostatistics, Epidemiology, Gerontology, Global Health, Health Care Management, Health Data Analytics, One Health and Climate Studies, Public Health, Recovery Research, and Rural Health

College of Health Sciences

etsu.edu/crhs
(423) 439-7454

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- › Bachelor of Science in Human Services
- › Bachelor of Science in Exercise Science
- › Bachelor of Science in Respiratory Therapy
- › Bachelor of Science in Nutrition
- › Bachelor of Science in Dental Hygiene
- › Bachelor of Science in Radiologic Science
- › Bachelor of Science in Rehabilitative Health Sciences

- › Bachelor of Social Work
- › Bachelor of Science Degree Completion Programs in Dental Hygiene, Radiologic Science, and Respiratory Therapy
- › Minors in Allied Health, American Sign Language, Communicative Disorders, Nutrition, Social Work, Human Development and Learning, Family Studies, Trauma and Resilience, and Clinical Exercise Science
- › Undergraduate career certificates in Child Advocacy Studies, Computed Tomography (CT), and Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)
- › Master of Arts in Counseling
- › Master of Science in Individual, Family, and Community Sciences
- › Master of Science in Sport Science and Coach Education
- › Master of Science in Allied Health
- › Master of Science in Clinical Nutrition
- › Master of Science in Speech-Language Pathology
- › Master of Social Work
- › Master of Science in Orthotics and Prosthetics
- › Doctor of Audiology
- › Doctor of Occupational Therapy
- › Doctor of Physical Therapy
- › Doctor of Sport Physiology and Performance
- › Graduate certificates in Child Advocacy Studies, Clinical Addiction Counseling Studies, Child Advocacy Studies, Social Work/Psychology Dual Degree Program, and Sport Nutrition, Interprofessional Pediatric Feeding Disorders, and Nature-Based Therapy

Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy

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- › Pharm.D.
- › Pharm.D./MPH dual degree program
- › Pharm.D./MBA dual degree program

Quillen College of Medicine

etsu.edu/com
(423) 439-2033

- › M.D. Program
- › Accelerated M.D. Program

- › Ph.D. Program
- › M.D./MPH dual degree program
- › M.D./MBA dual degree program

College of Nursing

etsu.edu/nursing
(423) 439-4578

- › Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) (Johnson City, Kingsport, Sevierville locations)
- › LPN to BSN (for licensed practical nurses)
- › RN to BSN (for diploma or associate degree nurses)
- › AAS/BSN Dual Degree
- › Post-Bachelor of Science in Nursing Certificate in Health Care Genetics and Genomics
- › Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) - Family Nurse Practitioner, Nursing Administration, Nursing Education, and Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing
- › Post-Master's Certificate Program in Nursing Administration and Nursing Education
- › RN-MSN (bachelor's degree in another field and RN license)
- › Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP)–Adult Gerontological Primary Care Nurse Practitioner, Executive Leadership, Family Nurse Practitioner, and Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner
- › Post-DNP Certificate in Executive Leadership
- › Post-Graduate APRN Certificate Program in Adult Gerontological Primary Care Nurse Practitioner, Family Nurse Practitioner, and Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner
- › ETSU-Tennessee Technological University (TTU) Joint DNP Program – Adult Gerontological Acute Care Nurse Practitioner, Executive Leadership, Family Nurse Practitioner, Pediatric Nurse Practitioner-Primary Care, Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner, and Women's Health Care Nurse Practitioner
- › BSN-DNP
- › BSN-Ph.D.
- › DNP-Ph.D.
- › Ph.D.



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