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7-8-2019

## Scholarship and Engagement for the Public Good

Albert Nylander

*University of Mississippi*

Laura Martin

*University of Mississippi*

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# scholarship & engagement for the PUBLIC GOOD



Community Engagement at the University of Mississippi  
*McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement*





## Mission

The McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement advances transformative service throughout the university and fights poverty through education in Mississippi.

## Vision

The McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement will be recognized for expanding community engagement throughout the University of Mississippi and for its success in addressing poverty in Mississippi through mutually beneficial partnerships.

## Core Values

The McLean Institute reflects the following values in its organization and programs:

- **Academic Excellence:** The McLean Institute believes that education should be a lifelong and empowering experience open to all.
- **Transformation:** The McLean Institute recognizes the potential of the University of Mississippi to transform the inequitable structures of Mississippi that contribute to generational poverty.
- **Respect:** The McLean Institute values the strengths and assets of all people and the organizations with which we partner.
- **Integrity:** The McLean Institute believes in listening honestly, processing information accurately, and following through on its commitments.
- **Inclusion:** The McLean Institute fosters inclusivity and cultural humility in its work.



THE UNIVERSITY of  
**MISSISSIPPI**  
McLEAN INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC SERVICE  
AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

P.O. Box 1848, University, MS 38677

662-915-2052 | [mclean@olemiss.edu](mailto:mclean@olemiss.edu)

[mclean.olemiss.edu](http://mclean.olemiss.edu) | [f](https://www.facebook.com/McLeanUM) McLeanUM | [t](https://twitter.com/McLeanUM) @McLeanUM

# scholarship & engagement

## FOR THE public good

Community Engagement  
at the University of Mississippi

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## Director's Welcome

Welcome to the McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement at the University of Mississippi.

The McLean Institute's bold mission of fighting poverty through education in Mississippi encourages not only the study of systemic and societal problems but also collaboration to address future challenges. The institute builds bridges between theory and practice and forms effective local partnerships to make a difference in the social and economic conditions in the areas in which we live, learn and serve.

This publication highlights the McLean Institute's programs that directly connect the university and its resources to communities in Mississippi. These programs are directed at the structural concerns facing many of our communities, including lack of early childhood education, health education, and the summer learning gap experienced by many lower-income students. The guiding principles of these programs are to advance knowledge and interventions that will have the greatest effect throughout the state.

Many initiatives that begin at the McLean Institute are taken to new heights by our students. Our focus areas include advancing education, promoting entrepreneurship, and improving quality of life through community and economic development.

The enclosed articles highlight the McLean Institute's programs and how they have benefited faculty, students and communities. In a state with almost 20 percent of its residents living below the poverty threshold – one of the highest in the nation – there are so many ways that public service and community engagement can make a difference.

Our programs, including Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development (CEED), LOU Saves, M Partner and the North Mississippi VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America) Project, work individually and together to fulfill our mission of fighting poverty through education.

Community engagement presents a holistic approach to empowering students and community members to become potential agents of change for the betterment of society. The vision for all of the institute's programs is to provide opportunities to learn concepts and to gain the tools necessary to challenge the persistent factors inhibiting social and economic progress in communities around Mississippi.

I hope you find this publication useful and informative. Increasing community engagement and service-learning opportunities for faculty, staff and students is an important goal for the university. We are fortunate to have such tremendous resources at the university and an institutional commitment to having an impact on quality of life in our state.

We understand that alleviating poverty requires broad-based collaboration, and we are committed to taking an asset-based approach to partnering with communities across the state. Alongside these partners, the McLean Institute is investing in people and communities for long-term change. And naturally we desire for those outcomes to be something better than when started. These community and economic development challenges will take all of us working together to address them. The future is bright for the institute, and we'll continue to seek other partners who are interested in making a difference in Mississippi by fighting poverty through education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Albert Nylander". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Albert Nylander

Director of the McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement  
and Professor of Sociology



## Associate Director's Welcome

Thank you for your interest in the work of the McLean Institute!

We are passionate about our work, and I invite you to join us. The McLean Institute partners with Mississippi communities to fight poverty in order to transform lives through education, innovation and entrepreneurship. We have an ambitious, statewide mission, and we can only be successful if we partner with others to accomplish something greater than we could by working individually.

The McLean Institute works on campus with students, faculty and staff, and in communities with nonprofit organizations, school districts, elected officials, government agencies and businesses to advance our mission. We believe that poverty alleviation in Mississippi requires all hands on deck, as well as a commitment to systemic change.

We draw inspiration from our community partners, who we see working around the clock, day after day, to create pathways of opportunity for their neighbors, and particularly for youth in their communities. We also believe that our partnerships should enhance work of these community organizations. As Sister Kay, our partner in Jonestown put it, "We'll live without the partnership, but we're so much better with it."

Community engagement literature talks a lot about mutual benefit and reciprocal partnerships. We see this each day as our students gain new insights, our faculty members make scholarly contributions to their fields, and our community partners build their capacity through our shared efforts. In the pages that follow, we are excited to share examples of community engagement in action. We believe it to be the best of what the University of Mississippi has to offer.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Laura Martin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line extending from the end.

Laura Martin  
Associate Director



## The CEED of Something Great

Program applies entrepreneurial mindset to combat poverty in Mississippi

A cohort of students joining the **Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development** program started its work at the McLean Institute in fall 2014. The CEED project is McLean director Albert Nylander's vision to create action-oriented efforts to advance community development. Nylander has a longstanding partnership with the Robert M. Hearin Support Foundation, whose goal is to improve economic development in Mississippi.

The 2018-19 CEED program includes 15 students from the College of Liberal Arts and the schools of Accountancy, Applied Sciences, Business Administration, Engineering, Journalism and New Media, Law, and Pharmacy. Given these varied disciplines, the 2018 cohort brings a variety of academic viewpoints together in service of the McLean Institute's mission to advance transformation through service and fight poverty through education.

These 15 students were selected to continue a nearly \$2 million McLean Institute investment from the Robert M. Hearin Foundation to bolster community and economic development in Mississippi. This grant will support UM students through 2021.

The CEED initiative works with University of Mississippi students and faculty to implement projects and conduct research that directly affects Mississippi communities. These students join a network of more than 50 UM students and faculty, as well as a collaboration of more than 400 community and business leaders in the state, who embarked on the first CEED project in 2014-18.

The 2019 CEED initiative convened the annual Mississippi Entrepreneurship Forum in Jackson on March 8, 2019. The event consisted of a day of panel discussions and talks that were focused around entrepreneurship and best practices being used by

*continued on page 19*



Cohorts 2 and 3 of the Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development program.



## McLean Institute spotlights CEED student research

The University of Mississippi's McLean Institute leads the way in student-led engagement research in Mississippi. Albert Nylander, McLean Institute director and professor of sociology, directs honors theses for the Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development, or CEED, students whose final product in the program is to conduct a fully developed business plan or academic research paper. The following students worked with communities to address local challenges. Their research included workforce development, tourism and youth education.

**Elena Bauer**, a University of Mississippi law school student, researched the sociological and economic factors that affect workforce development in low-income communities in Mississippi. Through an in-depth study of African American male respondents who were participants in a job-training program in a Delta community, her findings demonstrated that job-training programs, which operate in regions with persistent and deep poverty, must consider strategies beyond the traditional workforce development techniques to have success. A workforce

development program that intends to transition participants into full-time employment must address both the sociological and social psychological factors affecting participants in order to create a sustainable effect on the participants and in the community.

The respondents and community leaders identified transportation, inadequate wages, housing, affordable child care, poor educational resources and lack of resources as structural impediments for trying to get out of poverty. Structural forces developed negative attitudes such as lack of motivation, hopelessness and lack of trust in authorities. The attitudinal concerns enhanced the realities of unemployment, increased delinquency, disrespect for authority and lack of commitment. Thus, these factors contributed to the reasons that young adults in impoverished communities remained unemployed.

"The patterns reflected more broadly community brokenness, describing many communities throughout the Delta," Bauer said.

Effective workforce development programs must understand the cause and effect of the larger community forces.



**Sam Russell** worked with the McLean Institute for two years to research revitalization efforts of tourism in the Mississippi Delta. He explored how community-campus partnerships lead to stronger economic development for Mississippi communities. His findings demonstrated that communities and universities can create partnerships to assist in bringing needed jobs and resources to an impoverished region.

"The CEED initiative at the University of Mississippi has shown me a new side of the Mississippi Delta, and has given me a vision of Delta revitalization through community and university engagement and tourism," Russell said.

Russell is working as a digital programs coordinator at the Society for Neuroscience in Washington, D.C.



**Holly Pitts**, a Mississippi Delta native, graduated from UM in 2018 with honors as a civil engineering major with minors in studio art, mathematics and business. The purpose of her research was to examine the educational opportunities in Mississippi's tourism industry and to highlight the university's efforts to institutionalize community engagement.

Through internship experiences with the B.B. King Museum and Delta Interpretive Center and the GRAMMY Museum Mississippi, she gathered data from more than 200 respondents on the educational opportunities provided by the tourism industry. Her findings demonstrate that excellent opportunities are available for teachers and students to learn through the tourism industry. In addition, Mississippi's tourism industry indirectly affects the economy through additional tax revenues, which benefit educational budgets and improve the overall economy.

"The CEED program taught me how to see grand problems as potential grand solutions," Pitts said. "Rather than thinking in limited terms, one can develop an entrepreneurial mindset (to make Mississippi better)."

Pitts is living in Dallas, Texas, completing her joint graduate degree in engineering and business administration at Southern Methodist University.



**Henry Lang-VanDerLaan** graduated from UM in 2017 with a bachelor's degree in public policy leadership. His research involved examining the university's community engagement strategies to fight against poverty through civic participation and youth development. Born and raised in Hinsdale, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, he has been engaged in community service through restorative justice programs for minors. He has served as a peer mentor for troubled youth. During his two-year CEED experience, he explored an after-school program to determine its success and to evaluate how higher education can partner with local communities to elevate civic participation.

"(The) CEED program provided training in entrepreneurship education, civic responsibility and local participation in community engagement activities, especially youth development training," Lang-VanDerLaan said.

He completed a summer internship experience with the Boys & Girls Club in Greenwood. Ensuring access to quality after-school programs is necessary if Mississippi is going to improve youth opportunities. Lang-VanDerLaan's research demonstrated that after-school programs such as the Boys & Girls Clubs of America can have a major effect on the lives of youth. From education to character development to financial literacy to overall well-being, after-school programs have the potential to be transformational for students.

"It is time to recognize that child poverty is a national problem," Lang-VanDerLaan said.

Community-university partnerships are one way to tackle the problem. College students are ready to connect with and mentor youth throughout the state. One finding/recommendation is to create degree programs that permit semesters working and learning in impoverished communities as credit toward university students'

degree completion. Lang-VanDerLaan received about \$20,000 over the two years in CEED, with \$3,000 of that investment directed toward a summer internship.

"This is a small dollar amount for creating and developing life-changing partnerships," he said. "All it takes is a small investment, a university student willing and able to meet the needs of communities, and a dedication to alleviating poverty."

Lang-VanDerLaan is in graduate school at the University of Edinburgh. ■



## Planting Seeds through Service

# McLean staff assesses student civic learning through community partnerships

A qualitative research study examined the effect of service-learning on strengthening community-university partnerships.

Laura Martin, associate director of the University of Mississippi's McLean Institute, and Albert Nylander, director of the institute, conducted the study.

Working with former CEED innovation scholar Janae Owens, Martin and Nylander presented findings from their study of civic learning outcomes among students participating in a yearlong co-curricular service project housed at the McLean Institute.

"The expectation is that civic action on the part of the students will support the co-creation of knowledge and facilitate control on the community's end," Martin said. "The community, in turn, will support community development and action projects they help create through the student engagement program."

The mission of the McLean Institute is to advance transformative service throughout the university and fight poverty through education in Mississippi. Guided by this mission, the McLean Institute works to institutionalize community engagement practices in a way that affects quality of life in partner communities.

