

2022 Mississippi Education Law Conference

PRESENTER INFORMATION



Honorary Conference Co-Chair Mary Ann Connell



Mary Ann Connell spent a majority of her more than 40-year career in law advocating for educational institutions. She served as the university attorney for the University of Mississippi and as the board attorney for the Oxford School District and has represented clients on matters of gender, religion, and racial discrimination, sexual harassment, academic freedom and tenure, Title IX collegiality, and constitutional issues.

Mary Ann Connell holds an AV Preeminent Rating from Martindale Hubbell. She has been recognized for her dedication to the profession as the recipient of the National Association of College and University Attorneys Distinguished Service Award, the NAACP Freedom Award for Lifelong Service in the Area of Education and Civil Rights and the Thomas S. Biggs, Jr. Award for Leadership, Integrity and Service in the Legal Profession and Higher Education Community from Stetson University Law School.

She also served as an adjunct professor in employment law for the University of Mississippi School of Law and as an adjunct professor of school law for the University of Mississippi Principal Corps Program.

Jay Allen



Dr. Jay Allen became the seventh president of Itawamba Community College on July 1, 2017 after serving as president and chief executive officer of Hopkinsville Community College in Kentucky since January 2014.

A native Mississippian, Dr. Allen has served in several leadership positions at Hinds Community College and as a senior-level administrator for Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College – Perkinston and the George County Center – for a combined total of 25 years. He earned the Associate of Arts degree in May 1991 from Hinds; the Bachelor of Science degree in 1993 and the master's degree in 1995, both from Mississippi State University; and the doctorate in higher education administration from the University of Mississippi in 2009.

His experience includes both academic and career and technical education, student services, institutional development, information technology, business services, athletics, workforce

and other noncredit areas. He currently serves on numerous local, state and national boards. He serves as Chair of the Mississippi Association of Community and Junior Colleges State Workforce Education Committee, Chair of the Mississippi Education Achievement Council responsible for the statewide educational attainment goal and Co-Chair of the HERDI South Executive Board. He was nominated in 2019 by students and awarded the national Paragon Award recognizing college presidents who show exceptional dedication and support of student success by emphasizing academic achievement, leadership and service among high-achieving students at their college.

Bonita Coleman



Appointed superintendent of the Ocean Springs School District in 2012, has served in education for her entire professional life. Through her roles as superintendent, teacher, consultant, and parent, she has acquired a deep and broad understanding of the opportunities, challenges, and complexities of successfully leading a school district. Ocean Springs School District has set a new standard for Mississippi's school districts by focusing on student success, instructional development and coaching, and effective principal leadership. With a relentless focus on building positive relationships and instructional capacity, the district has developed annual strategic drivers and developed high-impact learning initiatives to increase the district graduation rate to over 90%. Under Dr. Coleman's leadership, the school district is recognized as one of the best school districts in the state and nation for its academic, athletic and artistic programs. With a focus on quality education, student leadership, civic engagement, and the "Greyhound Experience," OSSD continues to strive for excellence. As a result, the school district has continuously sustained an A-Rating by the Mississippi Department of Education.

Before assuming the role of superintendent of OSSD, Dr. Coleman served as deputy superintendent of Prince George's County Public Schools. During her tenure, she helped lead the nation's 18th largest school district. For more than 20 years in public education, she has served as a K-12 teacher and a visiting professor and scholar at a number of universities. Dr. Coleman also served several years as the associate state superintendent for academics for the Mississippi Department of Education. She is a member of the State Superintendent of Education's Superintendents Advisory Council, the MS Superintendents Collaborative, and MS Diverse and Learner Ready Council.

A native Mississippian, Dr. Coleman graduated from Tougaloo College. She holds a master's degree from the University of Mississippi and a Ph.D. in educational administration from Jackson State University. She is also a graduate of the Broad Superintendent's Academy.



Benjamin P. Cooper



Ben Cooper is the Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and the Frank Montague, Jr. Professor of Legal Studies and Professionalism at the University of Mississippi School of Law.

