

TennACADA Times

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Letter from Dr. Amber Williams



Dear UT Advising Community,

I am so pleased to write to you as the University of Tennessee's inaugural Vice Provost for Student Success. Being a part of UT's legacy overwhelms me with pride, and I am grateful for the opportunity to work with you to provide our scholars with the educational experience they deserve.

UT scholars are here to achieve their dreams, and our job is to help them become their very best on their unique path to success. Our role in student success is to help each scholar answer the important big questions in their lives. Who am I? Who do I want to be? How

will I get there? Essentially as vice provost, I am committed to:

1. Put students first.
2. Passionately advocate for and eliminate barriers that impede student achievement.
3. Help every UT scholar identify their unique strengths and stretch them.

To this end, the following offices have reorganized under the Vice Provost for Student Success umbrella: Student Success Center, Veterans Resource Center, First-Year Studies, New Student Orientation, Undergraduate Research, Center for Career Development, Student Support Services, National Scholarships & Fellowships, and the campus-wide initiatives for academic advising.

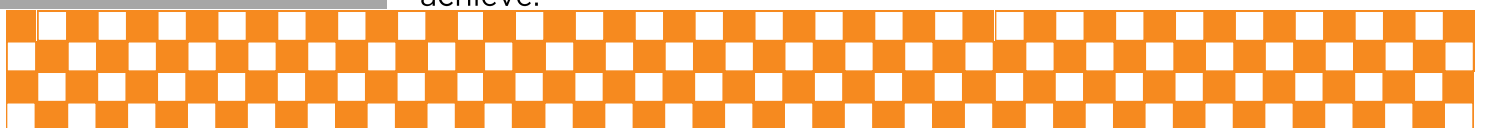
I know the advising community is critical to each scholar's success. As such, I am eager to work with each of you to ensure we maximize the potential of every UT scholar. Thank you for all that you do every day in small and big ways to make UT an outstanding institution. If you see me on campus, please say hello.

Go Vols!

Dr. Amber Williams

Vice Provost for Student Success

P.S. I refer to students as scholars. Reframing their roles as scholars sets clear expectations of the academic curiosity we hope they will achieve.



Spotlight: Abigail Blankner

Abigail serves as an academic advisor in the College of Communication and Information. She has been in this role since January 2019.

How did you get into the advising profession?

After exploring a variety of majors, I completed a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and a minor in Women's Studies at Pacific Lutheran University (PLU) in Tacoma, Washington. I returned to Tennessee and was hired as the Associate Director of Volunteer Services at Maryville College. Then, I moved to Atlanta where I completed a Masters of Theological Studies (MTS) at the Candler School of Theology and a Certificate in Women's Studies at Emory University. Not sure what to do next, I worked in an after school program (k-5th grade), ordered textbooks for the Emory University Graduate Schools, and crushed it as a cashier and sales person at an Ace Hardware and the Container Store. I explored completing a PhD in Women's Studies, contemplated getting certified as a licensed American Sign Language Interpreter, and was the primary caregiver for my grandmother until she died. I



stumbled into my first advising position when I attempted to contact my undergraduate advisor to ask for his advice. As it turns out, my advisor had retired and moved; I had no way to reach him. While searching for more information about my advisor on the PLU website, I realized I had nothing keeping me in Atlanta. So, I looked at PLU's open positions. I applied and was hired to be the Transfer Student Advisor at PLU.

What is the best advice that you give to students?

Make the best decision you can based on the information you have at this moment. If and when you have more information, then you can either make a new decision or stick with your original plan.

Tell us one fun fact we would not know about you.

I belonged to three library systems in Tacoma, and loved to read books on the bus ride to and from work.

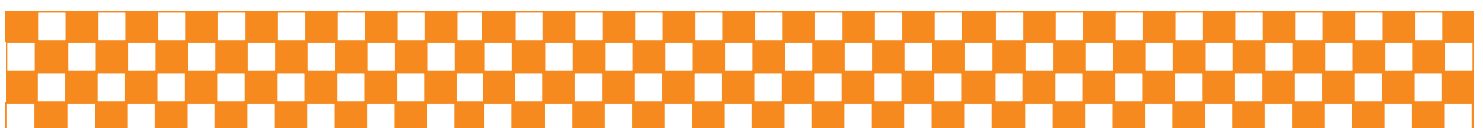


What books are you reading?

