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Newsletter Spring/Summer 2021

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Newsletter Spring/Summer 2021



Dear Students, Alumni, Colleagues, and Friends of the Graduate School,

What a year! I am thrilled to be writing for you our Spring/Summer 2021 Newsletter from my office in the Graduate House, while seeing familiar faces around campus (and not just on zoom). This past spring was busy and the availability of vaccines has been a gift as we move through the summer and plan for fall. Of course, the path to where we are was a difficult one and we are monitoring the ever-changing pandemic.

Before we get to the contents of our newsletter, I want to share my wishes that you and yours are healthy and well. In the Graduate School, we hope that all of you are finding time to spend with loved ones (even if still remotely) and to refresh and recharge after the extremely challenging past 16 months.

In this issue, we share several stories about the exciting accomplishments of our graduate students and programs during this highly unusual year. Read about our two (that's right) Doctoral Hooding Ceremonies, our 2020 and 2021 recipients of Graduate School awards in mentoring and inclusive excellence, an alum whose work and leadership has led to national recognition in his discipline, a graduate putting her UM education to use at Bud Lab, and several outstanding new students who are in our Southern Regional Education Board institutionally funded Doctoral Scholars Program and our Elite Scholars program (for students poised to contribute to our research mission). You'll also see stories highlighting our American Mathematical Society chapter (the only one in the state at the moment) and new programs in Industrial Pharmacy and Athletic Training. Finally, we look back on how our students and faculty adapted and excelled during this challenging year (with a guest article from Erin Pennington, a graduate student in Journalism).

This spring, we saw our front porch renovated at the Graduate House. We appreciate the Chancellor and other leaders on our campus ensuring that we got the needed repairs. It looks wonderful and I hope that many of you will stop by when you next visit our beautiful campus. For those who tailgate, we hope to have a tent at several home games, but I want to specifically invite you to **stop by the front of the Graduate House** to say hello and perhaps grab a snack prior to the **home football game against Arkansas on October 9th**.

In addition, The Graduate Student Council (GSC) plans to host a **Graduate and Professional Student Alumni Weekend** on November 5th and 6th. During the weekend, they will co-host a tailgate with the Graduate School prior to the **football game against Liberty on November 6th**. For the game against Liberty, the GSC worked to access discounted tickets for all Graduate School, Law School, and School of Pharmacy alumni. Our student leaders would love the opportunity to connect with alumni (more details from GSC to follow). I hope you will join us at their sure-to-be-amazing weekend. Of course, we are happy to see you before any of the games or have you stop by whenever you are in Oxford or on campus.

We are very proud of all that our students, programs, and alumni accomplished this year and we hope you enjoy reading these stories as much as we enjoyed telling them. Next time, we look forward to telling you about our newest Cole-Eftink Fellows and our first-ever Advancing STEM Scholarship recipient. For individuals interested in supporting these students by contributing to these scholarships, please visit <https://umfoundation.givingfuel.com/cole-eftink-fellows-program> to give to the Cole-Eftink Fellows. To contribute to the Advancing STEM scholarship fund, please visit [our giving page](#) and then select view other funds and type "Advancements in STEM" and select fund 06518.

Finally, we would very much like to hear from you. Feel free to drop us an email at gschool@olemiss.edu and, for our alumni, tell us about your updates with our **Grad Notes form**. We are eager to hear exciting news you have to share with us and, for those who are interested in being a resource for current students, to connect you with graduate students in your field. As always, and also especially over this past year, we appreciate your support of the Graduate School and our graduate students at the University of Mississippi.

Fins Up and Hotty Toddy!

Annette S. Kluck, Ph.D.

Dean of the Graduate School

Professor of Leadership and Counselor Education

Newsletter Spring/Summer 2021 Articles

Celebrating New Doctorates—Two Doctoral Hooding Ceremonies for New UM Ph.D. and Ed.D. Graduates



In late April and early May 2021, the Graduate School celebrated the awarding of several new doctorates at our 2020 and 2021 Doctoral Hooding Ceremonies. Holding the ceremonies in the Pavilion for the first time, the Graduate School staff worked to create a special event that would convey the significance of the moment. Masks were worn and people were seated six feet apart. Family, friends, and loved ones sat in pods in the stands, and there was room for everyone's guests.

For each event, the evening did not disappoint.

On April 29th, Dr. Glenn Boyce, the 18th Chancellor of the University of Mississippi, congratulated our newest doctoral graduates. According to Dr. Annette Kluck, Dean of the Graduate School, "Having the Chancellor at the hooding ceremony reflects the level of achievement we celebrate with the event." He congratulated our UM graduates on earning the highest degree the academy has to offer. The Chancellor thanked the faculty in attendance for their hard work, mentoring these new doctorates and making the moment possible. Kluck said, "The Chancellor also shared with the new doctorates and those in the audience the story of the day he defended his dissertation and the moment he felt the full weight of that accomplishment. It was really personal."

During our 2021 Doctoral Hooding Ceremony, nearly 100 individuals crossed the stage, standing in front of their mentor while the doctoral hood was placed over their shoulders. The first students to cross the stage were the 2021 Doctoral Class Marshals: Drs. Asmaa Zakaria Ahmad Taha and Jemar Tisby. Taha, who was the first Ph.D. graduate in Second Language Studies with an emphasis in Applied Linguistics reflected on the value of doing something that is far from easy. She called on her fellow graduates to continue to believe in themselves, pursue their goals, and identify ways to continue positively affecting the world. Tisby, who graduated with a Ph.D. in History and recently assumed the position of Assistant

Director for Narrative and Advocacy at the Boston University Center for Antiracist Research, spoke next. True to his discipline, he reminded us of history and, as a leader, he drew connections between the past and present (and our possible future). He declared, “We are living in the Civil Rights movement of our day” and he called on his fellow new doctorates to remember that it is not just progress but the opposition to that progress that is used to measure a movement. He ended his remarks with a call, “As we go forth from this place—degreed, verified, and satisfied—you must interpret the present time so that you do not miss your time to do what’s right.”

At the 2020 Doctoral Hooding Ceremony, we also enjoyed the opportunity to celebrate with many of the individuals who earned doctoral degrees in December of 2019 and May and August of 2020. Kluck said, “We had many graduates who made their way back to Oxford for this event. It was really a pleasure to be able to finally celebrate their achievement in person.” We had between 50 and 60 graduates who were able to join us for the event and had many more whom we celebrated who were not able to be there that evening. Kluck also noted that many of those individuals were in the final stages of their dissertation when the pandemic hit. They navigated such a disrupting moment extremely well. “Next, they went on to start new careers in the midst of a pandemic. I look forward to seeing what these graduates will do in their careers. They already demonstrated the ability to pivot and adapt while succeeding in their goals,” shared Kluck.