The Student Engagement Fellows program emerged out of a desire to nurture partnerships among student groups and community-based organizations. Fellows participated in a competitive application process, received a \$2,000 scholarship for the academic year and a \$500 project budget, and were expected to work collaboratively in order to involve student organizations in community programming and to tailor their projects to community needs. The institute provided assigned readings, led discussions and facilitated project planning.

The institute and a community partner located in the Mississippi Delta first sought collaboration in January 2015. The community is a town of



M Partner community day in Charleston.

“Long-term engagement from both community partners and university students with high levels of passion for what they are doing is highly effective for transforming communities struggling to provide opportunities for their most vulnerable members.”

— LAURA MARTIN



around 1,200 people, 98 percent of whom identify as African American, with 500 housing units occupying nearly four-tenths of a square mile. Median household income is about \$18,000; half of the population lives below the poverty level, and over 60 percent of children live below the poverty level.

“In this community, exposure to college students can present possibilities for future educational pursuits that youth may not otherwise observe in their community,” Owens said.

In approaching the community, student engagement fellows acknowledged members as the authorities on how to identify and respond to community challenges. Programming for each year was developed collaboratively with community members and sought to address a lack of enrichment opportunities for youth in this rural Delta community.

Based on those meetings, student engagement fellows organized a series of events such as a youth nutrition workshop, a composting and recycling workshop, garden and greenhouse workdays, a community health fair, ACT preparation sessions, a financial literacy and resume building workshop, and a young women’s empowerment workshop.

Fellows identified a common theme for their workshops, which was “Planting Seeds through Service.”

The study conducted by Martin, Nylander and Owens was grounded in a conceptual understanding of community engagement and its community-university partnerships serving on the forefront of social change through co-curricular service learning in higher education.

“Long-term engagement from both community partners and university students with high levels of passion for what they are doing is highly effective for transforming communities struggling to provide opportunities for their most vulnerable members,” Martin said.

“We argue that the student engagement fellows’ civic learning and resulting transformation in perspective occurred during their yearlong community practice, developing the critical lens necessary to see the structural issues of social justice



and challenging their own system of assumptions about reality.”

Using an ethnographic sensibility to illuminate the process by which the student engagement fellows made meaning out of their experiences, the study examined student civic learning – probing the development of critical thinking around identity, systemic injustice and one’s own set of assumptions about reality – to draw insights into how that learning can strengthen partnerships with community-based organizations.

Student engagement fellows completed three written reflections, participated in a key informant interview and took part in a focus group at the end of the academic year. Participant observation and field notes, as well as surveys of UM students and community participants, provided additional data. A community partner interview provided an external perspective on the program.

“Participants in the Student Engagement Fellows program demonstrated civic learning and reflection around a motivation to learn and lead, the opportunity to develop sustainable models of community involvement, examination of self in connection with others, and the sense that community-based learning can be a site of personal and systemic transformation,” Nylander said.

“Moving beyond individual civic growth and development, the impact of co-curricular service-learning programs such as Student Engagement Fellows can reverberate throughout a campus and partner communities by engaging students, faculty and community members to collaboratively create solutions to community problems,” Martin said. ■





Student volunteers from the University of Mississippi spend a day in October working in New Albany during an M Partner event.

## University of Mississippi celebrates M Partner pilot year and sets ambitious goals

Community, university partners build momentum to advance projects across state

With over a dozen ongoing community-engaged courses and co-curricular projects, University of Mississippi faculty, staff, students and community partners are leading a groundbreaking spring semester. The pilot phase of M Partner will address priority projects centered around community health and well-being, economic development, educational

initiatives, and beautification; all of these projects have the potential to create partnerships that lead to transformational collaborations between community members and UM faculty, staff and students.

“M Partner gives our students and faculty ways to engage in meaningful relationships and partnerships with the communities and citizens of Mississippi,” said Noel

E. Wilkin, provost and executive vice chancellor for academic affairs. “These collaborations and experiences make the work we do relevant to the state and have a transformative effect on our faculty and students, while striving to improve the quality of life for those in the communities.”

M Partner was designed after a national model, the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in





Communities Network, or EPIC-N. This initiative offers a framework through which community and university representatives can cultivate mutually beneficial partnerships that will lead to the co-creation of knowledge and ideas to enhance community well-being. The university and the partner communities have committed to a pilot phase of 18 to 24 months in the partner communities of Charleston, Lexington and New Albany.

After the launch in March 2018, M Partner convened stakeholder meetings with community leaders in Charleston, Lexington and New Albany to identify each community's strengths, opportunities and aspirations.



"In the needs assessment phase of M Partner, we spoke with many individuals who are working tirelessly to create pathways to opportunity and economic mobility," said Albert Nylander, professor of sociology and director of the university's McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement.

"Across all partner communities, we heard a deep desire for economic growth and an aspiration for the younger generation to be part of a movement toward innovation and economic revitalization."

These community meetings produced a list of 27 priority projects, and structured how the university as a whole can advance community and economic development in these three rural Mississippi communities.

During the spring 2019 semester, faculty and staff have taken on 15 of the community-identified projects. These priority projects will address community interests such as social media campaigns, health fairs, the opioid epidemic, grant writing,

research around the third-grade reading gate, expanding local farmers markets, and analysis of parks and recreation infrastructure.

"In the first year of M Partner implementation, we sought to generate momentum by aligning with other initiatives housed at the McLean Institute," said Laura Martin, M Partner director and associate director of the McLean Institute. "Through the efforts of summer associates with the North Mississippi VISTA Project and students in the Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development initiative, M Partner offered summer learning and enrichment opportunities for nearly 400 youth in Charleston, Lexington and New Albany."

The M Partner pilot phase will last until June 2020. For the duration of the pilot phase, M Partner will continue to establish and deepen collaborations with community partners to advance the shared goal of co-creating knowledge and resources to promote community well-being. ■

## M Partner Spotlight

### Jarvis Benson

**Hometown:** Grenada, Mississippi

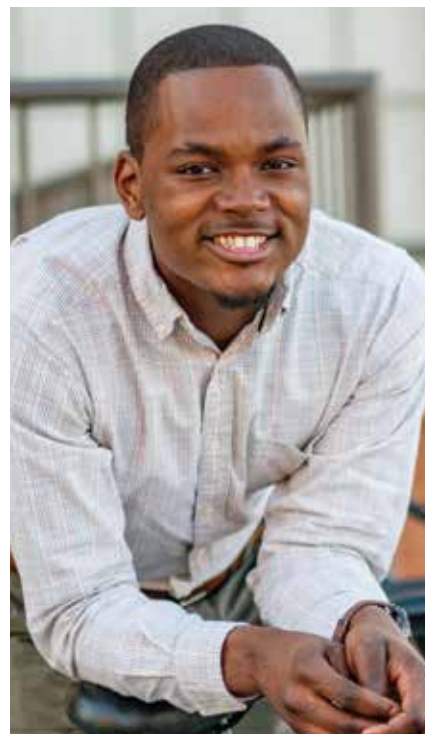
**Degree Program:** International Studies and Spanish

**What have you enjoyed most about volunteering with M Partner initiatives?**

I really enjoy the impact that we as volunteers are able to make. Instead of going in and leaving within a day, we are able to really get to know the community and serve according to their needs. I loved the work I was able to do because I was able to connect to a community very similar to my own. I was able to meet and interact with community members, students and parents. I feel that I quickly formed relationships with students in the program and looked forward to listening and learning about their lives every day.

**What have you learned serving in M Partner communities?**

I have learned that the wisdom that these communities can offer is so useful. Also, I have learned that every community is different and special in its own way. Additionally, I learned from this community about the importance of connection. The individuals I met and worked with during my time as a volunteer taught me that by building connections with people in the community, I will be able to learn about the community on a deeper level.



### Michaela Cooper

**Hometown:** Mantachie, Mississippi

**Degree Program:** Dietetics and Nutrition, Pre-Physical Therapy at the University of Mississippi; recently accepted to Harding University Physical Therapy Program

**What do you enjoy most about your work with M Partner and the North Mississippi VISTA Project?**

I am constantly surrounded by the greatest minds and supports that I could ever ask for. In my year after graduating and starting my next chapter into PT school, I wanted the chance to serve the state that had educated and supported me and needed my help in supporting others who did not have the same opportunities I had. I was connected with the NMVP and later M Partner, and it is through my work that every day I get to see the catalyzing effect of what a few people – with a heart for community engagement and the knowledge of sustainable practices – are able to accomplish in this beautiful state. It is easy for someone to have a bird's-eye view and see the pitfall statistics our state is notoriously falling in, but I have the privilege to be a part of an organization that is shifting the dialogue on these systemic problems. We are not standing idly by; we are rolling along.

**What have you learned as a VISTA member serving M Partner communities?**

No book could ever have prepared me for what I have learned as a VISTA. Life before VISTA, I saw communities like the three I serve and just wanted to pour my whole heart into. I was the hero. However, I have learned that I am no expert when it comes to these communities. I am an outsider learning about not only the sinkhole of poverty surrounding their town but also the assets that truly keep them running. I have learned to assess a community through the lens of “asset-based community development” and what it means to do so sustainably. It is so easy to step in and one person provide anti-poverty related services, but is your work really elevating the community if after you leave no one is able to continue? Community engagement work is often transactional – days of service, curriculum, marketing materials – but it is important to develop these transactions in such a way that they create a transformational community in the years after your service. ■



## North Mississippi VISTA Project: **Fighting poverty through education**

**T**he North Mississippi VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America) Project sponsors 20 organizations and has the capacity to recruit 25 full-year VISTA members to serve throughout north Mississippi and the Delta.

The McLean Institute is proud to have an eight-year relationship with the Corporation for National and Community Service and to lead the next chapter of the North Mississippi VISTA Project.

“The McLean Institute’s mission of advancing transformative service and fighting poverty through education in Mississippi is bold,” said director Albert Nylander. “This initiative will continue establishing and fostering mutually beneficial partnerships and programs that advance education in underserved communities across the state.”

The mission of the North Mississippi VISTA Project is to build sustainable systems that connect the University of Mississippi and its resources to low-income communities throughout a 23-county area. Whenever possible, NMVP develops projects in communities with underperforming schools and/or schools eligible for Title I School Improvement Grants.

VISTA members build capacity by developing new, meaningful and sustainable connections between the university, with its abundant resources, and the schools, education agencies and community organizations already working to move the people of the north Mississippi region toward academic success and higher education.

In the next year and beyond, NMVP will continue to develop host sites around north Mississippi, cultivate projects and place VISTAs with community partners that fight poverty through education. In the 2018-19 program year, the VISTA project contributed more than \$680,000 to the region.

NMVP service members are serving with several organizations based on campus and in Oxford. This includes the UM School of Education, M Partner, Doors of Hope Transition Ministries, Luckyday Academic Success Program, the Center for Mathematics and Science Education, Lafayette County Literacy Council and Yoknapatawpha Arts Council.

Partners outside Lafayette County include the Sunflower County Freedom Project in Sunflower, DeSoto County Youth Court in Hernando, Quitman County School District in Marks, Rosedale Freedom Project in Rosedale, the Union County Heritage Museum in New Albany and the Rust College Community Development Corp. in Holly Springs.



Albert Nylander (left) and members of the North Mississippi VISTA Project at the Fannie Lou Hamer statue in Ruleville.

Many VISTAs have been recent graduates of UM programs such as the Croft Institute for International Studies and Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College. Bryce Warden, who graduated from UM in 2016 and served as a VISTA with the UM School of Education, is now studying higher education policy at the Peabody College at Vanderbilt University.

“The VISTA experience offered extensive opportunities in designing and implementing community action service programs for college access in low-income communities,” Warden said.

Warden created a partnership with the Quitman County Middle School to bring over 50 students to the University of Mississippi on Saturdays throughout the spring semester for tutoring and enrichment activities.

“I saw the benefit of those interactions, where students – many of them potential first-generation – could find out what college life was really like, and I was eager to create such an environment for the kids from Marks,” Warden said. “Now, these middle school students get to receive tutoring on a college campus, which they may have never seen.”

Many other VISTAs have followed a similar path, going into graduate programs at Brandeis, Harvard, New York, Princeton and Stanford universities.