A member of the faculty since 2007, Professor Cooper currently teaches Legal Profession and Civil Procedure. He writes, speaks and consults on legal ethics and the law governing lawyers. Professor Cooper is the co-author (along with R. Michael Cassidy, John P. Sahl & Margaret C. Tarkington) of a Wolters Kluwer casebook entitled Professional Responsibility in Focus. Professor Cooper's scholarship has appeared in a variety of journals, including the Wake Forest Law Review, the Cardozo Law Review, the Cincinnati Law Review, the Baylor Law Review, Legal Ethics, and The Professional Lawyer.

Professor Cooper is a member of the Mississippi Bar's Ethics Committee. He is also the United States Reporter for the Reports, Comments and Notes Section of the international journal Legal Ethics. He just completed a year as the Chair of the Association of Association of Law Schools (AALS) Section on Professional Responsibility. He previously served as a member of the Mississippi Supreme Court Advisory Committee on Rules. In 2016-2017, Professor Cooper was Co-Reporter for the ABA Commission on the Future of Legal Services.

Professor Cooper received his B.A. with honors from Amherst College in 1994 and his J.D. with honors from the University of Chicago Law School in 1997, where he was a member of the editorial board of the University of Chicago Law Review.

Conference Co-Chair Macey Edmondson



Macey Edmondson is Clinical Assistant Professor of Higher Education and Graduate Program Coordinator for the Department of Higher Education. Before joining the Department of Higher Education, Edmondson served as the Assistant Dean for Students at the University of Mississippi School of Law. At the law school, she was chosen by the student body as the recipient of the Joan K. Murphy Outstanding Law School Staff Member Memorial Award. She also served as co-director for the Council for Legal Education Opportunity (CLEO) for four years. In 2015, she was chosen to serve as Chair of the Executive Board for the Student Services Committee of the Association for American Law Schools. Also in 2015, she was chosen as one of Mississippi's 50 Leading Businesswomen by the Mississippi Business Journal. In 2016, she co-founded the National Association for Law Student Affairs Professionals (NALSAP) and was elected as President of the organization in 2019. She also serves on the Mississippi Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. As a PhD student, she received the Frank E. Moak Memorial Award.

Phillis George



Phillis George is a higher education, scholar-practitioner with a background in academic and student affairs administration. She serves as the Interim Chair of the Department of Higher Education. Dr. George holds a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She conducts focused research on social justice and policy issues related to access, affordability, and accountability in higher education. She also teaches a variety of courses within each of the Higher Education degree programs, including College Teaching, Organization & Governance, Recent Developments in Educational Practice, and Advanced Education Policy Analysis.

Jaime Harker



Jaime Harker is professor of English and the director of the Sarah Isom Center for Women and Gender Studies at the University of Mississippi, where she teaches American literature, LGBTQ literature, and gender studies. She has published essays on Japanese translation, popular women writers of the interwar period, Oprah's book club, William Faulkner, Cold War gay literature, and women's liberation and gay liberation literature. She is the author of *America the Middlebrow: Women's Novels, Progressivism, and Middlebrow Authorship Between the Wars* and *Middlebrow Queer: Christopher Isherwood in America*, and the co-editor of *The Oprah Affect: Critical Essays on Oprah's Book Club*, *1960s Gay Pulp Fiction: The Misplaced Heritage*, *This Book Is an Action: Feminist Print Culture and Activist Aesthetics*, and *Faulkner and Print Culture*. Her third monograph, *The Lesbian South: Southern Feminists, the Women in Print Movement, and the Queer Literary Canon*, was released in the fall of 2018 by the University of North Carolina Press. She is also the founder of Violet Valley Bookstore, Mississippi's only queer feminist bookstore.

John Hooks



John Hooks heads the education law practice at Adams and Reese LLP and advises schools and universities on a range of matters including federal desegregation law, employment discrimination and civil rights claims. He has represented educational institutions in some of the most important litigation in the field of education law, from landmark desegregation cases to matters further defining the First Amendment rights of public employees. John has defended more than 35 school districts against more than 1,000 claims of violating federal overtime requirements. He is also a member of the firm's appellate team and often argues cases before state and federal appellate courts. John advises clients, lectures frequently and offers extensive training programs designed to prevent lawsuits from arising in the first place. John believes in empowering administrators and fellow education attorneys to be proactive in preventing claims arising from a range of threats including inappropriate employee relationships with students, workplace harassment, inappropriate use of social media and student safety.

