

Celebrating the Achievements of ITLS PhD Students

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Left to right: Zahra Jahani, Stephen Ameko, Sina Zandi

Three PhD students in the ITLS program are celebrating recent academic and professional achievements.

Sina Zandi, Zahra Jahani, and Stephen Ameko have each received recognition for their work and continued development as graduate researchers and educators. Their achievements reflect the diverse research and professional interests represented within the ITLS program.

Sina Zandi and Zahra Jahani were among 20 graduate students selected to receive the 2026 Graduate Enhancement Award (GEA). The award recognizes graduate students for their research and academic development and supports their continued growth as scholars. Their research takes them into very different learning spaces. For Sina, that space is digital. His research explores how digital game-based learning can bring mathematics and computational thinking together for young learners. He is interested in designing games that not only make learning more engaging but also provide new ways to understand and assess how students learn. For Zahra, learning happens beyond the traditional classroom. Her research examines how apprenticeship and internship programs can create inclusive opportunities for students to engage with STEM. Her work focuses on how informal learning experiences can support participation and create learning environments where more students can see a place for themselves in STEM.

Stephen Ameko received the Wesley D. & Lucille S. Soulier Scholarship from the ITLS department and

was selected for the Climate Adaptation Scholarship Program at the Ecology Center. He also earned the Explore Teaching Certificate through ETE, supporting his continued development as an educator. Stephen's research interests focus on the intersection of technology, learning, and learner behavior, including digital distractions and their influence on attention, engagement, learning, and comprehension in technology-mediated environments. He is also interested in climate science and environmental sustainability, particularly how technology and educational tools can help communities better understand climate risks and adaptation strategies.

These three students highlight the range of research, learning, and professional development taking place within ITLS. Congratulations to Sina Zandi, Zahra Jahani, and Stephen Ameko on these accomplishments!