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Sociology Graduate Student Gets National Science Foundation Internship

Yasmin McLaurin to spend summer working with program to stimulate competitive research

MAY 24, 2021 BY SHEA STEWART



Yasmin McLaurin, a Bay Springs native who is pursuing a master's degree in sociology at the University of Mississippi, has been selected to intern with the National Science Foundation through the Quality Education for Minorities Network. Submitted photo

OXFORD, Miss. – A **University of Mississippi** sociology graduate student will spend 10 weeks this summer assisting a **National Science Foundation** program in developing a communication strategy.

Bay Springs native Yasmin McLaurin, who is pursuing a master's degree in sociology, was selected last month to be an intern with the NSF through the **Quality Education for Minorities Network**.

The network's Talent Development and Innovation and Sciences Summer Internship is designed to complement students' academic abilities with experiences to develop professionally. The program also is intended to instill an appreciation for STEM-related projects, NSF-funded projects and careers in science, technology, education and mathematics fields.

"I was shocked when I was contacted by email stating I had been selected for the position because I had begun to think I had not been selected," said McLaurin, who also works as a research assistant with Anne Cafer, assistant professor of sociology and anthropology. "Once I read through the email, I really began to feel proud and excited because I know this is a big honor.

"I would like to acknowledge my adviser, Dr. Cafer, and JSU McNair Scholars Program director, Dr. Gilda Robinson, for writing the required letters of recommendation. I applied for the internship last-minute and both agreed to write favorable letters within a short time frame. During the interview, the interviewers raved about the type of recommendation that they both wrote."

The 10-week internship begins May 24 and runs through the end of July.

McLaurin will work with the NSF's **Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research** program, which is managed by the foundation's Office of Integrative Activities and enhances research competitiveness of targeted U.S. states, territories or commonwealth by strengthening STEM capacity and capability.

Mississippi is among the states eligible for funding through the program.

Beyond helping create a communication strategy, McLaurin also will produce background materials for a major upcoming stakeholder engagement activity. Some of these materials include data analyses, visualization and graphic design, and written communications.

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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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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.

"In addition to this, I will participate in staff meetings, attend NSF-sponsored presentations and workshops, and at the end of the summer, I will give a presentation to the Office of Integrative Activities about the outcomes from my project," she said.

"I hope to use the internship to gain more leadership skills, more knowledge regarding issues that may alter the quality of STEM education for minority students and learn more about policies created to overcome these issues. Learning more about the quality of STEM education will contribute to my future studies in disparities in education."

McLaurin also will learn more about some of the circumstances that prevent minority students from receiving a quality STEM education. And she will have an opportunity to pursue additional research to become familiar with NSF programs and strategies to address issues related to underrepresentation in STEM.

"I hope to use the skills I acquire from this experience to promote change in STEM education for underrepresented populations," she said. "I hope to create connections with NSF personnel that will not only be beneficial to my future endeavors, but also beneficial to the entire department and university."

The internship will help McLaurin prepare for further exploration of her research pursuits, which include interests in race, racial injustices and disparities, and education, along with how those fields interact. Working with Cafer has led to a growing interest in community resilience and demography, too.

"This is a tremendous opportunity and speaks to Yasmin's qualities as a scholar," said Cafer, who also **serves as co-director of UM Community First Research Center for Wellbeing and Creative Achievement**. "This opportunity highlights the growing importance of social sciences and community-facing work, both of which Yasmin has excelled in during her academic career, and especially in her research here at UM.

"Her focus on community issues, education and policy will serve her well in this internship, which, when combined with her education, will equip her with the skill set necessary to be a powerful change agent."

Since the internship is virtual, McLaurin will be based at Ole Miss, but she will be invited to attend a culminating workshop to get a firsthand experience of how NSF and its community work together to advance the progress of science.

A 2020 summa cum laude graduate of Jackson State University with a degree in social science and ethnic studies, McLaurin joined the **Department of Sociology and Anthropology** on a fully funded two-year assistantship through the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

She hopes to earn her Ph.D. and teach and conduct research in a social science field such as sociology, African American history or cultural studies so she can foster a sense of awareness of the struggles that underrepresented populations face.

"I have always had a keen interest in being an educator," McLaurin said. "Through the Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement Program, I learned that there is a lack of diversity in higher education settings.

"I hope to help diversify higher education spaces by becoming a professor. Grade school is mandatory, but students are not required to attend college. I want to be a college professor so that I can help students reach their career goals by providing knowledge, reasoning skills and discipline."

The Quality Education for Minorities Network was established in July 1990. Based in Washington, D.C., the nonprofit organization is dedicated to improving education for underrepresented students throughout the nation.

Talent Development and Innovation and Sciences Summer Internships are open to majors in STEM fields who have completed at least their sophomore year by the start of the internship. Graduating seniors must already have been accepted to and plan to enter graduate school in the fall to be eligible.

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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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