“Community partnerships inspire the work of the McLean Institute,” said Laura Martin, associate director. “We are thrilled to support VISTA members as they build capacity among our campus and community partners to impact quality of life in Mississippi.”

Nylander, too, said he was inspired by the success of the UM VISTA Project.

“We look forward to NMVP’s future growth and continued success.” ■



## LOU Saves sparks ambition to go to college

The University of Mississippi has the potential to transform the inequitable structures in Mississippi that contribute to generational poverty. **LOU Saves** is an initiative that seeks to promote family economic stability by increasing financial literacy and encouraging saving for higher education. LOU Saves opens a bank account for each participating child and offers incentives to encourage savings.

In Lafayette County, 45 percent of families experience liquid asset poverty, meaning they lack the savings to survive at the poverty level for three months. In an effort to disrupt the cycle of generational poverty, LOU Saves provides financial literacy workshops for child savers and their caregivers and offers individualized financial coaching sessions. These supports provide the scaffolding for financially vulnerable families to build assets.

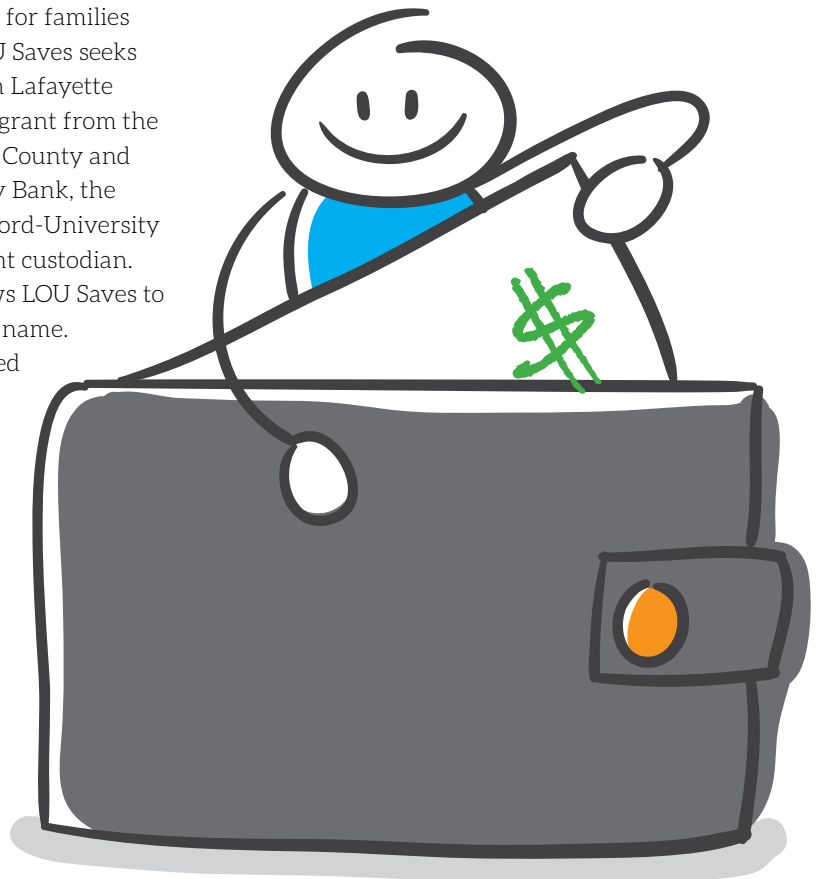
The Corporation for Enterprise Development has found that low-income students with savings of at least \$500 are four times more likely to graduate from college. By providing incentives for families to save toward higher education, LOU Saves seeks to facilitate educational attainment in Lafayette County. LOU Saves is supported by a grant from the United Way of Oxford and Lafayette County and works closely with Oxford University Bank, the financial institution partner, and Oxford-University United Methodist Church, the account custodian. The involvement of a custodian allows LOU Saves to open each account in the child's own name.

Each child savings account is opened with a seed deposit of \$50, and the program engages in fundraising to match up to \$100 of deposits made on behalf of each child per year. Currently, 62 child savers have opened accounts through LOU Saves; they are drawn from summer learning programs such as Horizons at the University of Mississippi and the Abbeville School Summer Enrichment Camp. As of December 2018, the 62 child

savers have deposited over \$14,000, an average of \$228.64 per child.

In addition to offering financial literacy workshops each fall, LOU Saves hosts an annual Bank Day for all participants, as well as a Financial Fun Day for Families that combines physical fitness activities with financial literacy challenges. UM students play an integral role in facilitating many of these workshops and events.

In reflecting on LOU Saves, one service-learning student said that “the financial education project was the first opportunity I had to interact with members of the community who are not connected to the university. The experience gave me a new perspective on the area. Now that I have been exposed to problems that are facing this community, I will pursue other opportunities to better the community of which I am now a part.” ■



## Horizons helps eliminate summer learning loss

Summer 2018 marks the sixth year of **Horizons at the University of Mississippi**, a six-week, full-day summer program that combats learning loss, which occurs over the months when children are out of a stimulating learning environment. The program provides academic enrichment and recreational opportunities for underserved students in the Lafayette-Oxford-University community.

Horizons students can join the program beginning in the summer after their kindergarten year. Participants then have the opportunity to return for nine consecutive summers. As the Horizons program grows and provides underserved LOU youth with opportunities for early and continued intervention, the results will produce transformative and cumulative gains in skills and abilities that narrow the achievement gap.

“The University of Mississippi’s Horizons program is transforming lives for both children in the community and university students. It is a key initiative in its work to fight poverty through education,” said Albert Nylander, director of the McLean Institute.

The average day for a Horizons student begins with a nutritious breakfast, followed by a morning of academics and swimming. After lunch, students participate in enrichment and recreational activities. One day of every week is reserved for a field trip that fosters additional learning opportunities and expands the students’ experiences. In the past, Horizons students have taken photography lessons, visited the UM Museum and enjoyed hands-on learning opportunities throughout the LOU community.

The educational model features project-based learning that combines academics with arts, sports and cultural enrichment. This combination has been confirmed by research as the most effective approach to alleviating the achievement gap.

Horizons focuses on providing long-term, deep engagement with underserved public school students; this hands-on approach is used to fuel a lifelong passion for learning. The program gives Horizons students the tools and support needed to become successful and confident college-bound students.



Horizons volunteer Daisy Martinez with student Ma'laija Towns.

Underserved populations of students who participate in Horizons have access to high-quality academics, arts, sports and confidence-building challenges. These students gain an average of two to three months of reading and math skills during their tenure with the program.

Horizons is grateful for the support of many campus and community organizations and local businesses, including the United Way of Oxford & Lafayette County, Oxford School District, Lafayette County School District, Lafayette County Literacy Council, Aramark, UM Museum, UM Counseling Center, UM School of Education and the Willie Price Lab School, UM Campus Recreation and the Turner Center, UM Office of Admissions, the UM Field Station, Lafayette County & Oxford Public Library, Delta Music Institute’s Mobile Music Lab, Rowan Oak, Yokna Bottoms Farm, UM Department of Nutrition and Hospitality Management, LOU Home, LOU Excel by 5, Leap Frog, The Ink Spot, UM Department of Outreach and Continuing Education, UM Department of Athletics and Rebel Ready, UM Department of Student Housing, the Yoknapatawpha Arts Council, Leadership Lafayette, Lafayette Oxford Foundation for Tomorrow and the LOU Reads Coalition. ■

## McLean Institute and RebelWell promote nutrition, exercise in local schools

The University of Mississippi's **RebelWell** initiative aims to support and encourage healthy behavior among students, faculty and staff. The program has provided innovative health and wellness education and programming that positively affects health outcomes and quality of life.

Some highlights include fitness classes and fitness pop-ups on campus and in the Oxford community, health expos and cooking demonstrations. RebelWell positions the university as a beacon of opportunity that provides a range of accessible campus and community-based programs positively influencing lifelong healthy habits in the populations it serves.

"The momentum on campus has also started to impact the community as our local schools and

community members are engaging in RebelWell and adopting healthier habits," said Brandi Hephner LaBanc, UM vice chancellor for student affairs.

Since its 2014 launch, RebelWell has emerged as a collaboration of partnerships across campus and with the Oxford community, providing initiatives that improve nutrition, exercise and individual wellness.

In fall 2016, the McLean Institute was invited to play a key role in the expansion of RebelWell's community work. The institute took a lead role in coordinating the nutrition and physical activity programming in Oxford and Lafayette County K-12 schools, including classroom brain breaks, Walking Wednesdays, Fresh Fruit Fridays, health fairs and an Educators' Fitness Challenge.



Mariana Jurss, UM registered dietitian, teaches nutrition lessons to Horizons students.



Collectively, these programs infuse nutrition and physical activity programming into the school day for students and educators alike. To encourage the practice of taking brain breaks throughout the day, the McLean Institute distributed copies of “Creating a Healthy Classroom and School,” a resource manual that provides in-class lesson plans to engage and calm active young minds during the school day.

Walking Wednesdays offer a dedicated time before the school day begins for elementary and middle school students to engage in physical activity alongside parents and UM student volunteers. Youth participants have the opportunity to win the Golden Shoe award for walking over 2 miles in 30 minutes, and to date over 400 students have participated at each school.

On Fresh Fruit Fridays, RebelWell provides fresh fruit (and accompanying nutritional fact sheets) as a morning snack or as a featured item in the lunchroom. The Fresh Fruit Fridays program serves over 2,800 students in four schools. This initiative serves to expose youth to new foods and increase health literacy.

The middle school health fairs provide free nutrition lessons as well as sessions on cardiovascular health, strength training and flexibility. The educators’ fitness challenge invites educators to obtain valuable wellness information and access fitness classes on-site. By reducing barriers to the practice of good nutrition and wellness, RebelWell makes it easier for educators to model healthy practices for the children they teach each day.

A major contribution of the McLean Institute is to operationalize community engagement principles through initiatives such as RebelWell. Two RebelWell graduate assistants and four student engagement fellows were instrumental in developing the curricula and volunteer management protocol to sustain these school-based health and wellness programs. The McLean Institute will continue to develop strong partnerships with the public school districts to enhance these programs and ensure that they are tailored to the needs of each district.

“We are grateful for the partnerships we have cultivated with Oxford and Lafayette County school districts through the Horizons program, and look forward to deepening those relationships through RebelWell,” said Albert Nylander, director of the McLean Institute. “We are committed to expanding access to nutrition and physical activity initiatives that will enhance quality of life in Oxford and Lafayette County.” ■

*CEED continued from page 7*

colleges and universities in Mississippi. But the weekend wasn’t all work. CEED students were able to visit Coffee Prose and ReFill Café in Jackson while enjoying Sal and Mookie’s pizza and milkshakes the night before the forum.

Elena Bauer joined the CEED program while she was completing her senior thesis, under the direction of Nylander, in the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College in 2017 with a business management degree and a minor in mathematics. Now a second-year student in the UM School of Law, Bauer has embraced a path of higher learning that has broadened her experience and opened countless doors for the future.

While in the CEED program, she used virtual reality technology to help high school students in Clarksdale have immersive virtual experiences in far-off locations, including the coast of Thailand; East St. Louis, Illinois; and Bauer’s hometown of Freiburg, Germany. A motivation behind the virtual reality experience was to give students from underserved communities an unprecedented opportunity to explore places outside their living situations. The program also focused on introducing students to entrepreneurial concepts.

The Southern Entrepreneurship Program, otherwise known as SEP, has pursued similar goals and partnered with the McLean Institute’s Entrepreneurial Leadership Program to work with Mississippi high school students in developing an entrepreneurial skill set. SEP has served more than 6,000 high school students through its annual series of regional conferences and competitions. The January 2019 STRIVE! Conference was hosted by the McLean Institute, and it challenged students to perform market research, interact with local business resource providers and practice proper soft skills such as communication, networking and dining etiquette.

Similarly, the McLean Institute held its third annual McLean Entrepreneurial Leadership Program, or MELP, in July 2018. Innovation fellows and scholars from the CEED initiative presented the weeklong experience for 15 high school students entering their sophomore and junior years. The program, organized by CEED innovation fellow Elena Bauer, was structured to cultivate innovative approaches to solving problems that students identified in their communities.

