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THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

Graduate School

UM Graduate School Commencement 2017





Dear Students, Friends and Colleagues,

Welcome to the 2017 Commencement edition of the Graduate School newsletter! Commencement is my favorite day of the academic year, and not just because it signals the beginning of that blissful period when everyone has left campus so my office will be quiet and I can actually go to a restaurant on the Square. I enjoy the opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments of our students and faculty.

In this issue we highlight three outstanding students. We also celebrate the faculty and programs that received recognition at our hooding ceremony.

We hope you enjoy the newsletter and appreciate your interest in and support of the Graduate School at the University of Mississippi.

Christy M. Wyandt, Ph.D.

Interim Dean of the Graduate School

Professor of Pharmaceutics

Physics Professor, Modern Languages Department Selected for Diversity Award

By Nathan Towery



Photo by Robert Jordan/Ole Miss Communications

Each year, an individual, group or graduate program is recognized for efforts in promoting inclusiveness at the University of Mississippi in graduate education. This year, both an individual and a program were recognized. The Department of Modern Languages along with Cecille Labuda, associate professor of physics and astronomy, received the award.

The Department of Modern Languages is inherently diverse, said interim chair Dan O'Sullivan. People

from many different cultures and countries are represented within the department, and one of the department's main goals is to promote diversity.

"We prepare a lot of American students for that cross-cultural understanding, which they do by hosting language tables, lectures and workshops that are open to all students," O'Sullivan said.

"We are so involved in cross-cultural understanding because in order to speak a foreign language you need to have some idea about that culture," he said. "It really feels like a slice of the globe. On any given day, you can come in here and hear half-a-dozen different languages."

Labuda said that the physics department traditionally has struggled with diversity. One way the department combated that was to host a conference for undergraduate women in physics back in 2015.

"One of the major goals was to encourage these undergraduates to go to physics grad school ... and basically to help give them the confidence to do that," Labuda said.

The conference was a success in that many of the attendees went on to graduate school.

Labuda also promoted inclusiveness at the graduate level by establishing a group for graduate women in physics.

“It’s a way for all of us to get together and celebrate women in physics and to learn about what women in physics are doing,” she said.

“You have to relate to the students in a way that they feel comfortable integrating with the department. This is very important if you want the department to become more diverse.”

She said the group is open to anyone who wants to discuss what women are doing in the physics world.

Labuda and the Department of Modern Languages received their awards at the doctoral hooding ceremony on May 12.

Graduate Instructor Presented 'Golden Apple' for Excellence in Teaching

By Nathan Towery



Photo by Robert Jordan/Ole Miss Communications

One graduate instructor is recognized for success in teaching undergraduate students at the University of Mississippi each year. Although their primary purpose is to be students, graduate instructors are essential to the educational enterprise at the university.

This year, Becky Nance, a graduate instructor for the School of Education, received the Graduate Instructor Excellence in Teaching and Learning Award.

“I try to run my college classroom in such a way that (students) not only pick up the content they need but also teaching styles,” Nance said.

Nance challenges her students, wanting them to become more critical thinkers rather than to just relay information. She said that she could sum up her teaching philosophy into two words, “relational” and “intentional.”

“Everything I do I try to do very intentional ... how I ask questions, how I present activities ... things like that to make it more engaging in the college classroom,” she said.

“As a teacher coming from a K-12 classroom, I knew that my best classroom management strategy was to have a personal relationship with each and every student. I carried that same philosophy into the college class and try to really invest into my kids’ lives.”

Nance tries to make it to sporting events, musical events or anything else her students are involved in outside the classroom. Her investment in her students adds an extra level of excellence to her teaching.

Nance is a Ph.D. candidate in elementary teacher education with an emphasis in math and science. She expects to complete her dissertation, on first-year teachers entering critical-needs schools, in May

2018. She said she hopes to teach at the university level upon graduation.

Johnny Lott, director emeritus of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, presented Nance a golden apple trophy and a monetary gift at the doctoral hooding ceremony on May 12.

