

ACHIEVING
EXCELLENCE IN
GRADUATE EDUCATION
WITH “SOUTHERN
MISS GRIT”



SUMMER 2024

ARETE

The University of Southern Mississippi
Graduate School Magazine

CONTENTS

3. A Message from the Dean of the Graduate School

4. Deployment Dedication

7. Wang Becomes First Doctoral Student from Mississippi Institution to Receive Prestigious Fellowship

8. Taking the Leap: Pursuing Growth Through the Nurse Anesthesia Program

10. Studying "Grit" at Southern Miss with Dr. Jack Howard

12. USM Graduate School Hosts 11th Annual Three-Minute Thesis Competition

14. Fullbright Recipient Spends Summer in Brazil Studying Largetooth Sawfish

16. From Forensic Science to Expatriate Accounting: A Graduate Student's Story of Career Change and Success

18. USM Hall of Fame

22. MFA Graduate Excels in His Craft

24. RA, TA and Mentor of the Year

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USM alumnus William Washington enjoys spending time and supporting USM with his family. His story is found on page 4.

A Message from the Dean



“We never give up, and we never give in.”
—Dr. Joseph Paul, 11th President, The University of
Southern Mississippi

It is powerful to hear President Joe Paul tell the origin story of Southern Miss. He recounts the 33 long years that lapsed between the initial distant dream of a teacher’s college in Mississippi and the eventual legislative approval of the Mississippi Normal College. Despite countless challenges and setbacks along the way, decades later, Southern Miss would ultimately join ranks with some of the most prestigious, Carnegie classified, “very high research activity” institutions in the world. Dr. Paul has dubbed this phenomenon, “Southern Miss Grit,” and under his dynamic leadership, we have become a university community that chases “audacious goals and dreams with an unrivaled passion and relentless persistence.”

The Southern Miss Graduate School embraces this idea and works diligently to prepare our students through professional development opportunities to make them “ready for life” and ready for their future careers. It is only fitting that “Southern Miss Grit” serve as the theme of the current *Arete* issue. This tenacity is evidenced in the hard work of our graduate students who often overcome obstacles and barriers to become accomplished experts and scholars in their respective disciplines. And just like Dr. Paul reminds us, our graduates truly can go anywhere and do anything with a Southern Miss education.

In this issue, readers will encounter stories of Southern Miss Grit displayed by our impressive graduate students: you’ll learn the story of a student deployed abroad who, during the height of the COVID-19 crisis, faithfully attended synchronous graduate courses to obtain his master’s degree while living many time zones away; you’ll read about the international student who became the first student from a Mississippi institution to be awarded the incredibly prestigious Advanced Light Doctoral Fellowship from the Lawrence Berkely National Laboratory; you will be introduced to a student who, after completing her first bachelor’s degree in a vastly different discipline, changed career paths and ultimately went to work for a nationally recognized accounting firm after completing her master’s degree; you’ll meet a doctoral student who became a Fullbright recipient and relocated to Brazil to pursue her research passions and spread awareness about conservation efforts. These are just a few of the stories included in this issue that highlight the hard work and determined spirit of many incredible graduate students.

I am extremely grateful to Madeleine Toole for her excellent efforts in compiling the lead stories and for designing and organizing the publication. I certainly could not have completed this project without her hard work, dedication, and attention to detail. She feels working on *Arete* was an “eye-opening and rewarding experience” in meeting new people across various disciplines. Working with her was a joy. I am also grateful to Haley Beasley for their editorial assistance. Both Maddie and Haley are pursuing master’s degrees in English literature.

I hope you enjoy this issue featuring some of our best and brightest students and most exceptional graduate alumni who have displayed Southern Miss Grit. They have clearly left their indelible mark on this institution.

Katie Anthony, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

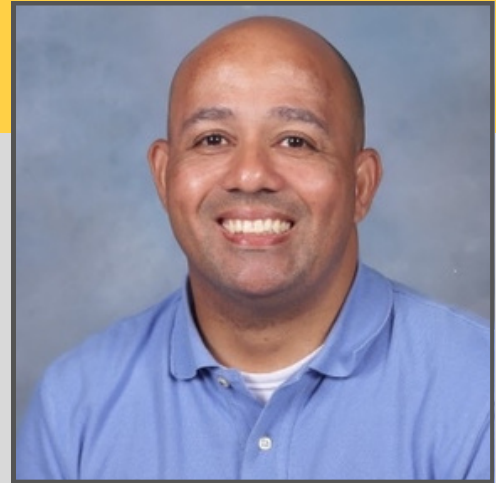
Deployment

Dedication

A story of commitment to both country and education

By: Madeleine Toole

William Washington is a paragon of hard work, perseverance, and Southern Miss Grit. A self-proclaimed Air Force brat, Washington was born in the Netherlands while his father was stationed abroad, but he has called Mississippi home since 1991.



Following in his father's footsteps, Washington enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve after high school, then transferred to the U.S. Army Reserve later in his career.

Washington first attended Hinds Community College before transferring to the University of Southern Mississippi, where he received his Bachelor of Science in Forensic Science in 2018. In 2020, he was deployed to Germany.



During his deployment, and while managing the uncertainties surrounding the novel SARS-CoV-2 virus, Washington decided to enroll in the USM Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program to pursue his dream of teaching through the alternative route.

While serving his country in Germany and working a full-time position, he completed 18 hours of graduate coursework.

His devotion to his studies while living in Germany required a great deal of discipline and dedication.

During the typical workday, he awoke around 5 a.m. for his required fitness training. At 7:30 a.m., he attended his assigned military position and remained there until about 4 p.m.