Our 2020 Doctoral Class Marshals were Drs. Michael Cox and Prabhdeep Sandha. Cox, a veteran with 26 years of service in the US Army Special Operations Forces, earned his doctorate in Education. He was unable to join the ceremony in person, but shared his remarks via video. To his fellow 2020 doctoral graduates, Cox urged them to build a legacy of the greatest meaning by having an impact for good on the lives of others. Sandha, a Ph.D. graduate in Nutrition and Hospitality Management with an interdisciplinary graduate minor in Applied Statistics, spoke next. Having just completed her first year as an assistant professor at Metropolitan State University in Denver, Colorado, she spoke about her journey at the University of Mississippi, the long hours of work on courses, writing, and research, and the value of following your dream. She humorously shared what many of us have experienced during the pandemic, such as video screens freezing at the *worst* time. But she also spoke of the resilience now evident among our 2020 doctoral graduates and said, “Each of us will carry a piece of this University in our hearts, a piece of the Grove and the Circle, moving forward in different directions, with one sole intention: Making this planet a better place to live in!”

In the Graduate School, we hope this for each of our graduates...that they take a part of this institution with them and help change the world.

THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

Graduate School

The Donald R. Cole Excellence in Promoting Inclusiveness in Graduate Education Award Winners Announced

The Graduate School selects one individual or unit/program for the Donald R. Cole Excellence in Promoting Inclusiveness in Graduate Education Award each year. The award recognizes unique contributions that make the Graduate School a more inclusive environment for students of diverse backgrounds. Named after Dr. Donald Cole, whose contributions to diversity, equity, and inclusion led to national recognition of UM's Graduate School, the award is a distinct honor based on commitment to inclusive excellence. We congratulate the 2020 and 2021 winners!

- Educational Leadership Graduate Program (2020)
- Psychology Department (2021)

For 2021, the Psychology department received the Donald R. Cole Award. Graduate Program Coordinators Dr. Stephanie Miller and Dr. Todd Smitherman were thrilled to see the department receive the recognition. The team effort from faculty helped shift the department forward over the last few years. One unique aspect of the recent changes in the department is the establishment of a diversity committee. The faculty endorsed the committee in 2017 to show the department's commitment to diversity. From hiring new faculty to increasing transparency about the doctoral programs' admission processes, the changes attracted diverse applicants and helped ensure applicants presented their materials in a way that best communicated their fit with the program.

Smitherman commented on diversity events as well: "We hosted a Diversifying Psychology Visit Day which was originally going to be in the spring of 2020. This was something [for which] we got a very small grant from the Office of Diversity and Community Engagement on campus ... to bring to campus diverse prospective graduate school applicants from across the country. So, these were students who were juniors or seniors in college, or a year or two out of college, they were thinking about going to grad school in psychology, and we were going to bring them to campus, spend a day with them, teaching them about our program, giving them a lot of tips, reviewing their resumes, giving them tips on how to

make them better, and having one-on-one sessions about how to write personal statements, sharing some faculty research and so on.”

The department rescheduled the event due to Covid-19, but successfully hosted the visit day online in Fall 2020. It showed prospective applicants from across the country what the department was like for graduate students and how the department embodies their commitment to diversity and inclusion.

“We just finished, actually, a climate survey of our faculty and grad students to get a sense of how welcoming the department is both for faculty and students and how much they feel the diversity points are encouraged. And so, for me, the Award was really cool. Not only because it’s a really great honor and it’s only given to one program or department. It was really meaningful because it shows that what we’re doing is being recognized beyond just our department.... We’ve got a lot of strides to make, especially in faculty hiring still, but it’s nice to know that our efforts are being recognized,” said Smitherman when talking about receiving the award.

This year, the Psychology Department diversity committee started a peer mentoring program for all the first-year doctoral students with the goal of supporting retention. By supporting the students, the tough Spring 2021 semester was made better. Since the students were faced with socially-distanced meetings and online course options, the mentoring program helped cultivate connections between the students.

“I think that some of our work moving forward is wanting to keep this momentum going. We want to keep going with this Diversifying Psychology event. I think that one thing I want to do is broaden recruiting of students, encouraging all students to apply and consider the University of Mississippi for graduate school in psychology. Those are two big goals moving forward in the graduate program,” Miller shared.

The 2020 Award winner, the Educational Leadership Doctorate Program, is another fine example of a unit making great strides for diversity in higher education.

Dr. Douglas Davis, Director of Leadership Doctorate Programs in the School of Education, shared, referring to the Ed.D. doctoral degree: “We have a special program built around [the students’] models of applied research.” He explained, “A lot of their research work is designed to address problems with practice, problems in their own practice in [their] schools.” He continued, “Then we also have a Ph.D. and it’s more of a traditional research scholarship oriented academic program.” He also shared that for their doctoral programs, “We really do target Mississippi and serving school districts in Mississippi. We also have a vision of supporting change in education ... of course, positive change.”

There are currently around 60 total doctoral students enrolled in the two doctoral programs. The curriculum in the Leadership Programs is updated frequently to help students prepare for the educational field after graduation.

Davis said, “We know that the leaders have a profound impact on schools and the performance of students in our schools. So, we really want to target those and focus on emphasizing what works to meet the needs of all schools, and what kinds of strategies are effective in producing results.” In particular, the programs seek to improve the experiences for school children, regardless of the circumstances they bring with them to their education environment, recognizing that different children bring unique experiences that can help or hinder their ability to succeed in school. Davis added, “We’re looking at holistic ways that we can support Mississippi’s efforts to improve our educational system.”

We are certainly proud of the great work being accomplished by our Donald R. Cole Award recipients. And, we look forward to the ways that the **Pathways to Equity** strategic plan will enhance inclusiveness in graduate education at UM.

Distinguished Teaching Award for Excellence in Graduate Teaching and Mentoring



Dr. Noell Wilson (left) and Dr. Annette Kluck (right) with Kathy Neff as she receives the plaque recognizing the awarding of the Distinguished Teaching Award for Excellence in Graduate Teaching and Mentoring in memoriam, awarded to her late husband, Dr. John Neff.

In the Graduate School at the University of Mississippi, we believe an excellent graduate education requires students to have outstanding faculty for guidance and support. The Distinguished Teaching Award for Excellence in Graduate Teaching and Mentoring was established in 2013, and the award recognizes graduate faculty members who influence graduate students through research, practice, and other areas of study. A positive influence on students in the classroom and research field can go a long way in school and after, when it is time to pursue a full-time career. The University of

Mississippi prides itself on having the best graduate faculty, capable to mold the minds of students into professionals to prepare them for life after graduation.

