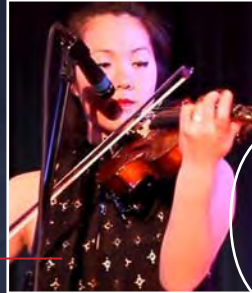
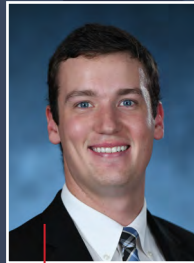


BUSINESS **FIRST**

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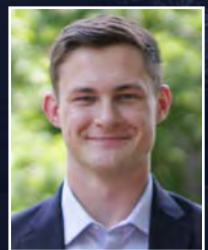


2019

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2019



2021

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greetings

alumni and friends



KEVIN BAIN

We hope you enjoy this magazine that details many of the great things going on in the University of Mississippi School of Business Administration. We are proud to showcase the accomplishments of our students, faculty, staff and alumni in this issue.

In these pages you will find stories of student excellence, both academically and personally. You will follow along select students' journeys to commencement, full of both trials and triumphs. It is stories like these that emphasize the determination of our students, as well as the extended support of our faculty.

You will read about the generosity of our alumni, who continue to give to support our school and programs, and you will learn about the seven recipients of the McClendon MBA scholarship, which honors one outstanding student annually in remembrance of former student Zach McClendon.

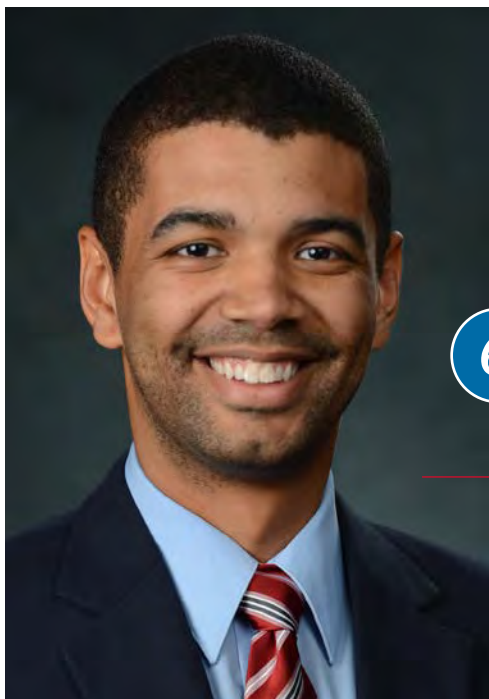
Finally, you will read about the faculty and staff who work tirelessly throughout the year to make the Ole Miss School of Business an exceptional place to learn and work.

Thank you for taking the time to read this issue of *BusinessFirst*, and I hope that you enjoy these stories.

Sincerely,

Ken Cyree
Dean

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Student Entrepreneur Launches Successful Clothing Business



SUBMITTED

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The School of Business Administration (Ole Miss Business) at the University of Mississippi is accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business.



THOMAS GRANING

Rich Gentry (left), co-director of the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, presents mechanical engineering graduate student Parker Brewster with a check for \$10,000. Brewster won the Mid-South Business Model Competition for his medical device, Plaquetomy.

Medical Device Concept Wins Mid-South Business Model Competition

A proposed arterial plaque-removing device, developed by a University of Mississippi mechanical engineering graduate student and founder of Innovative Heart Technologies LLC, won first place in the 2021 Mid-South Business Model Competition.

Plaquetomy is designed to safely remove plaque from the arterial walls to create a larger arterial wall volume. The product concept was developed by Parker Brewster, of Flowood, who was awarded \$10,000 as the winner of the competition.

The device creates an isolated environment around arterial plaque, and then removes the plaque by dissolving it and removing that dissolution from the body entirely while allowing blood to continue circulating.

“This has been a process three years in the making,” Brewster said. “I started off with an idea, moved into sketches, then CAD/3D rendering and then continued into advanced simulation with a multitude of software/packages.

“I have created simplified models and scaled-up 3D prints.”

Brewster participated in two accelerators: one focusing on business development in the med-tech space, and the other focusing on customer discovery and product validation. He has also

spoken with more than 500 professionals in the medical field to continue perfecting the device.

He has filed a provisional patent application and is working on the follow-up utility patent. He also has filed for copyrights and trademarks and created a website and a limited liability company.

All participants in the Mid-South BMC were evaluated by a panel of five judges: Diane Davis, John Alford, Steve Grantham, Teresa Hubbard and Josh Mabus. Rich Gentry, the Founders Chair of Entrepreneurship and co-director of the university’s Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, moderated the event.

“The Business Model Competition is a great way for students to get exposed to the process of starting a company,” Gentry said. “We spend a lot of time getting students comfortable finding and talking to customers, which is a job skill that they can use to launch their venture or build value for an employer.

“We are so fortunate to have the support we do from the donors, students and the community.”

Besides Ole Miss, this year’s competition featured students from the University of Georgia and John Brown University. All six finalists who competed Nov. 11 were awarded prize money of \$500.

BY SYDNEY GIBSON

Business Professor to Lead National Marrow Donor Program

A University of Mississippi business professor has been elected as chairman for the National Marrow Donor Program.

Brian Reithel, professor of management information systems, began his service at Be The Match as chair-elect for the 2022 fiscal year and will step into the board chairman role for the following two years.

“This is a big opportunity to serve, and I’m grateful for the chance to play an important role with a nationally and globally significant life-saving organization,” Reithel said.

Reithel is a full-time professor of management information systems at the School of Business Administration. He also has held a number of leadership roles at the university and has continually used his skills and expertise to serve people and programs around him.

“Having Dr. Reithel serve as the chair of the National Marrow Donor Program is a high honor and helps not only the outreach of the university, but also illustrates the service aspect of what we do,” said Ken Cyree, dean of the Ole Miss business school. “It is encouraging to see our faculty being so committed to bettering society and engaging in a cause like this.”

Reithel was previously elected to the Be The Match board of directors in 2014 in an effort to guide the organization’s information technology and corporate strategy.

“I’m very grateful to the university for supporting faculty members in our multiple roles – teaching, research and service – and am particularly thankful for being given this special opportunity to serve,” Reithel said.

Amy Ronneberg, CEO of the National Marrow Donor Program/Be The Match, said she is thrilled to have Reithel as chair-elect.

“I know that patients everywhere will benefit from Brian’s leadership over the next few years,” Ronneberg said. “Brian brings a wealth of knowledge, in not only the IT space but

around our business as a whole, and a strong passion for what we do.

“Brian is also the chair of the Audit and Finance Committee, where he has led the committee through some of the most challenging times with grace and a steadfast focus on what is best for patients.”

For people with life-threatening blood cancers – such as leukemia and lymphoma – or other diseases, bone marrow transplants offer a possible cure. Be The Match connects patients with their donor match for a life-saving marrow or umbilical cord blood transplant.

“My involvement with Be The Match for the last seven years has powerfully illuminated the



STELLA CONNELL

Brian Reithel, professor of management information systems, will serve as chair-elect for the National Marrow Donor Program/Be The Match for the 2022 fiscal year before serving as board chairman the following two years.

staggering depth of need for more people to share their experience and energy with such important life-saving organizations,” Reithel said.

Anyone interested can contribute to the cure as a member of the Be The Match Registry, financial contributor or volunteer. Be The Match provides patients and their families with one-on-one support, education and guidance before, during and after transplant.

BY KAITLIN CHILDRESS

Scholarship Recipients Carry on Late MBA Student's Legacy

KEVIN BAIN



Zach McClendon is honored through the Zach McClendon Memorial Assistantship program in the UM School of Business Administration. The program helps talented students complete their graduate degrees and pursue their dream occupations.

Zach McClendon had just completed his first semester as a Master of Business Administration student at the University of Mississippi in fall 2013 when he was killed during a robbery at his home.

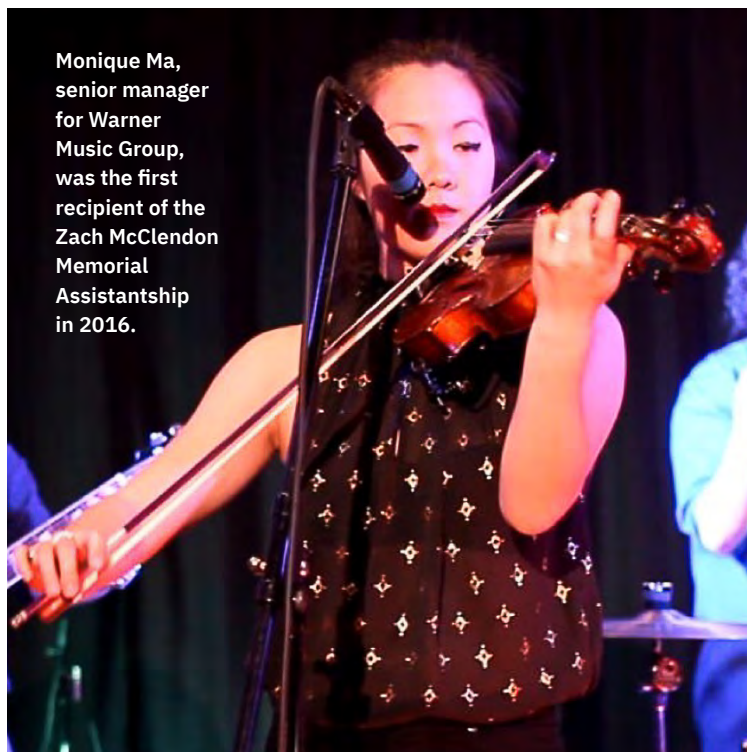
In 2016, the university's MBA board of directors worked with the UM Foundation to establish the Zach McClendon Memorial Assistantship Endowment to honor his memory. Since then, seven recipients – Monique Ma, Ferderica Cobb, Corbitt Chandler, Cindy Pan, Heath Rooks, Tsering Tashi and Cole Barnhill – have completed the assistantship program to pursue their dream occupations.

The most recent recipient, Cole Barnhill, was an

accomplished undergraduate student at the university and served as vice president of communications/public relations for the program.

The recipients all reflect the drive and character that McClendon exhibited, said Ashley McGee, director of MBA administration.

"I first met Zach when he was considering our program," McGee said. "During his campus visit, I knew within a few minutes of our conversation that Zach was an individual that sought success. Immediately, I



Monique Ma, senior manager for Warner Music Group, was the first recipient of the Zach McClendon Memorial Assistantship in 2016.

SUBMITTED

was impressed by him and his professionalism.”

Originally from Gulfport, McClendon received his undergraduate degrees in chemistry and biochemistry from Williams College in Massachusetts and in biology and medical sciences from Mississippi College. He planned to continue his education at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson after completing his MBA.

“We’ve picked people that exemplify the spirit of Zach,” said Scott Taylor, past president of the MBA Alumni Board, who helped establish the endowment. “We have found great recipients that would make him proud and his family proud.

“Now they are going off and doing great things to represent not only the memory of Zach but the Ole Miss MBA program.”

The first recipient in 2016 was Ma, a summa cum laude graduate with a bachelor’s degree in marketing and minor in music and physics. During her undergraduate years, Ma was affiliated with the Phi Kappa Phi honor society, Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College and LOU Symphony Orchestra.

“Monique is very impressive,” said Charles Vianey, past president of the MBA Alumni Board and another key participant in establishing the memorial. “She had a musical



SUBMITTED

Ferderica Cobb, 2017 recipient of a McClendon assistantship, is a digital marketing specialist for Envision in Jackson.

background, was strong in mathematics and strong academically all around. She lives up to the spirit of Zach even to this day.”

