

# ARETE

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI  
GRADUATE SCHOOL MAGAZINE



SUMMER 2023

CELEBRATING  
NONTRADITIONAL  
STUDENTS

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Above: Shwe Sin Oo enjoys campus when she's not conducting theoretical physics research. Story can be found on page 10.

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# Letter from the Dean

As I write this message, Southern Miss is closing out academic year 2022-23, and with it my career in higher education. On Friday, June 30, I will join many colleagues with whom I worked so closely at two Mississippi institutions of higher learning for more than three decades—as a retiree. The last nine years were spent here at Southern Miss, a place where I was welcomed, encouraged, and supported as graduate dean.

I am not sure where the time has gone, but the vivid memories of significant events that occurred throughout my career serve as remembrance markers of my journey. I began in 1990 as a brand-new assistant professor of microbiology at Mississippi State University, and I end as associate provost and dean of the Graduate School at Southern Miss. In between were many highs (major accomplishments) and some lows (disappointments), like most careers, but I would not trade my career path for any other. I've had the opportunity to teach thousands of students in a discipline that continues to fascinate me; advise hundreds of undergraduate majors; mentor amazing doctoral and master's students; address research questions of timely importance; and, finally, steward graduate education at two R1 institutions.

As I frequently tell students as the semester nears an end—Finish Strong. I believe the state of graduate education at Southern Miss as I retire indicates I managed to do just that, but nothing would have been accomplished without my outstanding team. I'll refrain from a detailed laundry list and only say I believe we've elevated graduate education by expecting our programs to be challenging and relevant, by expanding our programs and creating microcredentials, by offering opportunities for professional development for students and faculty, by overseeing enrollment growth, and by improving the visibility of graduate education to the university community and beyond by showcasing the accomplishments of graduate students and graduate faculty.

Regarding enhanced visibility, that is the purpose of *Arete*, our annual Graduate School magazine, and this is my last issue to edit. The name *Arete*, as I explained in the first issue in 2017, is the ancient Greek word for “excellence” or “virtue.” It described athletes who aspired to reach their personal best, resulting in the original Olympic Games, which started in the eighth century B.C. and continue to the present day. The work ethic, dedication, and sheer will to succeed of elite athletes has been applauded for millennia, and I contend the qualities of successful graduate students are the same and no less laudable. They, too, are striving for their personal best.

While graduate students share a common goal—earning a graduate degree—their paths to success can be very different, and this issue of *Arete* celebrates those differences. The theme is “nontraditional” graduate students whose early career choices did not include an advanced degree, but who returned because they now aspire to a different future. In these pages, you will meet a diverse array of students whose non-linear journeys to a graduate degree will encourage and inspire others seeking a career or life change. I hope you enjoy their stories.

As I close, I want to honor the Graduate School staff, graduate students, faculty, staff, and administrators I've worked with throughout my entire career. You've blessed me beyond my ability to express. Thank you all.

Karen S. Coats, Ph.D.  
Dean of the Graduate School



# Enlisting for Health

**How Army Engineer  
Officer Daquan Smith  
Became a Champion of  
Healthcare**

By Karlie Herndon

Just a few days after he turned seventeen, Daquan Smith told his mom he was going to the recruiting office to join the Army. Working his way up from enlisted to officer, Smith now serves in the Army Engineer Branch as an Army engineer officer, a branch he describes as “very broad.” With projects that involve constructing buildings, creating roads, and even working with explosives, it’s a role with plenty of potential for advancement and training.

These are qualities that Smith has looked for, not only in his career in the military, but in his education as well. A transplant from Bronx, New York, to Gulfport, Mississippi, Smith’s time in the state makes him feel like he’s from here. He graduated from Long Beach High School and went on to enroll in Alcorn State University, where he played football for three years, and he was involved in the ROTC and served as vice president of the Student Government Association.

As an undergraduate, Smith earned a criminal justice pre-law degree, with the goal of becoming a healthcare lawyer. “I always wanted to work with people in underserved communities, particularly the geriatric population,” he explains. His grandfather was a veteran of the Gulf War, and Smith saw the struggle his grandparents went through to get the healthcare they needed. As he finished up his undergraduate degree, he received notice that he’d been accepted to several law programs, but he decided to take a year off from school.

Opportunity—in the guise of a Golden Eagle—came knocking.

As luck would have it, Smith had a friend in the University of Southern Mississippi’s Master of Public Health Program. After a visit to campus, Smith decided that the MPH was a tangible path toward helping people like his grandparents.





He spoke with several program faculty, including Dr. Tanya Funchess and Dr. Susan Mayfield-Johnson, who talked about being healthcare champions and doing the practical work of healthcare administration.

“It made me feel like I need to be part of the solution before a healthcare lawyer has to step in to mitigate the issue,” Smith says. His visit to campus convinced him to change course and pursue a master’s degree in public health at USM.

He received a graduate assistantship, a role which gave him the opportunity to really get to know his professors in person while he completed the fully online program. This, Smith says, is where the mentorship of the program’s faculty played a huge role in his trajectory. “Just being in everyday conversations about health disparities, health inequities, some of the things that are going on around Mississippi,” Smith says, made a huge impact on shaping his education and his ability to think about the big picture, as well as the everyday problems people face when trying to access healthcare.

During his studies, he worked as a Young Ambassador with Dr. Traci Hayes on her NIH-funded Young Adults Against COVID-19 study, where he learned more about community engagement and how to conduct research. “He worked to disseminate evidence-based information about COVID-19 to his peers and community to prevent and mitigate the spread of the virus,” Dr. Hayes explains. “Daquan exemplified professionalism as he shared information with other students when participating in the Department of Public Health activities.”

He also attended the Mississippi Public Health Association Conference, where he met such influential people as Dr. Thomas Dobbs, the state health officer of Mississippi.

After several months of grueling aptitude tests, he also engaged in a three-month internship in Washington, D.C., in conjunction with the Senate Health Committee, which works on health education labors and pensions. This position afforded him a chance to work with Bernie Sanders on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), where he worked with veteran service organizations. He also worked with Dr. Mary Roary, director of the Office of Behavioral Health Equity, to pass legislation such as the 9-8-8 suicide crisis hotline.

With all of this experience under his belt, Smith returned to Mississippi and completed his master’s degree in December 2022. Now, he is on call as a regional director for the Department of Veterans Affairs, and he’s transitioning from his role in the Army Engineer Branch to serve in what’s known as the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service, something that one of his mentors, Dr. Vickie Reed, first suggested to him. “The officers that are in this branch are considered public health officers,” Smith explains, “so they serve in agencies across the government, such as the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Health Resources and Services Administration, and SAMHSA.” On top of that, Smith is completing the Doctor of Health Administration Program at Morehouse School of Medicine, where he’ll take virtual classes for two years, followed by a one-year residency. “The program has really made me more of a health equity champion,” he says.