After his workday ended, Washington completed schoolwork before going to bed. He would sleep for a few hours before rising again around 11:30 p.m. to attend his online synchronous USM classes until 3:45 a.m. Once class es ended, he tried to squeeze in a short nap before beginning his schedule all over again at 5 a.m. to tackle another day.

Washington's schedule while deployed was certainly not for the faint of heart; however, his drive and commitment to furthering his education is undoubtedly impressive.

He initially decided to pursue a career in teaching based on his deep desire to impact lives. He currently works as a biology teacher at Northwest Rankin High School.



Washington hopes to instill a solid work ethic in his students by encouraging them to be productive citizens and to be open to new opportunities.

He feels that the excellent mentorship from his Southern Miss faculty, especially Dr. Jay Howell, Associate Professor of Education, prepared him for the challenges of teaching.

Dr. Howell describes Washington as "simply unforgettable" and says, "his collaborative spirit, positive attitude, and willingness to work incredibly hard earned him immediate credibility and respect."

“Our program has seen time and again that service members make fantastic teachers, and we are eager to help the Williams of the world continue to give back to their communities through teaching. We were grateful for his service when he joined the program, and we remain grateful for his ongoing commitment to teaching the next generation.”

To those wishing to pursue a graduate degree, Washington advises, “Set a goal. Make sure it’s a manageable goal and you can set aside time to dedicate to that goal, and then don’t give up.” He encourages people to have “realistic expectations” and a plan to mitigate potential obstacles.

Washington highly recommends USM’s Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program to anyone who thinks they may be interested in teaching, and he believes the structure of the curriculum helps students achieve success in the program.

After 27 years, Washington retired from his military service in February 2024. These days, he enjoys spending time with his family, and teaching provides him with plenty of opportunities to do so. When he is not with his students or loved ones, Washington is either caring for his five dogs, collecting Star Wars memorabilia, or playing video games.

During his experience with the MAT program, Washington realized, “I am able to accomplish a lot more than I thought I could and push myself a lot harder than I thought.” He is pleased to be teaching and making a difference in the lives of his students, “I enjoy seeing other people be successful . . . I get a lot of joy out of it.”

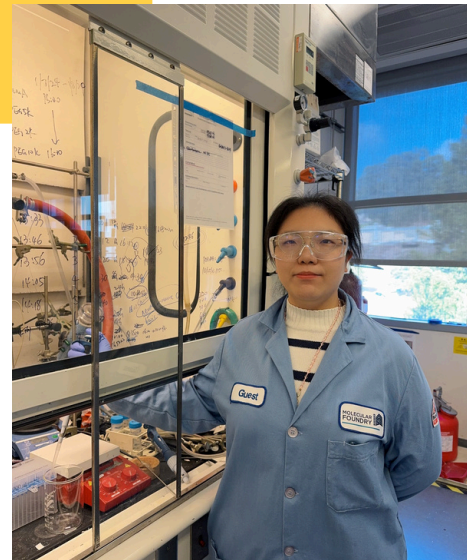


William Washington (Middle) with Dr. Bridgette Davis (Left) and Dr. Jay Howell (Right)

For more information concerning the MAT program, please visit:
<https://www.usm.edu/graduate-programs/secondary-teacher-education.php>

Wang Becomes First Doctoral Student from Mississippi Institution to Receive Prestigious Fellowship

By: Madeleine Toole and Van Arnold



University of Southern Mississippi's Yunfei Wang was given the chance to spread her wings and travel to Berkley, California, during the 2023-2024 academic year to participate in the Advanced Light Source (ALS) Doctoral Fellowship at Lawrence Berkley National Laboratory.

Originally from Tieling, China, Wang began her graduate studies at USM in 2019 in the School of Polymer Science and Engineering. Before attending USM, Wang received her undergraduate degree in engineering from the University of Electronic Science and Engineering of China in Chengdu. She then received her master's degree from Lanzhou University.

Wang recalls that when she first arrived in Hattiesburg, "I had no friends and no family," but she found USM to be "very welcoming." Wang is thankful for her professors, lab mates, and friends who have made her time at USM special.

For her research, Wang chose to join Professor Xiaodan Gu's lab, and she appreciates that "he is very hands on with teaching all of his students." She is especially proud to be "following in his footsteps" because he was also awarded the prestigious ALS fellowship.

During her time at the ALS fellowship, Wang used X-rays – the same type of radiation used to detect broken bones – to study the internal structure and morphology of polymeric materials. X-rays generated from a synchrotron light source offer higher intensity, greater focus, and energy tunability compared to those from a typical laboratory source.

This allowed Wang to rapidly examine her materials with exquisite detail, such as how molecules are connected and arranged in space, akin to how a powerful microscope might reveal the detailed structure of skin and tissues.

By pairing synchrotron X-rays with automation, she aimed to develop high-throughput and combinatorial tools that will streamline the discovery of new materials with unique properties. This research could lead to advances in various applications, such as flexible electronics and wearable devices.

Wang plans to apply the knowledge she gleaned to her research regarding stretchable, wearable, semiconductor devices. She feels she was exposed to many useful resources and people who will help advance her future career. After her fellowship is completed, Wang hopes to find a post-doctoral position focused on electronic applications of polymers now that her fellowship is complete.

During the busyness of her fellowship, Wang reminded herself that "the research is important, but so is our life" and strives for a manageable work life balance. She believes that for the most part, she has been successful in that endeavor. She hopes that other young aspiring scientists can also learn to appreciate the importance of living a balanced life.

For more information concerning the Doctorate in Polymer Science and Engineering program, please visit: <https://www.usm.edu/graduate-programs/polymer-science-engineering.php>

Taking the Leap: Pursuing Growth Through the Nurse Anesthesia Program

By: Madeleine Toole

Dr. Andrew Bundt, DNP and CRNA, is passionate about helping others. Born and raised on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, Bundt received his associate's degree in nursing from the Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College. He then attended the University of South Alabama, receiving his Bachelor of Science in Nursing in 2012. He began his career working as a nurse at Memorial Hospital in Gulfport, Mississippi.

