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Graduate School

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Newsletter Fall 2014

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

Graduate School

Dean's Welcome

Dear Students, Friends and Colleagues:

Welcome to the second year of the Graduate School newsletter! I hope you enjoy our featured stories such as the one on the new professional track in the Meek School of Journalism and New Media. We continue to highlight the interesting work done by our graduate students including the research performed by biology students in ecological restoration in British Columbia, Canada. Please note that the Graduate School will again sponsor the Three Minute Thesis Competition (3MT) this fall semester, and one of our articles in this issue summarizes this exciting program.

Thanks for reading our newsletter, and please continue to send us suggestions and ideas. We welcome story concepts from students and faculty, and we would love to hear about the successes of our graduate alumni. We appreciate your support of the Graduate School at the University of Mississippi!

John Z. Kiss

Dean of the Graduate School

Professor of Biology

Biology interns blaze through British Columbia

Story by Tyler Carter

Graduate students from the University of Mississippi recently concluded an internship studying ecological restoration and fire ecology in the Rocky Mountain Trench area of British Columbia. Interns Megan Overlander, Diana Mullich, and Ann Rasmussen spent three weeks learning with restoration professionals from organizations including the Rocky Mountain Trench Society; Rocky Mountain Trench Ecosystem Restoration Program; the Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations; and Parks Canada. The interns' travel and expenses were funded through their fellowship from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.



Rasmussen is a Ph.D. student in biology and studies forest fungal ecology with an emphasis on ectomycorrhizal fungi (EMF), which grow as symbionts on tree roots. Overlander is a master's student in the Biology Department. Her thesis examines the decomposition rates of different types of leaf litter in restored and unrestored forests in Mississippi. This involves tracking the development of microbial communities as decomposition progresses as well as monitoring enzyme activity as microorganisms break down the leaf litter. Diana Mullich is studying the effects of restoration on reptiles and amphibians as part of her doctoral research.

While the biologists are studying some of the same organisms, they are all studying how forest restoration affects organisms.

“Like the restorations in Canada, our field sites are restored by thinning trees followed by burning,” Rasmussen said. “However, in North Mississippi, what’s burning is mostly leaf litter on the ground, and thinning is needed to allow the leaf litter to dry out so it can burn. In Canada, severe fire in tree canopies is common because they have a drier climate and more flammable trees, such as pines. They thin to control fuel levels and lower burn intensity.” Overlander echoed similar sentiments.

“The trip to Canada was meant to show us what is involved in a successful large scale restoration initiative. We learned about the ecological, social, and economic benefits of ecosystem restoration, along with the challenges arising from issues of funding, gaining public support, and logistics of achieving restoration. We talked to scientists, government employees, private land owners, wild land firefighters, conservation groups, and so many more people—all of them important to understanding the big picture of what is involved in restoration. We spent time listening to seminars, visiting field sites, helping to collect data for the monitoring of restoration projects, and just talking to professionals.”

What both Rasmussen and Overlander concur on is the experience gained outside of the classroom and in the field for understanding an ecosystem that differs from their current one.

“It was very valuable to learn about how fire and restoration work in an ecosystem that is very different from ours here in North Mississippi,” said Rasmussen. “There are some general similarities in theory; both systems are degraded as lack of fire leads to the forest canopy closing and the loss of understory species. However, the severity of fire in British Columbia and its impact on human communities means the scale of restoration is much larger. The fire regime in the Rocky Mountain Trench is also similar to that in parts of the American Rockies, so understanding this ecosystem broadens my options for further research in the U.S.”

“There is nothing like hands-on learning,” said Overlander. “I learned more from this internship than I could have from any amount of time sitting in a classroom.”

Graduate School

Pharmacy professor receives teaching and mentoring award

Story by Tyler Carter

John Bentley is a professor of pharmacy administration and a research professor in the Research Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences. Bentley received his B.S. in pharmacy and M.B.A. from Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1993, and his M.S. (1996) and Ph.D. (1998) in pharmacy administration from the University of Mississippi. Bentley joined the faculty at the University of Mississippi in 1998 as an assistant professor of pharmacy administration.