Thomas K. Hudson



Jackson State University President Thomas K. Hudson grew up in Jackson, Mississippi, where he attended and graduated from JSU in 1999. He went on to receive his Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

With an equity-based focus, Hudson established a successful private practice, and served as an EEO specialist for the Department of Homeland Security/FEMA. Still, his JSU roots beckoned, and he returned to his alma mater in 2012.

Hudson served as Acting President of JSU before being named President on November 19, 2020, by the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning.

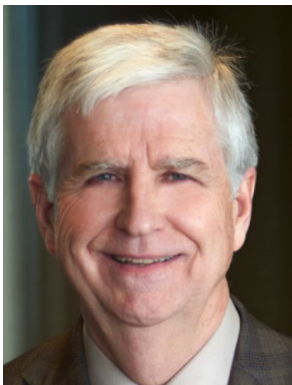
A long-standing champion of education, Hudson's goals remain to enhance the university's legacy and expand its global footprint while fortifying its mission to produce ethical and technologically advanced global leaders who properly address societal problems and compete effectively.

As a member of the Jackson State staff since 2012, Hudson has served as Chief Operating Officer/Chief Diversity Officer, Chief Diversity and EEO Officer/Title IX Coordinator. He has been described as a visionary who stays flexible and abreast of national themes, trends and issues across the higher education landscape and how HBCUs fit into that framework.

Before the presidency, Hudson was Assistant to the President and Chief Diversity Officer. He was the co-chair of the university's Strategic Planning Committee. He also served on the executive cabinet and guided senior leadership on all topics related to the university's future course and trajectory.

Committed to the standards of diversity, and inclusion, Hudson served as Vice-Chairperson of the university system's Chief Diversity Officers' Council. He is also a member of the Margaret Walker Alexander Center Board of Directors and the JSU Athletics Hall of Fame Foundation Board of Directors.

Jim Keith



Jim Keith advises clients in the areas of employment, education and administrative law. A focus of his practice involves the representation of educational entities, including school districts, community colleges and universities. Jim has advised school districts on employee matters, student issues, board/administration interaction, and education of students with disabilities. He has handled these matters in administrative hearings and in state and federal court. Jim has advised universities and colleges on issues involving student rights as well as on employment matters.

Robin Lemonis



Robin Lemonis serves as the State Director of Special Education at the Mississippi Department of Education. Prior to becoming the Executive Director in Mississippi, Lemonis served as the Director of the Office of Student Intervention Services, and the State Director of Literacy, Early Childhood, Response to Intervention, and Dyslexia. A 27-year veteran of the education field, her educational experience includes teaching students from preschool to college in the general education setting as well as in the special education setting. She provides professional development in the areas of early childhood, literacy, dyslexia, gifted, English learners, Response to Intervention, cultural proficiency, social and emotional skills, 504 regulations, Child Find, and drop out prevention.

Nancy Loome



Nancy Loome serves as President of the Parents' Campaign Research and Education Fund and Executive Director of the Parents' Campaign, a network of 64,000 supporters of Mississippi Public Schools.

Brent Marsh



Brent Marsh is Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Dean of Students at the University of Mississippi. In his role at UM, Dr. Marsh and his team oversee student of concern cases, student conduct, fraternity and sorority life, and the student union. Prior to arriving at UM, he served for five years as Vice President for Student Affairs at Rogers State University in Oklahoma, overseeing numerous programs and services that promoted student engagement and success. Before his time at RSU, Brent served for 10 years at Howard Payne University in central Texas in three successive student affairs leadership roles. He earned bachelors and masters degrees at Kansas State University and a doctorate in higher education administration from Bowling Green State University. He is actively involved in NASPA where he currently serves as Director for the Public Policy Division (2019-2021).

Conference Co-Chair

Kerry Brian Melear



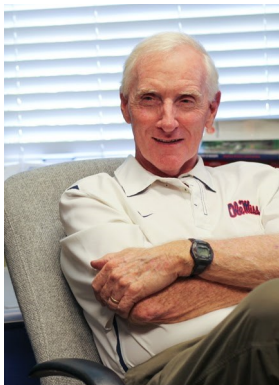
Kerry Brian Melear is a Professor of Higher Education at the University of Mississippi School of Education's Department of Higher Education and Affiliate Faculty in the School of Law. His areas of expertise are college and university law, finance, and public policy. He is a former member of the Board of Directors of the Education Law Association and a member of the editorial board of West's Education Law Reporter and the Journal of Cases in Education. He is also the book review editor for the Journal of Law and Education and a contributing editor to the Higher Education Law Blog. He teaches courses in higher education law, finance, human resources, and international higher education. Dr. Melear has worked as a higher education policy analyst for the Florida Legislature, a research associate for the Florida Postsecondary Education Planning Commission, and practiced in audit for a Big Six accounting firm. He was honored to receive the University of Mississippi School of Education's Outstanding Researcher Award in 2007, 2010, and 2013, the Outstanding Teacher Award in 2015, and was selected to membership on the Fulbright Specialist Roster in 2012.