Ma moved to Nashville in 2017 to work for Warner Music Group as a sync licensing analyst. Recently, she was promoted to senior manager.

“Having been our first one, she was the perfect candidate at the perfect time,” Taylor said. “She knew what her dream job was going to be, and went off and got it. She’s done such amazing things in Nashville.”

Cobb, who was awarded the assistantship in 2017, works as a digital marketing specialist for Envision in Jackson.

“While working as a graduate assistant for the MBA office and serving as the class vice president of communications and public relations, I was able to gain valuable experience that translated to my marketing career,” she said.

Cobb graduated with a bachelor's degree in integrated marketing communications while serving as an Ole Miss ambassador, *Daily Mississippian* reporter and a member of the Phi Eta Sigma national honor society.

"Just as Zach McClendon was known for his spirit and enthusiasm, I've strived to

bring passion and dedication to every marketing campaign on which I've worked," she said.

The third recipient, in 2018, Chandler graduated from Ole Miss in summer 2019 with an MBA after earning his bachelor's degree in risk management at the University of Georgia.

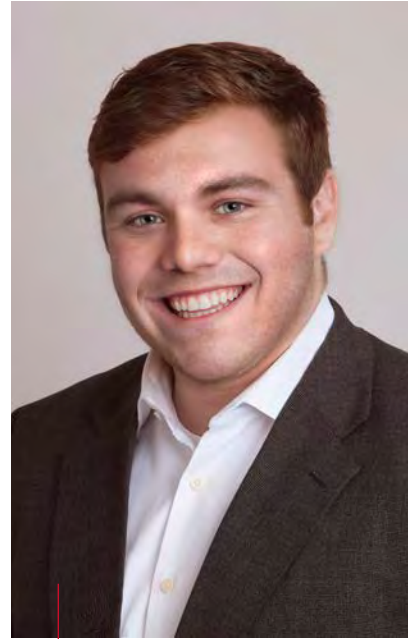
"Each of these students possesses a unique set of traits," Vianey said. "We look to find recipients that are strong students academically but that also have a strong character."

During his assistantship, Chandler envisioned himself becoming a top executive at an insurance company. Since then, he has been an associate at Starr Cos.' Property Division, an investment and insurance organization in Atlanta.

In 2019, the board was impressed with two outstanding candidates. It had sufficient funds to support another position and decided to recognize both students, Pan and Rooks.

Pan is enrolled as a second-year Ph.D. student in the Ole Miss finance program, and Rooks is a system marketing coordinator at Baptist Memorial Health Care in Memphis.

"I believe that my current role as a lifelong learner, and being a pillar of support for those around me, has allowed me to continually reflect Zach's spirit and enthusiasm,"



SUBMITTED

Heath Rooks, system marketing coordinator at Baptist Memorial Health Care in Memphis, was a 2019 McClendon assistantship recipient.

Pan said. "I am grateful for the opportunities that this distinguished assistantship has provided me and will continue to exemplify Zach's outstanding character."

Before receiving his MBA in August 2020, Rooks was involved in the Beta Gamma Sigma business honor society, National Society of Collegiate Scholars and the UM business school's Chief Emissary Officers before graduating with a bachelor's degree in marketing.

KEVIN BAIN



Corbitt Chandler, associate at Starr Cos.' Property Division, was a 2018 McClendon assistantship recipient.

Cindy Pan, a second-year doctoral student in the UM finance program, was a 2019 McClendon assistantship recipient.



SUBMITTED

In his job, Rooks spends much of his time managing and assisting the marketing efforts for hospitals and various service lines.

“I believe my assistantship helped me get where I am today,” Rooks said. “By teaching me how to manage both my classwork and client relations amongst both our MBA office and external alumni board members, I believe that Zach McClendon’s spirit has been reflected in my actions since beginning my career in the health care field at Baptist.”

SUBMITTED



Tsering Tashi was a 2020 McClendon assistantship recipient.



STELLA CONNELL

Cole Barnhill, the 2021 recipient of the Zach McClendon Memorial Assistantship, served the program as vice president of communications/PR.

The 2020 McClendon recipient, Tashi has committed himself to improving the teaching processes in Nepal. After narrowing down career interests to investment banking and strategy consulting, Tashi is enrolled in consulting preparation courses in addition to preparing for the Securities Industry Essentials exam.

“As an assistantship recipient, I feel like I am chosen to show leadership and commitment wherever I live, work and study,” Tashi said. “As a result, this always keeps me humble and committed to good causes.”

2021 McClendon recipient Barnhill, from Union, Kentucky, received his degree in management from Ole Miss in May 2021. As an undergraduate student, he served the school as a chief emissary officer, and the university as president of the Interfraternity Council as well as an Ole Miss ambassador.

For the MBA program, Barnhill served as class vice president of communications/PR. He is a project analyst for

Strategic Resource Management in Memphis.

“I have had the pleasure to work closely with Cole over the past year,” said Andrew Nail, president of the MBA Alumni Board. “He is an impressive young man.”

“I look forward to following his professional journey, as I know he will make a tremendous impact.”

The Zach McClendon Memorial Assistantship Endowment gives its recipients an opportunity to create relationships while gaining valuable experience alongside the board.

“Being selected as the 2021-22 McClendon scholar provided me with critical learning experiences and leadership opportunities that greatly enhanced my interpersonal and communication skills,” Barnhill said. “While having the opportunity to honor Zach McClendon’s legacy is the premier highlight of this role, the opportunities and experiences that accompany it are invaluable.”

BY SYDNEY GIBSON

The Zach McClendon Memorial Assistantship Endowment is open to support from organizations and individuals. Gifts can be made by sending a check, with the fund’s name noted on the memo line, to the University of Mississippi Foundation, 406 University Ave., Oxford, MS 38655, or by giving online at umfoundation.com/McClendon.

Funding the Future

New endowment establishes Roper Scholarship, four-year support for business and STEM majors

To say Bill Roper is driven is an understatement.

The Jackson native has continued to work ever since he started selling tomatoes door-to-door at age 8. Back then, he used some of the money to buy model cars. Today, he collects the real thing – the kind he enjoys driving on the lush and winding Coast Boulevard overlooking the Pacific Ocean’s sapphire waves near his La Jolla, California, home.

Hard work, Roper said, is the foundation for his success and the reason he and his wife, Melanie, are able to make a \$2 million gift to the University of Mississippi, establishing an endowment that will provide four-year scholarships in the amount of \$10,000 annually to two entering freshmen each year.

The Ropers’ gift will go toward Now & Ever: The Campaign for Ole Miss, a historic fundraising initiative to secure \$1.5 billion in private gifts to strengthen the university for generations to come.

“Our vision is that by supporting these students financially – and with the able assistance and guidance of the educators and staff at Ole Miss – we will be able to help identify and proudly produce any number of future leaders that will ultimately make our nation and the world a better place,” said Roper, a 1968 graduate of the UM College of Liberal Arts.

To be eligible for the Bill and Melanie Roper Scholarship, students must be enrolled in the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College



SUBMITTED

Bill and Melanie Roper during a white-water rafting trip near Lake Tahoe, California, 1997

majoring in business, science, technology, engineering or math.

“Melanie and I would like to assist in producing more business or technology leaders for the future, and that starts with a STEM-related education. Those are the areas that have served me well,” said Roper, president of Roper Capital Co., a private investment firm that provides



My parents taught me that when you see something that needs to be done, you should jump in and take the lead.”

– BILL ROPER



KIRSTEN SIMPSON

Melanie and Bill Roper made a \$2 million gift to the University of Mississippi, establishing an endowment that will provide four-year scholarships in the amount of \$10,000 annually to two entering freshmen each year. The Ropers' gift will go toward Now & Ever: The Campaign for Ole Miss, a historic fundraising initiative to secure \$1.5 billion in private gifts.

growth capital and management services to help small-to-midsize businesses create value and improve owner liquidity.

In addition to the other requirements, Roper scholars must have a demonstrated record of academic excellence and leadership.

"My parents taught me that when you see something that needs to be done, you should jump in and take the lead," Roper said. "So I was always the guy who volunteered to take on difficult assignments. And along the way, I discovered that one of the ways to differentiate myself and be successful in business was to be willing to go above and beyond, take on additional tasks and lead.

"So, Melanie and I are hoping these scholarships will indirectly help develop leaders out of bright kids who want to impact their world, but maybe need a little extra boost."

The Roper Scholarship will also benefit the Honors College, which incidentally was



So, Melanie and I are hoping these scholarships will indirectly help develop leaders out of bright kids who want to impact their world, but maybe need a little extra boost."

— BILL ROPER

founded by Roper's Sigma Chi fraternity brother Jim Barksdale.

"This family's generous gift will help us continue to attract some of the brightest students in STEM and business to the University of Mississippi," said Ethel Young Scurlock, dean of the Honors College.

Roper himself attended Ole Miss with assistance from two scholarships and majored in math "because it provided logic and discipline, and honestly it was an easy subject for me,"

Continued on page 13



LOGAN KIRKLAND

Young Entrepreneurs' New App Wows Gillespie Judges

An easy-to-use mobile device app that allows college students to buy and sell items took first place at the 18th annual Gillespie Business Plan Competition at the University of Mississippi.

Rumie, was founded by UM students Tanner McCraney and Patrick Phillips, of Jackson; Sam Pennock, from Madison; and Carson Zylicz, of Houston, Texas. The students designed an app to help college students buy and sell clothes, furniture, books and other items.

The young entrepreneurs of Rumie won \$10,000 and the Stephen E. Rowell Entrepreneur Award, worth another \$5,000. They also get free office space at Insight Park for the next year.

"All of the prize money will go into our marketing budget to make students aware of our app," McCraney said.

"We are so excited to see Rumie grow, and that was made possible by the CIE and Gillespie Business Plan Competition."

The Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship hosts the business plan competition each year.

"We are always excited to see the development of our students' ventures throughout the year and how they grow into viable Mississippi

startups like Rumie," said Clay Dibrell, co-director of the CIE.

The goal of this annual competition is for young entrepreneurs to make names for themselves and their business ventures.

Second place in the April 8 competition was awarded to Shop Raynekay, created by Ole Miss senior Rayne Grimsley, of Tomball, Texas. Shop Raynekay is an experiential-driven business that focuses on customizable and quality jewelry. Grimsley's jewelry line is aimed at both men and women.

Four finalists – Rail, 4rmCast, Findmylandlord and Abikadabi's Baking Co. each received \$1,000.

"We are pleased that this year's competition was a success with so many capable and enthusiastic entrepreneurs communicating their business proposals to our judges," said Ken Cyree, dean of the UM School of Business Administration.

Tereza Janatova, a second-year graduate student from Nova Paka, Czech Republic, who is working on a master's degree in engineering science, is the owner and founder of 4rmCast. Janatova aims to replace traditional casts with 3D arm casts that help eliminate skin irritation and itching, the inability to



Rich Gentry (left), co-director of the UM Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship; Blake Dubinski, entrepreneur-in-residence; Tong Meng, program director; and Clay Dibrell (right), CIE co-director, congratulate (from left) Patrick Phillips, Tanner McCraney, Sam Pennock and Carson Zylitz, founders of Rumie, on their win in the Gillespie Business Plan Competition.

shower and bad odors while also reducing the weight of the cast.

Janatova also took home the W. Thomas Colbert-Community Bank Invitation Award, which includes \$5,000.

“The competition is a great experiential learning opportunity, and pitching the business idea in front of successful outside people who could be potential investors helps provide the realistic and exciting atmosphere around the competition,” Cyree said.