While there, Bundt focused on critical care in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Over time, he witnessed countless medical traumas and patient loss, which took their toll and left him questioning whether he should leave medicine.



Rather than abandon the profession he once loved, his wife encouraged him to make a career change within nursing. Her support prompted his decision to change direction, and he applied to join the University of Southern Mississippi's Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) Nurse Anesthesia program.

After graduating from USM in 2020 with his Doctorate in Nursing Practice, he moved to Grenada, Mississippi with his wife and three children. He currently works as a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA) at Willow Anesthesia Solutions, and he practices primarily at the University of Mississippi Medical Center Grenada campus.

During his stint as a student at USM, Bundt and his family continued to live on the Gulf Coast while he commuted back and forth from Hattiesburg and to clinical rotations all over.

"My free time consisted of driving," Bundt explains, "On a typical anesthesia schedule, we would have class on Mondays, and we would have clinicals Tuesday through Friday, and we had clinicals all over the state, so we were from the Gulf Coast all the way up to Grenada."

Bundt clarifies the hospitals would provide rooms for clinical participants saying, “literally that would be my apartment for the week.” He would return to his family on the weekends to spend time with them, giving all his attention while at home.

“I lived out of a bag for two years, but it was all worth it. I spent more time in a hospital in two years than I did with my whole family. That’s part of our specialty. Not everybody does what we do.”

Bundt believes his instructors at USM, particularly Dr. Mary Collins, DHA, impacted him the most during the program. Bundt claims, “All of our instructors have such a wealth of experience in the field. They still practice, and I know they’re proud of that, and I think that’s the thing that really helps in the clinical setting and classroom setting.”



Bundt receives immense gratification in his career.

“It’s rewarding getting to help people. For the people you’re helping, they are often the most vulnerable at that moment than they have ever been in their life.”

He enjoys how career options in the CRNA profession are ever evolving and expanding. For those interested in pursuing a career in nurse anesthesia, Bundt suggests, “If someone does want to do this, they first need to be a nurse. Become a nurse, then shadow a CRNA. There are tons of programs where you can.”

Currently, Bundt enjoys living in Grenada and its “slow town movement.” His current position affords him ample time to focus on his family and engage in their beloved shared activities like fishing, road trips. He is grateful for a career that enables him to support his kids' extra-curricular activities of sports and dance, and he is forever grateful to the USM College of Nursing & Health Professions for helping him find a career that he feels fits him perfectly .

For more information concerning the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) Nurse Anesthesia program, please visit: https://usm.edu/leadership-advance-nursing-practice/nurse_anesthesia_program.php

STUDYING "GRIT" AT SOUTHERN MISS WITH DR. JACK HOWARD

BY: MADELEINE TOOLE



Growing up an avid sports fan and skilled athlete, Dr. Jack Howard could never have envisioned where his career interests would lead him.

A native of Alpharetta, Georgia, he attended Spring Hill College in Mobile, Alabama, as a student-athlete on a baseball and academic scholarship. He received his Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Spring Hill College in May 2015. After graduating, he enrolled in the University of Southern Mississippi's Counseling Psychology master's program in August 2015. Upon completion of his master's degree, he enrolled in the USM Counseling Psychology Doctoral Program in August 2017 and graduated from the program with his Ph.D in August 2021.

Howard focused his graduate research at USM on the characteristic of "grit," which he defines as, "the passion and perseverance to achieve long-term goals."

To conduct his research, he worked in Dr. Bonnie Nicholson's parenting lab. He first focused on "over-parenting" and its impact on students' self-reported "grit" in their academic success. He revealed an inverse relationship between students' perceptions of over-parenting and levels of grit and their academic skill measurements.

His research later considered student-athletes and the impact of parenting behaviors on perceived levels of grit, academic success, mental health, and burnout. Howard discovered that positive parenting increased perceptions of grit and simultaneously decreased burnout among student-athletes.

Describing his experience at USM, Howard said, "I think it was exactly the program that was right for me. I was able to get involved from a clinical perspective, from a research perspective, and from a classroom perspective."

He views the USM program as challenging but rewarding. Howard completed the Professionals in Preparation program in the Graduate School, and he was a finalist in the Three-Minute Thesis Competition (3MT) in 2016.

“USM gave me so many opportunities to be successful, and I really can’t thank them enough.”

Howard also enjoyed his time in Hattiesburg and remembers, “By my third, fourth, and fifth year I really felt like I was a part of the Hattiesburg community.” He enjoyed running the Long Leaf Trace, attending local events, and listening to live music. Not only did he meet great friends while residing in Hattiesburg, but he also met his wife. Howard admits, “I still miss those days.”

Following the completion of his Ph.D., Howard participated in an American Psychological Association (APA) accredited internship at North Carolina State University’s counseling center for one year.

At the end of his internship, he began a postdoctoral fellowship at Stanford University with a focus in Sport Performance Psychology that he completed in 2022. Following his postdoctoral fellowship, Howard joined Auburn University’s athletic department as a sports psychologist in August 2022.



In his current role at Auburn University, Howard works with teams and athletes and supervises Auburn’s APA-accredited internship rotation.

Howard’s role as a sports psychologist creates a full-circle moment for him: “I get to give back in the training. It’s been a really great experience to be on this side of things. I’m hopeful to continue working here and establish a structure that feels healthy and sustainable.”

