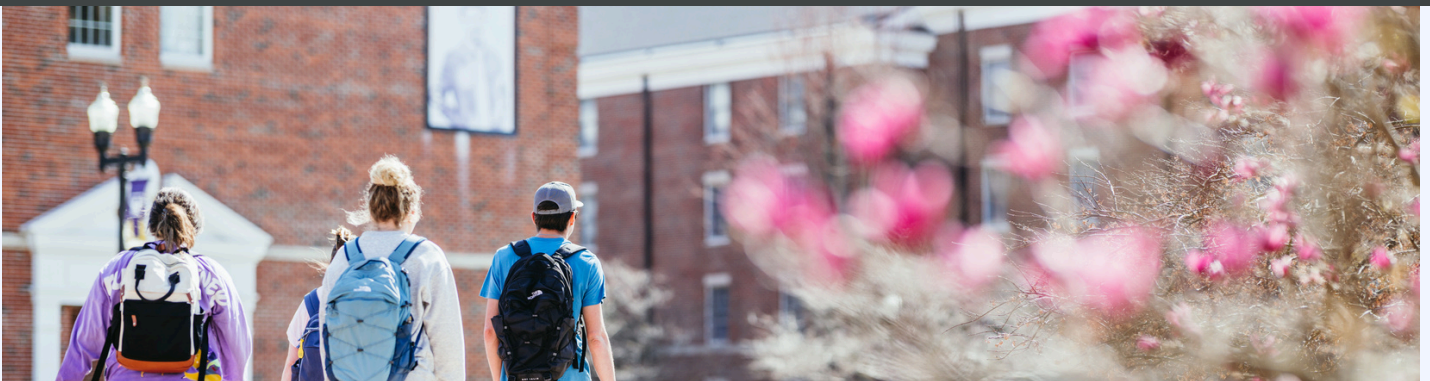


# STUDENT AFFAIRS NEWSLETTER

The Division of Student Affairs Quarterly Newsletter



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## TENNESSEE TECH NAMES KATIE AIKENS AS VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS



Tennessee Tech University has selected Katie Aikens, Ed.D., to serve as the university's vice president for Student Affairs, marking a new chapter in her more than 20 years of service to the institution.

Aikens, a Livingston, Tennessee native and two-time graduate of Tennessee Technological University, most recently led the division as interim vice president beginning in December 2025. Her appointment reflects a career dedicated to supporting students and strengthening campus life.

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In her role, Aikens oversees a division that supports approximately 10,700 students through nearly a dozen departments and programs. These include the Accessible Education Center, Center for Student Engagement, Center for Counseling and Mental Health Wellness, Dean of Students Office, Eagle Card, Health Services, Intercultural Affairs, the Marc L. Burnett Student Recreation and Fitness Center, Office of First-Generation Student Success, Roaden University Center, and University Housing and Residential Life. The division includes 76 professional staff members and nearly 400 student employees.

Aikens' connection to the university began when she enrolled as a graduate student in 2003. The following year, she joined the Division of Student Affairs as a graduate assistant before being hired full time in 2005 as coordinator of Greek life and university programming. Over the years, she has held a variety of leadership roles that expanded her impact across campus.

In 2017, Aikens became dean of students. She was the first woman to hold the position in the university's history. She later added the role of Assistant Vice President for Strategic Initiatives in 2021, further contributing to planning and development efforts within the division.

Throughout her time as dean of students, Aikens played a central role in organizing many of the university's most recognizable traditions. These include annual SOLO concerts, homecoming festivities, Week of Welcome activities, Live on the Plaza events and student tailgates. She also helped establish College Town Kickoff, a community celebration held each fall in Cookeville's WestSide district to welcome students back to town.

Beyond her work at the university, Aikens remains active in the local community. She serves on the board of CityScape, an organization focused on preserving and enhancing Cookeville's historic downtown, and has also taught as an adjunct instructor in the university's doctoral program in higher education leadership. According to Amy New, president and CEO of the Cookeville-Putnam County Chamber of Commerce and a member of the Tennessee Tech Foundation Board, Aikens has played an important role in strengthening collaboration between the university and the surrounding community.

With a long history of service and leadership at the university, Aikens now steps into the vice president role with a focus on supporting student success and continuing to enhance the campus experience for the Tech community.



# THE KID LAROI HEADLINES TENNESSEE TECH'S 2026 SOLO CONCERT

Every spring, Tennessee Tech's Student Government Association and SOLO Events Committee deliver one of the most anticipated nights of the academic year: the SOLO Concert. The 2026 edition lived up to the hype, bringing chart-topping artist The Kid Laroi to campus for a night that had students talking all semester.