The Master of Public Health Program provides students with academic skills, practical experience, and multidisciplinary study that will enable them to meet 21st-century public health challenges. The Master of Public Health degree is accredited by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH). CEPH is the national accrediting body for programs in Public Health. There are three degree options, two of which are fully remote. To learn more, go to [usm.edu/graduate-programs/public-health.php](https://usm.edu/graduate-programs/public-health.php).



Smith with Sergeant First Class Mullins

# When She Leads, Students Soar: Leadership in Action with Dr. Talia Lock

By Karlie Herndon and Van Arnold

Whether conducting the Long Beach High School marching band or reporting the news on the Bearcat Broadcast Network, Dr. Talia Lock leads by example in her role as the Long Beach School District (LBSD) superintendent. Her dedication, involvement, and leadership played no small part in the Mississippi Board of Education naming LBSD the #1 school district in the state of Mississippi in 2022, with all five schools in the district achieving A ratings. LBSD received this incredible honor just over a year after Lock was named the new superintendent.

Prior to this role, she served as principal of Long Beach High School. But Lock's story isn't one of easy wins; instead, she worked her way from high school graduate to superintendent over 25 years of sacrifice and dedication, but also with the support of her family and community. In her 2022-23 letter to the school district, Lock stated the district's vision: A System of Excellence. She noted that "education is a process that can only reach its fullest potential when all members work together," and indeed, the district's motto and social media hashtag throughout the pandemic was APARTbutTogether.

After graduating from Long Beach High School in 1995, Lock began work at a supermarket, but when she became the mother of twin boys at the age of 20, she re-examined her career and the impact she wanted to make in her community. Her late husband, Jeffery Lock, worked night shifts as a parking lot sweeper at the time, and money was tight. The two of them worked out their childcare shifts, finances, and Lock's return to school as a solid team.

After transferring to The University of Southern Mississippi from Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, Lock earned a bachelor's





degree in elementary education. “My bachelor’s degree taught me that graduation from a university is possible, even if you are not a traditional student and you have many odds against you. It taught me how to network with other like-minded people, and it gave me a stronger passion for teaching children, specifically in the area of literature,” she said in a recent USM news article. She later earned a master’s degree from William Carey University, but she returned to USM to pursue a doctorate in educational administration and supervision. And lead she did.

teacher to administration, she found ways to connect with individual students through extracurricular activities and even through forming a Superintendent’s Student Advisory Team, to hear directly from students on what they want to see in their district.

“She’s so supportive,” Lock’s successor as principal, Justin Sutton, said of his boss. “You see her at many sporting events, concerts, plays, and more. She makes time for the entire school district. She is



However, just as her school district’s success hinged on the whole community working together, Lock credits a lot of her success in the Ph.D. program to her mentors’ unyielding support. “Dr. Thelma Roberson and Dr. David Lee were completely instrumental in my journey as a Ph.D. student at USM,” she says. “It was so hard trying to balance a family and my career while also trying to pursue this degree. I also did not just want to balance, but rather, I wanted to give 100% to all three of these roles as mother, teacher, and student.” Lock says even when she contemplated pausing the degree and coming back to it later, Drs. Roberson and Lee cheered her on, met with her consistently, and helped her make it through the most difficult stages of the program. “Because they did not give up on me and believed I could cross the finish line, they had me actually believing in myself and envisioning what it would feel like to reach my goal.”

Lock completed the program, and she’s been putting every drop of her knowledge to work in her school district. “I have my heart here,” Lock says of Long Beach. With leadership skills and a whole lot of heart, she has led her students and her district through a multi-million-dollar school expansion and renovation, a pandemic, and now, a major honor as the top district in the state. After moving from classroom

concerned about students’ success academically while in high school and in life beyond high school.” Moving forward, her focus is on career and technical education for students, ensuring that they are ready for a bright and successful future.

Lock’s successes have inspired her own children, who both graduated from USM, where their mom persevered and took flight. With such an inspiring mom, it’s no wonder her children—both her sons and the children in her school district—also learn to soar.

The USM School of Education in the College of Education and Human Sciences offers an M.Ed., Ed.S., Ph.D., and Ed.D. in educational administration and supervision for individuals interested in careers in K-12 education as entry-level or district level administrators. For more information on these programs, please visit [usm.edu/graduate-programs/educational-administration-supervision.php](http://usm.edu/graduate-programs/educational-administration-supervision.php).



# THE PROOF IS IN THE BANANA PUDDING

## How a USM McNair Scholar Made His Way to NASA

By Karlie Herndon

As a child being raised by his grandparents in a rural Mississippi community, Zac Ahmad didn't think much about college.

All that changed in 2014, when he decided to enroll at The University of Southern Mississippi. "I was just seeing if I could survive in higher education," Ahmad explains. He didn't have a major in mind, but he began a journey no one else in his family had ever attempted.

Things didn't go to plan. In his first year, he had to withdraw to support his family when his grandfather lost his job. Many of the members of Ahmad's family have a genetic disorder that causes cataracts to develop while in the womb, making work difficult. Leaving college to support his family seemed like the best choice at the time. After a few years, he decided to return to USM, this time with a clearer plan in mind. Even though he "scraped by with math and science" in high school, he zeroed in on STEM. "I thought, that's something I can do to help the people who have raised me. Maybe polymer science offers a way for me to contribute to this world through medical devices."

In his second try, he didn't just succeed. He soared.

"After my first year, I was eligible for scholarships again. I won one of the most prestigious STEM scholarships in America, the Barry Goldwater Scholarship," a highly competitive scholarship in which colleges and universities nominate their top four candidates each year, with only 400 students receiving the award. By his second year, Ahmad was fully funded for the remainder of his undergraduate educational costs.

Ahmad ended up in a polymer science lab working under the supervision of Dr. Xiaodan Gu, and his return to the university gave him a completely new outlook on how to utilize the resources on campus, such as working with tutors and taking advantage of professors' office hours. When he joined Dr. Gu's lab, he realized that not only had a door been opened to an entire world of science, but also that he could now contribute to the field himself.

He joined the Honors College through the Honors Keystone Program, and there he took a class with Dr. Renée Bailey. At the time, Dr. Bailey was interim director of the McNair Scholars Program, which aims to prepare underrepresented or first-generation low-income undergraduate students to pursue doctoral degrees. Dr. Bailey encouraged Ahmad to apply.





Weekly McNair meetings prepared Ahmad for things like finding housing and maintaining his health. “Zac would frequent my office just to share details about his research and day, and little did he know, he served to remind me each time why McNair was a special and sacred space,” recalls Dr. Jessica Love, who was assistant director of the McNair program at the time. “He embraced all that McNair had to offer and was always appreciative of its opportunities and resources.”

While Ahmad was already conducting research in a lab, he was contributing to another researcher’s project and goals. “McNair gave [him] a way forward,” providing him with a framework to present to his polymer science mentor to propose new research. “Through the McNair program, I was able to take hold of my own project and publish papers, and that really set me apart for the whole graduate school process. Not only that, but it also helped me apply for fellowships later on that have paid, in full, for my graduate studies.”

