Education Edge 2013-2014

University of Mississippi. School of Education

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Center for Mathematics and Science Education leads FTC Robotics charge throughout state.
Dear Friends,

It’s my pleasure to share with you our 2014 annual report, Education Edge. As fall sets in and we begin a new academic year at the University of Mississippi, I hope you take a few moments to read about the exciting new ways we’re making a positive difference in education statewide.

UM is Mississippi’s flagship university and the state leader in teacher preparation. Last May, we honored nearly 500 new graduates who will make an impact on thousands of students in schools and communities. Because of our emphasis on maximizing field experiences, our degree recipients emerge with the knowledge found only at the intersection of theory and experience.

More than ever, we strive to support the educational needs of Mississippi on every front. We’ve launched new programs including an undergraduate emphasis in early childhood education and a Ph.D. in special education. Also, our elite programs like the Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program and the Principal Corps are attracting some of the highest caliber students UM has ever seen.

Every day, our faculty, staff, students and alumni embody what’s working in education.

Thank you for your ongoing support.

Hotty Toddy,

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Dean, School of Education
The University of Mississippi
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SCHOOL NEWS

Peralta Named Mississippi’s First Knowles Fellow

Ole Miss Alumna Jessica Peralta (B.A.Ed. ’13) is the first Mississippian to ever receive a Knowles Science Teaching Foundation Fellowship worth $175,000.

A five-year fellowship for early-career STEM teachers, the program will offer financial support for classroom materials, professional development, networking opportunities, travel to national conferences and more. Founded in 2002, Knowles fellowships are designed to attract and retain STEM teachers who demonstrate excellent content knowledge, effective teaching methods and plan to make a career of teaching.

According to KSTF data, more than half of all U.S. STEM teachers have less than five years’ experience. The fellowship program includes more than 250 fellows in 42 states across the nation.

Three times a year, KSTF fellows gather at conferences for professional development. Over five years, fellows advance through three phases of development focusing on content knowledge, teaching practice and leadership.

“There can be a negative association to studying math, and I want to help change that,” Peralta said. “Mathematics should be taught as problem-solving, critical thinking and logical reasoning. Helping students develop those things is going to help them in anything that they do.”

Early Childhood Program Begins at UM

To meet the demand for highly qualified pre-K teachers across Mississippi, a new curriculum at UM allows students to specialize in early childhood education and obtain a license endorsement in the field from the state. The coursework can be completed over two semesters as part of UM’s elementary education program. Working educators can also complete the program.

“One problem we’re facing in Mississippi is that many teachers haven’t had the specialized training to teach pre-K,” said Dr. Burhanet-tin Keskin, UM coordinator of early childhood education. “Some people believe that teaching early childhood is just kindergarten and first grade watered down, but it’s a completely different and very important field.”

According to the National Institute for Early Education Research, studies show quality preschool programs can produce long-term gains in academic achievement and can support positive social-emotional development. Studies also show an estimated 7-to-1 return on investment dollars in public pre-K education in long-term cost savings.

The Ole Miss curriculum was designed by three expert early childhood education faculty hired in 2013 after the School of Education received a $1.1 million grant from the Robert M. Hearin Support Foundation to build the program. In 2015, UM plans to also offer an online master’s degree for educators and researchers who seek advanced study in early learning.

Top left: Early childhood education professor Dr. Lynn Darling interacts with preschool children at Willie Price Lab School.
Bottom right: Jessica Peralta is the first Mississippian to ever receive a Knowles teaching fellowship worth $175,000.
Student Teachers Honored with Griffin Family IMPACT Awards

Four $1,000 awards honor excellence in student teaching

Four outstanding student teachers were honored for their commitment to education and professionalism on May 9 during the School of Education’s annual awards reception. Each of the students are recipients of the first-ever Griffin Family IMPACT in Education Awards.

Each $1,000 award recognizes a top-performing education student nominated for the honor by his or her peers. The most valuable monetary award for student teachers at UM, the award was made possible by a 2013 donation of $125,000 by longtime UM benefactors Ed and Jan Trehern who created an endowment in honor of Jan’s parents Ralph and Jerry Griffin.

