TENNESSEE TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY MAY 2026
RADICAL TIMES
DEPARTMENT OF MATHEMATICS VOLUME 19 ISSUE 2

Department Highlights

Spring 2026 has been a busy and celebratory semester in the Department of Mathematics. We are proud to recognize our graduates, scholarship recipients, competition winners, and new faculty, as well as to share important updates as we look ahead to Fall 2026.

Graduation

During the current academic year, ten students in the Department of Mathematics are completing their degree programs.

Anna Call and **Alexa Borski** earned Bachelor of Science degrees in Mathematics on December 12, 2025. An additional six students—**Paul Garrett**, **Quintyn Gibson**, **Clyde Haywood**, **Michael Potts**, **Brianna Rankin**, and **Ethan White**—are expected to receive the B.S. in Mathematics at the May 8, 2026, commencement. **Peyton Johnson** and **Aidan Woodard** are completing the requirements for the Master's degree in Mathematics and are likewise scheduled to graduate on May 8, 2026.

On April 9, 2026, **Peyton Johnson** successfully defended her master's thesis, *On Equal Values of the Sum-of-Divisors Function and Related Natural Density*, under the supervision of **Dr. Andrew Hetzel**.

Aidan Woodard successfully defended his thesis, *Applications of Elementary Submodels and Forcing*, on April 13, 2026, under the supervision of **Dr. Alexander Shibakov**.

On April 30, 2026, the Department of Mathematics hosted a graduation reception in honor of its graduating majors. **Dr. Michael Allen**, chair of the Mathematics Department, presented graduation gifts to the students. Faculty, staff, and students congratulate the graduates and wish them continued success. During the reception, **Dr. Allen** was also presented with tokens of appreciation in recognition of his service and dedication as department chair as he transitions from the chair role.

The department congratulates all graduates on their academic accomplishments.

Student Achievements & Recognition

Integration Bee Competition

On March 31, 2026, Tennessee Tech's Mathematics Department held its annual Integration Bee competition in the Bruner Hall auditorium. The program turned out to be a grand success. A whopping 57 students participated in the competition. They took a pretest that allowed the organizers to pick the top 13 students to move on to the competition phase.

The Integration Bee is a public challenge for Tech students to display their academic prowess in one subfield of calculus: integration. Modeled after the famous Spelling Bee,

participants are expected to work an integral in front of an audience. Those who succeed move on to the next round.

The degree of difficulty of each problem is kept low enough so that, given ample time, any student who has taken (or is currently taking) Calculus II could work it. But difficulty creeps in because of a strict time limit, and because others would be watching.

All in all, it took five rounds for the winner to emerge. **Anna Clark** bagged the first prize ($125), **Meet Patel** stood second (and received $75), and four different individuals won the third prize – **Benjamin Hewitt**, **George Schwaiger**, **Jonathan Salvato**, and **Jordan Jones**. During the competition, the four had decided to share the $50 so that each would get $12.50.

Dr. Allan Mills (Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences) funded the prize money. When he found out that the third-place winners were going to share the prize, **Dr. Mills** generously increased the funding so that each would get $50. We wish to sincerely thank **Dr. Mills** for his encouragement and generosity.

Sincere thanks are also due to math majors **Molly De Lap** and **Kylie Laster** for accepting the challenge from **Dr. Andrew Hetzel** to procure funding for the T-shirts to be given at the competition to those who made it past the pretest. **Molly** and **Kylie** secured funding from Tech's Student Government Association by writing to them, filling out the necessary forms, and satisfying every criterion that SGA set forth for such funding.

In addition, the following math faculty members deserve appreciation, without whose help the competition would not have been possible: **Dr. Motoya Machida**, **Dr. Brian O'Connor**, **Dr. Yung-Way Liu**, **Dr. Andrew Hetzel**, **Mr. Tommy Elliott**, **Mr. Spencer Kennon**, and **Mr. Jacob Copeland**.