The strength of the 2018 CEED program is the members’ diversity and academic training. This dynamic group of students has learned to approach generational poverty in Mississippi from a variety of disciplinary approaches and strategies. The programs and research initiatives they have created will long outlive their time with the McLean Institute and will have an impact on communities in Mississippi for years to come. ■





Chris Beard



## CEED alumnus strives to increase access to quality health care in rural Mississippi

Chris Beard arrived at the University of Mississippi in fall 2014 to study biochemistry. He had just graduated from Northeast Mississippi Community College and was already developing a plan to pursue his dream of practicing medicine someday. When he joined the McLean Institute's Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development initiative, or CEED, in 2014, Beard brought with him a strong passion for improving health outcomes in rural Mississippi. This commitment was based, in part, on his experiences volunteering at the Agape free health clinic in New Albany.

Beard is now in his fourth year of medical school, and he intends to apply for internal medicine residencies in the following year. He will also be marrying his fiancée next year, and upon finishing his

training he hopes to return to the state of Mississippi to practice medicine. This enduring dedication to improving Mississippi health outcomes has roots in Beard's involvement with the CEED initiative.

While serving as a CEED innovation scholar, Beard furthered his goal of improving health care access to rural communities by designing the Mississippi Rural Health Initiative pilot program. In addition to improving health care access and quality, the initiative sought to engage local health care workers, entrepreneurs and community leaders of all ages to better understand the role telehealth systems can serve in their communities.

Telehealth allows doctors and patients to connect via videoconference, which ensures that distance is not a barrier to receiving quality health care.



# James C. Kennedy Wellness Center

Beard learned that this technology was being used by Tallahatchie General Hospital in Charleston and believed its model could be expanded to other hospitals and health care facilities in the state. The Mississippi Rural Health Initiative also addressed a need for telehealth in schools. Beard believed that the presence of telehealth in a classroom could facilitate interactions among students, doctors and nurses that could inspire students to pursue careers in the health care field.

In addition to increasing the number of patients served by telemedicine, Beard also identified a need to improve the physical premises of rural health facilities. Again, Tallahatchie General Hospital served as an excellent model for Beard's initiative as it had been recently renovated.

Beard was able to spend his 2015 summer internship with the CEED initiative immersed in the health care field. He participated in the Physician

Shadowing Program at North Mississippi Medical Center in Tupelo and attended the Rural Health Conference at UMMC. Both experiences improved his model initiative.

"Students such as Beard take full advantage of the opportunities for discovery, innovation and networking that are provided by CEED and immeasurably enhance the work of the McLean Institute," said JR Love, CEED project manager.

However, the state of Mississippi is the ultimate beneficiary when a committed student such as Beard obtains firsthand knowledge of community and economic development through CEED. Thanks to his ability to merge an understanding of entrepreneurship with innovations in the health care field, Beard stands ready to have a positive influence on health outcomes in his home state for the duration of his career. ■

## Community Partner Spotlight: Catherine Moring

For four consecutive years, University of Mississippi students served in Charleston, Mississippi, thanks to Catherine Moring (PhD '13), executive director of the James C. Kennedy Wellness Center and a McLean Institute board member. Kate Sackett and Audrey Dayan, both Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development, or CEED, innovation scholars, were summer interns in 2015, 2016,

2017 and 2018, completing their internships thanks to a wonderful community partner. These internships provide Tallahatchie General Hospital and the James C. Kennedy Wellness Center the ability to conduct research to better facilitate and administer programs.

### Why did you select Charleston as the location for your project?

I did not select Charleston, Charleston chose me. When the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation county health rankings were first released, Tallahatchie County was ranked 81st of 82 counties in Mississippi. It was ranked just above the least healthy county, in what was at the time the least healthy state in the nation. This was very alarming and raised the concern of numerous Charleston



Charleston students learn what it means to become an entrepreneur.

residents. Through a local nonprofit organization, the Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort (CARE), and by way of Dr. Ed Meek, I was asked to help the community address their needs and health concerns. I don't think that this area necessarily serves the cause better than any other town in Mississippi, but Charleston and its residents were ready and willing to make a change and be an integral part of that change, which is crucial for sustainability and success.

### How did this topic become your dissertation?

My work in Charleston became my dissertation because after going there for the first time and given my public health background, I knew that before we did anything we needed to do a community health needs assessment. This process can serve to build relationships and gain knowledge about



Catherine Moring

“Health is our greatest form of wealth. Without our health we have nothing; good health is empowering. It is important to us as individuals; it is important to our friends and families, our environment and our community.”

— CATHERINE MORING



the community, as well as identify strengths, weaknesses, assets, needs and health concerns, and recognize existing organizations that could partner to improve health in the community. It was also important to conduct the needs assessment because many funding agencies now require needs assessments to be done before communities are eligible for funding. I needed a dissertation topic, and they needed a needs assessment so it was a win-win situation. I was also very eager to help this community because I saw potential for change and people who were engaged and ready to be a part of that change.

### **What has been your biggest challenge?**

The biggest challenge initially was personnel and finding the right people to be on the bus and fulfill the necessary roles and responsibilities. Not only did I need to get the right people on the bus, but I needed to get them in the right seats. Initially that was challenging; however, I can honestly say that after four years, I now have the greatest team I could've ever imagined. I'm not sure I would use the word surprise, but what I've been most encouraged by is the community and by their participation in our programs and engagement with the resources we offer. You wonder sometimes – if we build it, will they come? We built it, and they came. It has been an exciting year for us, and we are all extremely humbled, grateful and blessed beyond measure to be able to be a part of something so incredible and something potentially life-changing for so many people in this community.

### **How has the community responded to this?**

The community has responded well, to say the least. We have over 600 members and are continually gaining new membership. In just the first year, our programs have positively impacted the lives of over 1,000 people in this community. It hasn't been difficult to get people to open up and talk about health. Usually if you listen, people are willing to talk. The problem is that too often we don't stop to listen. That has been another huge difference in our work here; before we did anything, we asked the people what they needed, what they wanted for their community. When you give people a voice, they



Former CEED innovation scholars Mackenzie Poole (left), Audrey Dayan, Leah Gibson and Madison Gable.

are more likely to participate and be a part of that movement and change.

### **What do you think the long-term effects of this project are going to be?**

My vision for this, generally speaking, is to ultimately empower and educate others on how to live most optimally and how to lead a healthy lifestyle, which, in turn, will positively impact quality of life. Health is our greatest form of wealth. Without our health we have nothing; good health is empowering. It is important to us as individuals; it is important to our friends and families, our environment and our community. We all benefit when we as individuals and those who surround us are healthy and living in optimal states of wellness, so I have dedicated my life to share the good news in the sense that good health and optimal wellness are possible and available to everyone.

Through this facility and our programming, we hope to provide the tools and resources necessary for everyone to become involved and begin their journey toward optimal wellness. It is my hope that everyone who lives here, works here, is a patient or patient's family member, will benefit from our programming and resources and can find something here for them that will improve their health, and, in turn, greatly enhance their lives. The choices that we make are shaped by the choices that we have, and through our efforts we are bringing new choices to Tallahatchie County. A new chapter has begun here, and it is my hope that this will continue to be something great, something empowering and something that will change lives for generations to come. ■



## Environmental Education

## VISTA Denae Bradley serves with UM's Office of Sustainability

The University of Mississippi's Office of Sustainability supports the university's efforts to create and maintain an eco-friendly and sustainable campus. The role of Denae Bradley as a 2016-17 AmeriCorps VISTA was to foster these campus-based initiatives with the community. Specifically, Bradley worked to connect low-income families who are interested in making life-changing choices that incorporate fresh, local food consumption, community and school gardening, and environmental education.

Bradley partnered with student organizations, Office of Sustainability interns and community organizations to provide curricula and projects that deepen and expand environmental, health and sustainability-related opportunities for Lafayette-Oxford-University community members and beyond. Community and campus partners included the LOU Boys and Girls Club Garden Club, the Batesville Boys and Girls Club Garden Club, Oxford Community Market and UM's Garden Club.

With the help of a VISTA, the Office of Sustainability has a better opportunity to create and expand community and campus projects that respond to issues of food insecurity, advocate for environmental education, and promote initiatives such as composting and mobile farmers markets.

"When introduced to new ways of thinking about the environment, these kids' thirst for knowledge and increased energy gives me sincere hope in my own work for the Office of Sustainability and as a VISTA," Bradley said.

Studies show that connecting a human's imagination to the environment at a young age creates a shared partnership between the individual and his or her surroundings. Children have the



Denae Bradley

chance to learn that they are part of the earth and that it is our shared responsibility to be stewards in the cycle of sustainability.

"I see hope in the children's eyes every time we do a lesson with them," Bradley said. "Allowing them to be outside of a traditional classroom and to explore, share and care is our goal through these programs."

Bradley plans to attend Howard University's sociology Ph.D. program this upcoming fall semester, where she will continue her work on student activism and black student agency as well as community organizing and youth restorative justice initiatives. Although unsure of her goals following the program, Bradley said she hopes her goals will align with public sociology where she will merge the scholarly work of sociologists with minority communities and nonprofit organizations as they try to increase their overall sustainable goals toward a more just society. ■



UM students work alongside local youth to cultivate community gardens.

## VISTA Alumni Spotlight



### Lindsay Stewart

**Hometown:** Atlanta, Georgia

**Years of Service:** 2017-18 & 2018-19

**Sites:** Sunflower County Freedom Project in Sunflower, Mississippi; Horizons Atlanta

#### What is something that you learned as a VISTA?

During my VISTA term, I learned the value of indirect community service and how to build long-term sustainability for an organization that works toward alleviating the cycle of poverty through education. Saying I added to my toolbox during my term of service would be an understatement.

#### What was the most rewarding part of your year of service?

The most rewarding part of my VISTA term was actually living in the community I served and working daily to uplift an organization that is enabling young Mississippi scholars to reach their full potential. I experienced moving to a part of Mississippi where I knew no one, to 12 months later knowing my students' parents, local business owners and members of the Sunflower community that have lived there for generations. Working at my site felt rewarding every day because I got to serve ambitious future leaders and play a role in their lives.

## VISTA Leader Spotlight

### Virginia Dorris

**Hometown:** Crystal Springs, Mississippi

**Year of Service:** 2017-18 & 2018-19

**Sites:** North Mississippi VISTA Project at the McLean Institute, Horizons at the McLean Institute

#### What is something that you learned as a VISTA?

Serving as an AmeriCorps VISTA has shaped my perspective of my community, Mississippi, the world and, most importantly, how I engage with others. In this role, I have learned the importance of building trust when working with communities. In order to strengthen our efforts and create meaningful change, we must first work to build trust within the communities we serve, and our actions must reflect this. Our impact is so much greater when we come together collectively to address and create actionable solutions to salient issues.

#### What was the most rewarding part of your year of service?

For me, the most meaningful and rewarding aspect of my service year has been the connections I've made in Oxford and throughout north Mississippi with fellow VISTAs, UM faculty and staff, and community members. It has been a privilege to be part of a network of individuals and organizations dedicated to alleviating poverty and improving quality of life for Mississippians.



#### What is next for you?

As far as next steps for me, I will be pursuing a master's of education in community development and action at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College. I hope this opportunity will allow me to build off my previous experiences as an AmeriCorps VISTA as I work to create new pathways for social change.

## College Aspiration Initiative

# Program cultivates college-bound mentality

*I just need someone who will actually help me.*

These words were scribbled onto a survey conducted at North Panola High School in fall 2016. The high school is located in Sardis, a town of about 1,000 people with a median income of a little over \$20,000 per year. In the most recent census, 20 percent of the population lived below the poverty line. In a previous survey conducted among students at NPHS during their junior year, 50 percent of the class indicated that an obstacle in applying to schools of higher learning was simply a lack of information.

"I've become aware of how often 'education' and 'empowerment' become synonymous in community engagement work," Warden said. "Thus, the College Aspiration Initiative fights poverty through the empowerment that comes

from receiving the necessary knowledge to continue forward after high school graduation."