The recipients included elementary education graduates Andy Banahan of Oxford, Taylor Moore of Bruce and Stephanie Neely of Olive Branch as well as secondary mathematics education graduate Logan Dodson of Birmingham, Alabama. All four began their first year of teaching in their own classrooms in August.

The new award will be given annually during awards day as a way to recognize top education students—undergraduate or graduate students—who excel in teaching and possess high academic credentials.
New Ph.D. offers Neuroscience Focus

Concussions and other head injuries have attracted widespread attention in recent years. To help address these problems, the School of Education has launched a new Ph.D. program in special education with a neuroscience component.

One of only three such programs in the nation, the curriculum will train professionals to help those with traumatic brain injuries recover. The doctoral program trains educators to use therapies that incorporate mathematics, language and other subjects to speed up and improve recovery.

“We’re going to be able to really draw a lot of students nationally because of the Ph.D. with the neuroscience component,” said Dr. Roy J. Thurston, assistant professor of special education. “Some universities have master’s degrees in neuroscience, but the only other doctorates I know of are at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Harvard.”

Thurston’s research is in cognitive rehabilitation of those with traumatic brain injuries and also in neuroscience applications to education. He previously worked in Canada in a hospital setting and tested patients with brain injuries, including looking at how they performed in math, language and other subjects. Those tests and therapies helped patients exercise their brains, which sped up their recovery.

“When people pursue this degree, they can go work not just in P-12 education; they can work in rehabilitation and in hospitals,” Thurston said. “There are so many brain injuries now and the survival rate is huge compared to what it used to be. We’re looking at how we’re going to get these people back to school, back to competitive employment and get their lives back together.”

Principal Corps Admits Record Cohort

Eighteen teachers from across Mississippi came to UM in June as new recruits of the Principal Corps. An elite program for aspiring school administrators, all recruits were nominated by their superintendents to enter the rigorous program involving coursework at UM and two full-time internships supervised by school leaders.

The sixth cohort is the largest class to date. For the second consecutive year, the Principal Corps has attracted educators from north, central and south Mississippi. From its start in 2009 to 2012, the program’s reach was primarily in north Mississippi. The program awards recruits with full tuition, books, fees and housing and living expenses while completing coursework at UM. The program provides funding to help recruits maintain their salary during their time in the program.

The Principal Corps has a close-to-perfect success rate in landing its graduates job offers as principals, assistant principals or educational leaders. All graduates make a five-year commitment to stay in Mississippi education and receive a $10,000 bonus upon signing a contract as a principal or assistant principal and beginning work. With 49 graduates, the ranks of Principal Corps alumni is expected to grow to 67 in 2015.

Originally funded with $2 million from the Jim and Donna Barksdale Foundation, the program received additional funding in 2012, when the Robert M. Hearin Support Foundation awarded Principal Corps $1.5 million to expand and increase its cohort size.

Principal Corps recruit Marcus Stewart meets with children at Lafayette High School during summer training in June.
New emphasis to add fitness to elementary education degree

A new curriculum is in the works at Ole Miss to train elementary teachers who will specialize in integrating health and physical activity into the classroom. The project is being completed with $1.2 million in support from The Bower Foundation. With well over 700 undergraduates each year, elementary education is one of the largest majors at UM. The School of Education will offer the option to enroll in the new emphasis in 2015.

The program will be exclusively for aspiring P-6 teachers and will utilize research conducted in Mississippi showing a correlation between fitness and student achievement. UM’s goal is to produce teachers with a high level of content knowledge and a keen understanding on how health and activity affects learning.

“We know that increasing health and physical activity in schools increases attendance, decreases behavioral problems and stimulates thinking,” said Dr. David Rock, dean of the School of Education. “But we want to integrate subject knowledge into physical activity. Some might say, ‘You can’t teach mathematics with a physical activity.’ We believe we can.”