— Submitted by Dr. Sam Narimetla

Scholarship & Awards

Congratulations to the recipients of Mathematics Department awards and scholarships for the 2026—2027 academic year.

Undergraduate Scholarships

- Dr. R. H. Moorman Memorial Endowed Award — **Joseph Adams**
- Dr. and Mrs. Patil Mathematics Endowment — **Carson Alfaro**
- Grateful Heart — **Carson Alfaro**, **Ava Clark**, and **Emma Krebs**
- Leonard Dunavin — **Sophia Shoemake**
- Richard Savage, Sr. — **Henry Lagrange** and **Zoe Reed**
- Stanley W. Erwin — **Tristan Allison**, **Geneva Chandler**, and **Kylie Laster**

Graduate Scholarships & Teaching Awards

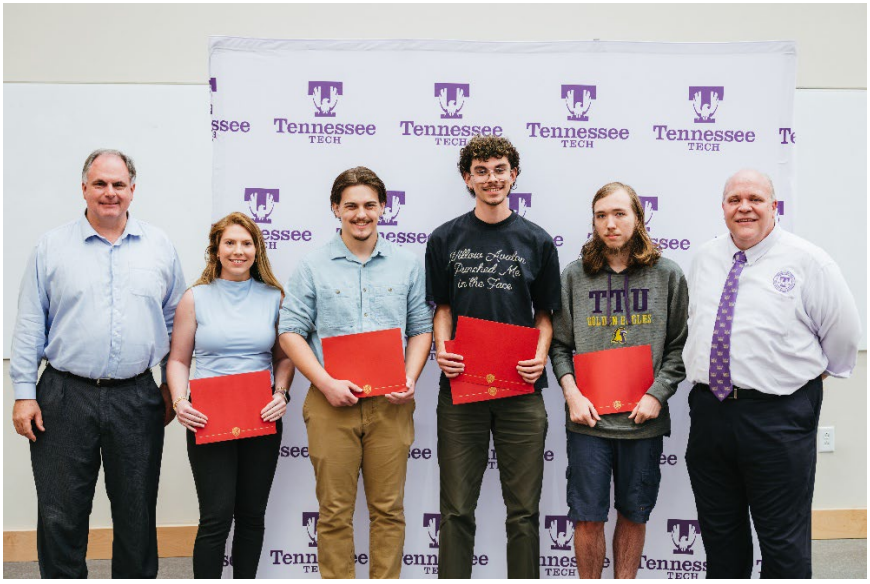
- Stanley Dolzycki Memorial Scholarship — **Aidan Woodard**
- Graduate Student Teaching Award — **Peyton Johnson**

Honors Night

On April 14, 2026, the College of Arts and Sciences hosted its Honors Night to celebrate outstanding students who received awards and scholarships in recognition of their academic achievements.

Four Mathematics scholarship recipients attended the event: **Aidan Woodard**, **Peyton Johnson**, **Joseph Adams**, and **Carson Alfaro**.

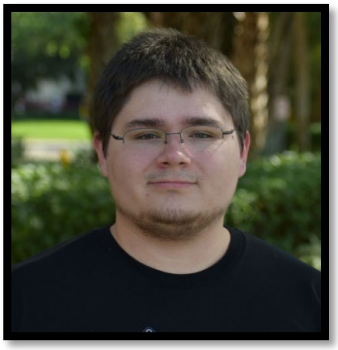
Dr. Michael Allen, Chair of the Mathematics Department, and **Dr. Daren Snider**, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, congratulated the students in person.



From left to right: Dr. Michael Allen, Peyton Johnson, Joseph Adams, Carson Alfaro, Aidan Woodard, Dr. Daren Snider

Faculty Spotlight: Justin Wisby

Justin Wisby joined the department this spring as an adjunct faculty member, responsible for two sections of Calculus III, MATH 2110-004 and MATH 2110-007. We are pleased to welcome him. Below is a brief bio to help you get to know him better.



