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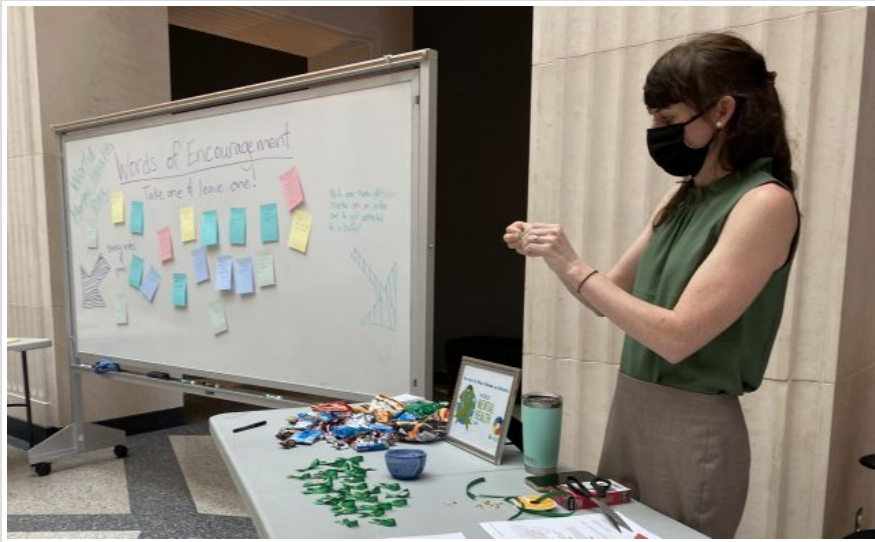
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Law School Recognized for Student Wellness Program

Judges cite school multidimensional wellness efforts that span 'bodies, minds and souls'

AUGUST 2, 2022 BY [CHRISTINA STEUBE](#)

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Brittany Barbee, assistant dean for student affairs at the School of Law, prepares a display and table of information for World Mental Health Day. The law school is being honored for its efforts to promote student wellness and prepare them for life after graduation. Photo by Christina Steube/School of Law

OXFORD, Miss. – It's no secret that the study and practice of law is difficult and stressful. In a 2021 [study](#), 69% of responding students from 39 law schools reported needing help for emotional or mental health problems within the last year.

The same study indicated that a third of students had been diagnosed with depression and 40% had been diagnosed with anxiety – statistics up by 18% and 21%, respectively, from 2014.

The [University of Mississippi School of Law](#) has made mitigating these negative statistics and actively helping law students in all areas of life part of its mission. The school's Student Wellness Program is among three national recipients of the 2022 E. Smythe Gambrell Professionalism Award.

"So many different individuals have contributed to this work over the years, and it means so much to us to be able to share this good news with them," said Brittany Barbee, assistant dean for student affairs at the law school. "We look forward to continuing our wellness program and making it even better."

The award is part of the American Bar Association Standing Committee on Professionalism. Officials from the school are set to accept the award at the ABA Division of Bar Services and the National Conference of Bar Presidents Joint Awards Luncheon, slated for Friday (Aug. 5) in Chicago.

Judges found the school's wellness program provides students with well-being resources and programming in an exemplary and innovative way.

The school developed a robust wellness program in 2018 to help students thrive in school and set them up for success post-graduation. Since then, the school has developed a range of programs and events to serve its roughly 475 students each year to provide support in the areas of intellectual, mental, physical, social, spiritual and financial wellness.

"Being a law student is challenging – you must be able to navigate many different stressors throughout the course of your studies," Barbee said. "If we can provide students the tools necessary to maintain their wellness in the midst of those stressors, then they will be well-prepared both personally and professionally for the practice of law."

Each semester, the Ole Miss law school hosts a Wellness Challenge, where students can track their

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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

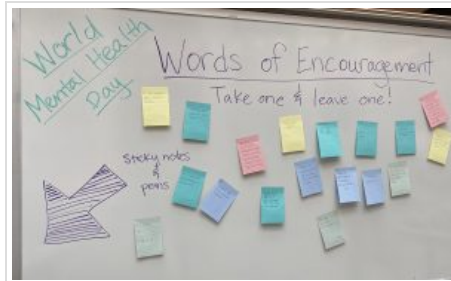
daily healthy habits to win prizes. Students can earn points for everything from taking a multivitamin to attending a community event to scheduling a counseling session.

The top prize is a coveted, reserved parking spot in front of the law school, with two runners-up receiving unlimited passes to the university's recreation facilities. The goal each semester is to have at least 10% of the school's student body participate, but some semesters, response has been much higher.

Professional mental health services are another pillar of the wellness program. Through a partnership with the Department of Psychology, the law school provides students with free access to individual, confidential counseling sessions.

The counselor position is held each year by a fifth-year doctoral student in clinical psychology, who is also a licensed therapist. The counselor's office is housed within the law school, making the service accessible and convenient for students who want to walk in or make an appointment.

Demand for counseling services has been high, but waitlisted students are referred to other local mental health clinics and practitioners. This past year, the counselor also held a training session for faculty and staff on ways they can help students who may be in crisis.



UM law students participate in World Mental Health Day by writing words of encouragement for a display in the school's lobby. Photo by Christina Steube/School of Law

Some studies indicate that students of color and other underrepresented groups can be even susceptible to well-being damage from the stress of law school. In response, the Ole Miss law school has incorporated a variety of approaches to diversity, equity and inclusion programming in recent year, including monthly "Diversity Discussions" hosted by student organizations.

Other programming throughout the year includes mental health recognition days, weekly yoga and meditation classes, a renovated student lounge, and a collection of books on wellness topics and financial literacy workshops.

Meredith Crockett, a second-year law student from Wilmore, Kentucky, is a past winner of the Wellness Challenge and has benefitted from the program.

"Law school is notorious for the academic rigor of the courses, but also a unique set of measures like class rankings, internships and extracurriculars that weigh heavily on the psyche of law students," she said. "In the fall semester of my 1L year, my mental health began slipping in a way I had not experienced before.

"As silly as it sounds, the goal of winning the wellness challenge encouraged me to prioritize my mental health and do the basics of drinking water, exercising and spending time with friends and family when my mind told me to do the opposite."

Crockett said the challenge redefined what wellness meant to her in practice, beyond typical stereotypes.

"Wellness exists in every size body, every income range and different levels of ability," she said. "Defining wellness as a holistic practice that includes both diet and exercise, but also spirituality, community and self-care, opens the door for anyone to participate in the practice of wellness without the monetary or ability barriers that typical gyms and fitness plans present.

"I would encourage everyone in my class to join the wellness challenge and see all the different ways the stressors of our day-to-day lives become more manageable when we are all collectively taking care of our bodies, minds and souls."

The award includes a \$3,500 cash prize, which will be used to support more wellness programming.

Other program partners include the Mississippi Bar Association's Lawyer Assistance Program, the ABA Commission of Lawyer Assistance Programs and AccessLex.

The award committee was impressed by the "robust, multi-dimensional wellness program aimed at helping students thrive both in law school and after graduation, noting that the University of Mississippi School of Law was at the forefront of the legal community to address law students' well-being and mental health," said Stephanie Villinski, committee chair, in the official award letter.

"The Standing Committee on Professionalism commends the University of Mississippi School of Law for implementing an innovative and effective program well worthy of emulation throughout the nation."

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