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Staff report

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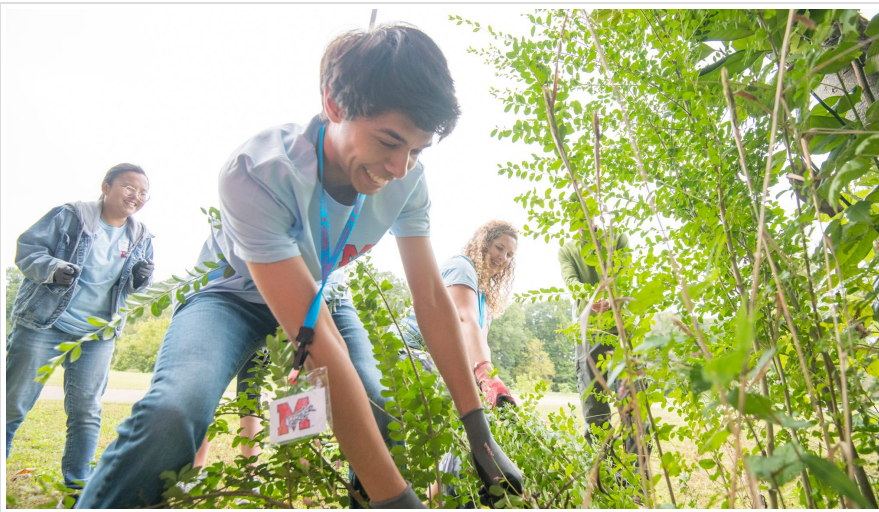
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## UM Celebrates M Partner Pilot Year, Sets Ambitious Goals

Community, university partners build momentum to advance projects across state

MARCH 20, 2019 BY STAFF REPORT



Student volunteers from the University of Mississippi spend a day in October working in New Albany during an M Partner event. Partnering with three communities across the state, including New Albany, the pilot phase of M Partner addresses priority projects centered around community health and well-being, economic development, educational initiatives and beautification. Photo by Kevin Bain/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

OXFORD, Miss. – With more than a dozen ongoing community-engaged courses and service projects, **University of Mississippi** faculty, staff, students and community partners are leading a groundbreaking spring semester.

The pilot phase of **M Partner** will address priority projects centered around community health and well-being, economic development, educational initiatives and beautification. All these projects have potential to create partnerships that lead to transformational collaborations between community members and UM faculty, staff and students.

### Pilot Project Seeing Initial Results

"M Partner gives our students and faculty ways to engage in meaningful relationships and partnerships with the communities and citizens of Mississippi," said Noel E. Wilkin, provost and executive vice chancellor for academic affairs. "These collaborations and experiences make the work we do relevant to the state and have a transformative effect on our faculty and students, while striving to improve the quality of life for those in the communities."

M Partner was designed using a national model, the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities Network. The initiative aligns university talent with community-driven projects to create tangible results in partner communities.

The university and the partner communities have committed to a pilot phase of 18 to 24 months in Charleston, Lexington and New Albany.

"With M Partner, we seek to create tangible benefits in our partner communities," said Katrina Caldwell, vice chancellor for diversity and community engagement. "The involvement of our community partners is essential for the success of this collaboration, and we are grateful to the community leaders and organizations that have invited us into their work."

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### 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

After its launch in March 2018, M Partner convened stakeholder meetings with community leaders in Charleston, Lexington and New Albany to identify each community's strengths, opportunities and aspirations.

"In the needs assessment phase of M Partner, we spoke with many individuals who are working tirelessly to create pathways to opportunity and economic mobility," said Albert Nylander, professor of sociology and director of the university's **McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement**.

"Across all partner communities, we heard a deep desire for economic growth and an aspiration for the younger generation to be part of a movement toward innovation and economic revitalization."

These community meetings produced a list of 27 priority projects and structured how the university as a whole can advance community and economic development in these three rural Mississippi communities.

"In the first year of M Partner implementation, we sought to generate momentum by aligning with other initiatives housed at the McLean Institute," said Laura Martin, M Partner director and associate director of the McLean Institute.

"Through the efforts of summer associates with the **North Mississippi VISTA Project** and students in the **Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development** initiative, M Partner offered summer learning and enrichment opportunities for nearly 400 youth in Charleston, Lexington and New Albany."

In August and October, M Partner hosted business forum webinars in each community with support from the Entrepreneur Center at the Mississippi Development Authority; these events engaged 115 participants from UM and partner communities. These events highlighted seven locally owned businesses and one nonprofit organization while providing networking opportunities among Ole Miss students, faculty, staff and community partners.

#### Days of Service Propel Next Phase of M Partner



UM student volunteers help with cleanup and landscaping work during an M Partner event in October in New Albany. Photo by Megan Wolfe/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

M Partner also has created opportunities for students to participate in Days of Service in partner communities.

