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Talented Seniors Elevate Work of the McLean Institute

Three Hall of Fame students work to better communities across Mississippi

MAY 16, 2019 BY LAUREN RUTLEDGE

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Jarvis Benson

OXFORD, Miss. – As undergraduates at the **University of Mississippi**, Jarvis Benson, Levi Bevis and Blair Wortsmit have helped advance the work of the **McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement** through the M Partner initiative, North Mississippi VISTA Project and LOU Saves.

Recently, each of these graduating seniors was inducted into the **UM Hall of Fame**. This honor recognizes the widespread impact that each student has had across campus as well as within the Lafayette-Oxford-University and surrounding communities.

“Jarvis, Levi and Blair are immensely talented students who have contributed to the McLean Institute’s mission to advance transformation through service at UM and to fight poverty through education,” said Albert Nylander, professor of sociology and McLean Institute director. “Over the years, I have found that our work attracts some of the most talented and passionate students on campus, and their efforts have elevated our work to a new level.”

M Partner is a community engagement effort that seeks to improve quality of life in Mississippi communities. It offers a framework for community and university representatives to advance priority projects in partner cities across the state and underpins institutional efforts to promote healthy and vibrant communities.

The inaugural M Partner communities are Charleston, Lexington and New Albany.

“In the year since we launched M Partner, I have been amazed at the level of interest from students, faculty and community partners,” said Laura Martin, M Partner director and associate director of the McLean Institute. “We are fortunate to have many engaged faculty and students at UM, and their service and scholarship are making a difference in our partner communities.”

An Active and Aware Citizen

Benson, of Grenada, graduated May 11 with a dual degree in international relations and Spanish. He was a member of the **Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College** and **Croft Institute for International Studies**.

Benson’s involvement on campus includes serving as president of the Black Student Union, an Associated Student Body senator, mentor for the Mississippi Outreach for Scholastic Talent program, orientation leader and organizer with Mississippi Votes. He received the Taylor Medal, the Spanish Honors Award and the Penny Leeton Service Award.

He was also selected as a 2018 Truman Scholarship Finalist for Mississippi and a 2018 finalist for the Rhodes Scholarship.

Shortly after returning from his semester abroad in Mexico, Benson served in 2018 as a VISTA Summer Associate with the New Albany School District. VISTA Summer Associates are part of the North Mississippi VISTA Project. As a summer associate, Benson supported summer learning programs in the New Albany School District and at the Boys and Girls Club of New Albany.

He remained involved in the community and worked with the Black Student Union to develop a relationship with community groups in New Albany in support of their community development work.

“The McLean Institute has been an absolute joy to work with over the past year,” Benson said. “The institute has allowed me to bridge my academics and campus involvements with making actual impacts on the ground in the surrounding community.”

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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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Thank You To Our Donors

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

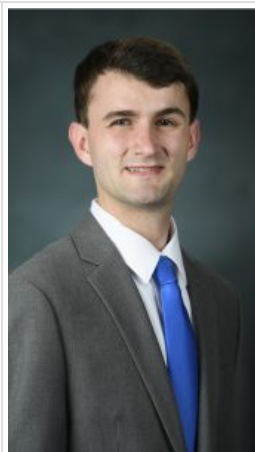
"I will always be grateful to the McLean Institute for allowing me the opportunity to grow as an active and aware citizen."

Thankful for an Enriching Experience

Originally from Florence, Alabama, Bevis earned a bachelor's degree in public policy leadership as a member of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College and the **Trent Lott Leadership Institute**.

He was active in the Columns Society, College Democrats, Forward Mississippi, Rebels Against Sexual Assault and UM Model United Nations, and was an opinion writer for The Daily Mississippian. He won several awards during his college career including 2019 UM Who's Who, the 2018 Columns Society Larry D. Ridgeway Award, the 2018 Associated Student Body Servant Leader Award and the Omicron Delta Kappa Freshman Leadership Award in 2016.

As a student in Melissa Bass' education policy class, Bevis worked on an M Partner project as part of his academic coursework. He approached the McLean Institute about the possibility of working in New Albany to initiate an assessment of the Union County Library, where his research explored program offerings and emerging needs for the library to better serve the community.



Levi Bevis

"Working with the McLean Institute has been a tremendously rewarding experience, and I am very grateful for the opportunity to give back to the north Mississippi community," Bevis said. "Through the McLean Institute, I am able to apply the skills I have learned at the University of Mississippi to advocate for positive change to improve our community and state.

"This opportunity has also better connected me with the community outside of the University of Mississippi campus, which is an invaluable enriching experience for college students."

Grateful for a Supportive Team and Resources



Blair Wortsmith

Wortsmith earned a bachelor's degree in managerial finance with minors in marketing and journalism. She was a member and ambassador of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

A native of Little Rock, Arkansas, Wortsmith served as vice president of administration and Panhellenic delegate for Delta Delta Delta sorority, vice president of partner relations for MoneyThink, ASB director of promotions, and a member of the Panhellenic Judicial Board. She received several honors, including Miss University 2019, Most Beautiful 2017, the Financial Executives International Scholarship, the Forrest C. Mobley Business Scholarship and the Tri Delta Carson/Pitcock Scholarship.

She also was an Honors College research funds recipient.

Wortsmith approached the McLean Institute in fall 2018 to identify opportunities for collaboration around her Miss University platform of financial education. She volunteered with LOU Saves, a child savings program that seeks to improve quality of life by providing multigenerational financial education and nurturing college-going aspirations among underserved youth.

She also supported financial literacy efforts in the M Partner community of Lexington, where she presented a personal finance curriculum for a business management class at Holmes County Career and Technical Center. In the workshop, high school students explored tax documents, loans and financial planning to prepare for life after high school.

"My engagement with the McLean Institute through LOU Saves and M Partner has given me incredible opportunities to share the important fundamentals of financial literacy with students in our community and our state," Wortsmith said. "The supportive team and incredible resources have been so beneficial, and I am so grateful for the work I have been able to do with this amazing program to ensure young people have the money management skills they need to successfully take on their financial futures."

To learn more about the McLean Institute, visit <http://mclean.olemiss.edu/>.

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