During the 2020 Doctoral Hooding Ceremony this year, we posthumously recognized Dr. John Neff, Associate Professor of History and Director of the Center for Civil War Research, with the Distinguished Teaching Award for Excellence in Graduate Teaching and Mentoring in memoriam. The Center for Civil War Research was established in the spring of 2009 with the goal to enhance understanding of the American Civil War. During Neff's directorship, the Center also emphasized the relationship between Mississippi's history and that of other states to facilitate a more comprehensive picture of the Civil War in the south. To fulfill its mission to enhance knowledge of the state's history, the center regularly hosts conferences and other programs, providing opportunities to connect our campus and the research of our graduate faculty and students with the public.

Neff's contributions to graduate education in the history department are remarkable. As the chair, Dr. Noell Wilson, stated during the ceremony, "His contributions to mentoring both master's and doctoral

students transformed our [History] Department.” After he arrived, the department saw a significant shift in the number of graduate students specializing in early American history. In addition, Neff directed fourteen completed dissertations (including three as a co-director) and was directing/co-directing several more dissertations at the time of his death in January of 2020.

Neff’s commitment to his students was immense and his absence is felt in the department. One just has to ask any of his former students...he was the epitome of a mentor whose contributions to students will go on as his graduates mentor their own students. As one of his graduates, Dr. Amy Laurel Fluker, shared with the selection committee, “I am the person, the scholar, and the teacher I am today because of him.”

The Dean of the Graduate School, Dr. Annette Kluck, noted that it was important to recognize the many ways Neff gave of his time to his graduate students. The ability to tell all of our graduates about this amazing mentor during the 2020 ceremony was one of the highlights of the graduation festivities this year.

Dr. Leigh Anne Duck received the 2021 Distinguished Teaching Award for Excellence in Graduate Teaching and Mentoring. Duck, who joined the faculty at the University of Mississippi in the fall term of 2010, is a professor in the English department. With a history of mentoring students, Duck continued to teach and support graduate students during the Covid-19 pandemic. She guided students through difficult challenges over the last year.



Dr. Leigh Anne Duck

“Teaching and mentoring graduate students is always a pleasure, because it means working with others who share a deep interest in one’s subject matter,” said Duck. “I am especially fortunate, because the English

Department here attracts exciting, dedicated students, many of whom are especially passionate about my subject area—the diverse stories and images produced in the literature and cinema of the US South.”

Duck edits and contributes to the journal *The Global South*. The focus of her published work is on representations of the Southern U.S. She has a current book project tentatively titled *Extraction, Expression, and Hollywood South: Film on Location in Louisiana*. Duck enjoys the unique opportunity that graduate school offers to cultivate wonderful scholars and coworkers in the English Department.

Duck shared: “Working with students from the Southern Studies MA and MFA sweetens the mix. In addition to helping students develop their own scholarship, I have been fortunate to work with them also as colleagues—not only as fantastic [teaching] assistants in the classroom, but also as editorial assistants for *The Global South Journal*.... I’m really an introvert, who came to this profession because I

wanted to spend a lot of time with books, but working with graduate students reminds me that teamwork can be one of life's great pleasures.”

Duck's commitment to her students was clear during our 2021 ceremony. One of the co-nominators for the award was her most recent doctoral graduate, Dr. Amber Hodge. In fact, it was Hodge who, in the semester before completing her degree, contacted the chair of the department, Dr. Caroline Wigginton, about collaborating to nominate Duck for the award. As Kluck notes, “We do not always get to see our award recipients with one of the students who nominated them. The nomination process requires gathering a lot of information and it is telling that Dr. Duck's most recent graduate took this on while completing a dissertation.”

The University of Mississippi is proud of professors like Dr. John Neff and Dr. Leigh Anne Duck who strive for greatness in mentoring of graduate students and whose legacy will impact the university for years to come.

UM Doctoral Alumni Are Leaders—Meet Dr. Emmitt Riley III



Dr. Emmitt Riley III

Dr. Emmitt Riley III is a down-to-earth Mississippi Delta man who shares insightful information on American Politics today. Riley hails from Itta Bena, Mississippi, and he attended college at Mississippi Valley State University—earning a bachelor’s degree in both English and political science. He received a graduate degree from Jackson State University in political science before continuing his education at the University of Mississippi.

After Riley received his Doctor of Philosophy in political science from the University of Mississippi in August 2014, he worked full time as a political science teacher at Coahoma Community College in Clarksdale. Riley then took a visiting professorship of political science at DePauw University in Indiana, and the visiting position turned into a tenure track position before long and he is currently an associate professor of Africana studies and political science.

At DePauw, Riley passionately teaches different subjects from political science to Africana Studies, and this passion led to his selection as the 2018 *Anna Julia Cooper Teacher of the Year* by the National Conference of Black Political Scientists. Last semester, he was promoted to be director of the Africana Studies Program at DePauw University. In 2020, he was awarded the *Fannie Lou Hamer Award for Service* by the National Conference of Black Political Scientists for his contributions to the African American community in the United States. In 2021, he was named Faculty Member of the Year at DePauw.

Riley considers himself a son of the Mississippi Delta, born and raised in the heart of the Delta. He believes if one can make sense of the Mississippi Delta, they can understand the political heart of America.

“There was always this conscientiousness of a region of the world that is culturally rich in terms of its music, its history, and just the culture of growing up in the Delta,” Riley said. “The Delta shaped my life in the sense that I grew up in an environment where I was racially conscious. It wasn’t a racially mixed area, and all that I have become as an academic and a person is because of my roots to the Mississippi Delta.”

For his research, Riley studies racial attitudes and political behavior. One part of the research looks at how Black political representation impacts the response of white people to Black leadership. More recently, Riley has been writing on how racial resentment predicts white political behavior in terms of vote choice, candidacy evaluations, and policy preferences. He currently has a book contract with Routledge Press for a project in which he examines racial resentment among different races in politics.

“The book is called *Racial Attitudes Today: The Emergence of Racial Resentment Among Blacks and Whites*,” Dr. Riley said. “We are now extending that study from a central focus on white racial attitudes to what are the ways racial resentment shows up among racialized groups such as Hispanics, Latinos, Asian Americans, and even Black Americans.”

One key question the book asks is, can one apply the same framework used to study white racial attitudes to analyze and make sense of the racial attitudes among people of color? Although Covid-19 has affected progress, with data delays, the publication of the book is expected near the end of 2021.