The proposed emphasis will give undergraduates an option to complete 12 to 15 hours of specialized coursework built into UM’s existing elementary education degree. By 2015, the courses will be offered online to allow education students outside UM an opportunity to specialize in P-6 health and physical activity.

During a Focus Friday event in September, 2013, the Move to Learn organization, which is also supported by The Bower Foundation, came to UM to meet with senior teacher candidates.
Celebrating 111 Years at Ole Miss
Fundraising initiative sees 228 percent jump in first-time donors

Since 1903, the School of Education has trained exceptional educators who make an impact in schools and communities across the nation. To celebrate its 111th anniversary at Ole Miss, the school launched its One-Eleven Initiative in January and has seen a 228% increase in first-time donors!

With a goal of raising $111,000 for the school’s general fund by the end of 2014, more than 600 alumni, friends, faculty, students and staff have pledged support totaling more than $68,000 to date. All donors can be found on the donor pages (18-19) in Education Edge, where their names are listed alongside other school benefactors from the last fiscal year. The School of Education would like to thank everyone who supported our mission to make a difference in education in Mississippi and beyond. Pledge your support online at education.olemiss.edu by December 31!

Rebel Road Trip Attracts Record Number of UM, Oxford Students

With nine loaded tour buses, the School of Education’s Third Annual Rebel Road Trip provided a massive field experience for more than 120 senior teacher candidates and 380 Oxford sixth-graders in January. A collaboration with Oxford Middle School, pre-service teachers helped mobilize the field trip for sixth-graders on a two-day road trip to Birmingham, Alabama. The students, teacher candidates and faculty members from UM and OMS visited the historic 16th Street Baptist Church, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, McWane Science Center and Birmingham Zoo.

Originally designed as a learning opportunity centered around educating UM seniors on the Civil Rights Era, the trip was expanded this year with the addition of students from OMS. Student teachers also had the opportunity to help sixth-graders learn about scientific concepts during an all-night lock in at the McWane Center. Each senior education major was assigned two to three OMS students to supervise throughout the trip and gained hands-on experience in leading field trips.

In preparation for the event, UM seniors and OMS students shared a common reading experience with the Newbery Award-winning novel “The Watsons Go to Birmingham” by Christopher Paul Curtis which is set in the midst of the 1963 16th Street Baptist Church bombing.

Additionally, the School of Education used the event to help raise funds to donate backpacks, school supplies and copies of “The Watsons Go to Birmingham” to the Youth Opportunities Unlimited organization in Marks, Mississippi.
World Class Teaching Program Leads Nation in NBCT Recruitment

With 409 teachers from across Mississippi, the UM chapter of the World Class Teaching Program was the largest recruitment site for national board certification in the nation in 2014. The WCTP supports educators who seek to become National Board Certified Teachers, or NBCTs, by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The program prepares teachers to pass assessments and a portfolio review to earn the credential and a $6,000 pay raise funded by the Mississippi legislature.

“We’ve concentrated on implementing our program within partner school districts,” said WCTP coordinator Jackie Parker, who retired from UM in May. “Our sites are run in classrooms by mentors who are NBCTs.”

A 2012 Harvard University study found that over a school year, students of NBCTs gained the equivalent of two months more instruction in mathematics and one month more instruction in English than students of non-NBCTs. The first-time passage rate for teachers taking national boards is nearly 30 percent. WCTP candidates have a first-time passage rate of more than 50 percent.

“The University of Mississippi has done a tremendous job with recruitment,” said Michelle Accardi, director of state policy for the NBPTS. “I wish every state would look at what Mississippi is doing with the World Class Teaching Program.”

Ole Miss, MSU METP Fellows Gather in Oxford

More than 30 high-caliber freshmen with aspirations of becoming English or mathematics teachers gathered at Ole Miss in April for a cross-campus visit between the UM and Mississippi State chapters of the Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program. Cross-campus visits help METP fellows gain a deeper understanding of issues facing educators today. The visits also help build community among students in the joint program.