The six final judges for this year’s competition were Emmet Seibels, co-founder and former president of Verus Healthcare; Liza Cirlot Looser, CEO of the Cirlot Agency; Jan Farrington, former executive director of Medical Support and Development Organization Inc.; Lawrence Farrington, a member of the board of directors for mTrade Inc. and the UM Foundation; Bill Roper, of Roper Capital; and Lois Lovelady-Rayburn, of mTrade.

“This year represented one of the best competitions the CIE has hosted,” said Tong Meng, CIE program director. “We were excited to see the passion, innovation and commitment exemplified by our student entrepreneurs.”

BY ABBY MITCHELL

Roper Scholars, continued from page 11

he said. During college, he also worked as a dorm manager and math tutor in addition to selling class rings and fraternity pins for Bal-four and clothing at Carl Coers, an on-campus retailer.

After college, he returned to Jackson to work for Deposit Guaranty National Bank and met his wife during that time. His career progressed from there. For 17 years, he was executive vice president of SAIC Inc., a diversified science and technology services organization, whose annual revenues grew from less than \$1 billion to nearly \$9 billion during his tenure with the company.

He also served as president and CEO of Verisign Inc., a leading global provider of internet infrastructure and security services and a member of the NASDAQ 100, where he was responsible for restructuring and repositioning the company.

The donor has also served on the boards of several public and private companies, along with active involvement in numerous civic and philanthropic organizations.

Roper said he credits his UM education not only for his degree but also for providing “the socialization, maturation and many of the things that I learned to be better prepared for a successful career and life.

“Education at all levels is a key ingredient in our society for future success – both personally and professionally, locally and nationally.”

But it was that introductory level – his first job selling produce to the neighbors – that taught him many of the lessons he would use throughout his career.

“I learned about margins and markup,” Roper said. “I learned about inventory losses when I got lazy and let some of the tomatoes get soft before I could sell them because I was busy playing baseball or whatever. And I learned about customer service, dependability and responsibility – so many of the important factors in life.”

The Bill and Melanie Roper Scholarship Endowment is open to gifts from individuals and organizations. To contribute, send checks with scholarship name noted to the University of Mississippi Foundation, 406 University Avenue, Oxford, MS 38655. Or visit give.olemiss.edu.

BY BILL DABNEY

For more information, contact Angela Brown, director of development, at browna@olemiss.edu or 662-915-3181.



SUBMITTED

Macey Hicks (left) with Avery Robinson on Bid Day in September 2017. Hicks joined Kappa Delta sorority.

A Cancer Survivor's Journey to Graduate and Heal

Growing up in the Florida Panhandle, Macey Hicks didn't seriously consider the University of Mississippi until she began visiting a friend at Ole Miss during her senior year of high school. Then, she and her mother came for an official tour and "fell in love with the campus," she said.

In fall 2017, she enrolled as a freshman, completed recruitment, joined Kappa Delta sorority and decided the School of Business Administration was the best fit for her academically. Later, she declared her major in marketing and communication strategy with a minor in entrepreneurship.

But by the beginning of her sophomore year, Hicks began to run a high fever, accompanied by extreme fatigue and night sweats. All her symptoms seemed like a bad case

of mono. This went on for almost five months, and no doctor was able to cure her until she came home after her finals.

She went to see Dr. Tarek Eldawy, who diagnosed her with Hodgkin lymphoma, a type of cancer that affects the lymphatic system, which is part of the body's germ-fighting system. That is when Hicks' journey began.

"Completing classes, while not knowing if I was going to survive, was quite the challenge," she said. "I had some help from classmates and friends back home to help me meet due dates when I was in the hospital."

There were others to help her obtain her degree while enduring the treatments. Cesar Rego, who taught MKTG 372: Supply Chain Management, was particularly supportive by allowing some flexibility with her assignments and by checking on her frequently.

"Macey had to travel regularly to Houston for her checkups or treatments, which made her miss many classes," Rego said. "I'd meet with her in my office to teach her the material she had missed in those days.

"Her enthusiasm was contagious and her learning speed out of the ordinary."

In December 2019, cancer was detected again, and Hicks went to the world-renowned MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, where she received a stem cell transplant. She and her mother lived in Houston for over six months, both because of COVID and because her immune system was too impaired for her to leave.

While at MD Anderson, she participated in a program called AYA, or the Adolescent and Young Adult Program, designed to support younger patients. Through this program, she received a scholarship to help pay her college tuition.

Hicks' focus these last two years has been completing her schoolwork to wrap up her degree from Ole Miss. She graduated in May. She hopes to work in the pharmaceutical industry to promote and sell therapies for blood cancers.

Since her transplant and treatment at MD Anderson, she has had clear scans since August 2020.

"I know there is a long road ahead to get me where I want to be," she said. "I'll work my way up for the chance to help patients find the right treatment and inspire confidence in their treatment plan and medical team."

BY STELLA CONNELL

Macey Hicks rings the bell at MD Anderson Cancer Center's Pediatric Wing at her release from the hospital 30 days after the stem cell transplant in August 2020.



SUBMITTED

Hicks with her friend's niece, Toni Bass, at a wedding in March.



SUBMITTED

Online MBA in Nation's Top 10

The University of Mississippi's online Master of Business Administration program has been named as one of the best in the nation by *U.S. News & World Report*. The rankings, released Jan. 25, place Ole Miss in a three-way tie for No. 9 among public universities and No. 12 overall.

U Miss is tied with the University of Maryland at College Park and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst for the No. 9 spot. The University of Florida is the only Southeastern Conference school ranked ahead of Ole Miss (at No. 3), and Auburn University came in at No. 24 in the public rankings.

"We are thrilled with this recognition of our online MBA program that indicates the outstanding education and value of the degree," said Ken Cyree, dean of the School of Business Administration. "We have focused on the best online experience possible that mirrors our on-campus program, while allowing students to keep their jobs while earning their degree.

"This ranking indicates the dedication of the faculty, staff and alumni who are providing an excellent program that creates competitive graduate degrees for our students. We are pleased to be ranked at the top, and we will strive to innovate and excel to remain a leader in online MBA programs."

MBA programs have a greater enrollment than any other type of graduate business degree program in the country, the *U.S. News* release noted. Prospective students often narrow their research exclusively to programs that award MBAs.

To aid their efforts, the publication compiles annual rankings of distance education

MBA programs. This year's rankings include 361 schools nationally.

"The rankings reflect a combination of excellent faculty credentials, high standards for student performance and outstanding technical support from our outreach division," said Walter Davis, faculty director for the MBA programs. "This is truly a team effort."

For the 2022 edition, *U.S. News* ranked online MBA programs using five categories: student engagement, expert opinion, faculty credentials and training, student excellence, and student services and technologies.

The publication selects factors, called ranking indicators, to assess each program in the five categories.

A program's score for each ranking indicator is calculated

using data that the program reported to *U.S. News* in a statistical survey and from data collected in a separate peer-reputation survey.

The strength of the Ole Miss curriculum is a plus for businesses in the state, said Ashley McGee, the program's director.

"In an increasingly competitive market, our online MBA program continues to attract some of the best and brightest professionals," she said. "Students looking for an accredited and affordable program recognize the value of an Ole Miss MBA.

"Many of our students are looking to advance within their current job, and others may be seeking a change in their career. Our program opens doors for either scenario."

BY STELLA CONNELL



***U.S. News & World Report* has ranked the University of Mississippi's online MBA program in the top 10 nationally for the fourth year in a row.**

CHAD HATHCOCK

**Keynote speaker
Marcus Bullock (left)
and UM Chancellor
Glenn Boyce address
students at the REDe
Entrepreneurship
Summit held Nov.
11 of last year at the
Jackson Avenue Center.**



PHOTOS BY KEVIN BAIN

App Founder Discusses Resiliency at Summit

“The entrepreneurial spirit is like the Ole Miss spirit; it demands a commitment to excellence and signifies a passion for one’s pursuit,” University of Mississippi Chancellor Glenn Boyce told a packed room of students at the annual REDe Entrepreneurship Summit.

Boyce opened the fourth annual summit, which featured entrepreneur Marcus Bullock as the keynote speaker. The Nov. 11 session last year, hosted by the UM Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, was aimed at inspiring students with varied academic backgrounds to engage in entrepreneurship.

“Life after prison can be one of success,” said Bullock, founder of Flikshop Inc., an app that allows inmates around the world to stay in contact with their loved ones.

He saw an opportunity to create Flikshop after spending eight years in prison.

“I was able to see the world through my mother’s lens, and that gave me a clear vision of what my life would look like after prison,” he said.

Bullock’s mother played an essential role in the individual he has become as she continued to write letters and send pictures of what his life would look like once he got out. Upon his release in February 2004, Bullock was ready to adapt to the changes and challenges that would come his way.

He applied for 41 jobs and was turned away from them all before he landed his first job at a local paint shop. Bullock then began a project that would change his life, hiring individuals who had similar backgrounds to develop and build Flikshop.

He found his vision by harnessing his hardships and experiences to help inmates around the world.

This service gives inmates “access to the Flikshop School of Business, a program Marcus

created that teaches returning citizens entrepreneurship using coding and software development,” said Liza Cirlot Looser, chair of the CIE advisory board.

Using a blend of resilience, empathy, storytelling, community and systems, Bullock launched a brand he is proud of and that provides hope.

“All 170,000 that we’ve connected today are able to tell a story,” he said. “It tells an amazing story of love and empathy inside of places you think it wouldn’t exist, and it’s all led by a community of people who simply love their children, just like my mom did for me.”

Bullock’s marketing strategy was unusual, as he had a significant knowledge gap after being sentenced to prison during his sophomore year of high school. He took what he already knew about the jails, began marketing his brand by leaving postcards out during visitation hours and created Facebook ads that continued to grow.

“Marcus’ message of using entrepreneurship to not only better his own life, but also to create positive change in his and other communities around the U.S., is a tremendous takeaway,” said Clay Dibrell, UM professor of management and co-director of the CIE. “The power of entrepreneurship for affirmative social transformation resonates strongly with Ole Miss students.”

Since August 2014, the CIE has assisted roughly 60 student-led startup businesses.

“We were so excited to host this year’s REDe Entrepreneurship Summit in person,” said Tong Meng, the center’s director of programs. “It’s wonderful to see our annual event contribute to the students’ learning experience at Ole Miss, and the CIE will continue to bring great stories to our community.”

BY JACQUELYN DELAVALDENE

Hancock Whitney Provides Prime Space for Business Resource Center

Hancock Whitney partnered with the Mississippi Small Business Development Center, headquartered at the University of Mississippi, and saw great returns.

With an in-kind gift of almost \$82,000 to the university, Hancock Whitney allowed the Gulf Coast Business Resource Center to move into the eighth floor of its historic building at Hancock Whitney Plaza in downtown Gulfport a year ago.

Since opening its doors, the Gulf Coast Business Resource Center has counseled over 1,800 clients and helped support the start of 65 businesses, according to data provided by Mitchell McDowell, assistant director of the MS-SBDC. While McDowell works for the MS-SBDC, which is based in the School of Business Administration on the Oxford campus, he lives in Gulfport full time to provide consistent personnel support to small business owners in the area.

During this time, 1,731 jobs were saved largely through SBA COVID-19 loans. The 261 SBA COVID-19 loans received by clients totaled more than \$12.7 million.

“Collaboration is the future, and together with Hancock Whitney, we will make sure that small businesses in south Mississippi have every

opportunity to thrive,” said Sharon Nichols, MS-SBDC’s state director. “If Mississippi’s small business ecosystem is successful and growing, then the economy of our state is successful and growing.