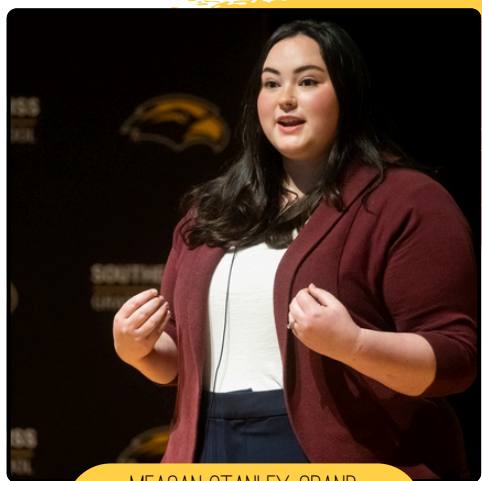
For others looking to advance their own education, Howard advises, “The more you get to know yourself, the more you will understand what you want to do.”

He lightheartedly added, “go where they love you,” and for Howard, the University of Southern Mississippi unquestionably was the right choice.

For more information concerning the Ph.D. program in Counseling Psychology, please visit <https://www.usm.edu/graduate-programs/psychology-counseling.php>

USM GRADUATE SCHOOL HOSTS 11TH ANNUAL 3 MINUTE THESIS COMPETITION

By: Madeleine Toole



MEAGAN STANLEY-GRAND
CHAMPION- PRESENTING HER THESIS

The University of Southern Mississippi Graduate School hosted the 11th annual Three Minute Thesis competition (3MT) on November 9th, 2023. The competition offers graduate students the opportunity to explain their thesis or dissertation topics to a non-specialized audience in three minutes or less. Students must make their presentations engaging and interesting for the audience with only the assistance of a PowerPoint slide.

Participants competed in one of four categories: Life, Health, and Environmental Sciences; Arts and Humanities; Physical Sciences and Mathematics; and Social and Educational Sciences and Business.

Meagan Stanley soared to the top as Grand Champion of the 2023 3MT competition. Lindsey Ostermiller, a doctoral student in Psychology, was the runner up, with Nick Enos securing the title of “People’s Choice” for the competition.

Stanley’s research advisor, Dr. Karl Wallace, said, “She can distill complex scientific material into bite-size and manageable chunks for the layman to grasp, which will bode well in her future endeavors. I am thrilled for Meagan and her achievement.”

Stanley, originally from Florence, Mississippi, is a fifth-year doctoral student in organic chemistry at the USM. Stanley’s thesis was titled, “Using Inclusion Chemistry to Develop Molecular Probs for Metal Ion Detection.”



DR. JOE PAUL, PRESIDENT, & DR. KATIE ANTHONY,
DEAN, WITH 3MT FINALIST

She attended Mississippi College for her undergraduate degree, where she received her bachelor's in chemistry. Her research focuses on supramolecular chemistry which, as she describes, is "chemistry beyond the molecule."



RUNNER UP LINDSEY
OSTERMILLER WITH DR. KATIE
ANTHONY & DR. JOE PAUL



GRAND CHAMPION MEAGAN
STANLEY WITH DR. KATIE
ANTHONY & DR. JOE PAUL

In describing her preparation for the competition, Stanley explained how she attempted to make her research applicable to real-world problems. She demonstrated the method of her research by discussing the molecular structure of Febreze, which was very relatable for audience members.

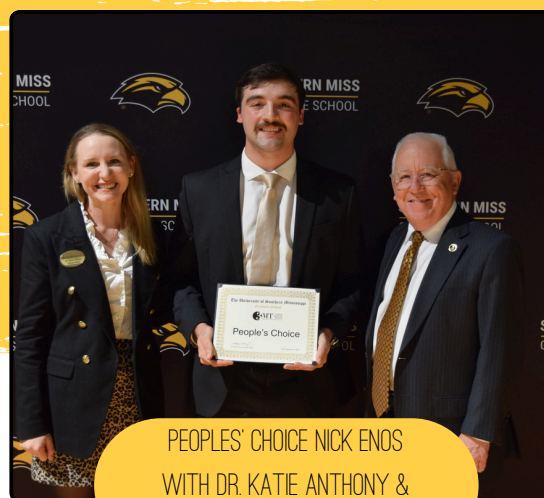
When she heard she was named the Grand Champion, Stanley expressed that it felt completely "surreal."

"It's very gratifying to say hard work really does pay off."

Becoming the USM 3MT Grand Champion has given her a confidence boost in her communicative abilities. Stanley hopes to pursue a career in academia as a professor, and she says her success with the 3MT competition helped solidify that teaching in a university setting is where she feels she belongs.

For other graduate students considering participating in future 3MT events, Stanley recommends they focus on distilling their research ideas and making their three-minute presentations as concise as possible. She also recommends practicing the presentation many times before commanding the stage in the competition.

Stanley represented the USM in Greenville, South Carolina, in March 2024 to compete in the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools regional competition. She has enjoyed her time at the USM and is thankful for all the faculty, staff, and peers she has encountered during her journey.



PEOPLES' CHOICE NICK ENOS
WITH DR. KATIE ANTHONY &
DR. JOE PAUL



Fulbright Recipient Spends Summer in Brazil Studying Largetooth Sawfish

By: Madeleine Toole

After receiving a Fulbright Fellowship award to research Largetooth Sawfish, Annmarie Fearing packed her bags and headed to Brazil. She traveled to the South American country in February 2024 and will spend a total of six months there working on her research.

Hailing from Gainesville, Florida, Fearing attended the University of Florida as an undergraduate student, where she received her bachelor's degree in zoology and a minor in communications. Fearing began her master's program at the University of Southern Mississippi in August 2016 in the School of Biological, Environmental, & Earth Sciences. After completing her master's program in December 2020, she began her doctoral work in the same program in 2021.