"Hi! I'm Justin, a Ph.D. candidate at Florida International University specializing in extremal graph theory, and I'm planning to graduate this summer—fingers crossed you can call me *Dr. Justin* soon. I was born and raised in Michigan, where I completed my undergraduate degree at the University of Michigan–Flint, before heading to Miami for graduate school.

My approach to teaching is rooted in the belief that *every student is capable of learning*, and part of my job is making sure they believe that, too. Students come from diverse backgrounds and face unique challenges, so I make a point to talk with them regularly to gauge understanding. I firmly believe in testing and retesting so students have meaningful opportunities to demonstrate mastery. I want students to know we're on the same team—I just happen to give the grades at the end.

Over the past twelve years, I've worked in a range of roles, including Supplemental Instructor, graduate teaching and research assistant, and image lead for Illustrative Mathematics, where I contributed to K–12 curriculum development. I've also done freelance work in full-stack development, digital fabrication, CAD, and IT—often with a strong emphasis on the *'free'* part of freelance. I'm guided by a simple belief: *if I can be helpful, I should be helpful.*

This term, I taught two sections of Calculus III, and I was genuinely amazed by how different the two courses were despite covering the same material. Calc III tends to attract students who enjoy tinkering and exploring mathematical ideas, and I'm very much cut from the same cloth. If I find something interesting, there's a good chance my students will too—except, perhaps, for Stokes' Theorem.

Outside the classroom, I enjoy making things through digital fabrication and coding, as well as breaking things by finding exploits in code—especially in video games—where I optimize the fun right out of them.

I joined the department after my wife accepted a position in the Psychology Department last fall and thought I'd be a good fit as well. She was right—she usually is. I'm happy to be here, and I hope students leave my classes knowing that I'm rooting for them."

— Justin Wisby

Outreach and Engagement

TMTA Math Contest

On Tuesday, April 7, the Tennessee Tech Math Department had the privilege of hosting the TMTA Math Contest. TMTA administered its first contest exam in 1957. Today, there are six contests for high school students (and advanced younger students):

- Algebra I (includes Core/Integrated Math I)
- Geometry (includes Core/Integrated Math II)
- Algebra II (includes Core/Integrated Math III)
- Statistics
- Precalculus
- Calculus and Advanced Topics

This year, approximately 300 students from 18 schools participated—so many, in fact, that we reached full capacity. Winners in each category advance to the regional level, with the possibility of advancing to the state level.

We hope these students continue to pursue STEM and will join our classes in the near future.

— Submitted by Dr. Stacy Brown

Advising & Placement Updates (Fall 2026)

For Fall 2026 and beyond, the Math Department has elected to change the challenge process for student course placement from Accuplacer to ALEKS Placement, Preparation, and Learning Challenge Assessment. The advantage of ALEKS is that not only does it assess a student's current math understanding, but it also provides opportunities for reinforcement of past skills necessary for the desired class. For more information and details, see https://www.tntech.edu/cas/math/aleks-ppl.php.

The department has also updated ACT-based math course placement criteria. Students may no longer be placed into MATH 1720 based on ACT math subscores, and placement into Calculus I now requires a minimum ACT math subscore of 29. Additional details are available at: https://www.tntech.edu/cas/math/course-placement.php.

Starting Fall 2026, MATH 1000 (Transitional Algebra) will be offered in place of MATH 1710-L (Learning Support for Precalculus Algebra).

— Dr. Wendy Smith

Department Transitions & Appointments

Upcoming Personnel Changes

In Fall 2026, **Tyler Genao** will join the Department of Mathematics, filling the Pure Mathematics professor line previously held by **Dr. Padmini Veerapen**.

In June, **Dr. Amy Chambers** will begin her new role as chair of the Mathematics Department. Congratulations! We look forward to her leadership.

Dr. Michael Allen will continue his role as a statistics professor.

Support the Department & Stay Connected

If you wish to donate to the Mathematics Department, please click this link and select "Mathematics Department" from the dropdown menu. If you prefer to donate to a specific fund, please select "Other" from the dropdown menu and enter the name of the fund. Your gift is truly appreciated!

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