A lot of people outside Mississippi do not realize the rich culture and history this state possesses, outside of the often-highlighted racial history of Mississippi. Riley notes that progress takes time everywhere, and Mississippi lawmakers have made steps toward progressive decisions recently. He offered the state flag change as one example. Riley wrote a story piece in the *Mississippi Free Press*, of which he serves on the editorial board, on the decision to remove the state flag and replace it with a more modern representation of the state.

“I was shocked. I did not see it coming,” Dr. Riley said. “The [new] flag was definitely one of my proudest moments of being a Mississippian.”

Dr. Riley was recently elected Vice President of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists (**NCOBPS**). Being elected vice president, he will rise to president of the professional association within three years. The conference emphasizes African American politics, scholarships, and other mentorships. The organization promotes research of topics that are not covered well enough in political science, and Riley discussed that the central focus of the group is dealing with critical questions of Black politics globally.

“It is a great honor and joy to serve these organizations and to also work on diversifying political science because it is a discipline that has struggled with diversity”, he said.

Riley reflected on his time at the University of Mississippi and recalled fond memories of Oxford while pursuing his Ph.D. Talking about some faculty who assisted him, he credited Dr. Jonathan Winburn for helping him get through the political science program and letting his work be seen. Winburn was on Riley's dissertation committee, and he cultivated a great relationship with Riley during his years in the political science program.

“He was very involved in the graduate program, focused on his research, and I think he matured into a really good scholar,” said Winburn. “In recent years, he has been one of our best successes coming out of our Ph.D. program.”

Riley travels the globe and presents his research in different countries as well as teaching abroad during some semesters. The impact of his research can be seen through his students, coworkers, and readers of his studies. He has high hopes that his research will push the US to be a better nation overall and that the research will provide some guidance to people interested in studying racial attitudes. Riley's roots will always reside in the Mississippi Delta, and his research will continue to speak volumes for him as a scholar, professor, and man.

“My research is a way to bear witness and [testify] to the conditions of Black people in the way race operates and functions in our political system. As a scholar who studies race, I think that we have to challenge traditional frameworks that do not make space for voices of marginalized scholars. One way I do that is by engaging in research that's going to speak about these particular matters.”

For more information on Riley his [faculty bio](#).

THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

Graduate School

The places YOUR UM graduate education will take you: An alumna uses her expertise at Bud Lab



Photo credit to Research Park at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

Anheuser-Busch recruiter contacted her through LinkedIn about a position at a research lab known as the InBev Bud Lab.

The Bud Lab was founded in 2013 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The lab focuses on analytics and develops innovative approaches to solve complicated data research problems, from social media to market trends and larger data initiatives. Gui was offered a position at the lab to work in research development related to key company products.

“For BudLab, the focus is trying to help Anheuser-Busch grow as a global business where we face different challenges day to day,” said Gui. **“We bring cutting edge technology to help solve problems from all around the world with Anheuser-Busch.”**

She started as a computer scientist with Anheuser-Busch while she was studying Bioinformatics for her doctoral degree at the University of Mississippi. (By the time of this interview, she had completed her

University of Mississippi students and Anheuser-Busch products have been acquainted with each other for many years. One alumna has been making a name for herself with Anheuser-Busch InBev. Tina Gui graduated from the University of Mississippi with a M.S. in Computer and Information Science in 2014. After she started working towards her Ph.D., an

doctoral defense and nearly finalized her dissertation.) When asked about her time in Oxford, she explained how her courses left her feeling sufficiently prepared to take on multiple roles such as data scientist, software engineer, and algorithm developer. She was ready for an opportunity to showcase her abilities and felt equipped for the job at hand.

“The skills and knowledge I learned through UM courses like critical thinking, conducting research methods, actually helped a lot in preparing me for getting my first job.”

With her first role as computer scientist at Anheuser-Busch, Gui led two junior data analysts in building the friendly user interface for the Anheuser marketing team to be able to understand pricing and promotion elasticities.

In 2019, Gui moved east from the Bud Lab at the University of Illinois to the lab located at MIT. She is currently working in a more leadership-based role as a manager of analytics. Now, Gui oversees different short- and long-term projects while working with MIT professors and is an individual contributor to other projects as well. There are challenges when Gui collaborates with different parties outside of Anheuser-Busch.

“The hard part is sometimes getting people up to speed with our day-to-day programming tools as they may not be familiar with the platform we use for projects, big data, or doing data analysis. It requires a lot of training beforehand to understand the platforms, so the challenge is using different tools and figuring out how to make collaborations more efficient.”

Continuing the discussion on challenges with work over the last year, Covid-19 was one that came up frequently. Most of the workers from Anheuser-Busch have been working remotely since last March, and many are waiting for everything to return to normal before in-person work can resume.

“From all around the world with Anheuser-Busch, we have the chance to learn from other markets from China to Brazil. We get to use different strategies for different markets. We work with the stakeholders, VPs, and senior directors, and understanding the challenges ... well, especially over the last year with Covid,” is a key part of the current work.

There are different opportunities to help the marketing team decide what new products are developed, where to launch, and pricing those products. Some examples are special product releases in certain cities and working closely with personnel to give the best product possible.

At the BudLab, the opportunity for fun is always around to keep the morale high through the workdays. Beer after 4:30 pm is common practice with the BudLab team, and coolers with employees' favorite beer are filled monthly by the company itself.

“For meetings after 4:30 we have sort of like a happy hour where we can have coolers and every month they restock, and you can have your favorite beer ordered.”

The places YOUR UM graduate education will take you: An alumnus uses her expertise at Bud Lab - Graduate School

The chemistry with lab employees is abundant, and the groundbreaking work is impressive. There is no doubt Gui will continue to do remarkable work with the company and she is proof that you never know where your graduate degree from the University of Mississippi will take you.

Gui quotes are in bold.

Graduate School

SREB Program—Meet Some Of Our Newest Scholars

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) Doctoral Scholars Program is an academic program focused on encouraging a doctoral level education for students who want to continue their education and pursue careers as full-time faculty at universities.

The SREB Doctoral Scholars Program was founded in 1993 with the goal to increase racial minority faculty percentages across college campuses nationwide. Since its founding, over 1,100 graduates have come through the program. Key components of the program are mentoring and allocating resources intended to develop students into doctorate level scholars.

