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## University Wraps Up 15th Speaker's Edge Competition

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

JANUARY 23, 2019 BY STELLA CONNELL



Speaker's Edge winners Amy Goodin (left), first-place finisher in Marketplace Pitch; Mitchell Kulesza, overall champion; and Emily Harral, first-place winner in Ethical Dilemmas, show off their awards. Photo by Stella Connell/School of Business Administration

OXFORD, Miss. – More than 100 business and accountancy students tackled ethical issues ranging from gender discrimination to embezzlement and pitched ideas for boosting the workplace at the University of Mississippi's annual Speaker's Edge competition.

They were joined by 69 judges and 17 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 on Jan. 17, celebrating its 15th year.

After two days of competition, Mitchell Kulesza, an accountancy student from Dallas, was declared the overall winner. The overall winner is the student who places highest in multiple categories, and Kulesza placed fourth in the Ethical Dilemma and Marketplace Pitch categories.

"I am very thankful for the opportunity to participate in such a well-organized event," Kulesza said. "I never would have imagined winning a competition like this and would not have been able to do so without the teachings of all the amazing coaches we had available to us throughout the process."

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

"The Speaker's Edge competition is an outstanding experiential learning opportunity for our students and helps our graduates excel in speaking to an audience," said Ken Cyree, dean of the UM School of Business Administration. "We are pleased with the support we receive from the judges and our sponsors that creates a competitive advantage for our MBA program."

In the Ethical Dilemmas category, Emily Harral, a Master of Business Administration student from Jonesboro, Arkansas, took first place. She was followed by Jack Sutton, an accountancy student from Sikeston, Missouri, in second, and Rachel Lochridge, an MBA student from Spring Hill, Tennessee, in third.

In this category, participants presented their best solutions for workplace challenges, where issues of gender discrimination, bribery, gifts for influence, altering budgets for personal gain, padding expense reports and defining the term "the right thing" were presented.

Harral's dilemma addressed an expired work visa of a highly productive employee to find a solution for the issue from the perspective of a human resource manager.

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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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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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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

In the Marketplace Pitch category, Amy Goodin, an MBA student from Booneville, took first place, followed by Jack Thompson, an MBA student from Nashville, and Maranda Armstrong, an MBA student from Collierville, Tennessee. These presentations were persuasive arguments regarding technology, strategy, leadership, productivity and innovation.

Goodin's pitch advocated for the inclusion of mental health insurance in employee benefit packages.

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. "Winter 2014 was our first year to be involved, with 14 students enrolled, and that number has grown each year to 77 accountancy master's students participating in winter 2019."

In the Team Pitch category, participating students randomly selected companies and applied a 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.

Technology, lodging, social media, luxury goods, food services and entertainment were represented in this division of the competition. The winning team's pitch was a remake of the film "Breakfast at Tiffany's" to attract millennials to shop at the famed jewelry and luxury-brand company.



**Winners of the Team Pitch category in this year's Speaker's Edge competition – Daniel Goodspeed (left), Brandon McLarty, Caroline Hill, Brad Booth II and Alan DeSantis – came up with a remake of the classic film 'Breakfast at Tiffany's' for their winning pitch. Photo by Stella Connell/School of Business Administration**

The team, composed of Daniel Goodspeed, an MBA student from Madison; Brandon McLarty, MBA, of Olive Branch; Caroline Hill, accountancy major, of Houston, Texas; Brad Booth II, accountancy, of Bassfield; and Alan DeSantis, accountancy, of Laurel, received the Tiffany assignment through a random drawing.

"After we drew Tiffany & Co., we came up with a remake of the film," McLarty said. "Immediately, everyone was on board and we just ran with the idea.

"We had a lot of enthusiasm, and it was an honor to win the contest."

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

"Through this experience, students develop the communication skills that are vital to success in professional and leadership roles," Davis said.

The competition was launched in 2004 by Ole Miss alumni. The event brings together industry professionals, retirees, working alumni and students, requiring students to adapt their message to different audiences.

"Speaker's Edge is a transformative event," said Ashley McGee, director of the MBA program. "Students that fear speaking in public are able to conquer or, at least, ease their fears, and students with natural charisma are able to polish theirs."

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

"Once again, the power of community to challenge, nurture and grow our students is on display during Speaker's Edge 2019," said JoAnn Edwards, speech instructor and director of forensics and special projects manager at the Lott Leadership Institute. "It is a joy to watch and experience."

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