Zac embodies what it means to be a McNair Scholar,” Dr. Love says. “He is selfless, driven, sharp, inquisitive, and determined—everything we look for in McNair Scholars. His enthusiasm and passion to make a difference through research is what drives him.”

The project he proposed involved wearable medical devices, such as blood pressure monitors. The problem is that “electronic materials don’t want to be flexible. My idea was to look at some polymers, which are basically long chains of molecules that are electrically conductive and carry a charge, but that are also flexible.”

His idea, then, was something like banana pudding. “The cookies are the electrical part. They give you a little bit of rigidity, but you’ve still got the pudding, which is the flexible part. You’ve got to know how to layer in such a way that you don’t have a wet pudding that’s going to fall apart, and you also don’t have this crusty pie of cookies. That was my project in a nutshell—tailoring the electrical conductivity with the flexibility.”

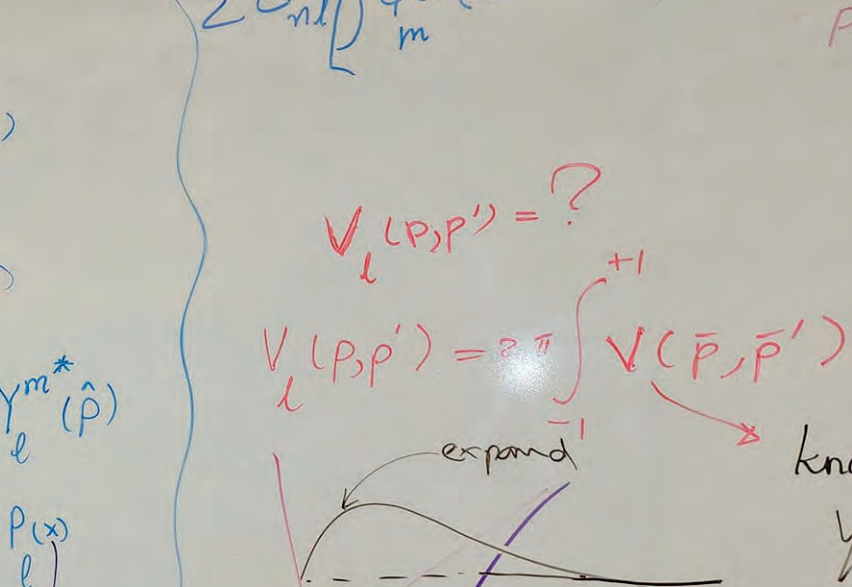
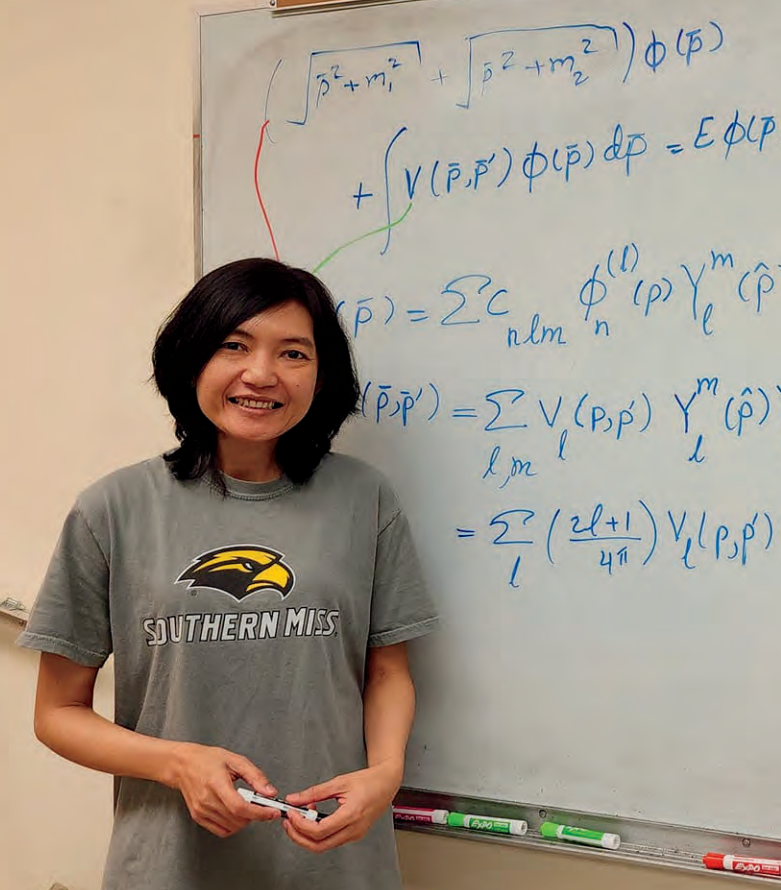
His research gave him an advantage in his graduate school applications, and after receiving acceptance letters from 11 programs, he chose to pursue a doctoral degree at the California Institute of Technology because of its close-knit community. “Professors here are very accessible. I’d gotten used to that at USM because I would just walk into my professor’s office and sit down and talk.”

After a short time working on a project similar to his “banana pudding” work, Ahmad transitioned to a lab with Dr. Katherine Faber, conducting research on a project at the nearby NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory. He works with ceramics more than polymers now, but he continues to press on the boundaries of known science, finding solutions that will one day be applicable in the extreme environment of the planet Venus.

Ahmad plans to pursue a postdoc, but he knows that one day he wants to be in the classroom. “I felt that because I have that unique background, I can come to people and teach them something about science in a way that they can understand.”

The McNair Scholars Program strives to increase the number of doctoral degrees among minority populations and underrepresented groups in academia. The program helps scholars achieve individualized goals through mentorship, financial support, and graduate school preparation. To learn more, visit [usm.edu/mcnair-scholars-program/index.php](http://usm.edu/mcnair-scholars-program/index.php).





# USM DOCTORAL STUDENT MAKES HISTORY IN THE FIELD OF THEORETICAL PHYSICS

By Cam Bonelli

After just two semesters studying for her Ph.D., Shwe Sin Oo gave a presentation in New Orleans on theoretical physics. Oo is the first Burmese woman in the United States to pursue a Ph.D. in theoretical physics, and she's doing it here at The University of Southern Mississippi.

"Doing this presentation is the best gift I could get from USM," Oo said.

Oo was born in a small village named Kaw Doon in Myanmar. Her parents and grandparents were farmers. Among her schoolmates, she was the only one to go on to middle school.

"When I was young, my parents put it in my head that education was the most important thing," Oo said. "They made sure that my siblings and I got a good education, even though my parents didn't finish high school."

Oo became a university faculty member in Myanmar in 2009 and earned her first Ph.D. in material sciences in 2013. But Oo decided to leave her job and home after turmoil erupted in Myanmar. At that time, it was dangerous for her to leave her country.