Beginning in October 2016, UM students volunteered to mentor high school seniors during the college application process. The mentoring relationship included meeting to discuss college life, completing applications to community colleges and universities, completing the FAFSA and applying for scholarships. In the 2017 spring semester, CAI added an additional "junior component" in which high school juniors prepared for the college application process by interacting with and learning from current college students.

This initiative sits at the nexus of community engagement and program models to narrow the achievement gap. From the higher education perspective, CAI

is a service-learning initiative for UM students. The program exposes prospective educators and leaders to the environments and needs of schools in low-income areas of north Mississippi. The college mentors gain firsthand experience in the public schools. The high school students can interact with actual college students, all of whom have gone through the matriculation process.

The program combats poverty through alleviating the "lack of information" these underprivileged students so often experience in applying for admission to institutions of higher learning. Mentors in CAI received extensive materials and training covering the application process, scholarship search websites, and financial aid available at the federal and state levels.

The mentorship relationship that develops in this educational setting fosters positive growth and interactions for both the college and high school students. The reality of Panola County is that most of these high school seniors, if they attend college, will be first-generation graduates. Herein lies CAI's greatest power: College mentors represent the reality of a college education in an environment where high school students have the opportunity to blaze a new path in higher education and serve as role models for the generations that follow in their footsteps. ■



VISTA Bryce Warden (center, standing) with UM volunteers and students at North Panola High School.





VISTA Marcus Ross (fourth from right) on a field trip with mentors and mentees.

## Meaningful Mentorship

VISTA Marcus Ross builds mentorship with DeSoto County Youth Court

**M**arcus Ross served as a VISTA with the DeSoto County Youth Court Mentoring Program from 2014 to 2018. The program, which was started by Youth Court Judge Celeste Wilson, aims to serve abused, neglected and court-involved minors who have come into the jurisdiction of the DeSoto County Youth Court. Many of these children are from impoverished, single-head-of-household homes. Others come from homes where drug use, lack of education and instability are present.

The Youth Court receives more than 400 referrals each month, and between 2,400 and 3,100 hearings are held each year. Around 95 children are under Department of Human Services custody or in foster care.

Since its inception in 2013, the program has increased awareness in the community by partnering with local middle and high school counselors. It has garnered community participation from more than 150 youth, recruited over 85 volunteers, engaged more than 50 new mentors and made over 50 mentor-mentee matches.

Because educational and recreational activities are included in the one-on-one and group sessions, mentors have been successful in building positive relationships with mentees. These relationships have resulted in six mentees enrolling in college and a wealth of other healthy decisions by others.

The goal of the mentoring program is that each child will exhibit improved discipline, behavior and social skills while improving academically. An ultimate goal is for the students to obtain a high school diploma or GED, thereby providing them the opportunity to enroll in college or begin employment.

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“ Serving as an AmeriCorps VISTA with the mentoring program has been particularly special to me because I once was a young man in a mentoring program similar to this one.”

— MARCUS ROSS

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Both outcomes greatly assist families in changing their economic situations while strengthening the community as a whole.

According to Ross, serving as an AmeriCorps VISTA with this program has been one of the most fulfilling endeavors of his life.

“I am able to work with young people in an attempt to affect their lives and the lives of their families, which positively gives me great joy and pride,” Ross said. “Serving as an AmeriCorps VISTA with the mentoring program has been particularly special to me because I once was a young man in a mentoring program similar to this one. The effect that it had on my life is a major contributing factor to the man I have become today.”

“It is my hope that I, too, can have a lasting positive impact on the lives of youth in my community,” he said. “I will never forget the time spent as an AmeriCorps VISTA member, serving as the program’s coordinator, and the community partnerships that have brought a wealth of experience and skills to help me continue my goal of strengthening my community.” ■



VISTA Amanda Pham leads a robotics competition.



Amanda Pham

## Amanda Pham helps Mississippi schoolchildren learn about robotics

In the first few months of her year of service in 2016, Amanda Pham, a former Center for Mathematics and Science Education VISTA,

helped to set up and kick off the Mississippi FIRST Tech Challenge.

The FIRST Tech Challenge is a global, competitive robotics program for teams of middle and high school students. It challenges students to design, build and program robots to compete in a sport-style challenge. This competition encourages students to engage in engineering and build life skills such as time management, teamwork, documentation and presentation. Pham works with coaches and teams from around the state to make sure they have the resources they need to compete and sustain this program.

After the kickoff events, CMSE hosted more than a dozen workshops for teams to attend, covering topics such as robot design, judging and programming. Many of the workshops were taught by FIRST Tech Challenge alumni or seasoned teams, which strengthened the network of mentors for new teams in their communities. In addition to the middle and high school teams in attendance, some elementary school-aged FIRST LEGO League teams participated in the event. Almost 500 people from around the state gathered at the event, which took place in Rae Auditorium and Smith Hall





at Copiah-Lincoln Community College.

Subsequently, Pham worked to obtain donated goods and services. In October 2016, the CMSE staff found volunteer coaches for five new FIRST Tech Challenge teams and had existing teams volunteer at the Imagine the Possibilities Expo in Tupelo and Nissan Family Day in Canton.

Volunteers contributed an estimated 147 hours during October 2016, with donated services estimated at \$6,802.

The Mississippi FIRST Tech Challenge has 49 teams in the state. Each team meets an average of five hours a week and has two coaches. That totals an average of 490 hours per week of donated time, which equals \$11,544 per week or \$46,177 per month contributed by the volunteer coaches.

A goal of Pham's year of service with the North Mississippi VISTA Project was to help CMSE engage kindergarten through high school students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM. In addition to helping with the FIRST Tech Challenge, Pham also helped develop the MATCH (Mississippi Achievement through Chess) program and the Starlab Portable Planetarium.

Now the center's current VISTA, Melea Long, is carrying on the goals set by Pham to help the center's STEM programs engage with K-12 students.

"The CMSE program aligns with the North Mississippi VISTA project goal to help individuals and communities grow out of poverty through education," Long said. "I was excited to be working out of the CMSE because it gave me the chance to share my love of STEM with young students." ■



Horizons fifth-grade students learn how to record and edit video footage.

## Budding filmmakers create science documentary

On a sunny afternoon during the 14th annual Oxford Film Festival, "Science: A Film by Horizons Rising Fifth Graders" premiered. Directed by Erica Avent, who taught the rising fifth-grade class during summer 2016, the film features students with the Horizons program who set out to learn about science by filming a documentary.

Thirteen students met with north Mississippi scientists to talk about the importance of STEM education. The students were also given time to reflect on their interactions and what they learned over the summer through the Horizons program.

The 10-minute film features the rising fifth-graders clad in their bright orange Horizons T-shirts, taking field trips to visit local scientists and researchers, including Matt Moore at the National Sedimentation Laboratory, Susie Adams at the U.S. Forest Service Southern Research Station and the University of Mississippi's own Kristie Willett with the environmental toxicology program.

In the latter portion of the film, students relate what they learned about science during the Horizons summer program that year. One student said, "Without science, we could never accomplish anything. We couldn't even record this without science!"

Avent said she thought the project was a success.

"When I first told them that we were going to make a documentary about the science community here in Oxford, of course, the students thought they couldn't do it," she said. "But to see them grasp the concepts of science and to run with the ideas that science is so much bigger than what they had thought of has been a tremendous thing. This summer has been phenomenal. It's because of them and because of the Horizons program." ■





2018-19 CEED cohort.

## Mississippi Entrepreneurship Forum lays foundation for partnerships to boost state's economy

Each year, the Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development initiative organizes

a Mississippi Entrepreneurship Forum as part of its effort to work with UM students and faculty to build actionable partnerships with Mississippi communities. The forum offers an opportunity for researchers and practitioners to share best practices and identify potential collaborations to positively affect the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Mississippi.

"The forum is designed to bring colleges and universities together in Mississippi to share about entrepreneurship, inform of best practices and discuss community and economic development in Mississippi," said JR Love, project manager for the CEED initiative at the McLean Institute.



CEED student Elena Bauer speaks on a panel at the 2019 Mississippi Entrepreneurship Forum in Jackson.

Moderators and speakers at the daylong forum included UM faculty and staff members along with peers from other higher education institutions in the state; business leaders; Glenn McCullough, executive director of the Mississippi Development Authority; and Delbert Hosemann, secretary of state of Mississippi.

Panels on technology and innovation, student entrepreneurship and the state's entrepreneurial ecosystem also were conducted.

"Entrepreneurship is an important endeavor for higher education," said Albert Nylander, director of the McLean Institute and UM professor of sociology. "The community-campus partnerships are stronger when together we create and disseminate knowledge."

Formerly known as the Rural Entrepreneurship Forum, the inaugural Mississippi Entrepreneurship Forum was held in summer 2015 in Clarksdale. Subsequent forums were held in Tupelo, Greenwood, Oxford and Jackson.

"The forum planning team is excited to begin the planning for the 2020 Mississippi Entrepreneurship Forum," Love said. "The McLean Institute is honored to partner again with the Robert M. Hearin Support Foundation to continue advancing economic development in Mississippi.

"This forum provided a place for colleges and universities to come together and discuss barriers around entrepreneurship but also share successful case studies in our state."

Additional sponsors for the forum included the Oxford-Lafayette County Economic Development Foundation, Innovate Mississippi, the ELSEWorks entrepreneurship program at Millsaps College, the UM Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship and Office of Technology Commercialization, Mississippi University for Women, Belhaven University, Williams CPA Firm PLLC and Williams Sanjo. ■

## Innovation scholar develops Impster app

During Michael Davis Jr.'s time at the University of Mississippi, he came up with an idea for a mobile application called Impster.

Impster is an anonymous social polling app that allows college students to crowdsource their decisions with one another. Despite being rejected from the Apple iTunes store four times, Impster was finally accepted in January 2016. Davis, who majored in management information systems, believes he learned a lot from his experience as an innovation scholar in the Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development initiative.

Davis' work highlights the strong partnership between the UM Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship on campus and the CEED program. Clay Dibrell, executive director of CIE and professor of management, along with the faculty and staff of CIE, worked closely to assist Davis in advancing his idea and goal of creating an app. In his final semester in the CEED program, Davis was able to share with a large smile on his face that his idea had become a reality.

"My time in the CEED program has taught me a lot about my history as an African-American male," Davis said. "I have also learned many things about business and developing an entrepreneurial mindset. The biggest thing I learned from being a part of the CEED program was learning how to work with different people from different backgrounds."

Davis became well known at UM by being actively involved in many organizations. He was president of the Entrepreneurship Club, a student business consultant and a UM ambassador for the SEC Symposium for the Atlanta area.

Today you can find Davis at his day job with International Paper in Memphis, working as an application development specialist. Davis is also the founder and CEO of Eventsnap, a digital photo booth app that collects photos taken by attendees at events. He is also the CEO of Shaking the Ground Technologies Consulting, where he creates apps and websites for clients. You can listen to Davis and others discuss life as an entrepreneur on the "Hot Butter Business" podcast. ■



Michael Davis (third from left) speaks with McLean staff and students.

## Brooking Breaks Routine

Nonprofit program director goes back to school to tackle workforce development challenges

Inside the Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service, the walls are lined with scraps of notes from new program development brainstorming sessions and maps of Mississippi showing programs yet to be served by volunteer and AmeriCorps programs, and the lobby is filled with the chimes of nonprofit staff from around the state logging into the latest round of recruitment webinars.

Caitlin Brooking, director of program development, bursts through the office doors, cracks a joke, flashes a smile, and the training process begins.

As the day ends and the office chatter dies down, Brooking glances at her computer screen with a furrowed brow, thinking of ways to learn more about how to surpass barriers faced by small community agencies in their efforts to carry out effective programming to fuel economic development.

Two weeks later, she packs up and moves to Oxford to pursue a master's in sociology at the University of Mississippi.

According to Brooking, some advantages are offered to students that are not offered to professionals.

"When you are working in a job and you are doing the same cycle every year, you are carrying out your role, and you don't really have a chance to pick apart the problems that you see," Brooking said.

She received that chance when she joined the 2014-16 cohort of Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development innovation fellows. During summer 2015, she worked with the Tri-County Workforce Alliance in Clarksdale. The alliance started in 1997 with the mission of improving the quality of life for people living in Coahoma, Quitman and Bolivar counties by promoting long-

term economic and community development and by building a competitive, healthy workforce through education and job training.