"The success of these Days of Service is due to our incredible campus and community volunteers – nearly 200 of them," said Michaela Cooper, an M Partner VISTA who has worked to organize days of service in each partner community. "M Partner Days of Service have provided students the opportunity to carry community service beyond campus to appreciate the opportunities for economic growth in Charleston, Lexington and New Albany."

"Since our Community Day in October, I have received many inquiries from students about future opportunities to be involved with M Partner. This engagement has helped to build trust and excitement that are propelling us into the next phase of M Partner."

#### More Priority Community Projects Underway

During the spring 2019 semester, faculty and staff have taken on 15 of the community-identified projects. These priority projects will address community interests such as social media campaigns, health fairs, addressing the opioid epidemic, grant writing, research around the third-grade reading gate, expanding local farmers markets, and analysis of parks and recreation infrastructure.

In Charleston, faculty and students are working on projects related to social media campaigns, health promotion, awareness of health professions, training and support for first responders on opioid use, researching opportunities to expand telemedicine, and exploring best practices for implementing wellness policies such as complete streets.

"Through M Partner, we are working with the University of Mississippi to make progress towards projects that are central to our community and economic development goals," Charleston Mayor Sedrick Smith said. "We look forward to moving from researching best practices to implementing programs that will make a difference for the people of Charleston."

The projects in Charleston involve faculty and students from the university's **integrated marketing communications, public policy leadership** and **sociology** majors, as well as **pharmacy practice** at



Charleston Mayor Sedrick Smith (right) greets UM student Michael Mott at an M Partner Business Forum event. Submitted photo

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the UM Medical Center.

"I'm seeing more faculty get involved and being encouraged to do so, where that hasn't always been the case," said Anne Cafer, an assistant professor of sociology who teaches a Community Development class that is partnering with Charleston this semester. "I also think community members are genuinely interested in engaging students and being a part of the educational process, while simultaneously getting help with work near and dear to their heart."

"Our students also have a place where they can see the ideas and concepts we learn about in class in a concrete and tangible way. Students also get to engage with community stakeholders, which helps them build important soft skills."

In Lexington, Ole Miss representatives are tackling projects that address community health and literacy goals.

"We are grateful to the University of Mississippi and M Partner for their resources in helping make a difference in the lives of our children and their futures," said Robin McCrory, mayor of Lexington. "Having more people at the table through this partnership brings a new, positive perspective and outlook to the people of our community as we work together to accomplish these most worthwhile goals."

For the M Partner projects in Lexington, the **Department of Health, Exercise Science and Recreation Management** and the **Office of Health Promotion** will be joining community efforts to establish a health fair for Lexington's Spring Festival and completing the 2019 Healthy Hometown application. The Center for Excellence in Literacy Instruction is working with the school district to promote reading proficiency by the third grade.

"To ensure that all students read and write at proficient levels, we know that effective literacy instruction is critical," said Angela Rutherford, professor of teacher education and director of CELL. "The CELL is partnering with the Holmes County Consolidated School District within M Partner to develop a coherent and cohesive literacy framework that teachers and administrators will use to provide instruction across all grade levels."



Lexington Mayor Robin McCrory (left) speaks with Allen Kurr, vice president of the Oxford-Lafayette County Economic Development Foundation, at Southern Coffee Roasters during an M Partner event. Submitted photo

"When students are proficient readers and writers, they are poised for college and career success, which helps to lift individuals out of poverty."

In New Albany, courses affiliated with M Partner are advancing projects that enhance the infrastructure around community health and well-being.

"New Albany is extremely grateful for the opportunity that has been created with M Partner," said Tim Kent, the town's mayor. "Students participate in real-life exercises that come as being a part of a community. Professors expand their content to teach, and the local community benefits from those exercises. All sides involved are winners."

The university's **Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College** is working with community members to study best practices in expanding the farmers market, while students from the health, exercise science and recreation management program will assess opportunities for growth and development of the New Albany parks and recreation system.

"The service learning component helps our graduate students learn about the recreation needs of a community," said KoFan Lee, assistant professor of park and recreation management. "Students have a chance to engage themselves with other stakeholders from this community and work together to make a place more livable."

The M Partner pilot phase lasts until June 2020. For the duration of the pilot phase, M Partner will continue to establish and deepen collaborations with community partners to advance the shared goal of co-creating knowledge and resources to promote community well-being.

In reflecting on the progress of the initiative since its official launch in March 2018, Caldwell noted that, "Laura Martin, who serves as M Partner director and associate director of the McLean Institute, has worked hard alongside others at the McLean Institute to ensure that this initiative has enjoyed the progress and success that it has to this point."

"This team's belief in the tenets of mutually beneficial community engagement practices serve as a model for the work that I would like to see grow in our division."

For more information about the M Partner program, visit <http://mpartner.olemiss.edu>.

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