Fearing studies with Dr. Nicole Phillips, Associate Professor in Ecology and Organismal Biology, in her conservation genetics lab at USM. Phillips's research focuses on trace DNA of sharks and rays for conservation purposes. Fearing's research primarily focuses on the conservation of Largetooth Sawfish.

While the process of extracting Largetooth Sawfish trace DNA can be difficult depending on certain tissue factors, Fearing has sharpened her DNA extraction skills and capabilities over the last eight years. She successfully takes tissue from dried Largetooth Sawfish saws to use for DNA extractions and uses the DNA for her conservation research.

Fearing applied for the Fulbright award because Largetooth Sawfish samples from Brazil are much needed; Brazil is thought to host the Atlantic's largest remaining population of Largetooth Sawfish, but shipping samples from there to the lab in Mississippi remains impossible.

For Fearing to work with the required samples, relocating temporarily to Brazil was necessary. Thanks to her Fulbright award, Fearing is now in a prime position to continue her scientific endeavors with Largetooth Sawfish.

In Brazil, Fearing is working alongside Dr. Patricia Charvet, a researcher at the Federal University of Ceara, and Dr. Vanessa Paes, a researcher at São Paulo State University. The three scholars comprise a robust team in advancing our knowledge of Largetooth Sawfish. Dr. Charvet supplies the titular saws for DNA, Dr. Paes contributes her genetic background, and Fearing provides her expertise in extracting trace DNA.



Fearing is currently residing in Botucatu, Brazil. When not in the lab, she's attending barbeques, thrift shopping, and exploring the city. During her downtime, she enjoys watching her favorite shows in Portuguese. She has particularly loved living in Brazil because "their focus is on biodiversity."

Ultimately, Fearing aspires to work as a museum curator or researcher. She wishes to continue her conservation research and outreach using museum specimens. Fearing feels strongly about teaching the public about conservation efforts and the importance of museum resources.

She would like to be able to display genetic testing with an audience of museum guests, giving them the option to ask her questions while doing so. She says museums, "help us look backward into the past" and hopes looking backward will strengthen conservation going forward.

For more information concerning the Doctorate in Biological Sciences Program, please visit:

<https://usm.edu/graduate-programs/biological-sciences.php>

From Forensic Science to Expatriate Accounting: A Graduate Student's Story of Career Change and Success

College of Business and Economic Development alumna Ashley Foley is the personification of the expression, "hard work pays off." Born and raised for most of her childhood in New Orleans, Foley moved to Mississippi during high school.

When it was time to attend college, she chose the University of Southern Mississippi and received her Bachelor of Science in Forensic Science emphasizing in Biological Sciences.

After taking a year off from her studies to reflect on her future, Foley returned to USM, pursuing a second bachelor's degree in accounting. After completing her BSBA degree in Accounting in 2014, she entered USM's Master of Professional Accountancy (MPA) program and completed her graduate degree in 2015. While enrolled in the MPA program, she worked as a Graduate Assistant in the Graduate School, and she studied abroad with the British Studies program while completing her MPA graduate degree.

Foley worked as an intern at a local expatriate tax firm, and she continues to work in expatriate taxes today. After completing her internship and after obtaining her MPA graduate degree, she began her professional career by working with one of the "Big 10" public accounting firms known as RSM, (previously McGladrey), located in McLean, Virginia, until December 2019. In January 2020, Foley began working at BDO USA, a public accounting firm ranked number 6 on the 2023 Top 100 Tax Firms list, in the Washington D.C. metro area.

Foley, who currently resides in Maryland, said, "I'm very proud to be from the South, I love to tell people I'm from Louisiana and Mississippi." Just as they say, "you can take the woman out of the South, but you can't take the South out of the woman," Foley keeps a personal stash of Toni Chachere's Creole Seasoning, meaning she is never too far removed from her culinary and cultural roots.

In her spare time, Foley often explores the downtown area of her city, teaches herself to play piano, or hikes the trails with her dog when she is not at home relaxing.





While attending USM, Foley found the faculty influential and “absolutely phenomenal” in terms of their mentorship and approachability. She is now connected with some of her faculty members on social media, also allowing her to stay connected to the institution. She found the resources provided by USM Career Services and other student organizations, including the accounting student honor organization Beta Alpha Psi, extremely helpful in preparing her for the professional environment, and she urges others to use the tools offered to prepare for job applications and interviews.

Amber Hatten, Professor of Practice and Director of the MPA program, recalls very fond memories of Ashley’s time as a student at Southern Miss.

“It was so exciting to see Ashley grow and mature, both personally and professionally, throughout her time at Southern Miss. She was an incredibly hard worker and a true leader during her time at USM, and her positive impact and meaningful contributions to both the School of Accountancy and the MPA program was such that she certainly was able to ‘leave it better than she found it.’” Hatten continued, “Ashley was a natural leader. She loved learning, and she was not afraid of rolling her sleeves up and working hard to achieve her goals; her enthusiasm, work ethic, and positive attitude were contagious.”

The skills students learn in the accounting program prepare them for a variety of careers, and Ashley found her place by developing her expertise in expatriate tax. Her time at Southern Miss prepared her for her professional accounting career - living in Washington, D.C. and working with colleagues and serving clients across the country and around the world. Ashley’s graduate school experience in the MPA program helped to prepare her for success in her career and to be “ready for life.”



For more information concerning the Master of Professional Accountancy (MPA) program, please visit:
<https://www.usm.edu/gratuate-programs/accounting.php>

USM GRADUATE STUDENT Hall of Fame

The University of Southern Mississippi's Graduate School honors graduate students from across all academic colleges with an induction into the Graduate School Hall of Fame every year.