"There was a military coup in 2021," Oo said. "It was one of the reasons I left. It was really hard to quit my job and everything. I worked there for more than 12 years, but I decided to quit my job and apply to USM."

Oo visited Southern Miss in 2019 for a mathematical conference and physics workshop. USM came first to her mind when she considered going back to school, and she decided to come to the U.S. to study, choosing to work toward a second Ph.D. in theoretical physics. Her research explores the bound states of quarks and antiquarks.

She calculates and predicts the masses of these bound states. A second research project is the application of statistical mechanics to DNA sequences.

"To do theoretical research, all you need is pen, paper, and willingness to work hard," Oo reflected.

Coming to Southern Miss has been a new experience for her. She said everyone has been welcoming.

After graduating with her second Ph.D., she hopes to stay in the United States and continue her research.

"I really want to share my knowledge and to continue my research after I get my Ph.D.," Oo said. "I've gotten so much new knowledge and experience just in two semesters."

"Now I am attending Ph.D.-level computational science classes, and I am enjoying them a lot," Oo said. "In my research, I am learning new methods and getting new ideas, which would have been impossible if I had stayed in Myanmar. If I had not come and joined USM, I would have been teaching freshmen physics classes under military rule."

The School of Mathematics and Natural Sciences boasts a 100% employment rate for graduates. For more information about the School of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, visit [usm.edu/mathematics-natural-sciences/index.php](http://usm.edu/mathematics-natural-sciences/index.php).



# UNDERSTANDING WOMEN VETERANS THROUGH HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

By Cam Bonelli and  
Karlie Herndon

In 2018, Tundra T. Gatewood began her Ph.D. in human capital development at The University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Park campus. After only three years of retirement from the United States Air Force—a career she pursued for 22 years—Gatewood knew she wanted to contribute to the scholarly discourse on the military-to-civilian career transition phenomenon.

Specifically, she was interested in the ways in which women veterans like herself "encounter identity challenges," she said.

She knew that far more women than men face questions about who they are and who they might become after a career in the military.

Gatewood holds a master's degree in public administration from Webster University and a bachelor's degree in workforce education and development from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. In other words, she is no stranger to research and workforce management. Prior to her retirement from the military, she was assigned to the United States Air Force Office of the

Surgeon General, where she served in dual roles as the director of the Medical Enlisted Corps and chief of medical enlisted force development. She oversaw a \$6.6 million budget and directed 17 career field managers, a role which indirectly oversaw roughly 30,000 total force healthcare personnel around the world. She also participated in several research projects, further integrating personnel policies with education, training, technology, and social science efforts to provide the Air Force Medical Service with a more dynamic and readied workforce.

When she retired from the Air Force and moved to Holly Springs, Mississippi, to be near her aging parents, her transition to civilian employment left something to be desired. Securing employment comparable to her military experience in the local labor market proved challenging, owing to skills/demand mismatches, her mostly rural location, and, in large part, the military-civilian divide. This realization pushed her to further her education and broaden her skillset, so she opted for a degree at Southern Miss. Although the beachfront campus in Long Beach is almost six hours from home, Gatewood felt that the human capital development doctoral program was the right fit in that it perfectly complemented her professional knowledge and expertise.

"All of it aligned with real-world experiences in the military—especially the human capital investment strategy and workforce development pieces," she said. "In my opinion, an organization's human capital is one of its greatest strategic advantages when realized and exploited."



**TUNDRA T. GATEWOOD**

Dr. Heather Annulis, director of the School of Leadership and professor of human capital development, defines human capital as the knowledge, skills, and health that people accumulate throughout their lives, enabling them to realize their potential as productive members of society.

"Once we have knowledge and skills, we can bring those with us to jobs across industries. This becomes currency in the workplace and makes us valuable in society and prepares us to contribute to the overall well-being of ourselves individually, our families, our organizations, and our communities," Annulis explained. "When we know better, we do better."

Annulis added that if an employee is interested in improving people, processes, and profits, human capital development is a good degree for them. It was certainly a good choice for Gatewood, who completed the Ph.D. program in December 2022. Her research is titled, "Psychological Capital and Perceived Employability: Exploring Women Veterans' Military-to-Civilian Career Transition," a project which seeks to understand women veterans' lived experiences of the transition from military to civilian life. "I was astounded by how their transition experiences affected them in such adverse ways," Gatewood said.

"When civilians join the military, they undergo indoctrination training as service members, which gets reinforced for the duration of tenure of their service. Differently, service members-turned-veterans (re)enter the civilian sector with no comparable re-acclimation process."

As a scholar-practitioner, veteran advocate, and woman veteran, Gatewood said she believes she can utilize the research skills she has gained to contribute more measurably to understanding veterans' post-military transition outcomes. "In particular, I aimed to elevate the voices of women veterans—a group often referenced in the scholarly literature as invisible," she said.

"We spend so much time at work; it should be meaningful and fruitful," Annulis said. "Empirical and research-based evidence exists to help us understand models to guide success in organizations. If we focus on people and help them to do good work by helping them to develop specific skills, then the other aspects of the business will also have positive results."



"The military invests considerably in resiliency skills training to enable service members to overcome challenges in the face of adversity, strengthening their resolve," Gatewood said. "Why not build on those essential positive psychological resources to better facilitate the oft-described stressful transition process upfront?"

There are currently 128 students—35 master's and 93 doctoral—in the Human Capital Development Program on The University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Park campus. The program focuses on building a positive culture where employees can do their best work and can inspire others to do the same, Annulis said.

Some of the jobs that graduates have landed after completing the Human Capital Development Program include training specialist, instructional designer, chief learning officer, human capital consultant, director of talent development, and other titles.

For more information about the School of Leadership and the human capital development degree path, visit [usm.edu/graduate-programs/human-capital-development.php](http://usm.edu/graduate-programs/human-capital-development.php).

JOIN US AT THE TOP!



# F L O O R

By Cam Bonelli



Amos Adams, a Marthaville, Louisiana, native, never thought he would be a graduate student, much less a master's student in biological sciences. Now, through his research, Adams is cataloguing all the plants in Marion County in a "floor study."

"Originally I didn't want to go to college," Adams said. "I didn't do well at all in high school. I barely passed high school. I didn't care growing up."

But that changed after he joined the Marine Corps at the age of 20. He served for five years—three in Okinawa, Japan—before leaving the Marines.

"Toward the end of my active duty, I really got into math and physics," he said, noting that these had previously been his worst subjects in school. "I wanted to learn about it and improve and conquer that aspect of myself that I had failed in for years in high school." He started teaching himself basic algebra and went to Palomar Community College.

After he left the military, he called Louisiana State University to see if he could get into school. He was accepted through the school's Yellow Ribbon Program, which doesn't deny veterans based on academics. He originally majored in physics at LSU, but he realized it was not for him. He switched his major to renewable natural resources after recognizing that's where his interests lie.