“We are extremely grateful for Hancock Whitney’s support of the Gulf Coast Business Resource Center, which serves Hancock, Harrison, Jackson, Stone, Pearl River and George counties,” she said.

Hancock Whitney became a partner when the center lost its home in the Innovation Center. McDowell and Nichols discussed space at the bank’s corporate headquarters with Anthony Montgomery, senior vice president on the community and economic development team at Hancock Whitney.

“It’s been a real pleasure dealing with the Mississippi Small Business Development Center. It’s evolved into a great relationship,” said Montgomery, who is an enthusiastic proponent of the services and resources offered through the four pillars of growth, funding, management and marketing.

“Hancock Whitney is always looking for opportunities for community reinvestments. I ended up taking the idea to senior management as a way to give back,” Montgomery said. “What



The University of Mississippi strives to be a resource and partner for industry through mutually beneficial relationships. To learn more about the university’s industry engagement initiative, visit industry.olemiss.edu.

better support can we give than to provide this direct help for small business owners and entrepreneurs?”

The full-time staff includes trained MS-SBDC business counselors and an international trade specialist. The Hancock Whitney space cements the center as a go-to hub for business resources in south Mississippi, as the Mississippi Contract Procurement Center and the Veterans Outreach Center are also located there. Montgomery and McDowell are trying to secure the Legacy Business League – a chamber of commerce-type organization for minorities and women – for an office there.

Locating the center on the bank’s corporate campus created a true hub of resources specifically designed to help small businesses succeed, said John M. Hairston, Hancock Whitney president and CEO.

“Additionally, we feel like we’ve come full circle in a long, productive relationship between SBA and our bank,” Hairston said. “In good times, we’ve worked closely with SBA to help small businesses thrive. In the wake of crises affecting our area and local businesses, we’ve rolled up our sleeves with SBA and their affiliates to get much-needed money to people and businesses working together to move forward.”

Connie Whitt, director of the center and a second center based at the University of Southern Mississippi, said, “We’ve had a great response to opening the Gulf Coast Business Resource Center. We’re now in an iconic building that everyone knows and on a main thoroughfare with several other financial organizations.”

In addition to one-on-one counseling, the Gulf Coast Business Resource Center hosts

on-demand videos and webinars, provides technical assistance and offers international trade expertise. April Holland, the statewide training specialist, plans conferences on legal issues, cybersecurity, SBA lending programs, local lenders, export opportunities, business resource partners and more.

The Hancock Whitney gift ensures the center has “more boots on the ground in south Mississippi,” as the funds usually reserved for rent and utilities can be spent on additional business counselors, McDowell said.

Several leaders from the university attended the grand opening event of the Gulf Coast Business Resource Center to show support for the program and for communities in the region. As part of the trip, the Ole Miss team met with a cohort of Hancock Whitney leaders and alumni who work at Hancock Whitney to discuss other ways the two could partner, such as recruiting students for internships and full-time roles as well as supporting Gulf Coast communities and economic development.

The university remains engaged with Hancock Whitney and hosted several of its leaders on campus for the Banking and Finance Symposium in the fall.

Hancock Whitney was founded in 1899. By 1939, the bank had moved its corporate domicile from Bay St. Louis to Gulfport, where it remains the largest bank headquartered in south Mississippi.

The Gulf Coast Business Resource Center is available to small business owners across the region. More information can be found at mississippisbdc.org.

BY MICHELLE THOMPSON
AND TINA H. HAHN



THOMAS GRANING

Those helping launch the Gulf Coast Business Resource Center of the Mississippi Small Business Development Center include (from left) Hughes Miller, UM director of industry engagement; Shawnboda Mead, UM vice chancellor for diversity and community engagement; Josh Gladden, UM vice chancellor for research and sponsored programs; Anthony Montgomery, senior vice president for community and economic development of Hancock Whitney; Sharon Nichols, state director of MS-SBDC; John Hairston, president & CEO of Hancock Whitney; Billy Hewes, mayor of the City of Gulfport; Judy Forester, associate state director of MS-SBDC; and LaShaundra McCarty, former public information officer for the City of Gulfport and now CEO of StraightForward.



Dee Evans wears a shirt from his company, Black Collections LLC. The shirt represents his connection to Ole Miss along with his roots in his hometown of Newton.

Building a Business as a Young Visionary

From small-town Newton, Demarius “Dee” Evans had big dreams. And after just one visit to the University of Mississippi, he knew he was at home.

“From the moment I stepped out of the car, the atmosphere felt like home to me,” he said. “It was at that point that I knew Ole Miss was the place for me.”

First enrolling as an accountancy major, Evans’ dream of becoming an entrepreneur led him to switch to a double major in entrepreneurship and management. He then became involved with the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

“I first found out about the CIE when I decided to switch my major,” he said. “After an initial meeting with the staff, they immediately placed me in front of alumni and business owners that were able to give me valuable advice.”

Determined to see his entrepreneurial dreams come to fruition, Evans took every opportunity to learn from those around him. He thanks the university’s business school, along with the CIE, for introducing him to people who provided knowledge and guidance at the start of his business.

“To me, the most influential professor in the business school was Dr. (Danielle) Ammeter,” Evans said. “She provided me with a different perspective and gave insight into corporate America through the information she taught.

“

I started working for student housing in August of 2019. During that time, Hilda Nieblas pushed me to come out of my shell and find an avenue to serve others.”

— DEE EVANS

“This information was relatable and applicable to me as a new small business owner.”

Another person of influence was Tong Meng, CIE director of programs. “Not only has she continued to see my vision, but she has also provided

me with multiple opportunities to serve and learn through the entrepreneurial spectrum,” he said.

Evans was invited by Meng to speak to football recruits interested in the business school and share his experiences. After a few of these visits, Evans was offered the role of outreach specialist, where he was tasked with promoting the CIE to current and prospective students.

Evans credits his great-grandfather, E.B. McIntosh, with the start of his entrepreneurial path. An entrepreneur himself, McIntosh paved the way for Evans to later live out his dream of owning and operating a business.

Evans’ business, Black Collections LLC, is a clothing company dedicated to promoting positive change in the world.

Continued on page 22

Evans hangs out at the Holman Hall courtyard where he often studied and worked between classes.



SUBMITTED



SUBMITTED

The student housing marketing assistant team includes (bottom, from left) Dee Evans, Arik Price and Austin Jones, and (top, from left) Maggie Odom, Erin Krumwiede, Grace Pederson, Esoterica Rayford and Ellie Haydon.



SUBMITTED

Evans at a pop-up shop with Black Collections merchandise.

Visionary, continued from page 21

The collection's first product, a simple T-shirt, was thought-provoking and inspirational. Offering its own definition of "Black," the shirt inspires viewers to "be Bold, be a Leader, be an Advocate, stay Conscious and have Knowledge." Besides urban wear, Black Collections produces performance and fan wear for youth sports teams and school districts in the state of Mississippi.

Whether Evans is producing an inspirational T-shirt or a team uniform, at the heart of his business model is positive change.

Evans' heart for serving others is evident, not only his company and his work with the CIE, but also in his role with the Department of Student Housing on campus.

"I started working for student housing in August of 2019," he said. "During that time, Hilda

Nieblas pushed me to come out of my shell and find an avenue to serve others."

As the graduate community director for student housing, Nieblas was responsible for providing leadership and helping students become engaged scholars and responsible citizens within the residential community. She was able to guide Evans along his journey and connect him with tangible ways to use his talents to serve others.

After working as a community assistant for two years, Evans was hired as a marketing assistant in August 2021. In this role, he served prospective students and their families through tours and marketing efforts.

Having graduated, he plans to find a physical location for Black Collections, while improving revenues, marketing and community engagement.

BY KAITLIN CHILDRESS

Ole Miss MBA Program Ranks Among Top 50 in Nation

The University of Mississippi's Master of Business Administration program has been recognized as one of the best in the nation by *U.S. News & World Report*. The rankings, released March 29, place Ole Miss at No. 44 among public universities and in a three-way tie for No. 82 overall.

UM is tied with Case Western Reserve University and Pepperdine University for the No. 82 spot. The Southeastern Conference universities of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama, Tennessee, Arkansas and Kentucky, and Auburn, Louisiana State and Texas A&M universities also are ranked among the top 50 public institutions.

"We are excited for this recognition of our MBA program that reflects the outstanding education and value of the degree," said Ken Cyree, dean of the UM School of Business Administration. "We have dedicated our efforts to create the best in-person experience possible for our students who spend a year working hard to advance their business education.

"This ranking indicates the dedication of the faculty, staff and alumni who are devoted to providing an excellent graduate education that creates opportunities for our students to succeed in their careers."

MBA programs have a greater enrollment than any other type of graduate degree programs in the country, the *U.S. News* release noted. Prospective students often narrow their research exclusively to programs that award MBAs.

To aid their efforts, the publication compiles annual rankings of campus and online MBA programs. This year's campus rankings include 134 schools nationally.

"The ranking reflects a deep and ongoing commitment to excellence among our faculty, students and alumni," said Walter Davis, faculty director of MBA programs.

Each year, *U.S. News* ranks professional school programs in business, education, engineering, law, medicine and nursing, including specialties in each area. The rankings in these areas are based on two types of data: expert opinions about program excellence and statistical

indicators that measure the quality of a school's faculty, research and students.

In fall 2021 and early 2022, *U.S. News* surveyed 493 institutions with master's-level business programs in the U.S. accredited by AACSB International, an organization that's widely considered the gold standard of business school accreditation, for data collection.

For the 2022 edition, *U.S. News* ranked MBA programs using five categories: student engagement, expert opinion, faculty credentials and training, student excellence, and student services and technologies.

"Our campus program includes a 36-hour comprehensive curriculum that allows students to gain important business concepts and knowledge," said Ashley McGee, director of the MBA program. Alongside this, we have a supportive MBA alumni board that emphasizes professional development.

"The knowledge gained in the classroom, plus the networking outside of class, equals outstanding career opportunities for our MBAs."

BY STELLA CONNELL

The officers for the 2021-22 MBA class are (from left) Cole Barnhill, vice president of communications and PR, from Union, Kentucky; Rebecca Eyiaro, vice president of community service, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria; Maia Dooley, vice president of recruitment, Biloxi; Elizabeth Tettleton Mason, president, Oxford; Anna Gregory, vice president of finance, Tupelo; and Will Gentry, vice president of social events, Memphis.



Alumnus Gives Back to Business, Athletics

After a career spanning more than 30 years across the telecommunication and information technology industries, including leading four companies as CEO, Dean Douglas is giving back to the university he credits for his success.

With gifts totaling \$250,000, the 1978 graduate of the University of Mississippi School of Business Administration established the Dean Douglas Business Student Preparation Endowment and the Dean J. Douglas Business Advisory Board Business Connect Program Endowment.

The funds will work in tandem to support an initiative designed to make the business school a go-to source for companies recruiting new executives, meaning graduates will be better prepared to be hired by top companies in global business.

“When I talked about Ole Miss to others at IBM and many other companies, I realized that University of Mississippi graduates weren’t on the top of their recruiting lists, and that bothered me,” said Douglas, who is retired, living in Oxford and teaching a sales class within the school.

“I understand that there’s a 90% placement rate for our

students within six months, but I’m not sure that they’re getting the best jobs. I want to help make certain they do.”

Douglas explained that he hopes his gift will be used to support the development of software or artificial intelligence tools to drive a stronger job-placement result for Ole Miss business graduates.