Established in January 2013, METP is an effort to attract exceptional students into teaching with the most valuable education scholarship ever offered in Mississippi. It includes four years of full tuition and funding for housing, food, travel and study abroad. The scholarship requires a five-year commitment to work in public education in Mississippi after graduation.

To kick off the event, fellows met UM Chancellor Emeritus Robert Khayat, who spoke with the group about implementing controversial change and making progress as leaders. Students received signed copies of his memoir, “The Education of a Lifetime.” The group also met with Chancellor Dan Jones and toured the Center for Mathematics and Science Education and Rowan Oak. Additionally, they met National Teacher of the Year Jeff Charbonneau and Mississippi Teacher of the Year Josh Lindsey.

UM’s first class of 15 fellows had a combined average ACT of 28.5. The second class includes 18 fellows with an average ACT of 29.
On Saturday, February 8, the UM Center for Mathematics and Science Education (CMSE) became a place of fierce competition. More than 400 middle and high school students—some decked out in circuit board armor, lab coats or team uniforms—gathered at the Oxford campus to compete in Mississippi’s second-ever statewide FIRST Tech Challenge (FTC) robotics competition. With 21 teams competing at the state level after victories at qualifying matches, the room was jam-packed with aspiring young engineers, each hatching a plan for victory.

In a game called FTC Block Party, teams controlled robots, built of their own designs, to rack up points by lifting and placing plastic blocks on a pendulum with baskets. Some teams also designed mechanical arms for their robots to raise a small flag on the 12-by-12-foot mobile arena. Others equipped their robots with hooks so they could do pull-ups on a bar across the forum. At day’s end, five teams advanced to compete at the super regional level. Two later advanced to the international level.

However, what’s more significant is the growing trend behind the competition; one that is helping students get excited about an extracurricular activity steeped in mathematics, physics, engineering and software development and is having an impact on the way STEM fields can be taught in Mississippi classrooms.

Spearheaded by the CMSE, FTC robotics has spread across north, central and south Mississippi exponentially in the last three years. In 2012, only four Mississippi robotics programs existed. In 2013, the number of teams grew to 21. In 2014 it rose to 43 teams—a 975 percent increase in just two years.

“In 2015, we’re aiming for at least 65 teams across Mississippi,” said Mannie Lowe, CMSE program manager and the primary point of contact for schools across the state looking to use robotics. “Our goal is to help every school in the state find a way to create and support robotics programs. Robotics opens up new
opportunities for students. They work as a team and learn new skills that might not have been so readily accessible before.”

A former software developer turned science teacher, Lowe came to UM in 2012 after working with school robotics teams in Georgia. Shortly before Lowe was hired, the university was approached by the FIRST organization, based out of Manchester, New Hampshire, to become a new affiliate partner for its FTC program. The CMSE, housed within the School of Education, was identified as an ideal unit to help grow the number of Mississippi students participating in robotics.

“The whole idea fit right into our K-12 STEM Outreach efforts,” said Dr. Alice Steimle, associate director of the CMSE. “Exposing students to STEM fields and getting them to engage and think about these fields is exactly what we do. When Mannie applied with six years of robotics experience in Georgia, it was a perfect fit.”

The CMSE’s robotics effort was originally created with financial support from multiple UM units, Ingalls Shipbuilding, the Mississippi Department of Employment Security, Butler Snow law firm and private individual donors. Robotics fit easily into the center’s existing programs. Since CMSE’s beginning, programs like its portable planetarium have exposed more than 6,500 Mississippi students to the wonders of physics, astronomy and the universe. Since 2012, more than 650 Mississippi students have traveled to UM to gain valuable experience via the CMSE’s engineering and math camps, trebuchet competition, STEM competition and more.

The center also specializes in providing professional development for mathematics and science teachers across Mississippi. In 2013-2014 alone, 45 percent of Mississippi public school districts were impacted by the center through professional development. The CMSE has also helped enhance mathematics and science teacher preparation at Ole Miss. Since 2007, the center has provided fellowships for teachers and aspiring teachers pursuing graduate degrees and increased UM’s production of Ph.D.s in mathematics education seven fold.