Bentley's career path following his initial academic appointment might be a little different than others according to him.

“Two of the courses I was assigned to teach when I joined the faculty at the University of Mississippi were graduate courses in applied statistics (intermediate and multivariate statistics). Although I (and some others) thought I was providing instruction at an above average level, I realized after several years of teaching these courses that my foundation in statistics needed some work. I was able to teach people what to do with respect to analyzing a dataset, but I struggled with explaining why. So in an effort to update my knowledge and skills, I started taking some mathematics courses (the undergraduate calculus sequence and matrix algebra) at the University of Mississippi. This helped not only prepare me for future study in statistics, but encouraged me to look a little closer at my own teaching style and habits. After completing these courses, I enrolled in a graduate program in biostatistics at the School of Public Health at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB).”

Bentley was awarded the Graduate School Teaching and Mentorship Award by the Graduate School based on his efforts in and out of the classroom. Receiving this award is “humbling” according to Bentley.

“I was truly honored by this recognition. It was also quite a bit humbling. I certainly do not do what I do for awards and recognition. I really enjoy working with graduate students – it is challenging and I am always learning something. I am fortunate to have worked with some truly outstanding graduate students both in my home department and also in several other departments across campus. These

students are intellectually curious, driven, persistent, and highly capable. To be recognized for doing something well that you really enjoy doing is special. It is also motivating. As academicians, we sometimes wonder what kind of impact we are actually having as it can be difficult to measure in many aspects of our work.”

Earning an award such as this one requires fellow colleagues and students to appreciate everything you bring to the table and Bentley thinks his students and colleagues appreciate his passion for his craft.

“I would like to think it is because of the dedication, enthusiasm, and passion I show in my work in addition to what I bring to the table in terms of knowledge and skills. Perhaps it’s because I openly recognize that we are always learning and should always be learning... no one knows everything. Learning is a never-ending process. It could be because I would like for students to say that I have high standards, that I expect excellence in my work and in the work of others, and that I hold myself and others accountable. But to be honest, I am not quite sure... you would have to ask them.”

Bentley is proud of what the Department of Pharmacy Administration has accomplished thus far.

“The Department of Pharmacy Administration at the University of Mississippi is one of the oldest graduate programs of its kind in the country, offering quality graduate education for almost 50 years. There was already a rich tradition when I arrived here, thanks to people like Dr. Mickey Smith and Dr. Dewey Garner. I would like think that we have built on that tradition. We have a very productive and collegial working environment. I am fortunate to have a department chair and faculty colleagues who are very supportive of each other, enjoy working together, and highly value graduate education. We all contribute to the teaching, research, and service missions of the department, school, and university. We have had and continue to have outstanding graduate students, who are working to find answers to interesting questions, who support each other, are very interested in learning, and are active members of their professions and communities. I am also proud of the relationships that we have developed over the years with other departments and programs on this campus. Our School of Business Administration has been especially supportive of our graduate students and I have had the pleasure of working with students from a variety of departments and schools on campus, including marketing, management information systems, finance, political science, psychology, accountancy, education, and health, exercise science, and recreation management.”

Outside of work, Bentley is an avid baseball fan and he and his wife are especially fond of the Ole Miss Baseball Program. Bentley and his wife Sandy travel to the SEC Baseball Tournament every year and for the past five years or so, they have made the trip to Omaha, NE for the College World Series. This past June made the trip to Omaha more special as the Rebels made it to the CWS for the first time since 1972. The Graduate School is pleased to highlight Dr. Bentley for his great work in the Department of Pharmacy Administration!