George McClellan



George McClellan joined the University of Mississippi community following 35 years of service as a student affairs professional (including 14 years as a senior student affairs officer) at a variety of institutions. He serves as a Professor of Higher Education. He is a frequent author, editor, and presenter on topics related to student affairs and higher education. He was named Pillar of the Profession by the NASPA Foundation in 2010 and Annuity Coeptis Senior Scholar by ACPA in 2017. His research interests include supporting students who are Native American, issues of access and attainment, the impact of computer-mediated communication on the student experience and student development, college student employment, professional identity and professional development in student affairs, student affairs as teaching and learning, and budget and financial management in higher education. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Arizona.

Andrew P. Mullins



Andrew P. Mullins is arguably one of the most influential educators in Mississippi's history. His leadership and stewardship of the Mississippi Teacher Corps throughout its history has been invaluable. Dr. Mullins began his career as a high school teacher and administrator for eight years at St. Andrews Episcopal School in Jackson after graduating from Millsaps College with a B.A. in History.

While teaching, he completed an M.A. in History from Mississippi College in 1976 and would later attain his Ph.D. in College Administration from the University of Mississippi in 1992. In 1980, he left St. Andrews to join Governor William Winters staff as a special assistant, and he and the rest of the "Boys of Spring" helped engineer Mississippi's landmark Education Reform Act of 1982. Mullins continued his public service as the special assistant to one other governor and three state superintendents of education. He is the author of *Building Consensus, A History of the Passage of the Education Reform Act of 1982* and the editor of *The Measure of Our Days, Writings of William F. Winter*.

In 1994, Mullins began his work for three different chancellors in various areas of responsibility including government relations and helping found the Mississippi Principal Corps.

Ronnie Musgrove



Before becoming governor, Governor Musgrove practiced law in Batesville, MS providing business defense and plaintiff representation for a diverse client base. Receiving the Outstanding Service Award from the Mississippi Bar Association and serving on the Board of Commissioners, Governor Musgrove also maintained an “AV” rating, the highest ethical rating awarded by Martindale-Hubbell.

Throughout his career in public service, Governor Musgrove focused his attention on building a solid foundation for economic growth through Mississippi’s public schools. He focused on the basics of air conditioning, textbooks, healthcare benefits for educators, and school supply money for Mississippi’s teachers as Lieutenant Governor. His successful push for quality education through adequate, equitable funding for every public school in Mississippi, as part of the Adequate Education Act changed the face of public education in Mississippi. As Governor, his commitment to education continued by passing a teacher pay package guaranteed to meet or exceed the Southeastern average, through making Mississippi the first state in the nation to place an Internet-accessible computer in every classroom, and his challenge to the Mississippi Legislature to fund education first before any other budget matter.

In August 2000, Governor Musgrove crafted a new jobs program for the state called the Advantage Mississippi Initiative (“AMI”). Its passage led to Mississippi being selected as the home for a new \$1.4 billion Nissan Motor Company production plant which created 5,300 direct jobs and over 30,000 indirect jobs.

During his term in office, Governor Musgrove chaired the Southern Regional Education Board, the Southern States Energy Board, the Southern Growth Policy Board, the Southern Governors’ Association, and the Democratic Governors’ Association Revenue Committee. In addition, he served as vice-chairman of the National Governors’ Association. He also held appointments to the National Assessments Governing Board and the National Board for Teacher Professional Standards.

Governor Musgrove is chair of the National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services, chairman of the Mississippi Center for Legal Services Advisory Group and is the Senior Policy Scholar in the Department of Health Policy and Management at the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health. In March 2014, Gov. Musgrove was reappointed by U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, to serve as a board member on the National Assessment Governing Board, of which he is a past-chairman of the NAEP 12th Grade Preparedness Commission. He is also past co-chairman of the Biomass Research and Development Technical Advisory Committee.

