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After Life-Threatening Accident, Mother of Five Pursues Dream

UM-Rankin student Holly Thrailkill selected for SOE's Sylvia Foran Curriculum Planning Award

 JUNE 3, 2022 BY **ERIN GARRETT**

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Holly Thrailkill, a rising senior elementary education major at the university's Rankin regional campus, was awarded the School of Education's Sylvia Foran Curriculum Planning Award at the school's annual awards ceremony. Photo by Thomas Graning/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

PEARL, Miss. – Holly Thrailkill has a mantra: one step at a time. She first used it when she was learning to walk again. She uses it now as motivation to finish her degree.

Thrailkill is a rising senior elementary education major at the **University of Mississippi** on the **Hinds Community College-Rankin campus**. She has beaten the odds again and again during her educational journey, which began more than two decades ago, and she just won an award for her skill in preparing unit curricula.

Hailing from Jackson, Thrailkill enrolled at Hinds Community College on the Raymond campus in 1997. When she learned that she was pregnant with her first child, she quit school to focus on raising a family.

"Figuring out how to be a wife, mom and a student all at once was overwhelming," she said. "So I took school off the table. I had my baby, and then two years later I had another baby, and two years after that I had another baby."

"I tried again to go back to Hinds, but I couldn't make it work. I always wanted to finish my associate degree."

In 2008, Thrailkill's life took a frightening turn. At 8 a.m. on a Tuesday, she was on the way back from dropping off her two eldest daughters, Laurel and Maddie, at school when she and her 4-year-old daughter, Graycen, were hit head-on by a drunk driver.

"I was trapped for two hours," Thrailkill said. "My daughter was out right away but had a spinal cord injury and was paralyzed from the mid-chest down. I was in a coma for two weeks and had six surgeries."

"They told me that Graceyn would never walk again and that the plan was to teach her to live in her new body."

This devastating news came with an overwhelming challenge for Thrailkill.

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Campus Briefs

Civil Engineering Professor Receives Most-Cited Paper Award

OXFORD, Miss. – Peer recognition is a rewarding experience for anyone, but University of Mississippi researcher Amir Mehrara Molan was elated when an article he co-authored recently received the Most Cited Paper Award at the 102nd Transportation Research Board meeting in the nation's capital. The International Journal of Transportation Science and Technology presented the civil engineering

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Young Alumna Gives Back to School of Accountancy

OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy's new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying "thank you." "It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

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Ole Miss In the News

Reuters: Keep an Eye on the Money Supply

U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to

"They said it was going to take me a year to learn to walk again," she said. "Then I could start taking care of my baby. In that year, Graceyn learned to use a wheelchair. I was working with physical therapists and learned how to stand and walk."

Watching her daughter navigate life in a wheelchair gave Thrailkill a unique understanding and compassion for children with special needs. She knew that she wanted to work with children, but wasn't sure how it would come to fruition.

A few years after the accident, Thrailkill had twins, Carter and Avery.

"I brought the twins home, and I was now a single mother of five," she said. "It was hard because Graycen still needed a lot of care."

All that time, Thrailkill still dreamed of finishing her associate degree. In 2018, she felt ready to try again and reenrolled at Hinds. She began by simply taking one class a semester and then moved up to two classes. She graduated with her associate degree in December 2019.

She planned to pursue a speech pathology degree, but those plans were thwarted when the pandemic hit. Her daughter was medically fragile, and so much was unknown about COVID-19 at the time.

"We couldn't be around anyone," she said. "We weren't risking anything. Me and my four kids who were living at home were all virtual students. I couldn't do the speech pathology program because I couldn't go to class."

Thrailkill didn't want her time at home to be wasted, so she searched for another option. She found the elementary education program at the University of Mississippi's Rankin campus.

"I found out that this program could allow me to work with and help kids," she said. "I wanted to go into the SPED program so that I could help teach children with special needs."

Pat Coats, interim executive director for the university's DeSoto campus, counseled Thrailkill on her next steps. She instructed her to take a few more required courses so that she was eligible for the program.

"I've enjoyed getting to know Holly," Coats said. "Her story is inspirational to her fellow students and to me as well. I am incredibly proud of all that she has accomplished so far. We are all cheering her on and can't wait to see her fulfill her goal of teaching."

Thrailkill said that she has been supported and encouraged by her instructors and classmates every step of the way. She is thankful that the program is located so close to home.

"If it were not for UM-Rankin, there would be no way for me to obtain my teaching degree," she said. "Having a regional campus right here is invaluable for me because it allows me to take care of my kids while getting the best education possible."

This year, Thrailkill earned the **School of Education's** Sylvia Foran Curriculum Planning Award. The award recognizes one teacher candidate who has shown promise and ingenuity in preparing unit curriculum.

"I was very surprised to be chosen," Thrailkill said. "It was such an honor, and I enjoyed attending the award ceremony on the Oxford campus."

Though it has taken a lot of hard work to get to this point, Thrailkill is looking forward to student teaching in the fall.

"I used to say that learning to walk again was the hardest thing I've ever done," she said. "Then I brought my twins home and that was the hardest thing. Now I am saying that completing this program is the hardest thing."

"But I also feel like all those of challenges that happened prepared me for this. I can keep pushing and keep going. I can take it a little at a time — one step at a time."

For more information about the elementary education program at the University of Mississippi – Rankin, visit <https://www.olemiss.edu/rankin/>.



Holly Thrailkill (back row, right), a student at the university's Rankin regional campus, poses with her children: Graceyn (seated), Carter (left), Maddie, Laurel and Avery. Thrailkill, who begins her senior year as an education major at the Rankin regional campus this fall, has become an advocate for children with special needs. Submitted photo

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