MFA in creative writing program recognized for diversity

Story by Tyler Carter

Professor Beth Ann Fennelly directs the Master of Fine Arts in creative writing program at the University of Mississippi, where in 2011 she was named Outstanding Humanities Teacher of the Year. Recently, Fennelly and her department were awarded the Diversity and Inclusiveness Award by the Graduate School. Winning this award was a great accomplishment for Fennelly and the MFA program.

“Winning the diversity award was an amazing recognition for how far our program has come,” Fennelly said. “It is not just that we have diverse students in our program — it’s that they are receiving the support they need to succeed in amazing ways. I’m really grateful that Dean John Z. Kiss and the Graduate School have established this award to promote and recognize the important ways that a diverse student body enriches the university and the culture at large. We will use the prize money to attempt to recruit even more diverse voices, and to advertise our program to people who might not know that the University of Mississippi can be a fabulous home for writers of any background.”

The Master of Fine Arts in creative writing program is prestigious as evidenced by the more than 300 applicants who applied for admission this past year. However, the program is very competitive with only a few students being admitted each year. The program is a unique one, according to Fennelly.

“Although Oxford has been a literary town since Faulkner, the MFA program is relatively young, established in 2001. In our 14-year history, however, we’ve already earned an astonishing national reputation. We were ranked one of the Atlantic Monthly’s ‘Top Five Up-and-Coming’ Programs, and we consistently earn a place in Poets and Writers’ Top Fifty Programs. In fact, our ranking rise has been amazing. In 2012, we were ranked 33rd, and this year we were ranked 14th.”

Another hidden gem within the fine arts program that attracts students is the faculty, according to Fennelly.

“Our current faculty, actively publishing, is a large part of what’s attracting applicants. Tom Franklin’s novel *Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter* was the winner of the L.A. Times Book Prize and New York Times

Bestseller. Pulitzer Prize winning Richard Ford teaches a master class for us every spring. Chris Offutt, in addition to being a novelist, is a scriptwriter for “Weeds” and “True Blood.” Ann Fisher-Wirth and Derrick Harriell are both Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters prize winning poets. In addition, every year we bring an emerging John and Renee Grisham Writer-in-Residence to campus for one year. This year, the writer will be Mary Miller from Jackson. Our Grisham Visiting Writers Series brings the best writers in the country to our campus, such as Robert Hass, Brenda Hillman, Jennifer Egan, Tobias Wolff, and Natasha Trethewey.”

The Fine Arts program has more than fourteen students who have works either published, soon to be published, or works turned into film. Fennelly emphasizes that this program’s students are working exceptionally hard.

“They are serving as graduate teaching fellows and are either section leaders and graders in the English Department’s 200-level literature or 300-level Shakespeare classes (three sections per semester of around 20 students each; each section meets once a week for 50 minutes) or they serve as graduate instructors with a yearly 2-1 course load. On top of that they are taking three classes and trying to write the Great American Novel, Essay, or Poem.”

These accomplishments are due to a collective effort among faculty and students and Fennelly thinks the fine arts program in creative writing is a great place to receive the proper tutelage to become the writer or poet the students strive to be.

“We believe that we are the best place for hungry students dedicated to honing their craft, and we do everything we can to see that they have the resources and encouragement to use their time to its fullest potential. Our students’ success stories offer evidence that our plan is working. The last four of five years, we’ve had student work in *New American Voices*. We have students in *Best American Poetry*, *The Oxford American*, *Tin House*, and many, many other prestigious publications. These students bring credit not only to our program and university but the state of Mississippi. They go on to teaching jobs or editing jobs or take more unusual paths, and when they do, they bring with them stories of their education here.”

University Food Bank benefits graduate students

Story by Tyler Carter

On most college campuses around the country, students have meal plans which allow them access to meals until their cafeterias close for the day. But what happens to students who may have classes scheduled during hours that do not allow them to make it to dinner? Or what about students who do not have enough money to buy food to eat? Colleges around the country are realizing that students are suffering from hunger so some schools have begun to build food banks on their campuses. According to the *Washington Post*, in the last six years, the number of food banks on college campuses has increased. Also according to this article, a recent survey this year found that 59 percent of students at Western Oregon University had recently experienced food insecurity. The figure was 21 percent in a 2009 report for students at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 14.5 percent of U.S. households fall into the food insecurity category, which is associated with lower academic achievement.