Each graduate student inducted into the Hall of Fame is an example of remarkable work ethic, academic achievement, and "Southern Miss Grit."

Academic deans from each academic college nominate students they feel are worthy of this recognition.

The Hall of Fame Inductees are photographed in environments visualizing their academic fields, and these portraits can be found hanging for one year in the Graduate School.



USM President Dr. Joe Paul with Dean Dr. Katie Anthony at the 2024 Graduate School Hall of Fame Portrait Unveiling event

2024 Hall of Fame Inductees



Fabersha Flynt

From Athens, Georgia, Fabersha Flynt received an Ed.D. in Higher Education Administration from the School of Education, College of Education and Human Sciences, in the spring of 2024. Fabersha's research examined the complexities of racism, sexism, and microaggression within predominantly white institutions and how black women use their faith as a counterspace to circumvent these barriers in their attainment to senior leadership positions. Dr. Kaity Prieto served as her major professor.

Ryan Aultman, originally from Seminary, Mississippi, is pursuing a Master of Science degree in Kinesiology specializing in Exercise Science. He is a student in the School of Kinesiology and Nutrition, College of Education and Human Sciences. Ryan's research focuses on autonomic responses, primarily pressor responses and the metaboreflex, in individuals presenting with metabolic syndrome or obesity. Dr. John Stavres serves as his major professor.



Ryan Aultman



Kaitlyn Boykin

Hailing from Ellisville, Mississippi, Kaitlyn Boykin received a Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology in the spring of 2024. She was a student in the School of Psychology, College of Education and Human Sciences. Kaitlyn's research investigated social perceptions and interpersonal relationships. Specifically, she considered the inferences we make about others based on various facial and bodily features. Dr. Don Sacco served as her major professor.

Benjamin James Goudy received a Master of Public Health degree with an emphasis in Health Administration and policy from the School of Health Professions, College of Nursing and Health professions in the spring of 2024. A Meridian, Mississippi native, Benjamin's research explored how cultural values affect health behaviors in the Deep South, specifically concentrating on diet and physical activity. Dr. Jennifer Lemacks served as his major professor.



**Benjamin James
Goudy**



Cassidy Tennity

Cassidy Tennity, a native of Collegeville, Pennsylvania, is pursuing her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology. She is a student in the School of Psychology, College of Education and Human Sciences. Cassidy's research and clinical endeavors focus on delivering accessible evidence-based mental health services to vulnerable youth, particularly those entangled in the juvenile justice system. Her major professor is Dr. Nora Charles.

Ana Ruth Cortés Arreaza from Pinalejo, Santa Bárbara, Honduras, is pursuing a Ph.D. in Human Capital Development with an emphasis in Instructional Technology Design. She is a student in the School of Leadership, College of Business & Economic Development. Ana's research examines career success among international students graduating from American universities and how institutions of higher education help prepare them for success in the U.S. job market. Dr. Quincy Brown serves as her major professor.



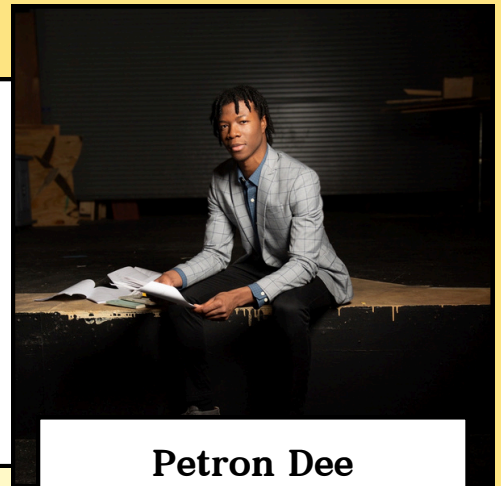
**Ana Ruth Cortés
Arreaza**

Melissa Queen Lomas is from Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Melissa received her Ph.D. in Human Capital Development from the School of Leadership, College of Business & Economic Development in the spring of 2024. Melissa's dissertation research explored night shift acute care nurses' narratives regarding burnout, low morale, engagement, and retention in the U.S., she aggregated stories focusing on collaborative clinical solutions to mitigate these detrimental workforce conditions. Dr. Quincy Brown served as her major professor.



**Melissa Queen
Lomas**

Petron Dee Brown received a Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Performance from the School of Performing and Visual Arts, College of Arts & Sciences in the spring of 2024. Originally from Nassau, Bahamas, Petron recently played Doctor Faustus in the university's Fall 2023 main stage production of "The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus" for his MFA creative project. Caitlyn Herzlinger served as his major professor.



**Petron Dee
Brown**



**Michelle Gomez
Dickerson**

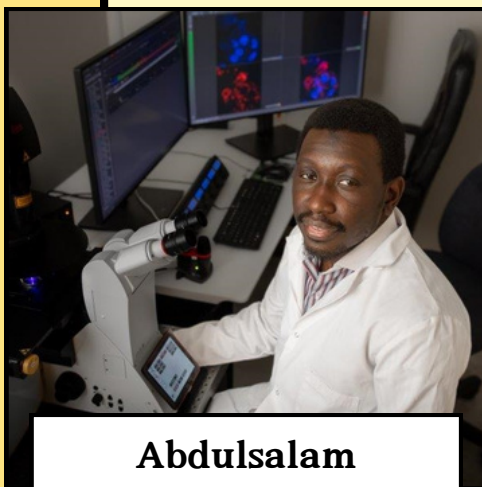
Michelle Gomez Dickerson from Meridian, Mississippi, received a Doctor of Nursing Practice degree in Clinical Nursing in the spring of 2024. She was a student in the School of Leadership and Advanced Nursing Practice, College of Nursing and Health Professions. Michelle's scholarly project was a quality improvement project designed to increase the knowledge and willingness of inpatient psychiatric clinicians to implement pharmacogenetic testing. Dr. Lisa Morgan served as her major professor.