# S T U D Y



“I didn’t want to be perceived as a tree hugger, but that’s what I really was,” Adams said. “I grew up around nature on a lot of land, and after taking a few courses, I began to really like plants.”

After taking dendrology under Dr. Chris Reid at LSU, Adams’ life changed completely. “We started developing this relationship, and he mentored me a lot,” Adams said.

Under Reid’s mentorship, Adams’ love for plants grew. He decided to go to graduate school after realizing he did not have the credentials for the jobs he wanted. After looking at a variety of schools, he chose Southern Miss because of Dr. Mac Alford. Dr. Alford is a professor of biological sciences and the curator of USM’s herbarium. A two-time Fulbright Scholar, Alford joined USM’s faculty in 2005.

“I presented this project idea to other universities, and I felt like the professors that I talked to weren’t really interested in what I wanted to do,” Adams said. “But when I met Dr. Alford, he was excited and said he had been looking for someone who wanted to do a floor study.”

A “floor,” or floristic, study identifies the plants of a specific area that can range in size from a couple of acres to an entire county. According to Alford, Adams is his second master’s student to attempt a floristic study of a county.

“The biggest challenge of a floristic study is time—a county is a really big area with a lot of plants, and it’s hard to catch them all at their peak, when they are flowering or fruiting,” Alford said. “Plus, lots of great places are just not known. A landowner may not know what interesting plants he or she has or may not be so open to having someone out looking for plants on their property. Then, of course, once you find plants you don’t know, you have to figure out what they are, and that takes time, too.”

Adams chose to study an area just two counties west of USM, in Marion County. The county is large, bisected by the Pearl River, and understudied. “I knew there was potential for a lot of new finds, and it was close to the university, which would allow me to do better sampling,” Adams said. His study requires him to go to specific locations within the boundaries of a defined area, collect as many plants as possible, and record the species of plants he collects.

“I feel like Southern Miss has opened a lot of opportunities for me,” Adams said.

Likewise, Alford remarked that Adams has been a blessing to him. “He gives me opportunities to go in the field and relive those moments of finding interesting plants and plant communities,” Alford said. “As a professor, I spend much more of my time in my office or lab these days, and it’s nice to have a good ‘excuse’ to go into the field. Amos helps me to learn, too. When he finds a plant that’s difficult to identify, it becomes a challenge for me, too, and we love working through these challenges together.”

Alford sees Adams as a dedicated student who loves being outside, being among plants, hiking, and cycling.

“That makes him good for a floristic study because the student has to look out for all kinds of plants in all kinds of places,” Alford said. “His enthusiasm is contagious, and he has a group of undergraduate conservation biology students who love to gather round him and learn about his new finds. As a teaching assistant, he is very dedicated to doing his best and making sure that the students get the most out of their lab.”

Adams has about one more year of collecting to do for his project. He credits USM for facilitating his success in graduate school by providing him with mentorship from Dr. Alford and others who have more work and life experience. Adams hopes to continue his studies and pursue his Ph.D. at Southern Miss, as well.

The School of Biological, Environmental and Earth Sciences offers six graduate degrees in biological sciences, biomedical sciences, environmental sciences, geography, geology and medical laboratory sciences.

To learn more about the School of Biological, Environmental and Earth Sciences, visit [usm.edu/biological-environmental-earth-sciences](http://usm.edu/biological-environmental-earth-sciences).



# The Graduate School Hosts 10th Annual Three-Minute Thesis Competition

By Dr. Kathryn Anthony



**Evan Stacy wins Grand Champion award at 2022 3MT Competition.**

In November 2022, the Graduate School hosted the 10th annual Three-Minute Thesis (3MT) competition at The University of Southern Mississippi. The 3MT competition, which originated at the University of Queensland in 2008, affords graduate students from across the university a chance to explain their often highly technical research to a non-academic audience in three minutes or less. Armed with only a single PowerPoint slide, students must effectively synthesize and summarize their research projects while communicating their information to the audience in an engaging way. Students at Southern Miss compete across the following four categories: physical sciences and mathematics, social and educational science and business, arts and humanities, and life, health, and environmental sciences. Forty master's and doctoral students participated in the much-anticipated Graduate School event in November.

This year, the winner of the Grand Champion award was Evan Stacy, a doctoral student in the School of Polymer Science and Engineering. Hailing from Louisville, Kentucky, Stacy attended Hanover College in Indiana to study chemistry during his undergraduate career. He then enrolled at USM in 2021 as a doctoral student, and he currently studies with Dr. Tristan Clemons in the Clemons Lab. Stacy presented his thesis, titled, "The Polyplex Approach: Exploring Alternatives to Viral Gene Therapeutics." According to Stacy, the overall experience of competing in 3MT was both draining and exhilarating. "The numerous hours I spent preparing were exhausting, but the joy I felt when my name was announced as the winner made every second of it worth it," he said.

Camera Cottingham, a master's student in anthropology clinched the second-place prize for her thesis, titled, "Identifying the Proper Methodology for Forensic Facial Reconstruction/Approximation," while Aynslie Fritz, a doctoral student in polymer science and engineering, took home the People's Choice Award for her thesis, titled, "Reactive Additive Manufacturing of Polyurethanes."

Following his win at Southern Miss, Stacy traveled to Tampa, Florida, in March 2023 for the annual meeting of the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools (CSGS) to compete at the regional 3MT competition. "The regional competition has been the highlight of the year 2023 for me so far," Stacy said. "It was incredible to have the opportunity to meet the other competing graduate students, as well as faculty members from the various



institutions who attended the conference. While competing on the larger stage was daunting at first, the camaraderie that was built among the graduate students leading up to the day of the competition made it much easier to feel comfortable."

Stacy also wowed an audience of Southern Miss alumni and community members when he delivered his thesis at the USM Foundation's Black and Gold on the Blue event on April 1, 2023. According to Dr. Karen S. Coats, associate provost and dean of the Graduate School, "Evan's 3MT presentation at our annual competition, at CSGS in Tampa and at the Foundation event was outstanding. He was able to distill a

complex research project into a three-minute pitch that folks outside his discipline could easily comprehend. That's the value of 3MT. It helps equip students to engage the general population in a clear, concise, and enthusiastic manner that compels interest in their research projects. That's important, whether they are seeking funding from a granting agency, pitching to donors, or just explaining what they do to friends and family."

Graduate students who successfully achieve these goals are often generously supported by the faculty who help them prepare. According to Dr. Tristan Clemons, assistant professor of polymer science, "In the School of Polymer Science and Engineering, and especially in the Clemons Lab, we take a holistic approach to developing our students; we want them to be great scientists, but we also want them to be able to communicate their science well, work in teams, and possess the soft skills which are integral for a successful career beyond their time at Southern Miss."