According to Lowe and Steimle, the center’s initial plan of action was simple: hit the road, meet teachers, engage students and most importantly, provide them with the support to get involved. In the first 12 months, the CMSE staff recruited coaches in schools, found venues for qualifying matches, recruited volunteers and hosted the first-ever statewide robotics competition for middle and high school students at Ole Miss in February 2013.

Partnering with Schools
FIRST, meaning For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology, was founded by inventor Dean Kamen in 1989. The nonprofit’s mission is to inspire an interest in science and math among young people. The organization’s robotics challenge offers a significant financial incentive, as well. Nationwide, students in FTC robotics qualify to...
apply for more than 800 special scholarships totaling more than $20 million at 180 colleges and universities. UM offers three such scholarships through its School of Engineering. According to FTC data, students who participate in robotics programs are 50 percent more likely to attend college and twice as likely to major in a STEM field. Lowe pointed out there is rarely a problem with the sales pitch to teachers who genuinely want to impact student learning.

“In the last year, I’ve been contacted by schools all over that state asking ‘Can you come and help us? We’re interested in robotics,’” Lowe explained. “That’s what we at the CMSE are here for. We’re here to help those who want to get involved.”

FTC teams typically consist of up to 10 seventh- through 12th-graders and one to three mentors. After registering online and making a payment of $275, teams receive a CMSE startup kit with essential robotics parts, including 11 motors, nine sensors, two controllers, a WiFi communications device and a LEGO MINDSTORMS NXT Intelligent Brick, commonly called the robot’s “brain.”

Beyond the financial incentive for students, another valuable aspect of robotics is that it allows teachers to create hands-on learning opportunities. Some teachers are finding ways to directly align the program to Common Core State Standards with learning activities addressing ratio, proportion, balance and much more.

“This program was perfect for my students,” said Silas Reed, a science and math teacher at Coffeeville High School who is also a trained agricultural engineer. “Our students have gained so much from this. Many of them didn’t know what an allen wrench was last year. Now they are having intelligent conversations with me and each other about the robot’s components and how we can improve design.”

The 2013-2014 school year was the first year for robotics at Coffeeville. Their bulldozer-styled robot is called the Kraken and their team is dubbed Pirate Nation. With 11 students—all of whom are returning next year—Coffeeville is just one of many small schools encouraging students to think big when it comes to math and science.

With support from the CMSE, FTC robotics teams have sprung up across north, central and south Mississippi–growing from just four teams in 2012 to 43 in 2014, a 975 percent increase.
“We couldn’t have done this without the CMSE’s help,” said Trena Attipoe, a mathematics teacher at Long Beach Middle School who is entering her third year as a robotics coach. “I remember I was in Hattiesburg and Man nie was doing a presentation and I knew my students would be excited to try this. The first year the CMSE gave us a grant that covered everything so the incentive was there.”

Attipoe’s team, the RoboBearcats, had five middle school members last year and competed at the statewide competition last February. Their robot used a shovel and elevator-like mechanism to lift blocks from the ground and drop them in baskets. She’s also finding ways to create new learning centers for her classes next fall as she writes Common Core aligned lessons.

A small number of teams competing in Mississippi are considered “community teams” and are coordinated outside of schools and often include homeschooled students. The Blue Crew of Summit is one such team. In their first year of competition last year, the team of four competitors—two homeschooled—won honors at the state and super regional levels. The team also competed at the FTC’s world competition in St. Louis in April. Their robot, named Smash Wagon, was designed to move blocks by smashing into the area walls to force the blocks on its lift.

“From a homeschool perspective, this is just like class for us,” said Walt Holifield, a mechanical engineer and coach of the Blue Crew. “In my opinion there are generally two types of students: those who can read a book and others who have to touch and feel. My boys are doers, so we were very driven to create something that they could learn from hands on.”

Looking Ahead

Incoming Ole Miss freshman Wesley Hale is one example of a student benefitting from robotics. After competing with Oxford High School’s robotics team last year, he is starting college with a FTC scholarship. The partial tuition scholarship will be renewable for up to four years as he pursues degrees in Chinese and computer science.

