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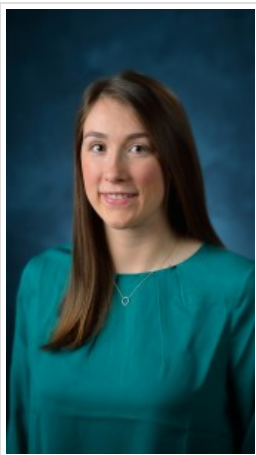
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Public Policy Leadership Students Invited to Present at Conferences

Four UM juniors preparing to share their research, conclusions at national meetings

MARCH 12, 2014 BY ELAINE PUGH



Alexandra Pena

OXFORD, Miss. – Dynamic teachers and students who stretch their minds beyond their comfort zones are a winning combination at the University of Mississippi.

Such a match has produced four public policy leadership majors who have been invited to present papers at national conferences this spring. The papers were required writing last semester in the class PPL 300: Ethics and Public Policy, taught by award-winning faculty member Eric T. Weber.

Enrolled in the Lott Leadership Institute, the high-performing students are juniors in the College of Liberal Arts. They are Christine Dickason of Collierville, Tenn., Alexandra Pena of Washington, D.C., Rob Pillow of Madison and Will Reynolds of Ozark, Mo.

Dickason and Reynolds are slated for Eastern Michigan University's fourth annual Undergraduate Conference in Philosophy, set for March 8-9, and Pena and

Pillow will present April 12 at the University of Central Oklahoma's Undergraduate Conference.

Weber, associate professor of public policy leadership, says he's not surprised when one or two of his students receive this kind of recognition, but four from the same course is unusually exciting.

"They're great students, first of all, and they worked through an 'intro-project' process, in which they were tasked with planning their papers and getting feedback at an early stage," he said. "They also picked practical and important topics to which our material clearly connected."

Provost Morris Stocks applauded both Weber and his students for their success.

"I congratulate these outstanding students for their excellence and the national recognition they have achieved for themselves and the University of Mississippi," Stocks said. "I also commend Dr. Weber for his enthusiasm and passion for teaching, a combination that empowers and inspires students to reach beyond the norm. This is truly another example of excellence at this university."

Glenn Hopkins, dean of liberal arts, agreed.

"We are always pleased when the combined efforts of our faculty and students put the University of Mississippi on the national stage," Hopkins said. "I congratulate Dr. Weber for guiding these exceptional students to this academic opportunity, and I have no doubt that they will be impressive representatives for us all."

Pena's research examined the federal public policy debate, including philosophical issues, related to the legalization of marijuana, defending her view that legalization is unethical. She credits her professor's teaching style for helping her produce a paper worthy of recognition.

"It was a difficult class where you definitely needed to try hard, but Dr. Weber was always there to offer support," she said. "His intro-project approach to writing was one example of a challenge, but I learned a



Rob Pillow

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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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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

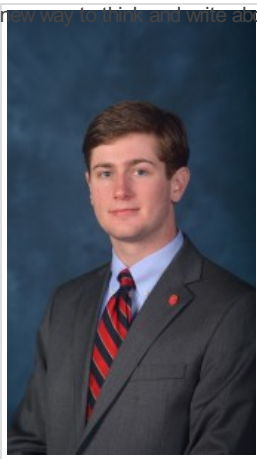
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Ole Miss In the News

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.

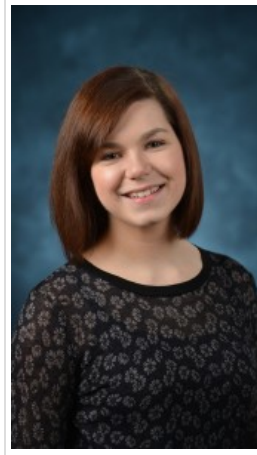


Will Reynolds

...way to think and write about public policy.”

Each of these students has the potential for “great careers as writers, commentators and/or policy analysts and advocates,” Weber said.

Dickason, a member of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College and a finalist for the national Truman Scholars program, already is making her mark as a published writer. She has had more than 10 opinion pieces published in UM’s The Daily Mississippian, and one of her articles appeared in the online magazine CampusProgress and was republished in The Nation national magazine.



Christine Dickason

In her PPL class paper, titled “America’s Schools: Separate and Unequal,” Dickason concludes that “the government must intervene to ensure that America’s children attend school together.”

“I explored theories about the individual, justice and democracy from influential philosophers, such as Dewey, Kant and Aristotle, to determine if racial integration in public schools is a moral necessity,” she said.

Pillow’s research also considers the public education dilemma.

“My paper is about the moral consequences of a segregated school system and its effects on the learning process,” he said. “Basically, years later (since integration) we still have segregated schools, only it’s not enforced by man’s law but rather by natural and economic laws. I cite many philosophical and ethical theories in an attempt to present the problem in a new light.”

Reynolds chose to research moral theories about liberty, basing his study on the “harm principle,” a political theory attributed to John Stuart Mill, a 19th-century British philosopher, economist and moral and political theorist. The theory is relevant to topics such as former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s policy proposal to ban the sale of many sweetened drinks.

“Mill outlined that the acceptable use of government coercion should be only to prevent harm to others, which has come to be known as the harm principle,” Reynolds said. “I chose this topic because the principle provides the basis of much of libertarian philosophy, and I am very much interested in the workings of libertarianism.”

Reynolds said he is “extremely excited” at having been chosen to present his paper at the conference and considers the experience as another step in his career preparation.

“I am hoping to one day work in the government relations department of a private company,” he said. “Ole Miss has consistently provided a high-quality education that is necessary for me to achieve my career goals.”

Dickason, too, expects her conference exposition to boost her career expectations.

“It will be an incredible opportunity for me to network with peers and learn from the critiques that I will receive from scholars at the conference,” she said.

Following graduation in spring 2015, Dickason plans to complete a master’s degree in public policy.

“I hope to be able to craft and influence education policy on a national scale that will work to remedy the inequality perpetuated within the existing education system,” she said.

A member of the Honors College, Pena also hopes to make a difference on a broad scale. Her long-term goal is to move back to D.C. and work for the government to help shape agriculture policy as it relates to food and nutrition and healthy lifestyles.

“It’s an awesome confidence booster that my paper has been chosen for presentation,” she said. “I have dyslexia, and school has never been easy, but this really shows me that if you try hard and work at it, you can be just as good as anyone else.”

Pillow said he is “honored and excited” to be an invited conference speaker, an opportunity that takes him closer to his long-term career goal. He hopes to become an economic adviser to address social and economic problems at the grass-roots level, including struggling towns in the Mississippi Delta.

Weber, who joined UM in 2007, received the College of Liberal Arts Cora Lee Graham Outstanding Teacher of Freshmen Award in 2011, followed in 2012 by the prestigious, campuswide Frist Student

“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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Service Award. He has published three books, with a fourth under way, and he is executive director of the Society for Philosophers in America, among numerous other achievements.

For more information, visit <http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/leadership/>.

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