When reflecting on Stacy's accomplishments, Dr. Clemons stated, "I was really proud of his efforts with the 3MT competition as I saw how hard he worked on preparing that pitch to get it just right. This is Evan's approach to all things in the lab. He tackles everything with passion and a real attention to detail, which is admirable and inspiring for those around him."

3MT is a great opportunity to learn transferable skills, as Dr. Clemons explains. Each award also comes with a monetary prize! To learn more about USM's 3MT competition and to start preparing your own presentation, go to [usm.edu/graduate-school/three-minute-thesis-details.php](http://usm.edu/graduate-school/three-minute-thesis-details.php).

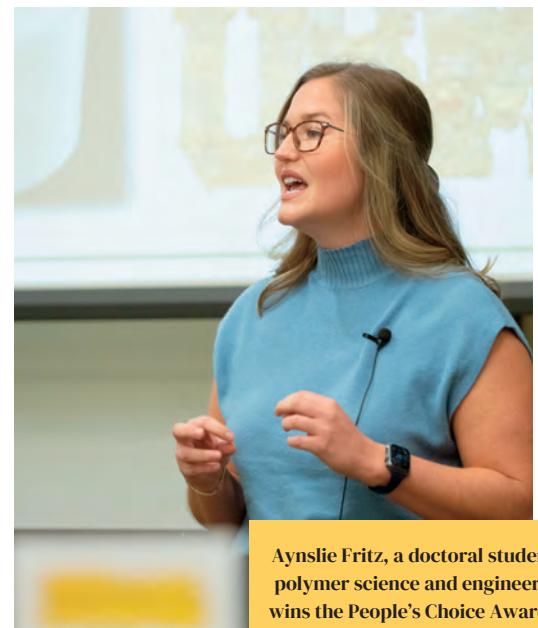
Camera Cottingham, a master's student in anthropology, wins runner-up for her presentation.



Dean Coats, Evan Stacy, and Dr. Anthony, executive associate dean, attend the CSGS Conference.



Aynsle Fritz, a doctoral student in polymer science and engineering, wins the People's Choice Award for her thesis.





# ALUMNA SPOTLIGHT

# PAM PARRY

By Cam Bonelli

Not everyone returns to school at 45 to get their Ph.D. Even so, Dr. Pam Parry, professor in the Department of Mass Media at Southeast Missouri State University and editor of *Journalism History*, did just that.

Parry discovered The University of Southern Mississippi while searching for schools that could help her continue her education in media studies.

"I started my journalism and PR career just expecting to be a practitioner. My father, however, was a college professor, and my sister was a teacher, so I guess teaching was a bit of a bug in our family—not one I thought would catch me," Parry said.

Parry got her master's degree from American University in 1997 and has taught ever since. Parry taught at several schools before becoming an associate professor at Belmont University in Nashville. It was during her time at Belmont University that Parry decided to pursue her doctorate in Mass Communications at Southern Miss.

"I was at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee, and they really wanted me to go get a doctorate," Parry said. "One of the things that appealed to me was that the mass media department at Southern Miss had a reputation as being a program that would work with late-comers to teaching and to academia. A lot of media folks had media careers first and then went into the classroom."

Parry contacted Southern Miss, who offered her an assistantship, and from that point on, she said she didn't look back.

"I looked at some other programs, but that just seemed like the best fit," Parry said.

Parry completed her coursework in one-and-a-half years and finished her dissertation remotely. Her dissertation took her five years to complete, and she graduated in 2013 at age 51 with a Ph.D. in mass communications with an emphasis in media history and public relations.

"The year and a half I spent at Southern Miss was the best of my professional career," Parry said. Belmont University allowed Parry to take leave from her duties as an associate professor and dedicate a year to pursuing her Ph.D. at Southern Miss. This time off allowed Parry to focus on her education and continue practicing her passion for teaching.

Reflecting on this time at Southern Miss, Parry said, "Because the



university I worked at gave me a year off and paid my salary, I was basically paid to go study. It was a lot of work—don't get me wrong. I did teach for Southern Miss because I had an assistantship, but it was the closest thing to a sabbatical I ever got."

Being a nontraditional student, Parry faced some challenges.

"There are strengths and weaknesses to being a nontraditional student," Parry said. "One of the weaknesses is when 9 p.m. came, I had to go to bed, and a lot of my classmates would stay up late in the night to study. I also think that having already been a professional that had been in the classroom and already had earned tenure gave me certain chops to work more efficiently."

While working on her dissertation's final chapter, Parry received an email from a publisher wanting to publish it. That email resulted in the publication of her first book, *Eisenhower: The Public Relations President*, in 2014.

In 2009, Parry was named Teacher of the Year by the Small Programs Interest Group within the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications. In 2016, Parry received the Applegate Award for Excellence in Research from the Kentucky Communication Association.

Today, Parry co-edits a book series with Southern Miss media and communications professor Dr. Dave Davies. The series is titled, *Women in American Political History* and is published by Lexington Books, a subsidiary of Rowman & Littlefield. Parry is currently the editor of *Journalism History*. Parry's main research area is journalism history and public relations.

"Media history always intrigued me," Parry said. "My research for my Eisenhower book has led to some other projects I'm working on. I'm writing a

second Eisenhower book tentatively called, *Eisenhower Women Changing the Face of Politics*. It's about women who were appointed to the Eisenhower administration. According to the Republican party of that day, Eisenhower appointed more women to federal office than any predecessor."

Parry said she wants to work on a third book idea about Colonel Thor Smith, who was Eisenhower's personal public relations representative, and his wife was a bureau chief for the Associated Press.

Throughout her experience as a doctoral student at Southern Miss, Parry had the opportunity to grow academically and professionally. Parry made lasting connections with Southern Miss and its faculty and staff.

To Parry, Southern Miss holds a special place in her heart.

"I don't even know if I can articulate how much I owe Southern Miss. When I came there, I was 45, and I was a tenured faculty member," Parry said. "The coursework really prepared me. I got really good instruction in the classroom and good advice in the pursuit of my research. I got to just stop and think about everything I'd been teaching. It made me a better teacher and an actual researcher, and I wasn't one before, so I'm grateful for that."

Parry possesses a true passion for teaching and education. Parry's ambition to further her education at Southern Miss demonstrates the value of higher education in reaching professional goals. Her perseverance proves that there will always be obstacles that may prevent a student from continuing their education, but passion and determination make anything possible.





# USM GRADUATE STUDENT HALL OF FAME

By Caroline Neese

Each year, the University of Southern Mississippi's Graduate School recognizes outstanding graduate students from each academic college through induction into the Graduate Student Hall of Fame.

Graduate students inducted into the Hall of Fame demonstrate exceptional academic performance, leadership skills, and character.

Nominated by their academic deans, graduate students receive this special recognition to showcase their academic accomplishments and contributions.

Honorees are photographed in their unique work environments to reflect their research or creative interests. The inductee's portrait hangs in the office of the Graduate School for one year.