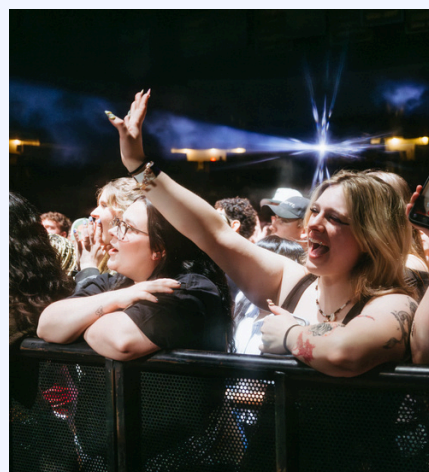
On April 9, the Hooper Eblen Center came alive as Tennessee Tech students and guests packed the arena for an evening of live music and shared excitement. Doors opened at 6 p.m., and by 7 p.m. the opening act had already set the tone before The Kid Laroi took the stage and delivered the kind of performance you don't expect to find right in your own backyard.

With massive hits like Stay and Without You to his name, The Kid Laroi has cemented himself as one of the most compelling young voices in pop and hip-hop today. His appearance at Tennessee Tech meant students didn't have to travel far or pay steep venue prices to see a top-tier touring artist perform live at a show that came to them, right in Cookeville.

That's exactly the point. The SOLO Concert is organized entirely by student leaders who spend the better part of the year planning large-scale events that make campus life worth remembering. It's one of the rare events that genuinely brings the whole campus community together, and it's become a signature way to close out the spring semester.

Current students registered through Eagle Engage and were each able to bring one free guest, who was required to enter alongside the student and show a valid state-issued ID confirming they were 18 or older. Students were encouraged to download the Tennessee Tech Eagle Engage App for easy registration and check-in on the day of the event. For non-students, tickets were available for \$45 plus tax while supplies lasted, with sales opening March 30.

By every measure, the 2026 SOLO Concert was another reminder of what makes Tennessee Tech special. We are a campus community that shows up, shows out, and makes the most of the time they have together.



# EAGLE FEST: END OF SUMMER BASH

Students gathered on the Quad at Tennessee Technological University on Tuesday, April 21, to celebrate the end of the semester during the 2026 Eagle Fest 2026. The afternoon event brought together students, activities, and food to help the campus community relax and celebrate the close of another academic year.

From 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., students participated in esports and interactive gaming experiences provided by Rewired Fest, offering a fun and competitive environment for gamers and spectators alike. Later in the day, from 12 p.m. to 6 p.m., the Quad filled with food trucks and attractions, giving students plenty of options to enjoy good food and spend time with friends outdoors.

Hosted by the Office of Student Engagement, Eagle Fest served as a lively send-off to the spring semester. With games, music, food, and a strong turnout from the campus community, the event provided a memorable way for students to celebrate their accomplishments and enjoy one last gathering before finals and summer break.



## HEALTH SERVICES STAFF PARTICIPATE IN DENIM DAY

Tennessee Tech University Health Services staff marked Denim Day this April, joining an international campaign that raises awareness about sexual violence and pushes back against victim-blaming. Observed on the last Wednesday of April each year, participants wear denim as a symbol of solidarity with survivors and a commitment to education and prevention.

By taking part, Health Services staff added their voices to a global movement and reaffirmed Tennessee Tech's dedication to a safe and supportive campus community.



# STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: JESSE AKOWUAH

Jesse Akowuah is finishing his final semester of a master's degree in Civil and Environmental Engineering at Tennessee Tech, and his time here has been anything but quiet. Originally from Ghana, he has balanced academic work with meaningful campus involvement, serving as Vice President of the ITE student chapter, Publicity Secretary of the African Students Union, and a global ambassador with the Center for Global Experiences, helping new international students transition to life at Tech.

On the research side, Jesse worked as a Graduate Research Assistant on a project examining the travel behavior of older adults in Tennessee, which also shaped his master's thesis. He recently passed the FE Civil exam and plans to pursue a career in transportation engineering focused on traffic operations and planning, with aspirations to grow into a project management role. He credits Tech's faculty and supportive environment for preparing him well.

Guided by his own experience as an international student, Jesse makes it a priority to be welcoming and encouraging to those just finding their way. His advice is simple: make the most of every opportunity. It's a philosophy he has lived out throughout his time at Tech, and one he plans to carry forward long after graduation.



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