This year, there are reportedly 121 food banks on college campuses. According to Savannah Thomas, student representative of the food bank at the University of Mississippi campus, the food bank was formed in November of 2012.

“During 2010 and 2011, many students at the university began to feel the effects of the economic recession,” Thomas said. “Faculty and staff, particularly at the University Counseling Center and in Health Services, began to hear from students who were seeking assistance due to financial hardship and hunger. A group of concerned students, faculty, and staff decided that there needed to be a resource for students who needed food assistance on campus.”

Thomas went on to explain why a food bank on campus was vital and needed to support students who were lacking funds to purchase food.

“The mission of the Ole Miss Food Bank is to provide food to end student hunger and to foster a healthy college community. No student should have to face the struggles of finding enough food to eat. The food bank ensures that students at Ole Miss have access to a resource that will assist them during times of hardship. The food bank is especially important because it raises awareness about the issue of hunger

that we have across the country and provides an open and anonymous space where any student can come to get food.”

Dr. Robert Cummings, adviser for the Ole Miss Food Bank serves as Director of the Center for Writing and Rhetoric and Associate Professor of English at the University of Mississippi. The food bank is very important to Cummings for numerous reasons.

“It helps to raise awareness of food insecurity as an increasing problem in the higher education landscape. Our students, colleagues, friends, and neighbors are all affected by food insecurity. We are the leading research university in the poorest state in the nation. That identity is more than a statistic: living in the poorest state in the nation means that almost everyone is affected by poverty in some way, and their needs are not always visible. Members of my family have needed a food bank at some point in their lives. It helps me understand that needing food assistance is something common for our community, and receiving food aid does not need to be a traumatic or stigmatizing experience. Sometimes we have some extra to share; sometimes we have a need for help. I have often heard it said that the difference between being broke and being poor is a state of mind; being broke is a temporary condition but being poor is a long-term condition. I think that students cheerfully and discreetly helping each other out with food assistance means that more students will see the need for food assistance as a temporary condition. But more than that, the existence of the Food Bank is proof of the good nature of our students to band together to help one another.”

While students know that this is an available resource for them, some may be too bashful to ask for assistance. Graduate students such as Hugh Jones utilized the Food Bank during his time here.

“Throughout my academic life, including the years before college, I have lived at a certain level of food insecurity. My parents are elderly, and my mother has been severely disabled for the last 20 years. I have always had to hold down jobs in college to support myself, and sometimes my family members. Until recently, with a big old pile of good luck, I am now bar tending 4 shifts a week, and coming close to earning over the Federal Poverty Line for a one person household, which as you may already know, a ridiculously low standard. I’m lucky for student healthcare.”

The food bank has over 100 students on its volunteer email list; per time slot, two students staff the food bank at all times. During the school year, they are open six days a week and hours are updated on the website depending on the time of year. Some students may be hesitant to ask for help so the food bank takes steps to ensure any student can feel comfortable visiting the food bank for assistance.

“We strive to be an open place where students feel comfortable; thus, we don’t collect any of the students’ personal information,” said Thomas. “To take advantage of the services we provide, a student simply comes during our hours of operation and is able to take as much food as he or she needs. We have no limit on the food an individual can take, nor a limit on the number of times a student can come to the food bank during the week.”

To aid in supporting this cause, anyone interested in contributing to the Ole Miss Food Bank should email [**olemissfoodbank@gmail.com**](mailto:olemissfoodbank@gmail.com). Financial assistance is also an option Cummings explained.

“Direct food donations and tax-deductible financial donations are our only means of support. Financial donations may be given to the University of Mississippi Foundation, with the indication that the donation is for the Food Bank.”

