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UM Wraps Up 16th Speaker's Edge Competition

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

JANUARY 26, 2020 BY STELLA CONNELL

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Ken Cyree (center), dean of the UM School of Business Administration, congratulates Ross Hester (left), winner of the Marketplace Pitch category, and Bea Tisher, overall winner of the 2020 Speaker's Edge Competition. Photo by Stella Connell/School of Business Administration

OXFORD, Miss. – More than 120 business, accountancy and law students tackled ethical issues ranging from gender discrimination to price-gouging and pitched ideas for boosting the workplace at the University of Mississippi's annual Speaker's Edge competition.

They were joined by some 55 judges and 21 coaches for this year's speaking competition, a partnership between the university's **School of Business Administration, Patterson School of Accountancy and Trent Lott Leadership Institute**. The event kicked off Jan. 16, celebrating its 16th year.

After two days of competition, Bea Tisher, an accountancy student from Mobile, was declared the overall winner. The overall winner is the student who places highest in multiple categories, and Tisher placed first in Ethical Dilemmas and third in the Marketplace Pitch categories.

"I had such a great experience with this competition," Tisher said. "My instructors, coaches and classmates were so supportive over those two weeks. I would recommend it to anyone going to graduate school interested in improving their speaking skills for presentations or interviews."

Students competed in two rounds in three different categories: Ethical Dilemmas, Marketplace Pitch and Team Pitch.

"The Speaker's Edge competition is a wonderful example of experiential learning," said Ken Cyree, UM business dean. "It brings the alumni back to campus to interact with our students and allows for networking while the students are honing their communication skills.

"We are grateful to all of the coaches, judges and administrative team for making this event such a success. We appreciate the value this program adds to our students and the improvement to their communication skills that will enhance their success in the marketplace."

In the Ethical Dilemmas category, following Tisher was Jonathan Cox, an accountancy student from Taylor, and in third was Jack Propst, an MBA student from Brentwood, Tennessee.

In this category, participants presented their best solutions for workplace challenges, where issues of gender discrimination, gifts for influence, altering budgets for personal gain, outsourcing using prison labor and questionable social media behavior by company employees were addressed.

Tisher's dilemma concerned a prospective buyout of a pharmaceutical company where the purchaser

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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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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.

would raise the price of a much-needed drug by 600 percent.

In the Marketplace Pitch category, Ross Hester, an MBA student from Ridgeland, took first place, followed by Cox and Tisher.

Hester's pitch advocated for background checks on Tinder, a popular online dating app, to assure users of their safety for a small cost. His service was called "CheckMate."

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

"The Patterson School of Accountancy is appreciative of the opportunity to have our master's students involved in Speaker's Edge as an elective course," Wilder said. "Having strong presentation abilities is a clear differentiator in the marketplace, and the Speaker's Edge program does an exceptional job in enhancing the verbal skills of our students."

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 team's goal was to determine and address points of vulnerability or opportunity identified in the analysis and how best to present a solution or highlight a strength.

Retail outlets, air travel, supply chain management and social media are examples of business in the Team Pitch area. The winning team's pitch represented Dollar General, and the group described how opening a distribution center in Salt Lake City would expand the retailer's business to the West. The other businesses represented in the finals were Target and Old Navy.

The team, composed of Cary Allen, an accountancy student from Cockrum; Chase Brieske, an accountancy student from Lexington, Kentucky; Hayden Dix, an MBA student from St. Louis; Jordan Sparkman, an MBA student from Scooba; and Josh Speyerer, an accountancy student from Madison, received the Dollar General assignment through a random drawing.

"Speaker's Edge was a series of time-intensive, rigorous platform presentations that allowed for the honing of my demonstration skills before joining the workforce," Sparkman said. "Thanks to Mrs. Edwards and her team, I feel much more prepared to take on any challenges that come my way after graduation."

The competition helps students gain an advantage as they prepare to launch their careers, said Walter Davis, MBA program faculty adviser.

"This is a great opportunity for our students to develop and demonstrate their talents not only for speaking, but also for business decision-making," he said. "It's a highlight experience for our students."

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.

"Students are able to transform their speaking skills through an extensive 10-day period where they have access to a team of wonderfully talented coaches," said Ashley McGee, director of the MBA program. "These coaches prepare them for the competition; but more importantly, they prepare them for their future."

In preparation, 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.

"Speaker's Edge, as an experience, impresses me each year," said JoAnn Edwards, speech instructor and director of forensics and special projects manager at the Lott Leadership Institute. "The talent, heart, energy and good-natured competition from everyone – students, coaches and judges – creates an atmosphere for growth. Speaker's Edge is a singularly excellent event."

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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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