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Stella Connell

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Speaker's Edge Competition Helps Develop Career-Relevant Skills

More than 100 students show off public speaking skills in 18th annual contest

JANUARY 28, 2022 BY STELLA CONNELL

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Elizabeth Tettleton Mason (left) accepts a check from Katherine Anderson as the overall winner of the 2022 Speaker's Edge competition. The check is presented by Billy Gottshall, executive director of the UM Trent Lott Leadership Institute. Photo by Logan Kirkland/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

OXFORD, Miss. – Fake vaccine cards, inappropriate behavior on Zoom, underreporting billable hours to improve bonuses, equal opportunities in the workplace, fitness apps, cruelty-free skin products and ways to be a better employer were among the topics addressed at the 18th annual UM Speaker's Edge competition at the [University of Mississippi](#).

More than 109 graduate students in business, accountancy and law tackled issues ranging from disclosing coworkers' exposure to the virus to employees being encouraged to work in the office for preference in performance reviews and promotion consideration, all during a global pandemic.

They were joined by 111 judges and 22 coaches for this year's speaking competition. Held Jan. 13-14, the event is a partnership between the university's [School of Business Administration](#), [Patterson School of Accountancy](#), [Trent Lott Leadership Institute](#), [Department of Writing and Rhetoric](#) and the [Division of Outreach and Continuing Education](#).

After two days of competition, Elizabeth Tettleton Mason, an MBA candidate from Oxford, was declared the overall winner and was awarded a check for \$1,000.

"The Speaker's Edge program is one of the most unique aspects of the Ole Miss MBA program," said Mason, who earned her bachelor's degree in hospitality management from UM. "I am honored to be named the overall champion this year and want to thank Katherine Anderson for her generous gift as my award.

"Public speaking has been a longtime passion of mine, largely influenced by my experience in undergrad while traveling in competitive forensics competitions. Our new speech center director, Dr. Ellie Moore, has done a remarkable job bringing Speaker's Edge into a new era, even in the midst of the challenges of the pandemic."

Mason placed second in the Ethical Dilemmas category and second in Market Place Pitch.

"We are excited and pleased with the 18th annual Speaker's Edge competition," said Ken Cyree, dean of the School of Business Administration. "I am grateful for the dedication of our staff and the commitment of our judges who made the competition a success and provided a unique learning

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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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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

opportunity through creating a competitive environment to test the mettle of our students.”

In the Ethical Dilemmas category, Aldyn Ewing, a master’s student in accountancy from Corpus Christi, Texas, took first place, followed by Mason. In third place was Anna Michele Borgen, an MBA candidate from Heath, Texas, who received her bachelor’s degree from UM in accountancy.

In this category, participants presented their best solutions for workplace challenges, where issues addressing unvaccinated workers who are unmasked in the office, the use of fake vaccination cards and nudity on Zoom.

Ewing’s dilemma posed a situation where the lead of an audit team at a regional accounting firm hinted that underreporting billable hours would improve the team’s annual bonuses, which are based on their reported efficiency.

“The Ethical Dilemmas portion of Speaker’s Edge was challenging yet very rewarding,” said Ewing, who earned her bachelor’s degree in accountancy from UM. “I know that competing in this event helped to prepare me for many situations I will encounter during my career as an accountant.”

In the Marketplace Pitch category, Caitlin Marie Moak, an MBA candidate from Canton, Georgia, took first place. She was followed by Mason and Borgen.

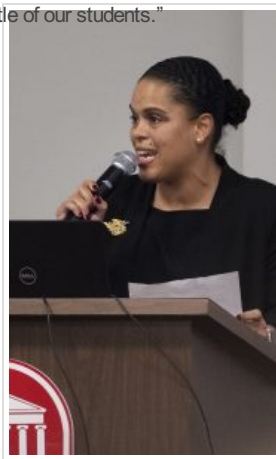
“I was honored to participate in the Speaker’s Edge competition,” said Moak, who earned a bachelor’s degree in economics and marketing from Ole Miss. “It helped me develop my speaking skills and overcome my fear of speaking in public.”

Moak’s pitch proposed a three-step plan to Amazon’s board of directors to improve the company’s business model to be a better employer.

The competition provides an exceptional vehicle for students to enhance their verbal communication skills, said Mark Wilder, UM accountancy dean.

“Thank you to Dr. Ellie Moore and the faculty, coaches, judges, staff and sponsors for a highly successful Speaker’s Edge 2022,” Wilder said. “This was Dr. Moore’s first year to lead the event and we received excellent feedback from students about the course and competition.

“It was an outstanding learning experience once again for students, and we are proud of all who participated.”



Ellie Moore, director of the UM Speaking Center and coordinator of the Speaker’s Edge competition, announces the winners of this year’s competition. Photo by Logan Kirkland/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

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Team Olay, whose pitch involved the marketing of a cruelty-free skin product, won the Team Pitch category. The team members are (from left) Kelly Moran, J.R. Kellen, Walker Cottrell, Trey Sankey and Logan Gage. Photo by Logan Kirkland/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

In the Team Pitch category, participating students randomly selected companies and applied the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, or SWOT, analysis to evaluate them. The goal was to determine and address points of vulnerability or opportunity and how best to present a solution or highlight a strength.

The winning pitch was from Team Olay, which involved the marketing of a new cruelty-free skin product line targeted to people in their 20s and 30s and using social media influencers to promote it.

Members of the winning team were all master’s students from the School of Accountancy. They are Walker Cottrell, from Columbus, Georgia, who received his bachelor’s in accountancy from Ole Miss; Logan Gage, of Ridgeland, who received his bachelor’s degree in accountancy from Ole Miss; J.R. Kellen, from Lexington, Kentucky, who received his bachelor’s in accountancy from Ole Miss; Kelly Moran, from Martinez, California, who received her bachelor’s degree in business administration from California Polytechnic State University, and Trey Sankey, of Tallahassee, Florida, who received his bachelor’s degree in accountancy from Ole Miss.

“Speaker’s Edge challenges students to develop their speaking, presentation and communication skills,” said Walter Davis, faculty director of MBA programs. “For many of our students, this is truly a transformative experience.

“The opportunity to develop career-relevant skills in such an exciting environment is what makes Speaker’s Edge a highlight of many students’ personal development in the MBA program.”

The competition was launched in 2004 by Ole Miss alumni. It brings together industry professionals,

retirees, working alumni and students, requiring students to adapt their message to different audiences.

"We were glad to be back in person this year, but we also incorporated virtual elements that we utilized last year to better deliver the event," said Ashley McGee, director of MBA programs. "These coaches prepare them for the competition; but more importantly, they prepare them for their future."

Participants spent a week-and-a-half working with volunteer communication coaches to discover strengths and weaknesses of their own personal presentation styles in front of multiple judges.

"The 2022 Speaker's Edge competition was a great success," said Moore, the competition's coordinator. "A special thank you goes to my predecessor, JoAnn Edwards, for laying the foundation for this great competition."

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