Additionally he has served on the faculty of the University of Mississippi and Mississippi College School of Law.

Governor Musgrove was born and raised in Tocowa, Mississippi, near Batesville. He is a graduate of Northwest Mississippi Junior College, The University of Mississippi, and The University of Mississippi School of Law.



Conference Co-Chair Ryan Niemeyer



Ryan Niemeyer is a Assistant Provost for Regional Campuses for the Division of Outreach and Continuing Education at the University of Mississippi and Associate Professor of K-12 Educational Leadership. His main area of expertise and research are in the areas of school administration and education policy. Dr. Niemeyer was awarded the School of Education’s Exemplary Service Award in 2016 for his work as Director of the Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program. He is a member of the Education Law Association and the Southern Political Science Association. He is also an active Rotarian and currently serves as Club President for the Oxford – Ole Miss Rotary Club. Dr. Niemeyer has ten years of experience as a former teacher and administrator in both public and private schools in the state of Mississippi. He also served 14 years in the Mississippi Army National Guard achieving the rank of Captain. Dr. Niemeyer received his Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from the University of Mississippi and a Master of Education in Educational Administration and a Bachelor of Science in Sports Administration from the University of Southern Mississippi.

Johnny R. Purvis

Johnny R. Purvis retired August 2003, (30.5 years) from the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) as a professor in the Department of School Administration, Director of the Education Service Center in the College of Education and Psychology, Executive Director of the Southern Education Consortium, and Director of the Mississippi Safe School Center at the University of Southern Mississippi. After retiring from USM, he was hired as a professor in the Department of Leadership Studies at the University of Central Arkansas in August 2003, and retired December 31, 2013. He also served as teacher, coach, school administrator, and member of a county school board in Mississippi. In addition, he retired as a law enforcement officer having served in both Mississippi and Arkansas.

Laura Rothstein



Laura Rothstein joined the Louis D. Brandeis School of Law at the University of Louisville as Professor of Law and Dean in 2000 (serving as dean until 2005). During her 42 years in legal education, she has written 16 books and dozens of book chapters, articles, and other works on disability discrimination, covering a broad range of issues, with an emphasis on disability discrimination in higher education. In addition to her work in disability law, she has worked to promote racial and gender diversity within legal education and the legal profession. She has also served in numerous leadership roles within legal education. Professor Rothstein's work to promote diversity and raise awareness on issues of disability, gender, and race have been recognized. She is an elected member of the American Law Institute. She uses her scholarship as an "advocate through education" and hopes to influence policy and practice by increasing awareness and understanding of disability rights issues. She received her B.A. in Political Science from the University of Kansas and her J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center.

Paul Watkins



Paul Watkins is an attorney for Mayo Mallette and serves as Board Attorney for Oxford School District and City Attorney for City of Oxford. In his practice, he has represented school districts in due process proceedings brought by parents of students with disabilities. He has also advised municipal and school district clients on land acquisition and construction issues, including contract negotiation and bid law compliance. Watkins is lead counsel for employers in workers' compensation claims, and serves as representation of Mississippi public universities in employment, tort, and civil rights actions. He has also advised public and private employers on employment and labor issues, and is a frequent lecturer on zoning and employment issues.

David Whitcomb



David Whitcomb is Chief Legal Officer and General Counsel for the University of Mississippi. Whitcomb has more than 25 years experience across the corporate, governmental, and higher education sectors. He joined the University of Mississippi after serving as the deputy general counsel at the University of Tennessee. He joined the University of Tennessee System in 2018, overseeing the university's litigation across all campuses, as well as nonlitigation controversies involving students, faculty, employees and the general public. He has experience with constitutional and civil rights matters and anti-discrimination statutes, including Title IX, Title VII and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Additionally, he has handled matters involving reasonable accommodations and program accessibility; the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, known as FERPA; free speech; and public records. Previously, Whitcomb was a partner with BakerHostetler in Columbus, Ohio, a national law firm ranked by The American Lawyer as one of the top 100 in the country. There, he was a litigator and employment lawyer and advised clients on public sector issues. He also worked as a trial attorney for the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and served as a law clerk for two U.S. District Court judges.