President Joe Paul joins Dean Karen S. Coats at the 2023 Graduate School Hall of Fame Portrait Unveiling event.

## JOSE BARBOZA

Jose Barboza, a native of Chiclayo, Peru, is pursuing a master's degree in economic development. His project involves an economic impact analysis of Mississippi Wildlife State Parks. Barboza's faculty advisor is Dr. Chad Miller.



## TOLULOPE AYO

Tolulope Ayo, a native of Osun State, Nigeria, is pursuing a Ph.D. in biological sciences. Her research is focused on the elucidation of the mechanisms that underlie tumor necrosis release from mast cells. Ayo's faculty advisor is Dr. Hao Xu.



## ASHLEY JONES

Ashley Jones, a native of Peoria, Ariz., is pursuing a Ph.D. in psychology (counseling). Her research explores ways that technology (like videoconferencing and apps) can be used to meet the needs of people who are involved in the justice system and live in rural areas or otherwise have reduced access to high-quality treatment or assessment services. Jones' faculty advisor is Dr. Craig A. Warlick.



## MARY CHRISTENSEN

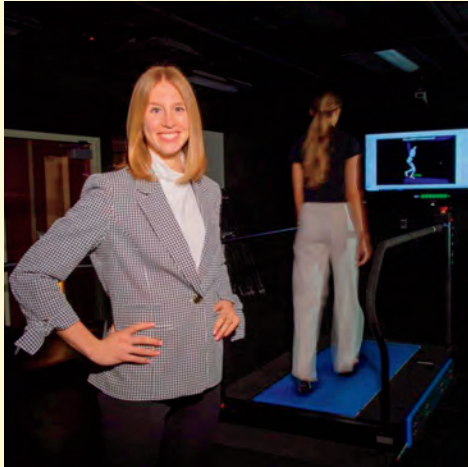
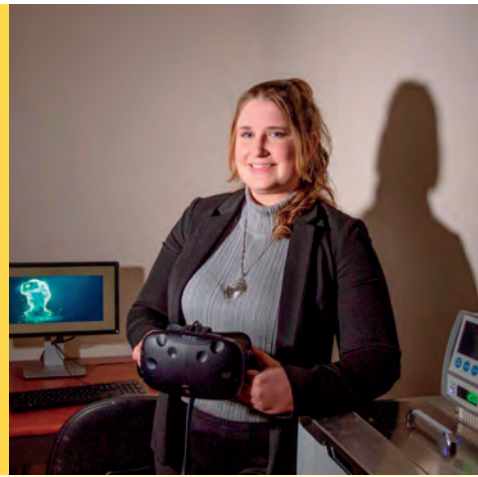
Mary Christensen, a native of Phoenix, Ariz., is pursuing a Ph.D. in English (creative writing). Her research considers the intersections of contemporary indigenous literatures, elegy, and hybridity. Christensen's faculty advisor is Dr. Adam Clay.

# 2023 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES



Nicole Caulfield, a native of Hackensack, N.J., is pursuing a Ph.D. in psychology (clinical). Her research explores the relationship between trauma, dissociation, and suicide, and she is focused on using new technology, such as virtual reality, to allow for a more comprehensive approach to understanding these complex relationships. Caulfield's faculty advisor is Dr. Daniel Capron.

**NICOLE CAULFIELD**



**LINDSEY LEGG**

Lindsey Legg, a native of Fort Walton Beach, Fla., is pursuing a master's degree in kinesiology (exercise science). Her research centers around understanding how and why the body moves in relation to its environment. Legg's faculty advisor is Dr. Tanner Thorsen.

*"It is an honor to be inducted into USM's Graduate School Hall of Fame and represent the College of Nursing and Health Professions"*  
 – Laura Hailey

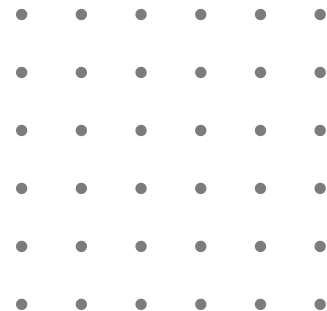


**LAURA HAILEY**

Laura Hailey, a native of Louisville, Miss., is pursuing a Doctor of Nursing Practice (nurse anesthesia). Her research project is titled, "An Objective Structured Clinical Examination for Pediatric Inhalation Inducted and Nasotracheal Intubation." Hailey's faculty advisor is Dr. Michong Rayborn.

**EMILEE HOANG**

Emilee Hoang, a native of Hattiesburg, Miss., is pursuing a Master of Business Administration and Master of Sport Management. Her research involves athletic development and understanding how culture, mental health, player performance, and personal/college life affect student-athletes. Hoang's faculty advisor is Dr. Jamye Foster.





## SAHITHYA SAKHAMURI

Sahithya Sakhamuri, a native of Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, India, is pursuing a Master of Public Health (epidemiology and biostatistics). She is working on a study titled, "Okla Achukma," aimed at determining the effectiveness of a holistic intervention to enhance health outcomes and program engagement among Native Americans. Sakhamuri's faculty advisor is Dr. Hwanseok Choi.



## MARK ROBERTSON

Mark Robertson, a native of Pensacola, Fla., is pursuing a Ph.D. in polymer science and engineering. His research is focused on understanding how polymers move at a molecular level and using that understanding to elevate commonplace polymers into highly functioning materials. Robertson's faculty advisor is Dr. Zhe Qiang.

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*"It is an honor to represent the university by joining so many great students before me who are pioneering research."*

*- Mark Robertson*

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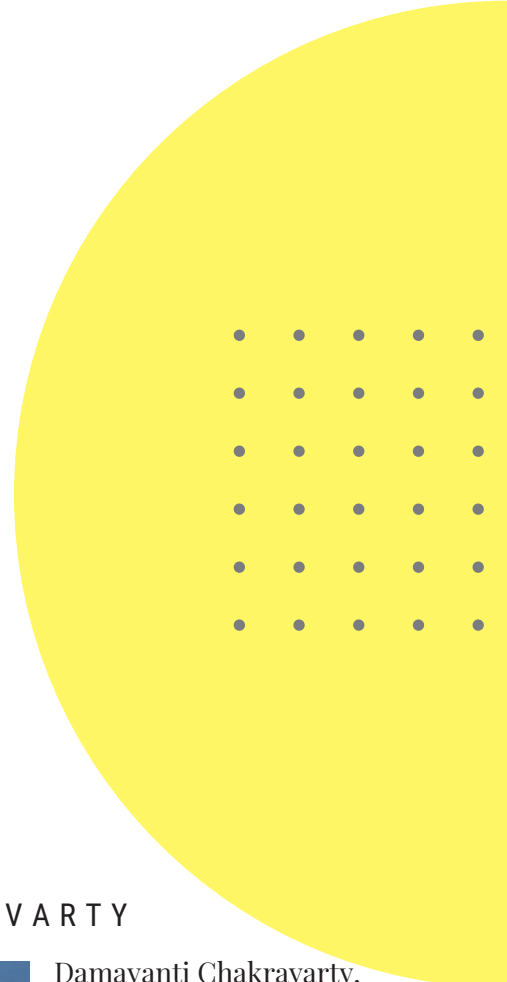


## LOREN STEARMAN

Loren Stearman, a native of Stillwater, Okla., is pursuing a Ph.D. in biological sciences. He studies freshwater fishes to learn how ecosystems respond to and recover from change. His research has focused on understanding how processes of landscape evolution, which fundamentally alter stream habitats, have affected stream fish ecological communities at multiple spatial scales. Stearman's faculty advisor is Dr. Jake Schaefer.