“I really enjoyed being on the team and the experience of programming the robot and how it operated because I knew I wanted to do something like that in college,” he said. “I just really liked the idea that I could write a program for a robot and tell it how to work and what to do.”

With scholarships awarded and plans underway to continue to grow high school level robotics in Mississippi schools, the CMSE is also planning to use this momentum to expose younger students to robotics through FIRST’s other programs including the FIRST LEGO League (FLL) for grades 4-8 and Junior FIRST LEGO League (Jr.FLL) for grades K-3. Like in FTC, FLL students build robots using a NXT Intelligent brick and components but the robots are built with LEGOs and teams set out to complete tasks rather than compete against one another. The hope is that by reaching students earlier, there will be increased involvement from schools, parents and communities.

On November 15, 2014, the CMSE will help host Mississippi’s first FLL qualifying tournament in Oxford. They are currently searching for volunteers to help launch the effort and a site to host the tournament.

The FTC season for this year will start with the Kickoff and Game Reveal on Saturday, September 6 at the Jackson Avenue Center beginning at 9 a.m.

“The growth we’re seeing in FTC here in Mississippi is the same kind of growth we had in Georgia,” explained Lowe. “When students get involved in robotics they experience something exciting and new and it becomes a place where they feel like they belong and can accomplish things as a team. We celebrate that.”

Volunteers Needed:

To become a robotics coach or volunteer in your community, please contact the CMSE at 662-915-6621 or visit www.umcmse.com for information about the FIRST Tech Challenge.

More than 400 students gathered to compete in the 2014 state robotics championship, many decked out in team uniforms of their own design.
Landon Pollard
The Corps Advantage

Meet Landon Pollard, the first UM alumnus to graduate from both the Mississippi Teacher Corps and Principal Corps. At age 30, he’s in his fourth year as a full principal.

Ole Miss alumnus Landon Pollard (B.A. ’06, M.A. ’08, Ed.S. ‘10), landed his first leadership job in 2010 when he became principal of Byhalia Middle School at age 26—a major move for the Birmingham, Alabama, native who had only four years experience in education at the time. When Pollard, now 30, took over at the north Mississippi school, it was struggling with substandard test scores, crippling teacher turnover and high levels of student misconduct.

Despite an admittedly rough first year, with Pollard in command, the school’s MCT2 scores rose from low-performing to average levels, teacher retention nearly doubled and student disciplinary action decreased by more than 50 percent over four years. At the Ole Miss School of Education, we’re proud to point out that he was the first of a growing number of Ole Miss alumni who are completing two elite programs within the UM School of Education—the Mississippi Teacher Corps and the Principal Corps.

We recently sat down with Pollard to ask him about his path to school leadership and his vision for the future.

Q: What was your first teaching job like?
P: The Teacher Corps placed me at Lanier High School in Jackson teaching English for grades 11 and 12. I say all the time that I wish I could go back and apologize for the terrible job I did that first year. I had no sense of the reality of what teaching in a community like Jackson would be like. I was from an upper, middle-class family and attended a magnet high school and graduated from the Honors College at Ole Miss. I grew up with social resources most of the kids I taught didn’t have in their lives.

Q: What was that like?
P: The vast majority of students I taught came from single-parent homes. Some of my students were 20 or 21 and I was
Despite their guidance, my second year went a lot better. It was because of them and the Corps educators who helped me. It was totally different from what I was having. There were also lots of non-Teacher Corps educators who helped me. It was because of them and their guidance that my second year went a lot better.

Q: What did you do to change that?
LP: I sought out help. Joel Hebert was my de facto mentor in the Teacher Corps. I met him every two to three weeks and he gave me great ideas on how to address the problems I was having. There were also lots of non-Teacher Corps educators who helped me. It was because of them and their guidance that my second year went a lot better.

