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Afton Thomas, Jazmine Kelley Receive Lift Every Voice Award

Award given to faculty and staff who push for diversity, equity and inclusion on campus

MARCH 3, 2022 BY [JB CLARK](#)



OXFORD, Miss. – The **University of Mississippi** Black Faculty and Staff Organization has presented the 2022 Lift Every Voice Award to Afton Thomas, associate director for programs in the **Center for the Study of Southern Culture**, and Jazmine Kelley, coordinator of wellness education at the **William Magee Institute for Student Wellbeing**.

The Lift Every Voice award is given to faculty and staff members who perform beyond their duties in their areas of diversity, equity and inclusion. The award is presented during the annual Black History Month keynote by the BFSO in partnership to the **Center for Inclusion and Cross Cultural Engagement**.

Afton Thomas

Thomas's day-to-day work involves planning workshops, conferences and special events, and helping documentary expression master's students orchestrate artist events. But when she talks about her role, she speaks of helping members of the university community find the common ground in their diverse experiences so that connections can be made and community can be built.

Because Southern studies includes a range of histories and cultures, Thomas said she is able to connect students, artists, authors, researchers, professors and community members of all backgrounds based on the intersections of their interests.

"It is my hope to create programming that speaks to the varied interests of our Southern studies students, faculty, staff, and larger university community," she said. "I think that is what resonates with all people – seeing themselves reflected back. When you can hear and see yourself in something, that's when it's most impactful."



Afton Thomas

Jazmine Kelley



Jazmine Kelley

Kelley wants to make sure all students are experiencing effective on-campus programming. She developed a programming assessment instrument that allows the Division of Student Affairs to gauge what types of students are attending which events, and how much those students enjoyed or learned from those events.

The tool is an anonymous survey that allows students to disclose demographic and identity information while answering questions about how engaging the event was and how supported they feel by the programming. That data allows the division to add and adjust future programming to ensure that all students have opportunities to learn and grow in ways that are engaging and helpful.

"I think of this as barrier-breaking because it's difficult to meet someone's needs if you don't know what those needs are," Kelley said. "This allows us to find and meet those needs where we may not have been able to before."

"It also allows us to break down stigma around what some of these minority groups need and then provide them with actual solutions."

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OXFORD, Miss. – Eleven University of Mississippi students spent their winter break learning about the people who work behind the scenes of the American government in Washington, D.C. Lead by Jonathan Klingler, assistant professor of political science, the students of Pol 391: Applied Politics met not with candidates, but with the people who make candidates'

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