- Louise Penny's Chief Inspector Armand Gamache Mystery Series
- *The Death of Mrs. Westaway* by Ruth Ware (audio)
- *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo

What places have you lived?

Florida, Alabama, Washington, Tennessee, Georgia, and Lancaster, England



Spotlight: Andrea Stedman

Andrea serves as an academic advisor in the College of Arts and Sciences. She has been in this role since August 2019.

Please tell us a little bit about your professional background. I originally joined City Year Miami to see if I liked teaching ESOL to high school students. I quickly realized I liked working with behavioral interventions more, and could really see how the rapport built with students acted as a bridge towards success. I then decided to pursue my MSSW at UTK (to become a school social worker), but found myself in more college access settings, first with Project Grad and then with Centro Hispano de East Tennessee as their College Access Coordinator. I enjoy how academic advising combines what I learned in my MSSW (connecting people to resources, supporting self-actualization, and utilizing the same developmental/therapeutic/intersectional theories).

What is most important to you in your work with students? It is most important to me that students feel like they are able to ask questions and are not afraid to make mistakes or “change their mind too much” at the expense of leaving with a degree that they are not passionate about. It’s important to me that students explore and feel comfortable expressing these doubts and interests with me so I can help them take advantage of their time and resources here so they are best set for their future!

What is on your wish list for the next ten years in the world of advising at UT? My wish is to get involved with the various committees on campus to make UTK more friendly towards people of all backgrounds.

What is something you’ve learned from working with students? It seems like most students are trying to change the world for the better, so that’s inspiring!

What is your favorite quote? “When you know better, do better.” by Maya Angelou.

What are some favorite Knoxville spots? The Women’s Suffrage monuments around downtown!

What are some of your hobbies? Running, pilates, reading, telling people I’m vegan, and hanging out with friends

What places have you lived? Wisconsin, Arizona, Missouri, Illinois, Tennessee, Florida (Miami), England, Spain, Hungary (Budapest), and Hong Kong

Describe what you were like at age 10. At age 10 I was still living in Arizona and spent lots of time with my neighborhood friends playing pretend on the playground, greenbelts, and ubiquitous pools. I also tried to write my own version of *The Chronicles of Narnia* (it was like four pages long). I was really into the Powerpuff Girls and identified with Bubbles because she could talk to squirrels. I enjoyed school and read a lot. I also wrote existential poetry.



Spring Events

Event Name	Date	Time	Location	Type of Event
NACADA webinar: A Deeper Look at Incorporating Coaching Conversations into Academic Advising Practice	2/11/2020	2:00–3:30	SU 362B	Webinar
CSRDE webinar: Peer Coaching: A Model for Supporting the Persistence of First-Generation College Students	2/19/2020	2:00–3:00	OIRA conference room, 5th floor Dunford Hall	Webinar
Thornton Center Information Session followed by an Open House	2/19/2020	3:30–4:30	Thornton Center	TennACADA
State of the Campus Panel	3/4/2020	2:30–4:00	SU 169	TennACADA
Diversity Workshop with Jermain Pipkins	3/6/2020	9:00–11:00 1:00–3:00	Conference Center 413AB	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
NACADA Webinar: Successful Advising Strategies for Supporting Student Academic Recovery	3/19/2020	2:00–3:30	SU 362B	Webinar
NACADA Webinar: Academic Advising for Social Justice: Theory, Reflection, and Practice	4/15/2020	2:00–3:30	SU 362B	Webinar
CRSDE webinar: Fleets, Captains, and Crews: Creating Programs to Help New Students Navigate the Stormy Seas of the First Year	4/22/2020	2:00–3:00	OIRA conference room, 5th floor Dunford Hall	Webinar
Advising and Success Spring Retreat #2	5/5/2020	12:00–4:00	SU 272A	Retreat

NACADA Election

Madeline Anderson (Arts and Sciences) is running for the Tennessee liaison to the NACADA steering committee; the deadline for voting in this election is **February 10th!** To view the candidates and their platform statements, please visit nacada.ksu.edu/Community/Regions/Region-3/Elections.aspx. This is a separate election from the general election, which takes place February 14–27.