For almost 30 years, the SREB Institute on Teaching and Mentoring has provided resources to cultivate Ph.D. students with the various skills needed to be successful at institutions of higher learning. The Institute offers workshops, networking, and recruitment opportunities to prepare scholars for their careers after graduate school. Another goal is to host professional settings for doctoral scholars to share advice for success at the graduate level. The opportunities are aligned with different developmental stages and areas of competence to help students in their respective career track.

At the University of Mississippi, we have an institutionally funded SREB Program. With the program, we aim to fulfill the goal of making the cost of a doctoral education affordable via collaboration between the Graduate School and the current academic department of the doctoral student.

In 2020, our new SREB Program Scholars were Kenneth Estrada and Bianca Lewis. Kenneth Estrada is currently a Ph.D. student in the English department and is accomplishing great things for the program and the University of Mississippi.

Bianca Lewis is a first-year doctoral student in the Clinical Psychology program. Lewis' coursework assesses psychopathology with evidence-based practices.

“It was such an honor to receive a scholarship [for] SREB, not only for the funding opportunity it provided, but for the community, social support, and opportunities for mentorship that came with it.” said Lewis. “SREB genuinely desires to support its students, from matriculation, to degree conferral and beyond.”

Lewis' research has an emphasis on the concerns and impacts of social support on health outcomes in patients who have chronic conditions.

“My most recent analyses demonstrated the ability of harmful involvement from friends and family to predict acute service use in adults with type 2 diabetes, and the curvilinear relationship between social support and number of supporters,” said Lewis. “This research was accepted for presentation at annual conferences for the Society of Behavioral Medicine and the American Diabetes Association, respectively.”

Academic research during a pandemic is a challenge for students across the nation. The University of Mississippi is home to great scholars, but the abnormal semester has created challenging environments for graduate students who are trying to focus on research projects. For future work, Lewis reflected on possible outcomes for her research.

Lewis explained: “One of the challenges I anticipate for my research will be recruiting research participants from the neighboring areas of Oxford. Mississippi has some of the highest prevalence of chronic health conditions, in addition to factors like poverty and obesity that worsen risk for chronic health conditions. This makes it especially important to use participants from the community in my research, but recruitment of these participants can be difficult.”

Networking is a priority of the SREB Scholars Program, and Bianca is ready to take advantage of the opportunity to continue her education.

“I'm excited to network with current SREB scholars and alumni, in addition to networking with recruiting institutions. I look forward to attending workshops and expanding my knowledge base at SREB's annual Institute for Teaching and Mentoring each year.”

The University of Mississippi looks forward to watching how the SREB Scholars will continue to impact the university.

THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

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Our Exciting And New Elite Scholars Program— Recruiting Outstanding Doctoral Student Researchers

The Elite Scholars Program is a tool to achieve excellence in our academic programs as we recruit leading researchers and professionals to pursue degrees at the University of Mississippi. Launched in the fall of 2020, for an extremely select group of students, the Elite Scholars Program at UM identifies prospective graduate students who are outstanding in their work and poised to contribute greatly to the research mission of the University. The Elite Scholars Program offers an opportunity for these graduate students to pursue a well-paid graduate research assistantship so that they can accelerate their development as scholars in their respective areas of studies.

The expectations of Elite Scholars are high at UM, and the potential of the nominees is considered along with their prior educational accolades and impact on research. The Graduate School and the Provost created the program with the hope that these students will conduct excellent research and advance innovations in their field.

We would like to congratulate the 2021 Elite Scholars, and introduce them, along with their research plans and overall goals.

- Caitlin Shaw
- Emily Gravlee
- Tara Baggett
- Natasha Wood
- Cody Porter

Caitlin Shaw is a first-year graduate student from Redlands, California. She was nominated for the Elite Scholars Program by her advisor, Dr. Carrie Smith.

“Receiving this [recognition] felt great and got me excited that others recognized the importance of my research,” said Shaw. “I came to the University of Mississippi excited to conduct impactful research and share this work with the academic community.”

Shaw is studying Experimental Psychology. Her research focuses on examining ambivalent sexism towards both men and women. Caitlin is aiming to have her first publication soon and to share her research findings with the academic community.

“In one of the projects, I will be examining men’s and women’s daily experiences with sexism and measure how these experiences impact their well- and ill-being,” said Shaw. “This study will use an interval-contingent methodology so I will be able to collect data each day for approximately 7 days and capture how experiences of sexism, well-being, and ill-being fluctuate over time.”

Shaw was ready to hit the ground running in Spring 2021, but Covid-19 interrupted her project, focused on incoming students, in Fall 2020.

“I was excited to begin a project where I would study incoming first-year students and learn more about their experiences in college,” shared Shaw. “However, this project had to be postponed because Covid interrupted regular campus operations.”

Emily Gravlee is a first-year Ph.D. student in Pharmacy Administration. The Department of Pharmacy Administration nominated her for the Elite Scholars Program when she applied to the Ph.D. program in the spring of 2020. She was informed later the following summer by Graduate School Dean Kluck that she had received the Provost Elite Scholar recognition.

“I was, and still am, very grateful that my department thought highly enough of me to sponsor me... and to the Graduate School for such a wonderful honor,” said Gravlee. “It was extremely exciting and humbling to receive the Elite Scholar [designation].”

Gravlee is enthusiastic for the opportunity to represent the Pharmacy Administration department and UM through research.

“It has also been a great source of motivation for me,” said Gravlee. “I try to make sure that my work lives up to the trust the Graduate School has placed in me.”

Gravlee is currently working on a project with faculty and studying Mississippi pharmacists’ involvement in immunization, along with the development of educational materials for pharmacists on pre-exposure prophylaxis to prevent HIV infection. Through her work, she wants to improve patient care.

Gravlee shared her future plans: “This summer, I plan to be involved in a project examining the impact of opioid use disorder in Mississippi. My tentative thesis project involves characterizing naloxone accessibility across the Southeastern United States... We know that standing orders make naloxone lawfully available over-the-counter at pharmacies, but we have limited information about whether pharmacies choose to stock naloxone or if it is affordable to patients when dispensed via standing order. Greater understanding of naloxone availability can help us to design effective interventions to increase naloxone uptake by at-risk communities and may ultimately help save lives.”

Tara Baggett is a first-year student in the Accountancy Ph.D. program. After her acceptance into the program, Dr. Kendall Bowlin contacted Baggett and informed her that the Accountancy School wanted to nominate her for the Elite Scholars Program.

“The notification that I had been selected as a recipient was surprising and humbling,” said Baggett. “It is an honor to be chosen, and the financial support [from the assistantship] has doubtlessly eased the transition. I am overwhelmed with gratitude for the University of Mississippi and the Patterson School of Accountancy.”