“Having our graduates placed in the best global companies is a focus of our advisory board, on which Dean serves, and it is good for our students, for our school and for the university,” Dean Ken Cyree said.

“I am extremely grateful to Dean for his perspective on



Visiting in front of the Douglas Family Gate at Vaught-Hemingway Stadium are (from left) Ken Cyree, dean of the School of Business Administration; Dean Douglas; Keith Carter, vice chancellor for intercollegiate athletics; and Matt McLaughlin, assistant athletics director for major gifts.

BILL DABNEY



There's no question my education at Ole Miss helped prepare me for my career path."

— DEAN DOUGLAS

this situation and for his generous gifts. Dean brings deep, real-world experience home to our students, and that kind of knowledge creates outstanding educational opportunities for our students."

Most recently, Douglas served as CEO and president of Syniverse, a software firm focused on telecommunications. Previously, he was president of the enterprise segment of CenturyLink, a division that accounted for \$10 billion of the company's \$16 billion in revenues; he was the core transformation leader at a crucial time for the company.

He formerly was CEO of Unify, where he led a conversion to a provider of software-based, enterprise-unified communications.

During his career, Douglas also served as CEO of the Westcon Group and LCC International, held an executive role at Motorola and lived abroad for many years, leading international business ventures for his employers.

Besides his gifts to the business school, Douglas supports Ole Miss athletics; his most recent gift of \$500,000 is designated to the Vaught Society and the Champions. Now, campaign.

"I'm a big fan of Ole Miss both academically as well as from a sports-on-the-field standpoint," Douglas said. "It just seemed to me that this would be a nice way to help out going forward as plans were being put in place to expand athletics facilities."

Keith Carter, vice chancellor for intercollegiate athletics,

expressed gratitude for Douglas' generosity, which will bolster facilities and programs for student-athletes.

"We are extremely grateful for Dean's longtime support and desire to see our student-athletes succeed in their particular sports, in the classroom and in life beyond college," Carter said.

Douglas attended DePaul University in Chicago for two years before transferring to Ole Miss, where he joined Phi Kappa Psi fraternity.

"My fraternity brothers laughed when I told them I was going to IBM because I was not the most technical guy," Douglas remembered. "I have an aptitude for it, but it's deeply hidden. I focused on verbal skills. I went to law school here for a year and was not interested in technology.

"Then I was given the opportunity to work in the Reagan administration or continue with IBM, and I opted to continue with IBM, which was a really solid move in hindsight. Leadership thought pretty highly of me.

"So in my early 30s, I was vice president of sales and marketing of a joint venture with Blockbuster that really taught me the value of technology, not only in terms of

computers but also with applications in the telecom space."

Douglas credits his UM education, both academically and socially, for his numerous professional achievements.

"There's no question my education at Ole Miss helped prepare me for my career path," he said. "Inside the classroom, the business degree I received aided a great deal in understanding how businesses work, understanding how to approach those businesses and sell.

"Outside the classroom, being on a very social campus taught me a lot about empathy and how to interact with people. At 24, my job required me to talk to the CEOs of these multibillion-dollar companies. The fact is that I became very comfortable with that dynamic as an Ole Miss student made me sort of fearless."

Individuals and organizations can contribute to the Dean Douglas Business Student Preparation Endowment, by mailing a check, with the fund noted in the memo line, to the University of Mississippi Foundation, 406 University Ave., Oxford, MS 38655, or give online at: give.olemiss.edu.

BY BILL DABNEY

To learn more about supporting the School of Business Administration, including its career preparation and Business Connect programs, contact Angela Brown, director of development, at browna@olemiss.edu or 662-915-3181.

To support Ole Miss athletics, visit givetoathletics.com or contact Fowler Staines, CEO and CFO, at fowler@olemiss.edu or 662-915-1143.

Speaker's Edge Helps Develop Career-Relevant Skills

More than 100 students show off public-speaking skills in 18th annual contest

Take vaccine cards, inappropriate behavior on Zoom, underreporting billable hours to improve bonuses, equal opportunities in the workplace, fitness apps, cruelty-free skin products and ways to be a better employer were among the

They were joined by 111 judges and 22 coaches for this year's speaking competition. Held Jan. 13-14, the event is a partnership between the university's School of Business Administration, Patterson School of Accountancy, Trent Lott Leadership Institute, Department of Writing and Rhetoric and the Division of Outreach and Continuing Education.

After two days of competition, Elizabeth Tettleton Mason, an MBA candidate from Oxford, was declared the overall winner and awarded a check for \$1,000.

"The Speaker's Edge program is one of the most unique aspects of the Ole Miss MBA program," said Mason, who earned her bachelor's degree in hospitality management from UM. "I am honored to be named the overall champion this year and want to thank Katherine Anderson for her generous gift as my award.

"Public speaking has been a longtime passion of mine, largely influenced by my experience in undergrad while traveling in competitive forensics competitions. Our new speech center director, Dr. Ellie Moore, has done a remarkable job bringing Speaker's Edge into a new era, even in the midst of the challenges of the pandemic."

Mason placed second in the Ethical Dilemmas category and second in Marketplace Pitch.

"We are excited and pleased with the 18th annual Speaker's Edge competition," said

LOGAN KIRKLAND



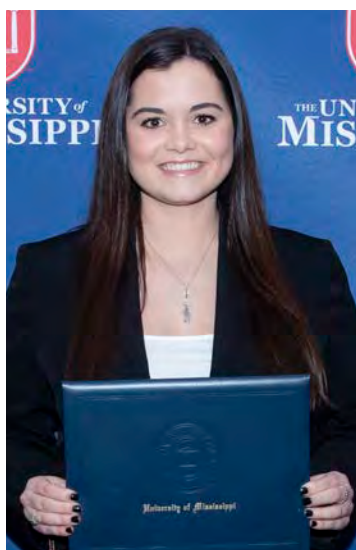
Elizabeth Tettleton Mason (left) is the overall winner of the 2022 Speaker's Edge competition. The check is presented by Billy Gottshall, executive director of the UM Trent Lott Leadership Institute.

topics addressed at the 18th annual UM Speaker's Edge competition at the University of Mississippi.

More than 109 graduate students in business, accountancy and law tackled issues ranging from disclosing co-workers' exposure to the coronavirus to employees being encouraged to work in the office for preference in performance reviews and promotion consideration, all during a global pandemic.

Ken Cyree, dean of the School of Business Administration. “I am grateful for the dedication of our staff and the commitment of our judges who made the competition a success and provided a unique learning opportunity through creating a competitive environment to test the mettle of our students.”

LOGAN KIRKLAND



ALDYN EWING

In the Ethical Dilemmas category, Aldyn Ewing, a master’s student in accountancy from Corpus Christi, Texas, took first place, followed by Mason. In third place was Anna Michele Borgen, an MBA candidate from Heath, Texas, who received her bachelor’s degree from UM in accountancy.

In this category, participants presented their best solutions for workplace challenges, where issues addressing unvaccinated workers who are unmasked in the office, the use of fake vaccination cards and nudity on Zoom.

Ewing’s dilemma posed a situation where the lead of an audit team at a regional accounting firm hinted that underreporting billable hours



The Speaker’s Edge program is one of the most unique aspects of the Ole Miss MBA program. I am honored to be named the overall champion this year and want to thank Katherine Anderson for her generous gift as my award.”

— ELIZABETH TETTLETON MASON

would improve the team’s annual bonuses, which are based on their reported efficiency.

“The Ethical Dilemmas portion of Speaker’s Edge was challenging yet very rewarding,” said Ewing, who earned her bachelor’s degree in accountancy from UM. “I know that competing in this event helped to prepare me for many situations I will encounter during my career as an accountant.”



CAITLIN MARIE MOAK

In the Marketplace Pitch category, Caitlin Marie Moak, an MBA candidate from Canton, Georgia, took first place. She was followed by Mason and Borgen.

“I was honored to participate in the Speaker’s Edge competition,” said Moak, who earned

a bachelor’s degree in economics and marketing from Ole Miss. “It helped me develop my speaking skills and overcome my fear of speaking in public.”

Moak’s pitch proposed a three-step plan to Amazon’s board of directors to improve the company’s business model to be a better employer.

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

“Thank you to Dr. Ellie Moore and the faculty, coaches, judges, staff and sponsors for a highly successful Speaker’s Edge 2022,” Wilder said. “This was Dr. Moore’s first year to lead the event, and we received excellent feedback from students about the course and competition.

“It was an outstanding learning experience once again for students, and we are proud of all who participated.”

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 goal was to determine and address points of vulnerability or opportunity and how best to present a solution or highlight a strength.

Continued on page 28

Speakers, continued from page 27

The winning pitch was from Team Olay, which involved the marketing of a new cruelty-free skin product line targeted to people in their 20s and 30s and using social media influencers to promote it.

Members of the winning team were all master's students from the School of Accountancy. They are Walker Cottrell of Columbus, Georgia; Logan Gage of Ridgeland; J.R. Kellen from Lexington, Kentucky; and Trey Sankey of Tallahassee, Florida, who all received their bachelor's in accountancy from Ole Miss; and Kelly Moran, from Martinez, California, who received her bachelor's degree in business administration from California Polytechnic State University.

"Speaker's Edge challenges students to develop their speaking, presentation and communication skills," said Walter Davis, faculty director of MBA programs. "For many of our students, this is truly a transformative experience.

"The opportunity to develop career-relevant skills in such an exciting environment is what makes Speaker's Edge a highlight of many students' personal development in the MBA program."

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.



LOGAN KIRKLAND

Team Olay, whose pitch involved the marketing of a cruelty-free skin product, won the Team Pitch category. The team members are Kelly Moran (left), J.R. Kellen, Walker Cottrell, Trey Sankey and Logan Gage.

"We were glad to be back in person this year, but we also incorporated virtual elements that we utilized last year to better deliver the event," said Ashley McGee, director of MBA programs. "These coaches prepare them for the competition, but more importantly, they prepare them for their future."

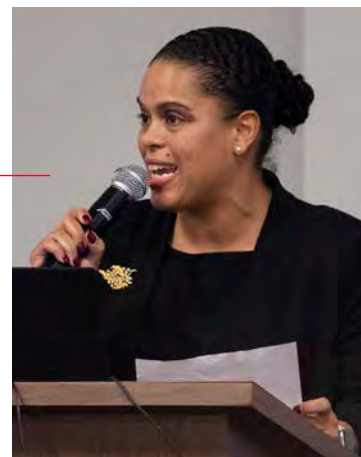
Participants spent a week and a half working with volunteer communication coaches to discover strengths and weaknesses of their own personal

presentation styles in front of multiple judges.

"The 2022 Speaker's Edge competition was a great success," said Moore, the competition's coordinator. "A special thank you goes to my predecessor, JoAnn Edwards, for laying the foundation for this great competition."

BY STELLA CONNELL

Ellie Moore, director of the UM Speaking Center and coordinator of the Speaker's Edge competition, announces the winners of this year's competition.



LOGAN KIRKLAND



The opportunity to develop career-relevant skills in such an exciting environment is what makes Speaker's Edge a highlight of many students' personal development in the MBA program."

— WALTER DAVIS



Kristin Cullen-Lester shows off her Distinguished Early Career Practice award from the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology.

STELLA CONNELL

UM Professor Studies Effects of Internal Recognition on Promotions

How does internal recognition affect promotions and retention of women in the field of academic medicine? That is a question that Kristin Cullen-Lester, an assistant professor of management at the University of Mississippi, hopes to answer.