Assistance is greatly appreciated by the community at The University of Mississippi and in Oxford.

What is the Three Minute Thesis and why should you participate?

Story by Tyler Carter

The Three Minute Thesis (3MT) is a competition that includes both master's and doctoral students. The competition is based on the students' abilities to communicate their thesis or dissertation research. Each student is given three



minutes and the use of one PowerPoint slide to present the significance of his or her research topic.

According to <http://threeminutethesis.org/>, this competition's genesis was formulated by the University of Queensland, which challenges graduate students conducting research to present a compelling oration on their thesis and its significance in just three minutes in language appropriate to a nonspecialist audience. John Z. Kiss, dean of the Graduate School, believes students benefit from participating in the 3MT competition.

“Good communication skills are an essential part of a graduate education and are required for professional success. 3MT encourages students to develop their communication skills by explaining their thesis/dissertation topic to a non-specialist general audience. The ability to communicate to a broad audience will help students throughout their professional careers.”

Harish Chander, a doctoral student in the health and kinesiology program, was awarded the grand prize in the 2013 3MT competition here at the University of Mississippi based upon the presentation of his thesis research about the “Impact on Balance While Walking in Occupational Footwear.” Chander loved and appreciated the experience the 3MT provided him with and recommends students participate in the competition.

“Overall and personally, the 3MT served as an amazing learning experience. The first preliminary rounds at Ole Miss demonstrated huge talents and research fields that were ongoing in our own campus. It brought all graduate student research into one spotlight and provided an opportunity for me

and other graduate students to not only showcase their research, but to learn other grad students' research and compete against them. Dr. John Kiss held mentoring sessions for the 3MT, which I would suggest students to take advantage of as it proved to be of great help, especially this being the inaugural 3MT at our campus. I am extremely glad that I got an opportunity to compete, present my research to other scholars, and, above all, represent Ole Miss at the SEC regional competition. The environment at the regional conference was great and just to be surrounded with fellow graduate student researchers was an amazing opportunity. I met a lot of people and got to know about their interesting research.”

Chander successfully completed his Ph.D. this summer and will be starting as an Assistant Professor of Biomechanics at Mississippi State University this fall. Chander felt that winning the 3MT helped with him obtain the job and further suggests participation by incoming graduate students.

“Winning the overall Grand Prize here at Ole Miss and competing and representing Ole Miss at the SEC regional finals for the Three Minute Thesis competition was very well recognized by MSU and in all of my job interviews. The search committee in all of job searches, their department chairs and the dean of the schools, all recognized this achievement and was well received. Hence, this opportunity couldn't have come in the best time possible and it certainly increased my academic credibility and certainly very happy to be the student that got to represent Ole Miss. The incoming graduate students will be greatly benefited with the resources that the Graduate School is actually providing us. It is an amazing opportunity to learn, present your research and along with funding opportunities for research, makes the 3MT an extremely vital experience that all grad students should experience and it will serve as an exceptional academic accomplishment for life after grad school too.”

Graduate School

Graduate School staff profile: Michelle Cole Dickson

Story by Tyler Carter

If you ask around the Graduate House about Michelle Cole Dickson, you will get nothing but positive feedback about her. Kegan Armstrong, regional admissions counselor, had this to say about Dickson.

“Michelle has been such a godsend for me since I began working here four years ago. She has given me direction, and encouraged me to tailor this job to accommodate my natural skill set. She has been much more than just a colleague; she has been a friend.”

Dickson has been employed here at the Graduate House for 10 years and thoroughly enjoys what she does. “Being able to assist the students make the transition as simple as possible is what I enjoy the most,” Dickson said. Her duties include: processing payroll for graduate school staff, supervising graduate assistants in our office, accounts payable, processing stipends, scholarships associated with graduate assistantships, minority scholarships, and fellowships.

