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Chemistry Professor, Diversity Official Honored for Student Service

EJ Edney, Eden Tanner earn Frist Award for passion to serving students

APRIL 27, 2022 BY MITCHELL DIGGS



OXFORD, Miss. – Two **University of Mississippi** employees who have demonstrated dedication and passion for helping students succeed have been honored with a campuswide award for student service.

Norris “EJ” Edney, assistant vice chancellor for **diversity and inclusion**, and Eden Tanner, assistant professor of **chemistry and biochemistry**, have been selected as this year’s Frist Student Service Award honorees.

They were chosen from dozens of nominations submitted by students, faculty and staff. A committee appointed by the chancellor weighs nominations and selects faculty and staff winners each year.

“As one of the highest honors on our campus, it is not surprising that EJ Edney and Eden Tanner were selected as this year’s Frist Award winners,” Chancellor Glenn Boyce said. “These deserving recipients embody and exemplify the caring nature of our campus community.”

“I commend and thank them for their extraordinary and sincere focus on upholding our universitywide commitment to serving and supporting our students.”

Any full-time faculty or staff member, except previous winners, is eligible for the award, which includes a \$1,000 prize and a plaque. The honorees also will be recognized during the end-of-the-semester faculty meeting on Friday (May 6).

In one nomination letter, a student credited Edney with mentoring and holding him accountable for his own success as a student.

“Growing up with no male figure in my life was complicated,” the student wrote. “I never knew how to interact with men, to be frank. Dr. Norris ‘EJ’ Edney is the first male figure to be 100% vested in my success.”

Edney encouraged the student to become active in several campus organizations, all while keeping his coursework and grades as the top priority.

“I am forever grateful for Dr. Edney’s role in my life,” the student said. “His love and passion for students inspired me to pursue higher education.”

“I want to be the Dr. EJ to another student, hoping that they will also pay it forward.”

Another nominator, a faculty member in the university’s Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College, echoed that theme, comparing Edney to “a stone thrown into a pond. His contributions ripple out from Oxford to the state to the nation.”

As a graduate student at UM, Edney helped create the university’s **Center for Inclusion and Cross Cultural Engagement**. When he finished his doctorate in higher education in 2019, he was named its director.

During his time at Ole Miss, he also has served as program coordinator for the Luckyday Scholarship Success Program and as a coordinator for National Pan-Hellenic Council. He moved into his current role earlier this year.

It is “surreal” to be awarded this honor, Edney said.

“I believe 100% that the University of Mississippi is its people, and they’re great people,” he said. “To be recognized among the best of them in terms of providing service to our students is really humbling.”



Norris ‘EJ’ Edney, assistant vice chancellor for diversity and inclusion, has been selected as this year’s staff recipient of the Frist Student Service Award. Submitted photo

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Campus Briefs

Donations Sought for 25th Annual Books and Bears Program

OXFORD, Miss. – The University of Mississippi is asking the community to help spread a little joy this holiday season by donating to the 25th annual Books and Bears program. Donations such as toys, books, dolls, bicycles and other children’s play items are being accepted through Dec. 14. All donations will be collected and sorted

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Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship Aims to Build Leaders

OXFORD, Miss. – Twenty-five inaugural recipients of the Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship – a program hosted by the University of Mississippi School of Education in partnership with the Mississippi Association of Coaches and the Mississippi High School Activities Association – are expected to increase their impact on student-athletes and their communities. The coaching fellowship

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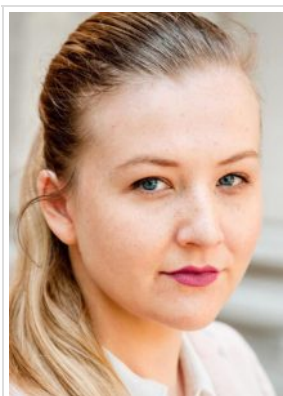
Clarion-Ledger: New Essay Collection Tells the Story of Meredith’s Enrollment

Essays celebrate 60th anniversary of James Meredith’s enrollment at University of Mississippi By Lauren Rhoades Oct. 1 marks the 60th anniversary of James Meredith’s 1962 enrollment at the University of Mississippi as the school’s first African-American student.

"It's a reminder that what we do for students is the central reason we're here."

The first person from his family to attend UM, Edney said his story is similar to that of many other Black Mississippians, who grew up hearing that they would be better served at other institutions of higher learning.

"Now, I'm part of rewriting the story of what it means to be a part of the University of Mississippi and expanding what that means for all people," he said. "It's part of how the university keeps getting better and better for everyone, and how we can make sure it provides opportunities for all Mississippians."



Eden Tanner, assistant professor of chemistry and biochemistry, has been selected as the faculty recipient of this year's Frist Student Service Award. Submitted photo

Although she joined the faculty only 18 months ago, Tanner has drawn praise for encouraging diversity in her academic and research pursuits. **Her laboratory group** includes one postdoctoral scholar, six graduate students and 18 undergraduates, about 65% of whom are women or nonbinary people, and 40% are people of color.

"She goes out of her way to make her lab a safe space for students of all genders and sexualities and nationalities," a student wrote in nominating Tanner. "She is a strong advocate for disabled students and equity for people of color."

Tanner actively works to make sure students are "happy, comfortable and don't have food insecurity," the student said, noting that she works to make sure minority students are considered for fellowships and scholarships, and tries to involve them in conferences and other professional opportunities.

"I am both medically disabled as well as a person of color," the student said. "When I became sick, she herself brought me to the hospital and took a significant portion of her time ensuring that I had

time, access to care and supplies to recover."

Tanner was seeing students during her office hours when the chancellor called to tell her about the award, she said.

"It was a big surprise, and I got to share the news with some of my students," she said. "I'm deeply honored because student service is why I'm in this kind of work."

"Being able to work with students and provide an open door and opportunities for them is really at the core of our mission here."

The Frist Award is the most cherished of the recognitions she has received, said Tanner, who joined the faculty after serving as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Oxford in England and at Harvard University.

"I'm so privileged to have a group of bright, talented students to work with," she said. "It's an honor to be able to work with them. I've worked at some of the top institutions in the world throughout my training, and the students here are really unbeatable."

The Frist Student Service Awards were established with a \$50,000 gift from the late Dr. Thomas F. Frist, of Nashville, a 1930 Ole Miss graduate. Previous Frist winners include faculty members Aileen Ajootian, Michael Barnett, Luca Bombelli, Robert Brown, Donald Dyer, Denis Goulet, Ellen Meacham, Ken Sufka and Eric Weber; and staff members Thelma Curry, Carol Forsythe, Cindy May, Anne McCauley, Valeria Ross, Marc Showalter and Linda Spargo.

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