Research shows that women in academic medicine wait longer to receive a promotion and leave their jobs at a faster rate than male peers. This project seeks to clarify whether and to what extent internal visibility influences the data.

Cullen-Lester is conducting the research with Caitlin Porter, a University of Memphis assistant professor of management, and Katelyn Cavanaugh, an industrial-organizational psychologist at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center.

“We are looking at the impact of internal awards on speed to promotion and voluntary turnover, including whether receiving these awards impacts the careers of men and women differently,” Cullen-Lester said.

The team recently traveled to the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology annual conference in Seattle to receive an SIOP Small Grant to fund its large-scale research study.

“We are all looking forward to involving students at our respective institutions in the project and hope it will be a great learning

experience for early career researchers,” Cullen-Lester said.

The project features an analysis of data for more than 1,800 medical faculty across 17 departments, spanning a 15-year period. The team members plan to use the grant to continue their project by conducting additional research.

“Dr. Cullen-Lester continues to produce exceptionally relevant and informative research for the School of Business,” said Richard Gentry, chair of the management department at UM.

“Her work produces the kinds of findings that can be immediately applicable in practice just as well as informative in the classroom. She would certainly know; she has extensive industry experience.”

Ken Cyree, dean of the Ole Miss School of Business Administration, also praised Cullen-Lester’s achievements both inside and outside the university.

“Dr. Cullen-Lester has been a prolific author with success in publishing in several journals that are rated as elite,” he said. “We are glad to have her providing insight into leadership and performance in organizations, in addition to adding value in the classroom for our students.

“Her research is outstanding, and she contributes effectively to our research mission as an R1-rated institution on this and other projects.”

 BY CLAIRE SAHS

Mississippi's Brain Gain

BILL DABNEY



AJAH SINGLETON

With her bright smile and signature dimples, Ajah Singleton enters into spaces with intentionality and curiosity.

Graduating from Raymond High School in 2018, Singleton decided to leave her small hometown of Edwards – population: 756 – to pursue higher education at the University of Mississippi. She aimed to push herself and step out of her comfort zone, and she “wanted to be close to home but experience a diverse environment.”

The Annexstad Scholar and member of the university’s Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College received her bachelor’s degree in management with a health care emphasis, and Singleton intends to use it to make health care “more equal and equitable for vulnerable, low-income populations in Mississippi.”

Singleton’s professional aspirations originate from personal experiences.

“Taking care of my mom and my stepfather motivated me into pursuing health care management,” she explained. “Making medical decisions and interacting with entities such as hospitals, health insurance companies, Social Security and disability advocates

“

I had no knowledge of how these systems operated, and I wanted to be able to help my family.”

— AJAH SINGLETON

In October 2021, Ajah Singleton (left), Brandon Ashmore and Kelly Li presented at the sixth annual National Society for Minorities in Honors conference at Ball State University in Indiana.

was difficult and traumatizing for me as a teenager.

“I had no knowledge of how these systems operated, and I wanted to be able to help my family.”

Coupled with her firsthand knowledge of navigating health care systems, Singleton researched a facet of the state’s health care system for her honors thesis, “Contributions Community Health Centers in the Delta Have Made During the Pandemic and Their Future.”

Her thesis adviser, Paul Johnson, associate dean of the School of Business Administration, associate professor of management and the Thomas Colbert Lecturer in Entrepreneurship, is proud.

“Ajah has been a pleasure to advise,” Johnson said. “Her work on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic by community health organizations in the Mississippi Delta has been inspired.

“Between the interviews with health care administrators at these organizations and the academic research on the challenges of rural health care, she’s put together an insightful and interesting thesis about the state of health care in the Delta and potential paths toward improvement. I look forward to seeing what she does in health care management after graduation.”

Indeed, one of Singleton’s first goals is to secure full-time employment and health insurance for herself and her mom.

Before her first semester at Ole Miss, Singleton’s stepfather died and her mother’s health declined. Rather than dive into the social scene, Singleton submitted applications for part-time jobs, and over

the past four years has worked as a barista at Starbucks, as a suite attendant for football games and in retail at Kohl’s, Marshalls and the Dollar Tree.

Between work shifts and studying, she has driven back and forth from Oxford to Edwards to help her mom.

Nevertheless, Singleton smiles.

Her hard work is paying off. To boot, she’s managed to find a community of thoughtful peers and has advice for any student hesitant to reach out to others.

“To me, community is when you find a group of people that you are comfortable with and

Continued on page 32



you can relate to one another without concern or judgment,” Singleton said. “I found my pockets of community within the Honors College. HoCoMEC (Honors College Minority Engagement Council) was where I met many of my friends.

“If I could give any advice to an incoming freshman, I would say to become involved when you first arrive on campus. Just show up to events and see what happens. Imposter syndrome may be your biggest enemy while you’re here, but you wouldn’t have gotten this far if no one saw any potential in you.”

The Annexstad Family Foundation and the Honor College saw potential in Singleton from the beginning. The Annexstad Family Foundation helps “exceptionally promising students from extraordinarily challenging backgrounds lay the foundation for careers of remarkable achievement and contribution to America.”

And before they even met Singleton, the Honors College admissions committee knew Singleton was special, as she demonstrated in her application how she made the most

out of a difficult environment. They sensed Singleton’s determination and joy in enduring and overcoming obstacles.

Many firsts occurred for Singleton and the Honors College in the last four years.

She is the only honors student to have presented three times at the annual National Society for Minorities in Honors, or NSFMIH, conference, and she continued to provide leadership for the Honors College Minority Engagement Council through challenges brought on by the pandemic.

It’s no wonder the Honors College asked Singleton to welcome her peers at this year’s Honors Commissioning Ceremony on May 4.

For Singleton, her firsts include trying Indian food – and loving it. She also took her first airplane ride, traveling from Memphis to Indianapolis to present at the NSFMIH conference.

Even when the trip was derailed multiple times, Singleton took it all in stride,

“

Sophomore year was really challenging, navigating COVID-19 and caring for my mom. I’ve had some tough decisions to make.”

— AJAH SINGLETON

shrugged her shoulders and smiled. She was simply grateful for the opportunity.

When she reflects on how caring for family and working multiple jobs has affected her time at Ole Miss, Singleton considers it all worthy.

“I think that my UM experience has given me challenges and opportunities for growth,” she said. “Sophomore year was really challenging, navigating COVID-19 and caring for my mom. I’ve had some tough decisions to make.

“But I do think I’ve become aware of my feelings and how to articulate them. I have learned to set boundaries and how to communicate effectively both at home and at work.”

No one will hear Singleton comparing herself to anyone else, and despite challenges and setbacks, she never misses a daily dose of humble pie.

“I would like to thank my family for being patient with me,” she said. “Now that I’m graduating, I’m feeling a bit relieved and optimistic about the future.

“I do not have it together still, but I’m working on it.”

BY JENNIFER PARSONS



In October 2018, Nakiyah Jordan (left), Jarvis Benson, Swetha Manivannan and Ajah Singleton participated in a panel at the fourth annual National Society for Minorities in Honors conference at the University of Central Arkansas.

JENNIFER PARSONS



BILL DABNEY

Cindy (back row, center) and Bob Seibels (back row, right), of Montgomery, Alabama, gather with their grandchildren at Vaught-Hemingway Stadium. The couple has made a \$40,000 gift to Giving Day to establish the Seibels Scholars program at the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship in the School of Business Administration. Cindy and Bob Seibels both are Ole Miss alumni, and their three sons all graduated from the business school.

Seibels Continue Giving Tradition

A family with deep Ole Miss roots and a tradition of giving stretching back decades has joined the Giving Day effort with a \$40,000 gift to establish a new scholarship program at the University of Mississippi School of Business Administration.

Bob and Cindy Seibels graduated from UM in the late 1960s with degrees in mathematics and education, respectively. They settled in Montgomery, Alabama, where Bob Seibels launched his career in finance and began giving back to their alma mater when their three boys were very young.

The new Seibels Scholars program in the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship is perhaps their most meaningful contribution to date, he said.

“My son Emmet had been involved with the CIE and was very impressed with the work they’re doing to encourage students to launch businesses and suggested that I support their mission,” Seibels said.

“Cultivating innovation and entrepreneurship in our business students can be life-changing for them and for everyone they uplift with their ideas. I’m very excited about the opportunities CIE is bringing to our students.”

The Seibels’ gift was part of Giving Day, a social media-heavy fundraising event that launched April 5 this year. Giving Day lasts for one day, eight hours and 48 minutes in honor of the university’s founding in 1848.

The first Giving Day at UM, in 2019, secured almost \$550,000, and the event has grown since.

The Seibels have supported academic units across campus, the arts, student scholarships, facilities and athletics over the years, and Bob Seibels served as president of the Ole Miss Alumni Association.

Their sons, Emmet, William and Ryan, all graduated from the School of Business Administration in 1996, 1999 and 2002, went on to earn MBAs at Harvard and Vanderbilt, and have continued their parents’ tradition of giving to strengthen Ole Miss.

The family is a great example of how entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurial spirit can benefit families and their communities, said Clay Dibrell, co-director of the CIE and a UM business school professor.

“We are excited about Bob and Cindy’s generous gift to create the Seibels Scholars program,” Dibrell said. “Students who qualify for this scholarship are those who are either entrepreneurship majors or minors and apply what they learn in the classroom by competing in our fall business model and spring Gillespie Business Plan competitions.

“The goal is to attract motivated students who want to change the world through entrepreneurship.”

BY JONATHAN SCOTT

For more information on ways of supporting the university, go to give.olemiss.edu. To get an update on Giving Day, go to givingday.olemiss.edu.

Mentor, Supporter and Red-and-Blue Through and Through

STELLA CONNELL

Lila Neely believes she was diapered in red and blue, and her deep-seated love for the University of Mississippi was with her at birth.

Neely comes from a devout Ole Miss family – her mother was Miss Ole Miss in 1946 and also was a cheerleader with Neely’s two aunts. Her father played football following World War II, and her uncles were both All-Americans.

Neely was a student from 1967 to 1971, and all five of her daughters graduated from UM. It’s fair to say this group means business when they say they are a part of the Ole Miss family.

In 2005, Neely returned to the university to work as a part-time career coach. Later, she moved into various staff assistant roles until she landed firmly in the Master of Business Administration office as the program coordinator. She retired at the end of last year.

“Lila started work for us in 2007, and she immediately made a lasting impact on the MBA students, alumni and staff,” said Ken Cyree, dean of the School of Business Administration.

“Her dedication and love for Ole Miss, helping our students, and connections to alumni have been instrumental to the MBA program’s success.

“She is passionate about helping our students and alumni, and always with a smile and great attitude. We will miss her dearly, and I hope that she will be able to spend lots of time with the grandkids and her family.”

For 14 years, she has coordinated huge events such as the annual Speaker’s Edge competition, the Friday Speaker Series and many professional development events for students.

STELLA CONNELL



Lila Neely (left) works with Walter Davis, faculty director of MBA programs; Ashley McGee, director of administration of MBA programs; and Amy Johnson, records coordinator, at the School of Business Administration.

“Lila makes coming to work each day enjoyable,” said Ashley McGee, director of administration of MBA programs. “She is a team player and has been an asset to our MBA team. I admire her dedication and commitment to our students. She is truly invested in the success of our MBAs.”

Neely’s biggest contribution has been developing the mentoring program, drawing from all the alumni she knows that she generously connects with MBA candidates to help them professionally.

“I believe that the joy in life evolves from the relationships we build both professionally and personally,” she said. “In the beginning, I simply strived to bring people that I knew into the MBA family by introducing them to the MBAs as mentors or speakers.