Psychology Professor Recognized for Excellence in Graduate Teaching

By Nathan Towery and Christy Wyandt



Photo by Robert Jordan/Ole Miss Communications

University of Mississippi psychology professor Kelly Wilson received the university's 2017 Excellence in Graduate Teaching and Mentoring Award at the doctoral hooding ceremony on May 12.

Wilson, who has been a UM faculty member for 17 years, has successfully directed the dissertations of 17 doctoral students and helped with 10 master's theses. He has published 17 peer-reviewed manuscripts, 19 book chapters, and two books with

his graduate students.

When reviewing candidates for the award, a committee evaluates their impact on graduate students, excellence in supervision of student research or professional practice, excellence in graduate classroom instruction, and any other contributions to improve instruction including influence on the graduate curriculum. It's obvious that Wilson meets these criteria, judging by the recommendations of former students.

"His standards are terrifically high, which, when matched with the tireless support he offers, creates a context for his students to excel far beyond their own expectations," said a former student. "The experiences he provided to me and my classmates prepared us to position ourselves, challenge ourselves and nurture ourselves into the professors, the scientists, the therapists, the administrators, the colleagues and the people we long to be."

Another former student said, "He bet on me when most people wouldn't have. You see, he doesn't just mentor students in research. He mentors his students to be the best they can be in the paths they chose. He believes in possibilities, which is now something that guides me in my own mentoring as a

professor. ... I am eternally grateful for him for going above and beyond with me. Making the impossible possible.”

Wilson’s influence has gone beyond the classroom; it has carried into many of his students’ professional careers. Currently, eight of his former students hold faculty positions at various universities.

In his personal teaching statement, Wilson said, “To this day, I feel privileged to breathe the air on a college campus. I feel privileged to be a member of the academy. And even after all of these years, I have a fire in my belly to transmit what I found.”

THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

Graduate School

Biological Science, Behavioral Neuroscience Students Chosen as 2017 Class Marshals

By Nathan Towery

Photo By Nathan Towery

Each year, the Graduate School selects two outstanding doctoral students to serve as class marshals. The class marshals for the spring 2017 hooding ceremony were Tim Colston, who earned his Ph.D. in biological science, and Hannah Marie Harris, who earned her Ph.D. in behavioral neuroscience.

Prior to coming to the university, Colston received his bachelor's and master's degrees, both in zoology, from the University of Oklahoma. He came to the University of Mississippi to work with Brice Noonan, associate professor of biology and his major adviser.

Colston's dissertation research focused on investigating ecological and evolutionary influences on the gut microbiomes of reptiles, primarily snakes, and what role the gut microbiome plays in community assembly.

"I think I benefited from being in a smaller department where most faculty have an open-door policy and are open to collaboration," he said. "When I first started my Ph.D., I wanted to study community assembly in tropical snake communities, but by interacting with other faculty I quickly incorporated studies on gut microbiomes into my research long before many other people were looking at the gut microbiome of nonmodel organisms."

Colston is now a National Science Foundation postdoctoral researcher at George Washington University. He is helping to develop new phylogenetic trees for reptiles that will be used to test broad evolutionary hypotheses regarding trait evolution. He will be conducting fieldwork in Colombia and Ethiopia later this year.

Harris received her bachelor's degree from the University of Mississippi. She enrolled in the terminal Ph.D. program at the university to work under Kenneth Sufka, professor of psychology and pharmacology, and was awarded a master's degree along with her Ph.D.



Photo By Nathan Towery

run their own projects.”

Harris hopes to obtain a postdoctoral position researching novel analgesics that are void of abuse potential.

In her research, Harris looked at the effects of a cannabidiol analog in combination with ineffective doses of opioids to see if they produce synergistic effects.

“Essentially you’re just taking two drugs that are ineffective and putting them together, you’re getting this really high analgesic response, yet there is no rewarding value ... like morphine without any abuse liability,” she said.

Harris said she feels lucky to have worked in professor Sufka’s lab and to have the opportunity to work with many undergraduate students.

“We have like a family with the undergrads. The most rewarding thing is to work with undergrads and see them come up with ideas to