Dickson has answers to questions you may have at the beginning of your tenure here at the University of Mississippi. One of the most frequently asked questions she gets is, “When will my scholarship be posted or why hasn’t my scholarship been applied to my account?” According to Dickson, “Departments have deadlines to get their assistantship paperwork submitted. Once the paperwork is submitted to our office, there is still another process; we have to verify the student’s GPA, resident status, and make sure that the students’ registration is within the guidelines set by our office for their appointment levels (10 or 20 hours). If departments submit paperwork by the deadline that provides ample time to get scholarships in place for disbursements.”

Another frequently asked question pertains to financial aid. “Releases of funds are not done by the Graduate School,” Dickson said. “We apply the scholarships; releases are done by the Financial Aid office. Initial disbursement is done a week to ten days prior to the first day of classes. After that,



releases are done daily. Students need to make sure that their financial aid is complete, and awards are accepted. This is done by logging into your myolemiss.edu account and you then select the financial aid tab. The financial aid office will notify you via email if there is something that you need to do.”

For the incoming graduate class, Dickson wants to leave you with one last nugget of advice regarding assistantships. “If you have an assistantship, make sure that your department has processed your paperwork. Scholarships cannot be disbursed until you have completed your registration. The Graduate School has one person that processes these scholarships; please be patient as I work diligently to get this done in a timely manner. If you cannot reach me via telephone, please feel free to email me **mdickson@olemiss.edu**.”

THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

Graduate School

Meet UM's Black Graduate and Professional Student Association

Story by Tyler Carter

On Aug. 21, orientation was held for incoming graduate students. These students attended to become acclimated to the University of Mississippi and to learn about their specific degree programs' requirements. Present at the orientation were groups such as the Graduate Student Council and the Black Graduate and Professional Student Association. BGPSA President



Purvis Cornish along with the executive board were on hand to greet the new students and inform them about the goals and origin of the organization. Other members of the executive board include: Vice-President Antwain Leach, Secretary La'Shaunta' Glover, and Treasurer Bianca Crudup.

“One of the missions of this year's leadership is to reestablish the BGPSA as an active and productive organization and strategize ways to ensure the BGPSA's longevity and presence on campus once the current leadership team graduates. The BGPSA was founded primarily as an organization that serves as an aid in advocating and promoting the needs, concerns, and interests of historically underrepresented graduate and professional students. More, the BGPSA was founded not only to create a space for cultural and social support, but also as an extra- departmental space that fosters academic and professional growth.”

The goals of the BGPSA this school year are to promote civic engagement, participate in service learning, improve interdepartmental and inter-organizational communication and scholarship between graduate and professional students, and begin the process of mentoring black undergraduate students and offering them assistance as they transition from the undergraduate level to graduate school or into their careers.

The BGPSA has a few events that are in the planning stages, one of which will be a forum on diversity at the university and how the BGPSA, and other graduate students of color, can assist and support the

university as it pushes for a more inclusive and diverse environment. This event will probably take place sometime in October. Also, the BGPSA plans to have a tent in the Grove for homecoming and other football games, "which should be pretty exciting," according to Cornish, since it will be their first Grove experience as an organization.

After a hiatus for four years, the BGPSA seeks to reestablish itself as a thriving organization on this campus. President Purvis Cornish and Vice-President Antwain Leach are heading the efforts to make sure this organization is around long after their tenure as graduate students expire.

Graduate School

Dean of students pledges to work with grad students

Story by Tyler Carter

After former Dean of Students Sparky Reardon's retirement, the school hired Melinda Sutton as his replacement. Sutton has made her way to the University of Mississippi by way of her alma mater, Southern Methodist University, where she served as the associate dean of student life. Before she returned to SMU, Sutton served students in various administrative positions at the University of Texas at Austin, Indiana University – Bloomington and Vanderbilt University. Sutton obtained both her master's degree, and more recently, her Ph.D. in education from Indiana University. When she saw the job opening at the University of Mississippi, Sutton was immediately attracted to the position.