“We have had some very successful matches that have grown into lifetime relationships.”

The job placement rate of the program is very successful, and it ranks highly among American public universities. For 2021, *Bloomberg Businessweek* ranked the campus program at No. 33, and *U.S. News & World Report* ranked the online program in seventh place for public universities.

“Lila has always shown caring and professionalism in everything she does,” said Walter Davis, faculty director of MBA programs. “It has been a pleasure for me to witness firsthand the positive impact she has on the students, faculty and staff of the MBA program.

“So many of our students benefit from her leadership and career counseling, accompanied by her amazing network in the professional community. It’s been a great honor to work with her, and her impact on our program will be felt for years to come.”

BY STELLA CONNELL



Sulser Scholarship Helps Business Students Considering Law Degrees

One way to build a successful career in the legal profession is to start by laying a firm foundation based on business knowledge.

This formula worked for Floyd Sulser Jr. during his higher education journey at the University of Mississippi in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Now, a half-century later, he and his family believe this same educational path still works for today’s generation of Ole Miss students.

That’s why they created the Floyd Sulser Family Scholarship Endowment with a gift of \$30,000 in 2019, and recently enhanced this scholarship with another gift of nearly \$28,000. The endowment is designed to encourage and assist UM business majors who want to attend law school.

“Having a degree in business certainly helped me establish my law practice,” said Sulser of Ridgeland. “My bachelor’s degree in business administration provided me with an understanding of business transactions, accounting and economics, which has proven to be invaluable during the many decades I’ve practiced law.”

The Sulser Family Scholarship provides financial assistance to full-time students in the UM School of Business Administration who plan to enroll in law school. With the Sulser family’s most recent gift to the endowment, this support will be even more generous.

“Dad made this latest gift to the endowment because he prefers that each year, one scholar will receive a larger financial commitment instead of having smaller financial amounts go to several scholars,” said Lauren Sulser Benner of Jackson, who has two children enrolled at Ole Miss.

This scholarship encourages business majors to expand the career avenues available to them by continuing on to law school, said Ken Cyree, dean of the business school.

“Having a multidisciplinary educational background with business and law degrees not only ensures graduates stand out from other professionals getting started after college, it also expands their skill sets and enables them to have a potentially greater, more effective impact on their community,” Cyree said.

“We’re so grateful that Floyd and his family are making these thrilling opportunities

Continued on page 37

New Career Initiatives Help Prepare Business Students for Job Market

During the spring 2022 semester, the University of Mississippi School of Business Administration hosted two new, career-specific events to help students meet employers and learn about possible job and internship opportunities in their field.

The Real Estate Career and Internship Fair gave students an opportunity to connect with 13 companies from across the country to learn what employers are expecting from graduates and how to prepare to enter the field. And the Core for Business Analytics, Sales and Supply Chain, or BASE, conducted a Sales Summit and Career Expo to provide students with insight into marketing and sales.

Ben Burnett, a senior real estate and managerial finance major from Jackson who attended the April 8 real estate fair, noted that “Each firm showcased their strengths and notable achievements, explained the opportunities they offer within the company, and the ideals they’re looking for in incoming employees.

“Everyone was personable, and each company insisted on us reaching out to them so we could, at the least, connect with them in the future and grow the Ole Miss real estate network.”



“Everyone was personable, and each company insisted on us reaching out to them so we could, at the least, connect with them in the future and grow the Ole Miss real estate network.”

— BEN BURNETT

The event was well attended and a success for all parties, said Sergio Garate, assistant professor of finance and director of the real estate program.

“We are really grateful to the employers that attended the event and everyone who made it a success,” Garate said. “In the real estate program, we are committed to facilitating our students’ transition from college to career, and these activities attest to that.

“We strongly believe they will be valuable assets for the companies they work for.”

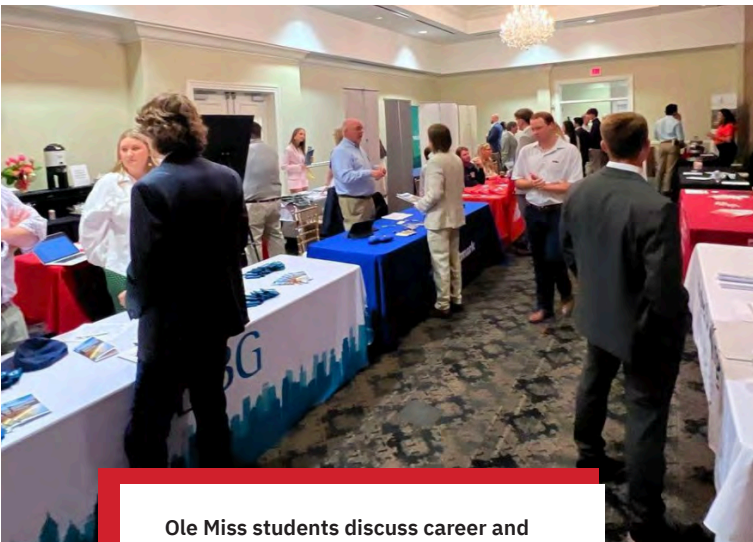
The BASE Summit helped fill a need in one of the fastest-growing fields of business, said

Tyler Meisenheimer, the school’s Business Connect program director, who works to connect students with business alumni to help secure jobs and internships.

“The employer demand for sales, across multiple industries, has continued to grow along with our concentration and curriculum within the marketing major,” Meisenheimer said. “We promoted this event to all of our business students because, overall, our



Panelists and UM faculty members participating in the inaugural BASE Sales Summit and Career Expo include (from left) Ken Cyree, dean of the School of Business Administration; Jeremy Duane, director of sales at Mylo; Lauren Kail, regional vice president at RJ Young; Sage Nichols, executive for client and business development at CoreLogic; and Barry Babin, chair of the Department of Marketing.



Ole Miss students discuss career and internship opportunities with real estate firms at the Real Estate Career and Internship Fair, hosted in April by the School of Business Administration.

SUBMITTED

students possess many of the heavily desired transferrable skills that are sought in multiple sales positions.”

The event was a great success and popular among students looking to network and begin their careers, said Barry Babin, chair and professor of marketing.

“We had well over 100 students show up, and each firm was able to meet dozens of prospective employees, and by all accounts they were very impressed with the talent Ole Miss has to offer,” Babin said. “The first ever BASE Sales Summit and Career Expo will certainly not be the last, and we look forward to putting students and firms together in the supply chain and business analytics spaces as well.”

Colleen Clark, the school’s career events coordinator, was involved in the organization, planning and execution for both events.

“Planning the BASE Sales Summit and Real Estate Career and Internship Fair was a team effort,” she said. “Working closely with faculty and development team members ensured a successful event for SOBA students and employer partners.

“I am looking forward to continuing to plan events catered specifically to our student and employer needs.”

BY CLAIRE SAHS

Sulser, continued from page 35

available to a new generation of business students,” he said.

The Sulser Family Scholarship also was established to honor James “Jimmy” Davis, an Ole Miss alumnus who served the UM Patterson School of Accountancy for more than 44 years as a faculty member and dean. When he retired, Davis was honored with the title of Peery Professor Emeritus of Accountancy.

“One of dad’s favorite professors was Dr. Jimmy Davis,” said Kristen Sulser Guinn, who earned a master’s degree in English from Ole Miss. “Dad wants this scholarship to honor Dr. Davis for his energy, dedication and mentorship.

“Dad loved his accounting classes with Dr. Davis, and he frequently shares stories about how his classes with Dr. Davis were fun, inspiring and always engaging.”

Sulser earned a bachelor’s degree in 1968 and his Juris Doctor in 1971. He is a founding member of the Bennett Lotterhos Sulser & Wilson law firm in Jackson.

His legal career focused on the areas of business and environmental law, as well as creditors’ rights and bankruptcy litigation. He now serves of counsel for the law firm and is the board chair for GreenHeart Holdings in Jackson.

In addition, Sulser and Guinn have devoted their time to the UM Friends of the Library board.

“Our dad and stepmom (Regina Sulser) have loved and supported Ole Miss for decades, and their appreciation and deep fondness for the University of Mississippi have been passed on to two more generations in our family,” Guinn said.

“The Floyd Sulser Family Scholarship Endowment reflects how our family feels about Ole Miss, but it especially reflects the love our father has for Ole Miss, provides him with a way to give back to the university and helps future generations of UM students,” she said.

The Floyd Sulser Family Scholarship Endowment is open to accept gifts from individuals and organizations. To contribute, send a check, with the endowment’s name noted in the memo line, to the University of Mississippi Foundation, 406 University Ave., Oxford, MS 38655, or give online at give.olemiss.edu.

BY JONATHAN SCOTT

For more information about supporting the School of Business Administration, contact Angela Brown, senior director of development, at browna@olemiss.edu or 662-915-3181.

Banking Symposium Explores Use of Technology in Post-COVID Marketplace



Officials from regional banks and other financial industry firms explored the impact of technology on the banking and finance industry, particularly in the wake of COVID, at the University of Mississippi's 20th annual Banking and Finance Symposium.

The annual conference, held Nov. 12 at the Oxford Conference Center, was open to Ole Miss students, alumni, finance professionals and business leaders. The event was co-hosted by Ken Cyree, dean of the UM School of Business Administration, and Stan Viner, chair of the Banking and Finance Advisory Board, and featured numerous speakers and panelists throughout the day.

"The 20th Banking and Finance Symposium continued

the tradition of an excellent educational event with outstanding industry leaders speaking to the audience of financial professionals and students," Cyree said. "There were many friendships renewed and an outstanding mood from the attendees and all involved.

"It was a wonderful day and helped us continue the

outstanding momentum we have enjoyed in the banking program here at Ole Miss."

The event kicked off with Rebeca Romero Rainey, president and CEO of Independent Community Bankers of America, leading the first "Women in Finance" breakfast, where she discussed the significance of acting on seen opportunities or gaps in the industry.

Rainey pointed out that community banking is dependent on the engagement and success of the community. She also elaborated on the idea of digitalization and said the "demonstration of resilience is why I'm so optimistic about the future of banking."



STELLA CONNELL

Louise Burney (left), UM professor of accountancy, and Tracy Wofford of Cushman & Wakefield

The 20th annual UM Banking and Finance Symposium kicked off with Rebeca Romero Rainey, president and CEO of Independent Community Bankers of America, leading the first 'Women in Finance' breakfast.

KEVIN BAIN



STELLA CONNELL

Gibson Eatherly of Origin Bank (left), Tom Walker of Jones Walker and Bruce Ware of Davita Inc.

Scott Anderson, head of investment banking and managing director at KBW, later joined Rainey in discussing the impact that digitalization has played in the industry. Anderson used numerous graphics to show the short-, medium- and long-term effects this industry is experiencing while discussing what's next for the future of banking.

Jill Castilla, president and CEO of Citizens Bank of Edmond, examined the impact of small community banks and emphasized how she used social media to optimize her business's search engines.

Bankers must adapt to the evolution of technology while "implementing storytelling in the self-interest of their customers," she said.

In the afternoon, two industry panels were led by Viner

and Carl Chaney, chairman of Beach Bank.

The first panel, "What's Next?" hosted by Viner and moderated by Scott Mills, president of William Mills Agency, discussed the significance of fintech and its advancements through the last decade.

The other looked at "M&A Trends in 2022 & Beyond," hosted by Chaney and moderated by Paul Davis, director of market intelligence of Strategic Resource Management, which addressed the effects of COVID-19 on businesses and the industry as well as the need for strategic partnerships.

