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Honors College Student Receives Barksdale Award

Maureen Maher gets \$5,000 to fulfill dream of capturing national parks employees' perspectives

FEBRUARY 21, 2019 BY EDWIN B. SMITH



Douglass Sullivan-Gonzalez (left), dean of the UM Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College, presents the 20 Barksdale Award to Maureen Maher during the annual spring Honors Convocation. Photo by Kevin Bain/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

OXFORD, Miss. – A junior psychology major in the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College at the **University of Mississippi** will get to fulfill her dream to visit 12 national parks and interview seasonal workers this summer, all thanks to a prestigious and generous award.

Maureen Maher, of Gulfport, was presented the 2019 Barksdale Award during the Honors College's annual spring convocation Tuesday (Feb. 19). The Barksdale Awards were established in 2005 to encourage students to test themselves in environments beyond the classroom, teaching lab or library. Maher is the 25th recipient of the honor.

"I never dreamed this proposal would become a reality," said Maher, who has minors in Spanish, biology and art. "I am so honored and grateful for the Honors College's support and I am eager to begin my research."

With this \$5,000 award, Maher will travel to 12 national parks to interview workers. She plans to use this research to write her honors thesis on seasonal workers of the National Parks Service.

As a freshman, she worked in **Yellowstone National Park** as a seasonal employee at Lake Yellowstone Hotel.

"I was able to live and work with people from all across the United States and all across the world, people of different ages, people with different backgrounds and people with different reasons for choosing to work at national parks," Maher said. "I was fascinated by the group of people that Yellowstone attracted."

"This idea of seasonal workers sparked my interest and desire to further understand them and what drew them to the park."

Maher exemplifies the true citizen scholar of the **Honors College**, Dean Douglass Sullivan-González said.

"She combines both her academic interrogatives with a deeply empathetic set of questions to understand the motivations of the hundreds of national park workers who choose to live in the midst of the beauty of our nation," he said. "Her creativity and imagination with this project of a lifetime 'make us jealous' and we await the rewards of her research with her thesis."

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Campus Briefs

Students Learn 'Real Politics' in Washington, D.C., Winter Session

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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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 abate. The Federal Reserve's

"We are very proud of Maureen and wish great success with this new adventure."

Maher has planned a 42-day road trip through the dozen national parks this summer. At each stop, she will interview and photograph seasonal workers to produce a photographic essay that will illuminate their perspectives.

"The profiles I will create will be based on structured interview questions with short surveys with open-items and measures that assess environmental attitudes and behaviors and well-being, along with sociodemographic factors," said Maher, who expects to graduate in May 2020.

Interviews will be content-analyzed, highlighting themes that are common as well as contrasting across workers. Survey data will provide additional perspectives such as how age, gender and a number of seasons are related to well-being and connection to nature.

The photographic essay use acclaimed photojournalist Caroline Wang's methodology, "Photovoice," and Maher's own reflections and interactions from the journey, along with parks images and sample quotes from participants.

"I am confident that with my past experience, I understand the way of the parks: the written and unwritten rules, dangers, precautions and secrets of the land," Maher said.

Maher has worked as a research assistant to Laura Johnson, chair and professor of **psychology**.

"I am more than thrilled with Maureen's interdisciplinary, mixed methods research project," Johnson wrote in a letter of recommendation. "Her results will contribute to the field of conservation psychology and our understanding of human-nature interactions, increasingly critical in this time of climate crises.

"Maureen has shown remarkable eagerness and cutting-edge thinking about her topic. I look forward to our continued work together."

Ann Fisher-Wirth, professor of **English** and a mentor of Maher's, was equally complimentary of the student and her research.

"Particularly in the current political climate, in which the National Parks system is underfunded, undervalued and under attack, Maureen's desire to learn more not only about the park system, but also about the people who choose to define themselves as seasonal park workers, is important and timely," Fisher-Wirth wrote in her recommendation. "She seems well-prepared to undertake such a project, and seems to have thought through its various elements and challenges."

For more information about the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College, visit <http://www.honors.olemiss.edu/>.

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