"It sounded like a great fit," Sutton said. "Once I visited campus, I felt that I connected to the people that I met- as well as the attractiveness of the position; one thing led to another, and here I am."

Sutton's transition has been seamless and she greatly appreciates the hospitality she has received while adjusting to life in the University of Mississippi community.

"The folks here have been so welcoming and have done a great job of helping me get up to speed as quickly as possible, providing the information that I need, and answering all of my questions. The people here are making me feel at home already."

Sutton is looking forward to helping to advance the institution, but what she plans to do first is to learn more about the culture and how she can better serve the student body on all levels. There has been concern among the Graduate Student Council that graduate and professional students are not recognized as a valued population, and Sutton hopes to dispel those notions.

"Being a former graduate student myself, I feel like I connect with them pretty well. At UT-Austin, I advised the graduate student assembly and worked with them on many issues that were unique to them. I enjoy working with this population because they have so many diverse needs, but I also recognize that they are a very important population; we want to make sure their needs are being met and that they are having a great experience here at the University of Mississippi."

Sutton is looking forward to being a valued member in the community as well as representative for the University of Mississippi and anticipates being an advocate for all students on campus. Her energy and enthusiasm about the position has not gone unnoticed and she expects great things of herself to best serve the students at the University of Mississippi.

New master's journalism track approved

Story by Tyler Carter

The Meek School of Journalism and New Media has created a new professional journalism track and enrolled the first cohort of students this fall. The new track consists of four core courses that will prepare students for the versatile and ever-changing field of journalism. The new program positions the University of Mississippi to serve as a leader at the graduate level in a growing and challenging field as journalism and the art of narrative storytelling in nonfiction evolve along multiple media platforms. The program will serve the needs of future journalists and those professionals in journalism today who want to raise their skills to a higher level and make journalism itself serve its core functions in our society at a higher level. Professor Joe Atkins, chair of the master's degree program in journalism is excited to have this new track finally come to fruition.

"We've been working on this a couple years now," Atkins said. "We surveyed journalists all around Mississippi and beyond to learn what they look for in such a program, how a professional program could serve students and the profession best. We also sought input from our faculty and we've listened when students have shared views with us. We looked at other programs in the country, at what works and what doesn't, and considered what makes us unique and different from other places. This track is the fruition of a lot of hard work, and we're very proud and happy to see it now in place."

Ashley Norwood, first-year graduate student from Jackson, Mississippi, has high hopes entering her first year in the program.

"Coming into the program, I was a little skeptical. I didn't know exactly what to expect being that I have a background in print journalism, and the future of print is not as promising as other sources of media. What I appreciate the most about this program is the variety of subjects that are available. Because digital media is now a hot commodity, participating in such a diverse track of courses has given me the opportunity to learn and gain worthwhile experience."

Norwood also values how marketable the multimedia track will allow her to be after her time at the University of Mississippi.

“I am elated the productions aren’t just for grading purposes but we will have the chance to show our work and in turn, make our work marketable for those employers looking for young innovative multimedia journalists.”

As new classes are created, it could be assumed that new professors would be brought in to shift some of the work load, but Atkins is confident in the abilities of the faculty currently within the Meek School.

“We have some highly qualified folks already on our faculty with lots of professional experience that is ideal for this program. However, we do hope to bring in guest faculty to augment what we already have here, and we’re in those conversations now, talking to people with considerable professional and academic experience, too.”

With such a rich history in journalism, the University of Mississippi as well as the state of Mississippi have always promoted great writing. Authors such as William Faulkner and Willie Morris have paved the way for great journalism here in Mississippi, and this program seeks to further enhance and promote stellar journalistic practices.

“This is the perfect home for a program like this,” Atkins said. “The journalism program already has a strong tradition of in-depth journalism and excellent narrative writing that writers like Willie Morris so well embodied. This continues and enhances that tradition.”