During the internship, Brooking completed a survey to assess barriers to workforce education in rural Mississippi. Brooking's research focused on two



Caitlin Brooking

initiatives, Getting to the Finish Line, which tackled overcoming the barriers to completing academic goals, and Leveling Up, which concentrated on career advancement and providing guidance and support for participants to seek promotions, acquire professional licenses and pursue training opportunities.

Originally from

Methuen, Massachusetts, Brooking came to Mississippi in 2007 as an AmeriCorps program coordinator and has been actively involved in the volunteer sector since then. Brooking's commitment to workforce development initiatives shows not only in her work with the Tri-County Workforce Alliance but also in her love for AmeriCorps.

She said she is glad she went back to school and is thankful for the McLean Institute.

"I really wanted to come to school and to work with the McLean Institute because I knew I would have a chance to sit down and come up with new solutions on effectively training community organizations to identify and efficiently use resources."

Brooking has returned to the Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service and now works as deputy director. She serves alongside the executive director to direct internal and programmatic operations to develop and maintain key external partnerships. She was recently awarded the 2018 Outstanding Commission Staff at America's Service Commissions Innovation and Leadership Awards. ■

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“When you are working in a job and you are doing the same cycle every year, you are carrying out your role, and you don't really have a chance to pick apart the problems that you see.”

— CAITLIN BROOKING

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# Camille Walker contributes to positive change in Mississippi through CEED

Sometimes we seek out opportunities without knowing the effect they will have on us. Enter Camille Walker, a Tupelo native and 2016 University of Mississippi graduate.

As a sophomore, Walker, a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority and former Oxford Leap Frog mentor, searched for scholarships to offset her parents' out-of-pocket cost for her college tuition. She came across the McLean Institute's Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development program in the UM Today newsletter. Without much knowledge of the program and with the motive of gaining a scholarship, she applied and was accepted. Walker did not know CEED would be the stepping stone to her passion for social action and her contribution to be the change she wanted to see in her home state.

As a CEED innovation scholar, Walker interned with the Entrepreneur Center at the Mississippi Development Authority in Jackson in summer 2015.

Inspired by entrepreneurial approaches to addressing community concerns, Walker then created a proposal for a new nonprofit organization, College Coaches. This organization would aim to address low graduation rates and limited access to information about college.

Walker proposed that recent college graduates serve as college "coaches" in high schools because their recent college experience would allow them to serve as near-peer role models and provide information and encouragement to students. Walker modeled College Coaches after a program in Georgia that took its graduation rate from 89 percent to 100 percent in 10 years' time.

"In Mississippi, many students attend school in rural areas, where the counselor-to-student ratio is such that it's challenging to obtain personalized information about financial aid and college attendance. I saw this firsthand. My assigned high school was underperforming, so my parents sent me to school outside of the district," Walker said.



Camille Walker

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“ Dr. Nylander and other institute staff believe in you. They instill a social responsibility to your home and college town, to not just come and suck up the resources and leave. It is important to make a difference.”

— CAMILLE WALKER

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During her senior year at UM, Walker interned with a member of the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington, D.C., which led to a full-time position as a legislative correspondent for U.S. Rep. Trent Kelly. Walker then served as the community outreach coordinator for the Mississippi Small Business Development Center for nearly a year and was responsible for serving the Mississippi Delta region by connecting small business owners or potential small business owners to MSBDC.

She is now a graduate student at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, where she is earning her master's degree in higher education. Her efforts are specifically targeted toward work with high school entrepreneurs and bridging the gap between high school and college for students with limited college access. Walker was also married in May 2018, and her younger sister, Kendall Walker, is now a member of the 2018-19 CEED program.

Camille Walker credits the McLean Institute for giving her the opportunity to benefit others along with herself. She believes the next William Winter and other state leaders will come out of the CEED program because of the hard work and support it entails.

"Dr. Nylander and other institute staff believe in you," Camille Walker said. "They instill a social responsibility to your home and college town, to not just come and suck up the resources and leave. It is important to make a difference." ■



Brian Foster, UM assistant professor of sociology, delivers the keynote address at the 2017 MLK Day ceremony in Burns-Belfry Museum and Multicultural Center.

## Community Stories Project

VISTAs collect stories from north Mississippians to foster conversations

The Community Stories Project is an ongoing collection of interviews and stories from community members who live and work in the places where the North Mississippi VISTA Project serves. The idea behind this project is to strengthen relationships with and understanding of these communities by fostering conversations about the past and present. Deeper knowledge and communication with community partners and the people they serve are critical.

For the 2017 Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service, eight VISTAs collected nine interviews from residents of Hernando, Marks, Jackson, Water Valley and Holly Springs. During the MLK Day of Service keynote event, the North Mississippi VISTA Project showcased four of these stories at listening stations at the Burns-Belfry Museum and Multicultural Center. VISTAs who completed the project had the opportunity to hear stories about the civil rights movement and its enduring effect on their communities, Mississippi and the U.S. at large.

Chris Caldwell, a former VISTA who had served with Volunteer Oxford, interviewed a member of his family.

"I had never talked to anybody in my family about their history," he said. "Nobody wanted to talk about it. I'm glad I had this opportunity to learn about my people and where I come from."

His interviewee, an older woman from Water Valley, spoke of her childhood in Yalobusha County.

"My family been here all they life. That's all I can say. In Yalobusha County – it was bad. I said bad ... Our men folk couldn't walk down the streets decent with they girlfriend because when they see the white coming, they had to step off the streets for them to pass. That's just how we had to come up."

The focus of the Community Stories Project will shift to national and international service during AmeriCorps Week, an annual celebration of national service programs. The interview subjects will include alumni of a range of programs including AmeriCorps, Peace Corps, Mississippi Teacher Corps and Teach for America. The North Mississippi VISTA Project continues to make these interview recordings available to elevate community voices and inspire others to serve their communities. ■

“ I’m glad I had this opportunity to learn about my people and where I come from.”

– CHRIS CALDWELL

# Edy Dingus finds meaning as United Way VISTA

**E**dy Dingus was sick of restaurant work. Her legs were stamped with spider veins, and her wrists clicked whenever she refilled anyone's sweet tea. Late one night, after scrubbing ranch dressing off her server's apron with a toothbrush, she emailed a laundry list of questions to the office of the North Mississippi VISTA Project. The VISTA



Edy Dingus

leader at the time, Sylvia Stewart, replied the next day. Dingus began her VISTA service in late August 2016. After speaking of a blossoming love of community building, she was assigned to serve at the United Way of Oxford & Lafayette County. At the time, Dingus had a vague notion of what United Way did, based primarily on memories of the outstretched hand logo.

Through her tenure as the local United Way programmatic VISTA, Dingus worked to expand the efforts of the organization's two childhood education coalitions, LOU Excel by 5 and LOU Reads. LOU Excel by 5 is a diverse network dedicated to ensuring that every child is prepared for school success by age 5. LOU Reads is a broad-based group of educators and leaders committed to encouraging every child to read on grade level by third grade. For both coalitions, Dingus served as a liaison, coordinator and support system.

LOU Excel by 5 is now a part of the LOU Reads campaign for grade-level reading, which stands as an independent entity supported by the Lafayette County School District, Oxford School District, and the United Way of Oxford & Lafayette County.

From August 2016 to August 2017, Dingus and another United Way VISTA, Ben Strassman, learned much about the work coming out of United Way's little office on North Lamar Boulevard. When a family in need called, they stayed on the line until they were confident that family could reach the next nearest resource, many of which were United Way grantees. When a donor came by, they turned from their computer screens and talked about building sustainable

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“... or when a student asks me if she can keep the donated book I just handed her and I can say, ‘Yes! And let’s read it,’ I know I have achieved that powerful sense of fulfillment I was desperate for not so long ago.”

— EDY DINGUS

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systems to combat poverty. When partner organizations or grantees emailed, Dingus and Strassman asked how they could help make their visions a reality.

To enhance outreach at the United Way, Dingus met with prospective community partners and planned with loyal providers to produce programming that would deliver the best in care and education for every child in the LOU community. She developed partnerships to plan communitywide events that are open to children of every background and fulfill the educational mission of United Way, the North Mississippi VISTA Project and the McLean Institute.

Dingus reflected on her term of VISTA service.

“When a child excitedly tells me what they look forward to most in kindergarten ... when two sisters happily play jump rope with a shy little boy at a community play date ... or when a student asks me if she can keep the donated book I just handed her and I can say, ‘Yes! And let’s read it,’ I know I have achieved that powerful sense of fulfillment I was desperate for not so long ago.”

After her term of service with the United Way, Dingus served as the VISTA leader with North Mississippi VISTA Project in 2017-18. She sustains her passion for improving educational opportunities in Mississippi by maintaining an active presence in north Mississippi anti-poverty organizations such as Move On Up Mississippi, the local chapter of the national Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, and Team 36.

As the executive director for Magnolia Montessori School, Dingus strives to support families from every background in an effort to build community and impart the importance of quality education for all. ■



## smART brings art and wellness to Vardaman

When an undergraduate student saw a need for enrichment in students' education, she used her own passion for education to create a program that would be effective.

Elizabeth Anne Kelley graduated from the University of Mississippi in 2016 with a degree in elementary education. She is a special education teacher in Portland, Oregon, and has recently obtained her master's degree in education from the University of Portland.

"I believe that the driving force behind being an educator is to instill a passion for knowledge, a passion for kindness and a passion for service," Kelley said. "I think that all students deserve a high-quality education and access to resources that can provide enriching experiences."

Kelley was selected to participate as an innovation scholar in the 2014-16 cohort of the Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development initiative. Of her time in CEED, she said, "My involvement as an innovation scholar was an experience that changed my outlook on education, helped me build meaningful relationships and taught me the value of service, and for that I will be forever thankful. It was a truly unforgettable experience."

In summer 2015, Kelley found that many rural communities in north Mississippi lacked funding and resources for their art and health/wellness education departments.

"I believe that art is not only an opportunity to create – which is very important – but also an opportunity to expand our knowledge of the world around us and that which is abstract to us," Kelley said. "It is an opportunity to learn about emotions,



“ I believe that art is an opportunity to expand our knowledge of the world around us and that which is abstract to us.”

– ELIZABETH ANNE KELLEY



Students, families and friends gather to view student artwork at the Vardaman Family Life Center.

feelings, poetry, travel and, ultimately, an opportunity for students to find a way to express themselves in a way they might not have been able to before.”

To foster these opportunities, Kelley, alongside fellow innovation scholars Brittany Fields and Maddie Gable, created smART, a free summer program to provide students a fun and educational experience that focused on art and wellness. Kelley credits her original inspiration for smART to her involvement in the McLean Mentors program, where she had the opportunity to volunteer as a tutor at Excel Learning Center in Calhoun City.

“The idea for smART arose from learning about my students’ school environments and the lack of art and wellness education and opportunities,” Kelley said.

The program targeted students in grades K-6 from Vardaman. It was intended to accommodate 15-20 students, but the program quickly grew to over 30 students by the end of the first week. Each week, students participated in art classes and health/wellness education. Each Friday featured a unique science-oriented theme such as “Earth Day” and “Beach Day.”

At the end of the program, the students took a field trip to UM and Lamar Park in Oxford. On the final day of smART, the program hosted an art gallery walk and luncheon for the students’ families, friends and community partners to view their children’s artwork from the month.

“My team and I wanted to give these students a high-quality educational experience through art and wellness education. We wanted to provide students with the opportunity to come together as a community and form meaningful relationships, expand their knowledge on subjects that may not always be addressed during the school year and, ultimately, have a lot of fun,” Kelley said. ■

## Fighting Poverty

Danna Johnson finds her calling with Catholic Charities

Many people search their whole lives to find their true meaning and purpose, whether through personal or professional pursuits. Danna Johnson identified her true vocation in 2012, when she began to volunteer with the Vardaman Family Life Center, an office of Catholic Charities.

Johnson, who is originally from Honduras, immediately built community in the town, where many immigrants from Mexico and Central America work in the fields that make Vardaman the “Sweet Potato Capital of the World.”

