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## Endowment Provides Graduate Scholarships

Gift honors donor's mother, aids students in UM College of Liberal Arts

JUNE 18, 2022 BY BILL DABNEY

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Southern studies and English professor Kathryn McKee holds her honors English class in the Grove. A gift from alumna Karen Comer Matthews will assist graduate students in English at the University of Mississippi. Photo by Kevin Bain/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

OXFORD, Miss. – A Christmas present opened by Nannette Holcomb Comer, of Fulton, has the power to make dreams a reality for countless [University of Mississippi](#) students.

The gift from Comer's daughter, Karen Comer Matthews, of Memphis, Tennessee, will help students seeking graduate-level degrees within the [College of Liberal Arts](#) while also serving as a tribute to her mother.

Matthews made a \$50,000 gift to the university to establish the Nannette Holcomb Comer English Scholarship Endowment. The purpose of the endowment is to honor in perpetuity the life and legacy of Matthews' mother, while providing income to support qualified graduate students.

"Scholarships open a world of transformational educational opportunities to many of our students," said Lee Cohen, UM liberal arts dean. "This generous support enables our [Department of English](#) to be more competitive in recruiting our most highly ranked graduate applicants, who may choose to go to another university that offers higher stipends."

Matthews, a 1985 UM [School of Engineering](#) graduate, is president and CEO of Delta Health Alliance, a nonprofit, community-based organization that funds and operates 40 health care and education initiatives in 38 Mississippi Delta counties.

Comer earned a bachelor's degree in English in 1961 and a master's degree in English in 1967, both from Ole Miss. Retired from teaching freshman composition and sophomore literature at Itawamba Community College in Fulton, Comer said she was surprised and honored by her daughter's gift.

"I was astounded," she said. "It took me a few minutes before I could understand that this was really happening. It was a total, complete surprise. Karen can come up with some surprises! She is amazing."

Comer hopes the gift will be valuable to students who may not otherwise have the opportunity to attain an advanced degree.

"Getting an education is expensive, and it took all of our time and energy," Comer said. "When I was in the graduate program, I was so overwhelmed with the work I had and the amount of reading that was required. If students have a heavy course load along with financial responsibilities that they can't meet, pursuing a graduate degree is just doubly hard."

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#### 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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### Thank You To Our Donors

#### 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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### Ole Miss In the News

#### 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.



**Nannette Holcomb Comer (left) and Karen Comer Matthews**

“It would be a pleasure to me to help students who maybe couldn’t have gone to graduate school otherwise, who couldn’t have furthered their education or earned a degree without some help.”

Recipients of the Comer Scholarship will be full-time graduate students in the College of Liberal Arts majoring in English and residents of Mississippi, or legacies of UM alumni.

“It was lovely to work with Mrs. Matthews in creating an everlasting gift for her mother,” said Caroline Hourin, development officer for the College of Liberal Arts. “Of course, as a retired educator, Mrs. Comer was aware of one of the greatest needs in higher education.

“Graduate student support allows for us to compete with other institutions in recruiting the best and brightest, subsequently impacting the quality of engagement with our faculty and undergraduate students.”

In 2008 and 2009, Matthews made gifts to the university’s Campaign for Engineering as a tribute to her father, Carl C. Comer, a Fulton resident who earned a bachelor’s degree in science and a master’s degree in chemistry from UM in 1960 and 1965, respectively. The School of Engineering honored Matthews’ gifts and her father’s legacy in 2010 by dedicating an auditorium as the Carl C. Comer Auditorium.

“We’re an Ole Miss family,” Matthews said at the time. “We never considered ourselves just students, alumni or fans. Ole Miss is just more a part of us, and we’re a part of it – like home.”

Matthews’ daughters, Shelby and Olivia Fox, and her sister, Mary Margaret Comer Grissom, are also UM graduates.

The Nannette Holcomb Comer English Scholarship Endowment is open to support from organizations and individuals. Gifts can be made by sending a check, with the fund’s name noted on the memo line, to the University of Mississippi Foundation, 406 University Ave., Oxford, MS 38655, or by giving online at <https://give.olemiss.edu>.

For more information about supporting the College of Liberal Arts, contact Caroline Hourin, development associate, at [cehourin@olemiss.edu](mailto:cehourin@olemiss.edu) or 662-915-6385.

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“James Meredith: Breaking the Barrier,” a collection of essays edited by UM professor of journalism Kathleen Wickham, honors this historic milestone with

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