Oladeji Quadri Siyanbola, who moved to Mississippi from Ipapo, Oyo State, Nigeria, is pursuing a Ph.D. in Marine Science with an emphasis in Physical Oceanography. He is a student in the School of Ocean Science and Engineering, College of Arts & Sciences. Oladeji's research work focuses on the impacts of remotely generated internal waves on the ocean dynamics near the West Coast of the U.S. using regional numerical model simulations with a global ocean model simulation. Dr. Martin Booiman is his major professor.



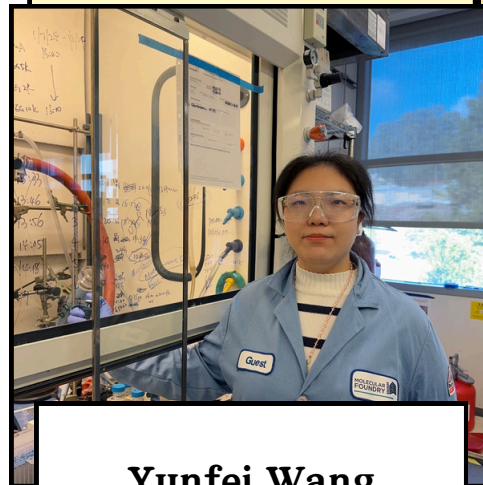
**Oladeji Quadri
Siyanbola**

Abdulsalam Babatunde Adegoke received a Ph.D. in Biological Sciences from the School of Biological, Environmental, and Earth Sciences, College of Arts & Sciences in the spring of 2024. Hailing from Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, Abdulsalam's research investigated how blood-feeding arthropods, such as ticks, transmit pathogens that cause diseases to humans. Dr. Shahid Karim served as his major professor.



**Abdulsalam
Babatunde Adegoke**

Yunfei Wang, who moved to Mississippi from Tieling, China, is pursuing a Ph.D., in Polymer Science and Engineering. She is a student in the School of Polymer Science and Engineering, College of Arts & Sciences. Yunfei's research focuses on the developing stretchable and self-healable semiconducting polymeric composites for wearable and implantable devices. Wang is one of only six candidates to receive a Berkley ALS fellowship, and she is the first student to ever receive the fellowship from a Mississippi institution. Dr. Xiaodan Gu is her major professor.



Yunfei Wang



SMTTT!

MFA Graduate Excels in His Craft

By: Madeleine Toole

Born and raised in Nassau, Bahamas, Petron Brown's educational pursuits led him to the U.S. when he was just 17 years old.

He originally thought he would pursue a future in marine biology, but Brown knew deep down he wanted to be a creative force in the entertainment industry.

For his bachelor's degree, he double majored in environmental sciences and theatre at The University of the Ozarks. After graduating in May 2021, he enrolled at the University of Southern Mississippi to pursue his Master of Fine Arts in theatre performance.

USM MFA students must complete a thesis creative project, which consists of months of preparation, research, and meetings with committee members about character script analysis, movement, voice, and dramaturgical investigation.

Brown completed his thesis creative project by performing Doctor Faustus in *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* in October 2023.

In recalling his most memorable moments from his role, he stated, "I said an entire monologue in Latin, and I can still remember the Latin. It hasn't left me yet.

"I love that I still know it though because I often still think about the role. Your thesis role is meant to push you. It's meant to be something that's incredibly difficult, and it was."



Brown performed seven shows as Doctor Faustus, and he describes the role as an eye-opening learning experience that left him "entirely, emotionally and physically, drained" once the curtain closed.

He explains, "It was the first time I learned as an actor that you need to take care of yourself because sometimes these roles just become a little bit too real and emotionally taxing."

“It’s great for a thesis role to realize it at that point. I would finish a performance, and until I went to bed, I would be thinking about things that I want to do better.”



Brown felt incredibly supported by the students and faculty in the MFA program. He states, “The graduate class and the entire program at USM is a really healthy one,” he said.

Brown feels particularly grateful to his thesis committee members, acting faculty members Robin Aronson, Monica Hayes, and Caitlyn Herzlinger.

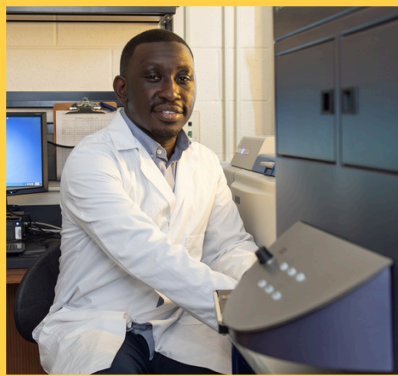
Aronson, a professor in the School of Performing and Visual Arts, describes Petron as “a leader among his peers.” “He is a highly talented, intelligent and kind individual. Petron has already gained national attention and is only going onwards and upwards after graduation. He truly embodies ‘Southern Miss to The Top!’”

Now that he officially holds an MFA from Southern Miss, Brown plans to pursue other professional development opportunities before transitioning later in his career as a theatre educator. He hopes to first find success in the illustrious and competitive New York City theatre scene, but Brown maintains that his “education will always continue.”

Brown enjoyed his time in Hattiesburg and at USM. He appreciates the “progressiveness and liveliness” of Hattiesburg and the USM campus community. He says, “there are so many things that can spark your creativity and imagination that exist on the campus that might not have anything to do with your major or what you’re studying.”

Wherever his career takes him, Brown maintains that he will remain impressed by the dedication of the students and faculty in the USM theatre program.