"Technology for business purposes used to be a convenience," said Mitch Waycaster, president and CEO of Renasant Bank. "When COVID hit, that convenience became a necessity, and now that necessity

has become a preference to our consumers."

Both panelists, Waycaster and Chip Reeves, CEO of Beach Bank, credited regional banks for stepping up during COVID with stimulus checks and providing community support during a challenging time.

"This year's event set new highs in attendance, sponsorships and the overall energy level," Viner concluded. "We now have a 20-year history of hosting the Ole Miss banking symposium.

"This energy was a result of many factors, including the quality and diversity of our speakers/panelists and the huge success of our inaugural 'Women in Finance' breakfast."

BY JACQUELYN DELAVALDENE
AND SYDNEY GIBSON



KIRSTEN SIMPSON

Alumnus Gives Gift for Startup Ventures

Owens Alexander has been involved with the University of Mississippi's Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship since its inception and, after retiring, wanted to encourage students to think about starting their own businesses.

A 1971 Ole Miss alumnus, Alexander also serves as both a mentor for students and a judge at local competitions.

In fall 2021, Alexander saw an opportunity to assist students by creating the CIE Discovery Grant, in which he and his wife, Emily, will provide 10 grants a year for 10 years. These micro-grants will allow entrepreneurial-minded students to begin their business ventures.

"The 'good idea' is the key thing to validate very early in the process," he said. "Far too often, student entrepreneurs get focused on their solution – the product or service, app, etc. – before first finding out whether they are solving a problem people want solved and whether their

proposed solution will be wanted by their target customers."

The new grants provide funding for Ole Miss students to test their ideas with potential customers, said Tong Meng, director of programs for the CIE.

"Customer discovery is essential to the success of startups, and this grant will help our students gain valuable customer insights and improve their business," Meng said.

Timber Heard, owner of Talitha Kumi Jewels, and Lucas Ramsey, owner of Ramsey Auto Group and creator of Dashh, are two recipients of this year's CIE Discovery grant.

After spending six years in foster care and being emancipated at the age of 18, Heard created her business with an idea to minister to others and reflect her faith in Jesus.

Heard donates 10% of the proceeds from Talitha Kumi Jewels to the University of Life Church, in which Prophetess Denona Benson showcased her work in a fashion show. All

Owens and Emily Alexander attend a reception at Memory House honoring the establishment of the Roper Scholarships.

benefits from the fashion show went to a shelter run by Benson for women in transition.

The CIE grant will help with living expenses, as Heard recently earned a spot in the Paris Fashion Week and needs to hire labor to fulfill her orders, she said.

At 12, recipient Lucas Ramsey created Ramsey Auto Group in St. Louis. In 2017, Ramsey was detailing cars for more than 300 clients and began using eBay to sell used car key fobs to vendors across the country.

In 2019, Ramsey started his latest venture, Dashh, an app that allows auto industry professionals and shops to connect with customers and other shops to maximize their profitability and learn from peers in the industry. The app also allows owners to purchase and buy products for their businesses and manage almost every aspect of daily operations, Ramsey said.

He plans to use the CIE Discovery Grant to further develop the application and add new features.

An important quote that Ramsey coined and uses frequently in seminars and when mentoring is, “Take every opportunity that presents itself to you, because one just might be the difference in your success.”

The CIE staff selected recipients for this year’s grants based on the quality of their applications and a follow-up interview. Both Heard and Ramsey demonstrate what hard work can do and the importance of starting early.

“We are very pleased with the gift from Owens and Emily since it helps our students start and expand new businesses,” said Ken Cyree, dean of the School of Business Administration. “It is especially rewarding because Owens saw firsthand how funding and faculty guidance help foster an entrepreneurial climate through experiential learning.

“This gift will help multiple future entrepreneurs to prove business concepts and to jump-start their companies, and we are grateful for their generosity.”

Alexander, who worked 21 years for BellSouth in Atlanta and Jackson, held executive positions at Southern California Edison and Science Applications International Corp., and was CEO of Titan Wireless, an international telecom firm based in San Diego. He also co-founded and served as CEO of the startup Real Phone Corp. in 2007.

In 2013, the Alexanders moved to Oxford, where he served as entrepreneur-in-residence



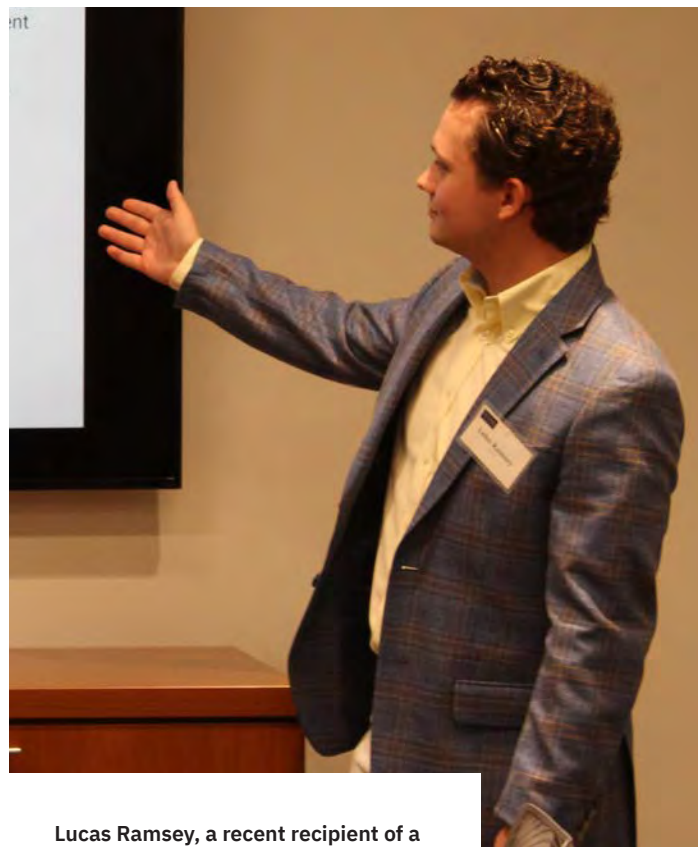
Take every opportunity that presents itself to you, because one just might be the difference in your success.”

— LUCAS RAMSEY

for the CIE and instructor of entrepreneurship until 2019.

Established in 2014, the center’s mission is to inspire students “to create innovative businesses through excellent teaching, exceptional service and world-class research.” With programs such as the CIE Discovery Grant program, students can begin the journey to create a business venture and start their future.

BY JACQUELYN DELAVALDENE



Lucas Ramsey, a recent recipient of a CIE Discovery Grant, presents during the first round of the Gillespie Business Plan Competition. Ramsey’s company, Dashh, is an app bringing social media to the automotive industry, offering forums among dealerships, detailers, auto shops and the like, as well as management of warranties, finances, marketing and reporting.

STELLA CONNELL



School of Business Administration

Founded in 1917, the University of Mississippi School of Business Administration now serves over 3,900 students. The Ole Miss MBA program includes a total enrollment of 150 students, and the online MBA program is ranked No. 9 among American public universities by U.S. News & World Report.

Since August 2014, the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship has assisted roughly 60 student-led startup businesses, and four of the past six business concepts that won the Gillespie Business Plan Competition are still thriving.

The school offers 10 majors: banking and finance, entrepreneurship, finance, general business, management, management information systems, marketing, marketing and communication strategy, real estate, and risk management and insurance, and hosts 12 student-led organizations.

For fall 2022, the School of Business employs 60 full-time faculty members, 25 full-time staff members and four part-time staff members.

We sincerely thank you for all your support,

Ken Cyree

Dean Ken Cyree

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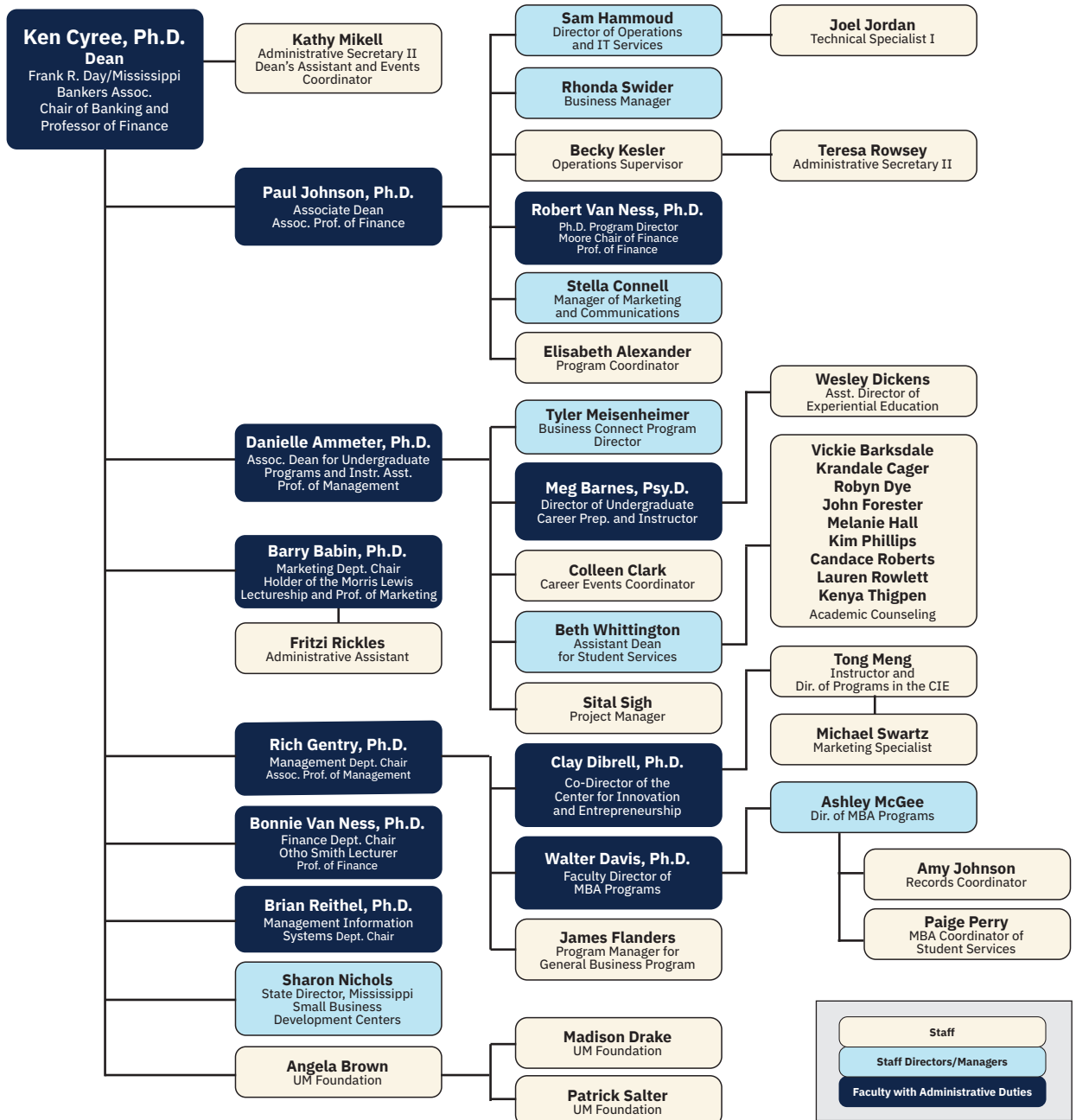
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or contact Angela Brown at 662-801-0569.

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For a full listing of faculty and staff, visit business.olemiss.edu/directory



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