Q: Did you live where you taught?
LP: Well, my first year teaching I lived in Belhaven and it took me seven minutes to get to work. The Belhaven community is a very middle-class neighborhood. I would literally cross the train tracks and I was in a different part of town – it was a totally different world; government and public housing. There were so many things these kids had to deal with that I never had to address when I was growing up – drugs, gangs and violence. Meanwhile, I was trying to teach them Macbeth. Don’t get me wrong, I loved my job but I felt like I was not doing enough to help these students. I was required to teach them literature but they needed to understand how to apply for a job, how to manage a checkbook and control their anger. These kids needed practical life skills rather than Shakespearean sonnets.

Q: So what did you do about it?
LP: I tried to change the situation from a broader perspective. I left the classroom and got involved with the Madison County Adolescent Offender Program. The program was geared toward young people convicted of a felony. As part of their sentencing, we picked the kids up from schools and worked with them on social skills, academics, sex-ed and anger management. I did that for nine months and it only took me a few months to realize that this kind of leadership was what the schools needed. That’s when I first heard about a new program called the Principal Corps.

Q: What was the biggest factor that attracted you to the Principal Corps?
LP: It was the fact that it was almost all hands-on learning. I had the privilege of being in the first class of the program and interning at two different schools in Clinton over the course of a year. They got extra help and I got invaluable experience. Much of the academic coursework in the program was theoretical, but, through the internships, I was given the unique opportunity to directly apply those theories and new teaching styles to actual students. To me, that just makes a lot of sense.

Q: How long after graduation were you hired at Byhalia?
LP: I was offered the position in late April or early May of 2010.

Q: Did you receive any perks or bonuses from the Principal Corps?
LP: After I accepted and signed the contract in mid-May I received a bonus check for $10,000 from the School of Education. All Principal Corps graduates receive this upon accepting administrative positions. I used that money as a down payment on a house in Olive Branch.

Q: How was your first year as principal?
LP: In my first year there were some fantastic teachers, including some Mississippi Teacher Corps teachers. But there were also some pretty poor ones. It was very divided. There were cliques. Teachers did not work across the curriculum or grades. I will admit that during my first year I did a very poor job of implementing structure. Everyone seemed to be pulling in his or her own direction. After my first year, I had to replace more than half of the faculty. This year I am replacing eight out of 23, so that’s 34 percent. We improve that number each year.

Q: Can you tell us about your students?
LP: I think we have some of the best kids here in Byhalia. They are hard working and creative. A lot of them come from single-parent homes and low socioeconomic backgrounds, but their families instill in them good values. That’s not always the case with such a high rate of poverty. Byhalia has a rich sense of history and community.

Q: You’ve done a lot to improve Byhalia Middle School’s test scores and teacher turnover. What’s next?
LP: We’re always improving. One of our more recent projects has been with the Byhalia Garden Club. We’ve partnered with them to create a Junior Garden Club here at the school. They meet twice a month and they work on beautification projects at our school and community centers. We’ve also done work with the Byhalia Arts Council. They’ll come to the school and work with our art classes to teach things like basket weaving and ceramics. We’re trying to do a lot more reaching out to get community members involved in our school. Community involvement and support is very important when it comes to the success of our students.

Q: Where do you see yourself in 10 years?
LP: To be honest, I think I would be completely happy being here at Byhalia Middle School. I like my job and my teachers. There are new challenges every year. Our kids are still on average or below grade level in reading and math so I feel that we still have a lot of work left to do. I don’t want to leave this job feeling like it’s unfinished.
Darling Honored for Leadership in Pre-K Education

Last January, UM early childhood education expert Dr. Lynn Darling received the Southern Early Childhood Association’s Marion B. Hamilton Award for outstanding leadership in pre-K education. A clinical assistant professor, Darling was unanimously nominated for the award by all 30 members of the Mississippi Early Childhood Association’s board of directors. In 2012, Darling headed a task force formed by the Mississippi Department of Education to establish statewide early learning standards for 3- and 4-year-olds in alignment with new Common Core State Standards. Before joining UM, Darling served as director of the Early Childhood Institute at Mississippi State University. She is among three expert faculty members hired at UM in 2012 to develop a new curriculum in early childhood education.