“What inspires me to work in this organization is that I have found the real meaning of my life by serving others,” Johnson said.

Catholic Charities, a nonprofit social service organization, was established to serve the most vulnerable members of society – the poor, and particularly children, women and families living in poverty. Catholic Charities serves all people regardless of religious affiliation, race, color or country of origin.

Through this organization, Johnson has had the chance to learn and grow in all aspects of her life: professionally, spiritually and as a human being. As a volunteer, she was trained to be an English as a Second Language teacher and to lead parenting classes. In November 2015, Johnson was hired as the program coordinator of Vardaman Family Life Center of Catholic Charities.

The McLean Institute’s primary goals are transformation through service and fighting poverty through education; these efforts are natural complements to the work of Catholic Charities. Johnson first learned of the McLean Institute from Sister Judy Sinnwell, a former McLean Institute board member and director of Excel, an after-school program in Calhoun City. Since that introduction, the McLean Institute has partnered with Johnson and Catholic Charities to identify community needs and host workshops and programs in response to those opportunities.

In summer 2015, students with the McLean

Institute developed a four-week art and wellness program known as smART. The smART program was created out of a desire to provide enrichment opportunities for students who attend schools with limited funding for arts and recreation. In addition, many children in Vardaman stay at home by themselves during the summer while their parents are at work, so they lack the enrichment opportunities that more affluent children tend to enjoy.

“The smART experience was a great success and inspired all of us to



Danna Johnson (fourth from left) and CEED innovation fellows Taeisha Gambrel (fifth from left) and Jan Vidal (far right) visit with community partners at Insight Park on the UM campus.

“Through the workshop, we created an environment of trust and dialogue. Participants were able to recognize those habits that need to change for the sake of a healthier financial situation in their lives. And the workshops gave us the opportunity to address budgeting and saving with adults and children alike.”

– DANNA JOHNSON





channel the beauty and enthusiasm of children that we have inside of ourselves,” Johnson said.

With the support of the Caterpillar Foundation, the McLean Institute partnered with Catholic Charities again in June and July 2016 to offer a series of four free financial empowerment workshops in Calhoun County. The workshops sought to provide financial management tools to families who relied on Catholic Charities for financial assistance.

One participant, Eliseo, a Mexican immigrant who works on sweet potato farms to support his wife and two kids, did not believe that keeping track of his expenses would be helpful because of his variable paychecks. However, the financial empowerment workshops provided an opportunity to explain that tracking expenses is an excellent method for managing fluctuations in income and to ensure that enough funds are set aside each month.

When he shared his perspective after tracking his expenses for a month, Eliseo mentioned that his

takeaway was “las palabras mágicas son ‘si lo necesito o lo quiero.’” In Eliseo’s words, “the magic words are ‘do I need it or do I want it?’” For Eliseo, that question helped him to stop and think before making purchases and to consider his wants and needs in the context of long-range financial goals.

“Through the workshop, we created an environment of trust and dialogue,” Johnson said. “Participants were able to recognize those habits that need to change for the sake of a healthier financial situation in their lives. And the workshops gave us the opportunity to address budgeting and saving with adults and children alike.”

This partnership has benefited not only the community but also students at the University of Mississippi, who have learned how to lock arms with community partners to identify scalable and sustainable solutions to alleviate poverty. Johnson, in turn, has found her calling by creating pathways out of poverty for those in her community. ■

# McLean Institute Grant Award to Fund Community Engagement

*Hearin Foundation provides support for research and service efforts*

**By Staff Report  
University Communications**

Oct. 5, 2018

A grant from the Robert M. Hearin Support Foundation for the University of Mississippi's McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement will fund research and service aimed at increasing community and economic development in Mississippi communities.

The McLean Institute welcomes a new group of outstanding students from around the globe this fall, representing majors from across the university. This scholarship opportunity serves to build actionable partnerships across the state to promote entrepreneurship and economic development.

Albert Nylander, director of the McLean Institute, professor of sociology and principal investigator for the Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development, or CEED, program, said he is thankful for the approximately \$500,000 provided by the foundation.

"The wonderful people at the Hearin Foundation continue their remarkable record of supporting university students through fellowships to make a difference throughout Mississippi," Nylander said.

Fifteen students were selected this year to continue a nearly \$2 million McLean Institute investment from the Hearin Foundation to bolster community and economic development in Mississippi. This grant will support UM students through 2021.

The CEED Initiative works with Ole Miss students and faculty to implement projects and conduct research that directly affects Mississippi communities. These students join a network of more than 50 UM students and faculty, as well as a collaboration of more than 400 community and business leaders in the state, who embarked on the first CEED project in 2014-18.



The University of Mississippi's McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement welcomed a new group of outstanding students from around the globe this fall, representing majors from across the university. First row from left, Albert Nylander, Hannah Newbold, Navodit Paudel, Kristina Fields, JR Love, Laura Martin; second row from left, Michael Mott, Allison Borst, Zachary Pugh, Joshua Baker, Kendall Walker, Curtis Hill; third row from left, Bryce Williams, Elena Bauer, Adam Franco, Arielle Rogers, Virginia Parkinson, Anna Katherine Burress, Ashley Bowen.

The annual entrepreneurship forums, business webinars, youth leadership programs and other activities are focused on spurring economic growth in the state.

"We are thankful to the Robert M. Hearin Support Foundation for providing the opportunity to continue working in Mississippi with business and community leaders in partnership with UM students to help move our state forward," said J.R. Love, CEED project manager.

The program's annual Mississippi Entrepreneurship Forum, which helps strengthen the state's entrepreneurial ecosystem, took place March 8, 2019,

at Millsaps College in partnership with other universities throughout the state.

The CEED program supports undergraduate and graduate students and faculty members to research poverty, education, asset building, and health care in Mississippi.

"As a McLean Institute innovation fellow, I am to think critically about the issues of poverty and development in Mississippi, in particular the Delta area," said Ashley Bowen, a master's student in computer science from Lambert. "Through sustained community engagement, and by applying strategies in community development, I have been able

to positively impact the community and develop myself professionally.”

The McLean Institute also supports faculty research projects through the CEED Initiative. Cristiane Surbeck, associate professor of civil engineering; Kate Centellas, Croft associate professor of anthropology and international studies; David Holben, professor of nutrition and hospitality management; Tejas Pandya, assistant professor of mechanical engineering; and Annie Cafer, assistant professor of sociology, all have received funds to conduct projects in Mississippi.

The 2018-19 CEED program includes students from the College of Liberal Arts and the schools of Accountancy, Applied Science, Business Administration, Engineering, Journalism and New Media, Law and Pharmacy.

Other students in the program are: Josh Baker, a junior majoring in economics from Katy, Texas; Elena Bauer, second-year law student, Freiburg, Germany; Allison Borst, junior in biological sciences and sociology, Madison; Anna Katherine Burrell, junior in pharmaceutical science, Water Valley; Kristina Fields, junior in psychology, Belden; Adam Franco, senior in public policy leadership, Birmingham, Alabama; Michael Mott, junior in integrated marketing communications and Spanish, Chicago; Hannah Newbold, junior in integrated marketing communications, Roswell, Georgia; Virginia Parkinson, sophomore in marketing and corporate relations, Oxford; Navodit Paudel, junior in general business, Dhading, Nepal; Zach Pugh, sophomore in public policy leadership, Oxford; Arielle Rogers, sophomore in accountancy, Guntown; Kendall Walker, junior in communication sciences and disorders, Tupelo; and Bryce Williams, master's student in exercise science, Ridgeland.

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*For more information on the McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement, visit [mclean.olemiss.edu](http://mclean.olemiss.edu) or contact Albert Nylander at 662-915-2050 or [nylander@olemiss.edu](mailto:nylander@olemiss.edu).*

# Ole Miss student serving as intern at Boys & Girls Club

**By Chloe Ricks**  
**The Greenwood Commonwealth**

June 27, 2016

In the summer of 2016, the Boys and Girls Club of Greenwood enjoyed the help of a University of Mississippi student.

Henry Lang-VanDerLaan, a Chicago native, was fulfilling an internship at the local club as part of his commitment to the McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement at the University of Mississippi.

“All participants are required to complete a service-based internship after their junior year,” said the McLean Institute’s director, Albert Nylander. “When the students start school in the fall, they will be able to draw on their experiences for more meaningful class discussions.”

Lang-Vanderlaan said he enjoyed every minute of his internship. It began June 1 and ran through July 15. An April visit to the club influenced Lang-Vanderlaan to pick it as the place for his internship.

“I felt this was a good place, and we already had connections in Leflore County,” he said. Nylander, a native of Greenwood, was a member of the club as a kid.

Lang-Vanderlaan said it was important to him that he chose an internship that “wasn’t just for a resumé.” He wanted to be in an environment that wouldn’t be a cakewalk and would actually make a difference in him and others.

By Nylander’s account of what the McLean Institute aims to do, Lang-Vanderlaan was spot-on in his decision making.

“Our mission is to create opportunities for Ole Miss students to both transform society and be transformed by society,” Nylander said.

“Because Lang-Vanderlaan is not from Mississippi, the experience allowed him to better fill the needs of a community and go on to make informed economic policies,” Nylander said.

Lang-Vanderlaan’s focus while at the McLean Institute was on entrepreneurship and economic development, with a particular emphasis on financial literacy. His aim was to “help children develop basic financial skills so that they learn how to save long before they are adults,” he said.

It excites him that “his internship could have a positive impact,” Lang-Vanderlaan said.

The club’s director, Antonio Jones, said, “Lang-Vanderlaan was an awesome help. Anytime I called his name, he was eager to do whatever was asked. Henry has the talent where he knows how to relate the information he knows to the kids.”

Lang-Vanderlaan is now a master’s student at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland studying sports policy, management and international development. He is conducting a dissertation research project on the rise of American football in the United Kingdom and Scotland, focusing specifically on the effect the NFL had on integrating the game into U.K. schools and universities.

“I could not have been able to pursue this degree or this research without the McLean Institute,” he said.

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Contact Chloe Ricks at 581-7124 or [cricks@gwcommonwealth.com](mailto:cricks@gwcommonwealth.com).

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# McLean Summer Program Turning High School Students into Entrepreneurs

*Inaugural weeklong program helped develop leadership and creativity*

By Edwin Smith  
University Communications

June 13, 2016

Twelve high school students from across Mississippi gained exposure to innovative problem-solving skills by participating in an entrepreneurial leadership program at the University of Mississippi.

The inaugural class of the McLean Entrepreneurial Leadership Program, or MELP, met May 29-June 3, 2016 on the Oxford campus. The weeklong series of activities was sponsored by UM's McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement in partnership with the Office of Pre-College Programs.

Terrius Harris and Ryan Snow, innovation scholars with the McLean Institute's Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development initiative, were instrumental in planning and facilitating the program.

"In this first summer, we sought to introduce an initial cohort of students from around the state to the entrepreneurial approaches to addressing pressing community needs," said Albert Nylander, director of the McLean Institute and professor of sociology.

"Our initial assessment indicates that at the beginning of the week, only one student believed that he or she could become an entrepreneur. By week's end, the overwhelming majority of participants believed they had the potential to become entrepreneurs."

MELP was structured to cultivate an innovative approach to solving problems that students identified in their communities. Throughout the week, participants studied principles of entrepreneurship, data and demographics, environmental sustainability, and health and wellness through readings, lectures from UM faculty and staff, and field trips to meet with community leaders.

Snow, of Summerville, South Carolina, and Harris, of Eagle River, Alaska, reflected on their experiences planning and leading the program.

"I am excited to see this program develop into a statewide initiative," Snow said. "As I begin my next phase of involvement with the McLean Institute as a graduate innovation fellow, I intend to continue the work of MELP by working with the students to implement the projects they planned during the program."

Working with students in the inaugural MELP program was rewarding, Harris said.

"This program attracted high-caliber high school students from across Mississippi," he said. "I believe we're off to a

great start and on the verge of something truly significant for our state's economic growth and community development."

MELP's first-year goal was to pilot a scalable and replicable program that will stimulate an entrepreneurial interest among high school students that can be used to solve community and state problems through community engagement.