In the next year, Baggett hopes further to develop her knowledge of experimental design and the accounting literature. As she does this, she hopes to cultivate and refine ideas for her accountancy research.

Natasha Wood is in her first year in the Experimental Psychology program. She earned a B.S. in Criminal Justice from Seattle University, an M.A. in Forensic Psychology from John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and an M.S. in Social Psychology from the University of Pittsburgh. After graduate school, Wood plans to work in federal law enforcement or intelligence as a social science researcher.

“In general, I study the motivations that drive people to radicalize to violent extremism, particularly when they are deprived of their psychological needs, such as after experiencing social isolation, loneliness, and/or ostracism,” said Wood. “In my research, I use both experimental manipulations of isolation/ostracism and measure self-report real world experiences of these constructs. While I primarily study extremism, I also have separate lines of work investigating firearm ownership, ghosting intentions, [and] the use of smartphones as replacement of face-to-face communication.”

Cody Porter is a first-year Ph.D. student in Pharmaceutical Sciences. Having earned his undergraduate degree at the University of Mississippi, Porter joined the Department of BioMolecular Sciences for his Ph.D. He works with Dr. James Stewart, investigating diabetes-mediated cellular and molecular signals responsible for diabetic cardiomyopathy.

The Graduate School looks forward to seeing the innovative research from the above students. And, we look forward to sharing more about the exciting accomplishments of each Elite Scholar as we move forward. The future of UM is in good hands with this year’s Elite Scholars.

Graduate School

AMS Graduate Student Chapter

The American Mathematical Society (AMS) Graduate Student Chapter at the University of Mississippi is a unique group of mathematicians from various backgrounds, fields, and career stages. The Chapter is a resource for all graduate students in the math department, and almost all students are actively engaged in its mission and endeavors. The AMS is a professional society with over 30,000 individual and 570 institutional members worldwide. Members of the Society have access to different events, seminars, and opportunities for professional networking and the society serves people who want to pursue interests in mathematics.

At UM, faculty and graduate students have cultivated a great relationship in the group, and many wonderful things are happening within the AMS Chapter. Christopher Schwanke (now Dr. Schwanke) was the co-founder of the AMS Graduate Student Chapter in Oxford and the first chapter president, graduating in 2015 and now holding a tenure-track position at Lyon College. Dr. Sandra Spiroff is one of the faculty advisors and the other co-founder. She is a professor of mathematics, working in Commutative Algebra, currently on assignment at the National Science Foundation.

“One thing I really like about this chapter is that it is student driven,” Spiroff said. She noted that faculty primarily serve to answer questions and provide guidance, “but the students are very much in the driver’s seat.”

A main component of the AMS Chapter is the Graduate Student Seminar, hosted by the students, where the presentations all have a mathematical theme, including theory, application, and career opportunities. Speakers are always sought, with the opportunity to present essentially open to whomever volunteers. “Sometimes we bring in outside speakers, and that is supported by the funds we get from the American Mathematical Society. Folks talk about their research, so that’s one of the professional aspects of the chapter activities,” Spiroff added, in describing the student-led seminars. The seminar provides opportunities to develop skills that are transferrable outside of academia. Graduate students in any department need to practice speaking and presenting topics, and these seminars prepare graduate students to become academics or enter the job market after school. Public speaking can be a daunting task for many, and these events help ease nerves for people who may not like the idea of talking in a room full of people.

Moriah Lugar is the president for the AMS Graduate Student Chapter, and her first year as president was extra adventurous due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The students in the AMS chapter are close, and despite being constrained to online events, they made the best of the year.

“It was very different. It was a little sad not to be able to be in a room with somebody, to be able to just have that ... comradery and just be right there with that person. We’re all fairly close as a smaller department, so we all know each other and can empathize with the struggles of trying to get through your research and all of these things.”

Like so many others this past year, they used Zoom to stay connected. The chapter hosted student speakers from the University of Alabama and the University of Georgia, with UM students presenting as well, all implemented online to facilitate access during the pandemic. These seminars were great opportunities for AMS members to network and foster professional connections in the mathematical field.

“Our main goal as a chapter is just to serve as a vehicle for sharing mathematical ideas, and we want to specifically open that up to graduate students.... What we do is we bring in student speakers. We bring in non-student speakers as well in mathematics. It’s just an opportunity for us to really have a colloquium that’s geared mainly towards graduate students,” Lugar shared on the overview of AMS at UM.

Dr. Andrew Pham completed his Ph.D. in 2021 in the math department, and he accepted a visiting assistant professor position at the Mississippi University for Women. He is the immediate past president of the UM AMS chapter, having served before Lugar, and he had some great memories from the society.

Pham shared: “I spoke in student seminar. That’s been great practice for me whenever I present at conferences, having the opportunity to speak to a group I was more comfortable with... It’s been great. Being able to meet other mathematicians from other colleges and also taking their perspective on some topics here and there.”

Networking and higher education research go hand in hand to be successful in and after school. Dean of the Graduate School, Dr. Annette Kluck said, “In the Graduate School, we are thrilled to have the AMS Graduate Student Chapter at UM. Professional societies offer a powerful opportunity for our graduate students to acclimate to their profession. That UM has an AMS Graduate Student Chapter is really something. We have the only recognized chapter in the state at this time.” Congratulations to our Mathematics department on building an organization that supports the mathematical achievements of UM graduate students.

The chapter also engages in social activities, like Game Night, joint with the Physics grads, Movie Night, joint with Physics and ASB, and Pizza Grading Parties during finals week. In December, the AMS Chapter hosted a contest for their graduate students to design a T-shirt. The design of math graduate

student Kanchana Gamladdalage was selected, for anyone who wanted a shirt from this year. “It was something that I felt in the midst of [the COVID-19 pandemic], just having something ... like that to connect us and just something that we can enjoy” was important and it was something they could do, Lugar recalled.

To learn more about the chapter, visit <https://amsgsc.olemiss.edu/>.



Picture from the AMS at UM.

2020-2021 Officers

Back, from left: Page Thorn (Secretary), Apoorva Mate (Treasurer), Moriah Lugar (President)

Front, from left: Samuel Lisi (Interim Faculty Advisor), Phil Kains (Vice President),

Qinghong Zhao (Webmaster)

Industrial Pharmacy: Expanding Opportunities For UM Students in Pharmaceutics



Rasha Mahmoud Mahmoud Elkanayati

In 2019, the University of Mississippi's Department of Pharmaceutics and Drug Delivery added an emphasis in industrial pharmacy within the master's program in pharmaceutical sciences. The new emphasis complements the pharmaceutics emphasis. The industrial pharmacy emphasis provides professional development to support career readiness of graduates who will enter industry. This focus on industry means the new emphasis does not require a thesis as part of the program. Rather, pharmacy students with an emphasis in product development and management will complete projects based on their specialty, preparing for the pharmaceutical industry after school.