Bellman Recognized for Teaching and Research

In May, UM mathematics education professor Dr. Allan Bellman received the School of Education’s annual Outstanding Teacher Award and Outstanding Scholar Award after nomination by faculty and students. An associate professor, Bellman is the author of more than 30 books. He partnered with the Oxford School District during the 2013-2014 academic year to coordinate a pilot program allowing mathematics education majors to drastically increase the number of field experience hours completed during student teaching. Before joining UM in 2012, Bellman served as a lecturer at the University of California, Davis and taught high school mathematics in Maryland for more than 30 years.

Rutherford Appointed to Mississippi Reading Panel

UM literacy education scholar Dr. Angela Rutherford is among six experts working with the Mississippi Department of Education to recommend new standardized assessment tools in reading for public P-3 schools. The Mississippi Reading Panel was established as part of the Literacy-Based Promotion Act established in 2013. The act seeks to improve student achievement in reading with new literacy coaches, implementing new teaching methodologies and assessments. A UM faculty member since 2004, Rutherford also serves as an associate professor and as director of the Center for Excellence in Literacy Instruction. She was appointed to the panel by state Sen. Gray Tollison, chair of the Senate Education Committee.

Wolff Leads Center for Educational Research and Evaluation

Longtime UM faculty member and administrator Dr. Lori Wolff was tapped to lead the Maxine Harper Center for Educational Research and Evaluation last fall. A professor of higher education, Wolff was appointed to the directorship of the center—which serves as a full-service firm for individuals and organizations seeking, administering and/or evaluating grant-funded service and research projects—to support a variety of UM and external organizations. Wolff previously served as coordinator of UM’s higher education program, director of assessment for the School of Education, associate dean of students and as an institutional research associate.
**Stapp Helps Lead New Effort in Health and Physical Activity**

Dr. Alicia Stapp joined UM in August to help design a new undergraduate emphasis in health and physical activity as part of the School of Education's existing elementary education degree. An assistant professor of physical and elementary education, Stapp is a veteran of Florida public schools and comes to UM from the University of Central Florida where she taught courses on integrating arts and movement into classroom curriculum since 2013. With $1.2 million in external funding from the Bower Foundation, Stapp and other UM faculty will develop the new emphasis in health and physical activity by 2015.

**Kirkland Joins Faculty as World Class Teaching Program Director**

UM alumna Tammy Kirkland (B.A.Ed. ’03, M.Ed. ’05) was selected in June to be the new director of the Ole Miss chapter of the World Class Teaching Program (WCTP). A professional development program for working teachers who wish to pursue a national board certification from the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, the WCTP was the national leader in recruitment in 2014. Kirkland hails from the New Albany Public School District where she has worked as an elementary teacher as well as a local mentor for teachers participating in the WCTP. She also will serve as an instructor in the Department of Teacher Education.

**Melear Named Interim Chair of Leadership and Counselor Education**

In August, UM higher education professor Dr. Kerry Brian Melear (B.Accy. ’95, M.Accy. 96), was selected to serve as interim chair of the Department of Leadership and Counselor Education. An associate professor, Melear has been a UM faculty member since 2004 and will lead the department during the 2014-2015 academic year. As interim chair, Melear—an expert in higher education law and finance—will oversee the academic unit offering more than 10 master’s, specialist and doctoral degree programs including the Principal Corps, UM's elite educational leadership program and the nation's only online specialist degree program in play therapy designed for mental health clinicians.

**McClelland Named Chair of Teacher Education**

After serving more than two years in an interim capacity, Dr. Susan McClelland (M.Ed. ’88, Ph.D. ’96), was appointed as the official chair of the Department of Teacher education in July. With more than 1,000 students and more than 40 full-time faculty, the department is one of the university's largest individual academic units. During her tenure as interim chair, the department grew to include new programs including the Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program, a new doctorate in special education and an undergraduate emphasis in early childhood education. Before leading the department, McClelland was the founding director of the Principal Corps and is a 21-year veteran of public education in Mississippi.
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