"With entrepreneurial problem solving as the central focus of the week, students were required to complete a weeklong project with the goal of generating an actionable plan to address a community challenge," said Zack Grossenbacher, another innovation fellow in the McLean Institute. "This project was developed in conjunction with faculty and community members with the intention of allowing students to actively practice the skills that they acquired throughout the week."

The inaugural participants were Albert Ball and Ajene Buchanan, both of Oxford; Dylan Dickerson, Kyarria "Ari" Hardy, Tyteanna Wragg, Hailey Fox, Kendall Dawkins, Mister Clemmones and McKinley Ware, all of Newton; Abidemi "Titi" Ayegbaraju and Jimeya Mayes, both of Greenwood; and Baylea Brown of Magee.

Several of the students weighed in on their expectations versus their experiences. Ayegbaraju said she had a particularly emotional moment during a session at the Robert C. Khayat Law Center.

"They asked us to share what we value the most, and I discovered what I value most is myself," the Greenwood High School sophomore said. "I also found out that in order to be a good leader, you must first be a good follower. And that you must have no fear of failure in order to succeed."

Brown said she thought she'd feel disconnected and isolated from the others during the week.

"Instead, I found we all made a great connection and learned how well we can communicate," said the junior from Magee High School. "By sharing like we did, we each built one another up."

Dickerson, a sophomore at Newton High School, said he was expecting "a bunch of boring meetings."

"But, that's not what happened at all," he said. "Everything and everyone has been wonderful. I hope we all get to return if they do this again next year."

As a follow-up, the McLean Institute conducted exit interviews and had students fill out surveys to evaluate the program. When asked to define the term "entrepreneurship," one student responded with "having the courage to speak up about

# Grisham Fellows Find UM Family During Visits

*Newton High School students meet with faculty, staff and students; volunteer in community*

**By Edwin B. Smith**  
**University Communications**

Feb. 25, 2019

As a student at the University of Mississippi, Bruce Ware took Sociology 101 under professor Vaughn Grisham. From that classroom experience, Ware and Grisham developed an enduring friendship that inspired Ware to incorporate an ethic of service into his studies and career path.

The Newton High School graduate wanted to both honor Grisham and his wife, Sandy, and to expose other students from his high school alma mater to the university as a college option. In 2016, Ware and his wife, Rhondalynne, inaugurated the Newton High School Grisham Fellows program.

Three years and two cohorts later, the third group from Newton High School visited the university last week to explore academic opportunities and engage in community service.

Ware worked with the Newton Municipal School District, the McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement, and his longtime mentor and friend, First Baptist Newton minister Randy Cuchens, to create the competitive program for NHS students. The impact has been “incredible,” he said.

“With the 58th student from Newton High in this cohort, I believe the Grisham Fellows program is making a real impact,” he said. “We never would



A Grisham fellow from Newton High School helps a resident of the State Veterans Home mix watercolors for his painting project. Photo by Kevin Bain/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services.

have been able to offer this without the McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement.”

Fifteen students spent a full day (Feb. 12) on campus learning about programs and initiatives designed to promote college access and success. As the Grisham Fellows program seeks to instill a college-going mentality in each student, the fellows were challenged to articulate their academic goals and commit to a plan that will propel them along that path.

Another integral component of the Grisham Fellows program is community service. For their project this year, the group spent their second day (Feb. 13) leading art activities with residents at the State Veterans Home in Oxford before returning home.

The McLean Institute co-sponsored the program with the Grishams.

“It has been extraordinary to watch students from the first cohort enroll here at UM and thrive in their college

*continued on page 44*

a problem and make a plan to fix it and follow through with your plan.”

The goal of MELP was to bring about this type of inspired and innovative thinking, said JR Love, project manager for the Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development initiative.

“Thanks to our CEED students, program partners and the students who joined us this week, we have come together to learn from one another and join forces to address pressing

social and economic problems in Mississippi,” Love said. “I am optimistic that we can expand this program in the future and develop a network of partnerships across the state that will impact quality of life in Mississippi.”

Besides support from the Office of Pre-College Programs, other MELP partners included the Center for Population Studies, Office of Sustainability, RebelWell, the UM Food Bank, Square Books in Oxford and Home Place Pastures in Como.

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careers,” said Laura Martin, associate director of the McLean Institute. “We are excited by the prospect of more students beginning their path to higher education through this experience.”

Among inaugural Grisham fellows who enrolled at UM through their contact with Ware are Mister Clemmones, a sophomore chemistry major who is minoring in Chinese, and Paris Payne, a junior broadcast journalism major. Both students have, in turn, recruited other underclassmen who are in the cohort of Grisham fellows.

“I had not visited Ole Miss before becoming a Grisham fellow, but it was that and subsequent visits that led to my decision to attend here,” Clemmones said. “Each time I came, I fell more in love with this place than the time before.

“Making connections and networking with Ole Miss faculty, staff and students made me feel like I’d found my family away from home.”

Payne also said her life has been deeply influenced by the UM community.

“I was all set to attend another university, but the people I met here completely changed my mind,” she said. “Once I became a part of the Ole Miss family, I shared my experiences with my classmates and underclassmen at Newton. Three of them are in this cohort, and I hope that they will decide to attend Ole Miss like I did.”

The high school scholars’ itinerary also included a stay at The Inn at Ole Miss, as well as tours of campus, the Innovation Hub at Insight Park and Luckyday Residential College. They also attended a concert at the Gertrude C. Ford Center for the Performing Arts.

An annual tradition is a closing lunch at Phillips Grocery, during which the students share reflections from their two-day experience.

A highlight of the visit presented virtual reality as a bridge connecting academics with community and economic development.

“Virtual reality has taken Mississippi by storm,” said J.R. Love, project



Michaela Cooper (right), M Partner VISTA with the McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement at UM, instructs Grisham fellows from Newton High School on how to work with residents at the State Veterans Home. Photo by Kevin Bain/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services.

manager for the McLean Institute. “As a learning tool, it has the power to engage students who thrive in an immersive and experiential environment.

“VR also has promising job creation potential, as this growing field will need many coders and developers who can be trained and employed right here in Mississippi.”

“This is my very first visit here, and all I can say is it has been a mind-blowing experience,” said Sundra King, Newton High School guidance counselor and a chaperone for the visit. “More than just information about academics, I’ve seen that the professors, staff and students here really take an interest in our students and let them know that they would matter at this institution.

“They’ve shown them that help is available to them if they only ask for it.”

Senior Trynica Wash agreed.

“I’ve been on campus three times before,” said Wash, who was encouraged in her junior year to apply to the program by Clemmones. “I am a senior now, and this is my second time coming as a Grisham fellow.

“Ole Miss has felt more and more like family each time I have come here. Plus, the two fields I want to major in – nursing and African American studies – are not offered at the other institution I

was considering attending after graduation, but are offered here. After this, my second Grisham Fellows experience, I really feel like I’m supposed to be here at Ole Miss.”

Named in honor of Grisham, professor emeritus of sociology and founder of the McLean Institute, and his wife, a retired educator, who both have remained active in community development work, the program encourages young leaders to pursue higher education and challenges them to better their communities through a lasting commitment to community service.

Since its inception in 2016, the program has facilitated visits to the university for nearly 60 students, many of whom were or will become the first in their families to attend college. The Newton High School Grisham Fellows Program is funded by the Annette Ware Fund at the UM Foundation as well as the McLean Institute.

The McLean Institute works to create programs through which the university cultivates mutually beneficial partnerships that enhance the quality of life for all Mississippians and instill a commitment to community and civic engagement in all members of the Ole Miss community.





Brittany Fields converses with Albert Nylander at the McLean Institute.

## McLean Scholar Takes Service, Leadership Roles

*Houston native Brittany Fields looks forward to giving back*

**By University Communications  
Special to the Chickasaw Journal**

Some students from small towns grow up yearning for the day when they can graduate from high school, go off to college and leave the community they feel has nothing to offer them.

They leave with the anticipation of making their lives better and gaining all that the world has to offer, including opportunities that may not have been afforded to them back home. Brittany Fields, a recent graduate from the University of Mississippi, was one of those students.

Raised in a single-parent household, Fields graduated from Houston High School in Houston, Mississippi, before

heading to college. Moving away from Houston gave her an opportunity to see Chickasaw County from an outsider's view and helped her "see the county's true values that many people so often overlook," Fields said.

"Houston, Mississippi, is a very small town where everyone knows everyone," she said. "But that's not a bad thing. Houston is a lively town."

"The people are sociable, and the educational system is remarkable," she added. "Crime rates are low. There's a church on every corner, and the town itself just gives you a sense of well-being."

Fields said she believes it's her duty to not only give back to the community that so graciously gave to her, but to innovatively bring more to a deserving town. She started her journey to do just that when she joined the McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement at UM in 2014 as an undergraduate innovation scholar.

Vaughn Grisham, a leader in the field of community development, founded the McLean Institute at Ole Miss in 1984. From that foundation, the McLean Institute was dramatically expanded as

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part of UM 2020, the university's strategic plan that called for an increase in service to benefit Mississippi.

The McLean Institute seeks to make community engagement a distinctive part of the university's educational culture by promoting engaged scholarship and reflective community action.

Fields was named an innovation scholar within the institute's Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development initiative, known as CEED. In her last year of the two-year program, Fields worked alongside about 30 other UM students to establish partnerships throughout rural communities in Mississippi.

CEED organizers hope that these partnerships will help boost economic

development and entrepreneurship throughout these rural communities.

"Brittany's role as an Innovation Scholar at the McLean Institute provides her the opportunity to engage her background from Chickasaw County and her exercise science major to advance the mission of the McLean Institute," said J.R. Love, CEED project manager.

Fields, along with fellow innovation scholars Elizabeth Kelley and Madison Gable, started a smART summer art and wellness camp in Vardaman. The purpose of the day camp was to combat the summer slump and teach children, ages 5-13, about living a healthy lifestyle.

The program included teaching local youths about different European and Mexican artists and organizing art activities. The CEED scholars also taught the young participants about the human body and gave them anatomy projects

to complete. Those in the art and wellness camp learned about physical fitness and the effects it has on the body, and they were instructed in how to do physical activities.

The goal of each innovation scholar is to develop a specific sustainable solution within a community. The scholars attain the solutions by making connections with communities and by developing a method of research that includes participating in a summer-long internship in their chosen community. Each scholar then presents some sort of business plan or research paper at the end of two years.

Brittany Fields is now living in Jackson and attending the University of Mississippi Medical Center, where she is working toward her master's in occupational therapy. She intends to graduate in May 2020.

## Indianolan chosen for McLean Institute

### The Enterprise-Tocsin

Sept. 24, 2015

Holly Pitts of Indianola helped give back to the Delta through the McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement at the University of Mississippi.

The 2013 Indianola Academy graduate was one of 30 Ole Miss students who established partnerships with rural communities over the 2015-17 program term.

Although there are many paths left to explore before selecting an area to address, Pitts has shown interest in further promoting tourism — perhaps centered around Mississippi's rich blues history — as a means of sustainable economic development.

"The Mississippi Delta provides us with an extremely rare and valuable culture, and it is our job to take such a place and provide it with the opportunity it deserves," Pitts said in a prepared statement.

The institute is named for George McLean, the late former owner of the *Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal* in Tupelo and a progressive leader in Mississippi, and was founded by Vaughn Grisham, an Ole Miss sociologist.

Pitts was a McLean Institute innovation scholar within the Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development initiative.

The ultimate goal of each scholar is to develop a specific sustainable solution within a rural community.

Upon graduating from the UM, Pitts moved to Dallas, Texas, where she is obtaining a dual master's degree in civil engineering and business administration at Southern Methodist University. She also works part time in the Lyle School of Engineering as a graduate student ambassador, and she expects to graduate from both of her master's programs in May 2020.

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OPPORTUNITY







THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**MISSISSIPPI**

MCLEAN INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC SERVICE  
AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



P.O. Box 1848, University, MS 38677  
662-915-2052

[mclean@olemiss.edu](mailto:mclean@olemiss.edu)

[mclean.olemiss.edu](http://mclean.olemiss.edu) |  [McLeanUM](#) |  [@McLeanUM](#)