Students are already making developments in their respective fields.

Rasha Mahmoud Mahmoud Elkanayati is a Fulbright student from Egypt. Elkanayati came to the University of Mississippi in the fall of 2019 to pursue her second master's degree. The Fulbright program offers a chance for students to exchange different cultures with the respective nation, and the program is a way to perform individual research while also creating opportunities to further one's education through a more professional setting.

Elkanayati had previous experience with pharmaceuticals before coming to the University of Mississippi. She received her undergraduate degree at Cairo University in the School of Pharmacy in 2004, and she received a master's degree at the Arab Academy for Science and Technology in Egypt for quality management. Elkanayati then started her work in the quality assurance field, working in the Egyptian Drug Authority—equivalent to the FDA in the United States. Her time with the EDA led to her interest in expanding her education in the pharmaceutical field.

"It was something new to me as it was a completely different field that I was going through. After some time, I started to think how most of my colleagues had the same educational background as me," said

Elkanayati. “We would come to a point where we would not have enough information for something that was new to us.”

Elkanayati researched scholarship opportunities, and the Fulbright Program was one opportunity she found to develop more knowledge about industrial pharmaceuticals. She will be one of the first graduates of the new pharmacy master’s program with an emphasis in industrial pharmacy.

The series of courses offered in the program explore the concepts of product development and formulation development. Some notable courses are taught by Dr. Walter Chambliss and Dr. Eman Ashour on regulatory sciences and pharmaceutical manufacturing. Others include product development by Dr. Michael Repka, applied pharmacokinetics by Dr. Chalet Tan, research ethics, statistics, and lots of other well-designed courses. These courses are preparing pharmacy graduate students for future careers in regulatory sciences, research and development along with other work opportunities in the pharmaceutical industry.

Elkanayati is working on an applied research project under the supervision of Dr. Eman Ashour, Dr. Michael Repka, and Dr. Walter Chambliss. For the research project, the team is working to develop a product to prevent and treat dry mouth. Xerostomia (dry mouth) is a serious medical condition that can lead to health problems like tooth decay, fungal infections in the mouth, and trouble swallowing. Millions of Americans suffer from xerostomia and it is estimated to affect over 10% of the population.

“The project I am working on involves incorporating two advanced technologies, hot-melt extrusion and three-dimensional printing, for developing a mucoadhesive film that adheres to the buccal cavity and provides relief from xerostomia, which is characterized by decreased salivary secretion,” said Elkanayati. Xerostomia may occur as a side effect accompanying the intake of some drugs, or due to different diseases like Sjogren’s syndrome, diabetes, AIDS and [it] is very common in patients receiving chemotherapy and radiation for upper body cancer therapy.”

The formulation Elkanayati is working on now is intended for immediate release of the ingredients to stimulate the flow rate of saliva. There are existing products on the market that have shorter durations of action and require frequent administration. The goal for the product under development now is to have a treatment option that is longer lasting than the current pharmaceutical products.

“Our future goal is to develop a long-lasting 3D printed mucoadhesive film to prevent and/or treat dry mouth conditions,” said Elkanayati. “This condition (xerostomia) is serious and if left untreated can lead to tooth decay and infections in addition to patient discomfort during chewing, swallowing, and speaking.”

After the completion of “proof-of-concept studies” the plan is to transfer the technology to a commercial partner for commercial development. Proof of concept studies are early stages of clinical drug development.

After graduation from the master's program this May, Elkanayati will pursue her doctorate with the University of Mississippi and continue to develop the film to help with xerostomia. With more developments, the drug is set to last hours while producing saliva to combat dry mouth.

The Graduate School wishes Elkanayati and her colleagues success as they continue to make innovative discoveries in the world of pharmaceuticals and wishes all involved in the new emphasis in industrial pharmacy well as it continues to provide valuable education to students.

More information about the industrial pharmacy emphasis, including directions to apply, can be found at <https://pharmacy.olemiss.edu/pharmaceutics/professional-masters-programs/>

UM Launches New Master's Degree in Athletic Training

When someone thinks of athletic training, their first thoughts tend to be of the person they see on the football field or the person who always has athletic tape on them, but that is just one part of a field that is evolving constantly.

There is a new Master of Science program in Athletic Training at the University of Mississippi, beginning in the summer of 2021. Although most commonly offered at the bachelor's level, some institutions offer athletic training at the master's level, and UM now joins this list of institutions.

When Dean Peter Grandjean arrived at the School of Applied Sciences, he spoke to a class taught by Dr. Melinda Valliant. Dr. Corbit Franks Jr., an athletic trainer for the University, was a student in that class at the time and now is a professor for the MSAT. After the dean spoke, Franks asked if he would have any interest in establishing an athletic training program at UM. Grandjean had some interest and that is where the connection was made.

From that starting point, the work to develop the program began. "After the meeting with Dean Grandjean, all the necessary steps were taken" to obtain internal approvals and the final approval from the state of Mississippi's Institutes of Higher Learning, explained Dr. Heather Shirley, assistant professor and program director of athletic training. "From the initial conversation, it took around two years for the program development."

According to Shirley, the new program will undergo review to obtain accreditation. Accreditation is critical as it provides documentation of the quality of the program, something very important to the graduates when they sit for their Board of Certification exam (required to practice as a certified trainer). "The process starts with [the] first class of students and the actual review will begin next summer." Shirley elaborated that the self-study next summer constitutes the first step in the review, and will require submission of multiple forms and documentation regarding the accreditation standards for the program. "Certain education markers are to be met, like what is being taught and how the information is being taught. You have to meet all the standards in order to receive accreditation. There are 94 standards to meet for the process. All of that isn't strictly curriculum. The procedure looks at faculty, their background, their experience in athletic training and clinical experience, as well as their degrees plus the facilities, to get an overall picture of the program."

The initial cohort, which started this summer, has 11 students. The program will use a rolling admission process in which applications are reviewed as they are received. Shirley projects the program will grow given the success during the short window for recruiting this first year.

“The curriculum will be hands on-learning and not just [learning in a] classroom setting,” said Shirley. Learning opportunities outside the classroom called *clinical*s will teach students how to apply things learned in the classroom. These experiences working in real settings are the key to making students into practitioners.