For more information concerning the Master’s in Theater Performance program, please visit: <https://www.usm.edu/graduate-programs/theatre-performance.php>



2024 RESEARCH ASSISTANT OF THE YEAR ABDULSALAM ADEGOKE

The 2024 Research Assistant of the Year is Abdulsalam Adegoke. Abdulsalam completed his Ph.D. in biological sciences in the spring of 2024. Originally from Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, Abdulsalam began his doctoral program in August 2019, and he has published five peer-reviewed articles, three which are first authored.

His papers appear in high-impact journals in his field. During his time at Southern Miss, Abdulsalam has been honored with various awards, including receiving the Mississippi Entomological Association Scholarship and being a recent inductee in the 2024 USM Graduate School Hall of Fame. Abdulsalam focuses his scholarship on “tick research and their role in transmitting human pathogens.”

“My research aims to comprehend how diverse microbial communities within various tick species influence their ability to harbor human pathogens. By collaborating with external investigators, I have made significant contributions to our understanding of tick immunity, including the characterization of tick hemocytes and their responses to various pathogens at single-cell resolution.”

Dr. Jake Schaefer, Professor in the School of Biological, Environmental, and Earth Sciences, claimed, “I have no reservations saying he is our top student graduating from the program this year. He is clearly a leader among graduate students in Cellular and Molecular Biology.”

Dr. Shahid Karim, Professor and Abdulsalam’s research mentor, stated, “Abdul’s scholarly contributions exhibit an impressive level of scholarly productivity and collaboration, and it is a strong indication of his academic and scientific competence.” “Abdulsalam is carving out a unique position in the field of vector molecular biology.” Additionally, Dr. Karim stated, “I have no reservations that Abdulsalam is the strongest and highest achieving student I have interacted with during my more than 15 years at the University of Southern Mississippi.”

2024 TEACHING ASSISTANT OF THE YEAR EMILY GOLDSMITH

The 2024 Teaching Assistant of the year is Emily Goldsmith. Emily is a poet in their third year in the Ph.D program in English (Creative Writing). Originally from Baton Rouge Louisiana, Emily has won various awards at Southern Miss, including the Howard Wilson and Helen V. Bahr Scholarship Endowment and most recently, they received the 2024 Graduate Student Innovation award. Emily boasts well over a dozen various publications of their poetry, and they also recently published a scholarly book chapter.



Emily has served as the instructor of record of multiple courses at USM, including Introduction to Composition, Basic Writing, World Literature, and Multi-Genre Writing Workshop. They also served as the Composition program assistant through assisting with new teaching orientation, observing graduate student teachers, and serving as a teaching mentor.

According to Emily’s personal statement, their pedagogy “emphasizes active learning in a student-centered context.” Emily states, “Each writing class I teach, regardless of level, emphasizes process over product. Students turn in drafts, engage in peer review or workshops, and revise their work. In my classroom, students become agents of their learning and are empowered to think, question, and develop identities independently.”

According to Dr. Monika Gehlawat, Professor of English, “It is because of instructors like Emily that USM retains first-year students, many of whom are first-generation college admits who need encouragement and granular-level instruction to meet classroom milestones. Emily is dedicated to their own students, but also the general population of undergraduates at USM.”

Dr. Adam Clay, Associate Professor of English and Director for the Center of Writers claimed, “At the core of Emily’s teaching identity is a focus on anti-racist pedagogy, one that values student-centered learning and meets each of them where they are coming from in terms of their specific backgrounds. This is not easy work, but Emily approaches this challenge with enthusiasm at every turn. Emily is a teacher who consistently adapts successfully to a range of situations.”

2024 GRADUATE MENTOR OF THE YEAR DR. DAVIN WALLACE

Dr. Davin Wallace, the 2024 Graduate Mentor of the Year, is an Associate Professor of Marine Science in the School of Ocean Science & Engineering.

Dr. Wallace earned his Ph.D. from Rice University in 2010, and he joined the faculty at USM in 2013 after completing a National Science Foundation postdoctoral fellowship jointly at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Dr. Wallace is an accomplished scholar, boasting dozens of peer-reviewed publications.



Dr Wallace is an exemplary mentor because he holds his students to high standards of excellence; he helps them develop their reputation in the field by supporting their travel to professional conferences to present their work, and he encourages them to publish their research. Dr. Wallace frequently publishes with his students in high impact journals. He is known to be accessible to his students in helping navigate their degree programs while holding them accountable for their academic and research progress.

Doctoral student Sarah Monica, who nominated Dr. Wallace for the award, claimed, "Dr. Wallace goes above and beyond in supporting students' professional growth. As a first-generation and female student, I initially had doubts about pursuing a Ph.D. Dr. Wallace not only encouraged me to aim higher, but also provided invaluable guidance and support. His belief in my potential has been empowering and has instilled in me the confidence to pursue ambitious career goals."

She continued, "Dr. Wallace fosters an inclusive environment where students feel welcomed and valued, regardless of background or identity. His commitment to diversity enriches the learning experience for all students not only by contributing to a more equitable and supportive academic environment, but also by amplifying the voices and scientific curiosities of people that are often overlooked by the scientific community."

Additionally, his colleague Dr. Chris Hayes, Associate Professor, stated, "Dr. Wallace is very observant of a student's progress on research, and he can keenly tune his mentoring strategy to the student's needs. For instance, some students need much more face-to-face time with following up on short-term tasks, while others thrive more with intellectual stimulation and longer-term goals. Indeed, as I began as a junior faculty here, I looked to Dr. Wallace as a role model in terms of student mentoring."

Dr. Wallace exhibits all the qualities that make a successful and impactful mentor. The Graduate School commends Dr. Wallace for his high standards of excellence, and for giving his students opportunities to grow personally and professionally, thereby enriching their lives.



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