The clinical portion of the curriculum starts immediately when students enter the program. As Shirley describes it, “The first semester is an introductory [to] athletic training and what to expect in a clinical setting. The clinical coordinator will work closely with the students and focus solely on shaping out the clinical experience for the students. The new program will allow students to begin clinical rotations and start to customize the academic experience based on the students’ interests and the setting they may want to work in.” The integration of the classroom concepts into practice is critical to allow students to practice what they learned and feel comfortable in the field. Shirley said, “For the capstone, there are two options with a research thesis or a field service project that will allow some creativity on the student’s part.”

“A lot of times, athletic trainers are seen as those on-field individuals. You see them running out on the football field during a time out or when there is an injury,” said Shirley. “That’s kind of our front door, students see that, and it gets them excited, but we know that setting is not the setting everyone wants to work in. We want to give students exposure to other things to broaden their horizons and explore something they may not have considered.”

Shirley described the program as a two-year intensive program where students learn as a cohort. They arrive in the summer and complete 66 credit hours to earn the degree. The timing of courses positions students to graduate in May and sit for their Board of Certification exam in their last semester. This really sets up students “with job opportunities maybe starting that summer or fall. Many professionals work in collegiate to high school level with that seasonal type of schedule.”

As Shirley summarizes the program, “We just want to mainly share the excitement” they have for the program. “Corbit and I are extremely grateful to be a part of this unique opportunity to move from the clinical side after such a long time knowing we can help contribute to the profession and to the students and help make them future professionals for our field’s future. We can’t say how exciting that is for us, and we hope the students see that and know that we want them to succeed.”

Graduate School

Going the Distance

By Erin Pennington

OXFORD, Miss.— The year of 2020 was a pivotal moment in history.

The Coronavirus spread fast and caused a major shut down all over the world. Its impact affected many industries, individuals and even so here, at the University of Mississippi. For the first time in recent history, Commencements were postponed and distance became the norm for students, faculty, and staff.

As the 2020-2021 school year began, everyone had to adjust to distance learning. From 8am Zoom classes to sitting at least 6 feet apart, it was a drastic change. Several students, specifically graduate students, did not know what to expect or how to even navigate their first and/or last year of graduate school.

Graduate student Ladius Caddle began her academic career at the University of Mississippi in 2015. Caddle graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Integrated Marketing Communications in 2019. She would shortly take a year off and then decide to pursue her Master of Business Administration.

As eager as she was to return to campus, little did she know she would be returning to a different, more digitized University of Mississippi campus.

“The return to campus was very weird because there was nobody on campus,” said Caddle, “The School of Business told us that we would be doing some virtual classes. I still had my assistantship which required me to go on campus.” Ultimately, for health reasons, all of Caddle’s classes went virtual in September.

Caddle, a hands-on learner, preferred for her classes to be in person. She said the learning experience became much more of a challenge for her. She missed being able to have the privilege of fully interacting with her professors and peers.

“I had to have a lot of Zoom meetings with my professors,” Caddle said.

Even with Zoom and progress in combating the pandemic, new challenges emerged in the spring.

“The second semester for me was pretty rough, I am from Jackson, Mississippi and ended up getting stuck in the snowstorm,” she stated, “We lacked electricity and water on my side of town but I am so grateful that my professors were understanding of it all.”

There would soon become a time for Caddle to appreciate the extra steps she had to endure during an all virtual semester. She walked in the 2021 MBA Commencement with her family cheering her on in the crowd.

There was no better feeling for Caddle than reaching for her diploma, then looking up in the stands to see her family watching all of her hard work finally pay off.

“This experience was definitely all worth it, especially my program. It was a different pace. I do wish I could have gotten to know my classmates in person. However, I do feel like I learned a lot about myself and the business industry,” stated Caddle. “I am really excited about the future!”

While some were getting adjusted academically, others were trying to navigate being in a brand new environment.

Assistant Dean of Graduate Programs for the School of Journalism & New Media and Associate Professor Dr. Marquita Smith recently made Oxford, Mississippi her new home one year ago. Moving in the middle of a pandemic to a new location and school was frightening.

“It was probably one of the hardest professional transitions I have ever made, mostly because of the lack of engagement, ” said Smith, “Everything was conducted online via Zoom, all of us new hires found ourselves trying to bond and build relationships. It was challenging.”

Smith said one of her favorite things to do while adjusting to being a part of the Oxford community was visiting the farmer’s market on Saturday mornings. She would later find connections with sorority sisters. Oxford would soon begin to feel a lot more like home.

“Once I was able to connect with them, I built more relationships. I just cried,” stated Smith.

Dr. Marquita Smith was also able to be closer in proximity to her immediate family once she moved to Oxford. She said being near them was one of the greatest feelings ever throughout the pandemic.

“I was able to be here, closer to my sister and spend time with my new nephew. I could visit my mother more often,” said Smith, “Had things been at a normal pace, I don’t think I would have been able to reflect as much, especially in terms of the program and reducing barriers. So it was a gift in the midst of everything going on.”

As the year flowed by, many individuals like Caddle and Smith were starting to accept their new normal but Commencement dates would soon be announced that gave many a feeling that there was light at the end of the tunnel.

Many students were excited to be able to walk across the stage to receive their degrees. Faculty and staff would be there to cheer the students on.

On April 30, Caddle received her diploma and Smith completed a full year in a new work environment. As monumental as that moment was, it served as a reminder of the extra steps they made during a pandemic to put health as a priority.

Associate Dean of Community Engagement for the School of Applied Sciences and Professor of Health, Exercise Science & Recreation Management Dr. Allison Ford-Wade said that living during the pandemic was a monumental moment in history and that it highlighted the importance of public health.

“From the public health perspective we were able to live in a part of history that will forever be in our epidemiology textbooks, we all did the best we could under the circumstances,” said Ford-Wade.

Ford-Wade said it was amazing to finally see her students walk across the stage despite the obstacles and challenges faced. “It was so wonderful to attend the 2020 and 2021 graduate Commencement ceremonies,” said Ford-Wade. “Just to be able to see our students walk across the stage brought tears to my eyes because of everything that the entire world had been through. It was such a blessing to be able to witness the graduation ceremonies.”

The work of students and staff has created a lasting impact on the university and has helped to create an increased priority on the study of public health.

UM’s Department of Health, Exercise Science and Recreation Management now has new degree programs in public health, including a Master of Public Health that will begin this fall.

“We were excited to hire a new faculty member in epidemiology beginning this fall,” said Ford-Wade, “Throughout all of this I have learned that people are resilient, we can work well together, and if we can survive that, we can survive many things.”

This significant moment in history opened millions of eyes and highlighted how precious time, connection, and achievement can be.