# 2022 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES



## TRISTEN MILLER

Tristen Miller, a native of Madison, Miss., is pursuing a Master of Public Health (health policy and administration). She creates informative materials for law enforcement and educators that address the need for increased child advocacy services. She also authored a Board of Directors' report with organization details, current challenges expressed by staff that may hinder the organization's proficiency, advocacy statistics from the previous year, and past, present, and future projects and events. Miller's advisor is Dr. Tanya Funchess.



## DAMAYANTI CHAKRAVARTY



Damayanti Chakravarty, a native of Kolkata, West Bengal, India, is pursuing a Ph.D. in biological sciences. Her research investigates the impact of oxygen availability on the survival and virulence of the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes* in the gastrointestinal tract.

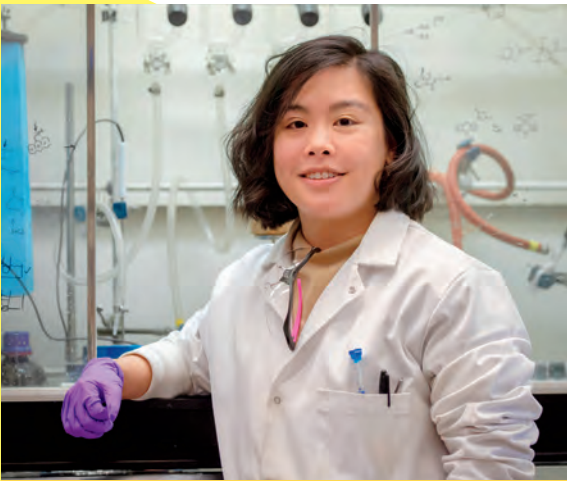
Her research utilizes molecular and microbiological techniques to characterize biological processes undertaken by *Listeria* under anaerobic conditions. Chakravarty's advisor is Dr. Janet R. Donaldson.

## NICHOLAS MAXWELL

Nicholas Maxwell, a native of Olive Branch, Miss., is pursuing a Ph.D. in psychology (brain and behavior). Nick's research aims to understand the processes involved in learning and memory. He is particularly interested in whether individuals can accurately judge their ability to learn new information. If so, Nick seeks to understand whether making these judgments could be an effective study strategy. Nick's advisor is Dr. Mark Huff.







## CHEYENNE LIU

Cheyenne Liu, a native of San Ramon, Calif., is pursuing a Ph.D. in polymer science and engineering. Cheyenne’s research investigates the scope of stimuli-responsive polymer materials and novel polymerization methodology. Specifically, she designed and synthesized synthetic, photodegradable micelles that can degrade and potentially participate in drug delivery. The overarching goal of her dissertation work is to expand the synthetic tools available to polymer chemists toward a facile generation of complex polymer materials. Liu's advisor is Dr. Yoan C. Simon.



## KATE ROBERTS

Kate Roberts, a native of Silas, Ala., is pursuing a Master of Science in speech-language pathology. Kate researches factors related to the overall success of augmentative communication post-intensive early intervention programs. Her goal is to provide clinical knowledge for speech-language pathologists in delivering evidence-based augmentative communication implementation for children. Kate's advisor is Dr. Amanda Mathews.



## MARISA MILLS

Marisa Mills, a native of Lenoir City, Tenn., is pursuing a Ph.D. in English (literature). Marisa’s work examines the human-horse relationship in Arthurian romances following the Norman Invasion of Wales. Marisa's advisor is Dr. Christopher Foley.



## HANNAH “JENNY” BUCKLAND

Jenny Buckland, a native of Irvine, Calif., is pursuing a Master of Science in sports management. Jenny's research is grounded in providing real-world learning opportunities within intercollegiate athletics for Southern Miss sport management students. She instituted an Ambassador Program that provided students with experiential learning opportunities. The program included involvement with game operations for home football games and provided engaging learning opportunities to manage sports facilities. Buckland's advisor is Dr. Chris Croft.



## SARAH KING

Sarah King, a native of Jackson, Miss., is pursuing a Master of Arts in political science. Sarah researches the media's portrayal of teachers and teachers' unions during school reopening policy negotiations after COVID-19. Her goal is to understand the role of the media in politicizing school reopening policies. Sarah's academic advisor is Dr. Iliyan Iliev.

## CHRISTOPHER O'QUINN



Christopher O'Quinn, a native of Franklin County, Miss., is pursuing a Master of Education in school counseling. Chris serves as a graduate assistant at the Center for Child Development. Following graduation, Chris plans to work as a high school counselor and become a licensed professional

counselor to work with families in clinical settings. Christopher's academic advisor is Dr. Chelsey Holden.

## CORY WICKER

Cory Wicker, a native of Baton Rouge, La., is pursuing a Ph.D. in human capital development. Cory's research examines internships through social capital theory. His research investigates how internships develop valuable professional networks for improving graduates' employment outcomes. Cory's academic advisor is Dr. Quincy Brown.



## ALEKS KARNICK

Aleks Karnick, a native of Indianapolis, Ind., is pursuing a Ph.D. in clinical psychology. Aleks' research focuses on neurocognitive vulnerabilities interacting with biased cognitions leading to maladaptive coping behaviors. This research aims to identify potential treatment targets for intervention. Aleks' advisor is Dr. Daniel Capron.



**Congratulations to all of the Southern Miss graduate students recognized in the Graduate Student Hall of Fame.**

## DENISE WILLIAMS

Denise Williams, a native of Bogalusa, La., is pursuing a Ph.D. in educational research. Denise researches graduate students' academic interests and experiences and reported social support from professors and peers. Her research explores how these variables contribute to students' transition from academic to professional settings. Her academic advisor is Dr. Kyna Shelley.





# RESEARCH ASSISTANT OF THE YEAR

By Caroline Neese

## 2023 RESEARCH ASSISTANT OF THE YEAR

The Southern Miss Graduate School selected Mark Robertson as the 2023 Research Assistant of the Year. Mark is a doctoral student in polymer science and engineering. Dr. Derek Patton, director of the School of Polymer Science and Engineering, said, "Mark is a brilliant, self-motivated graduate student who is very enthusiastic about mentorship, outreach, and broader impact activities."

Mark began his degree program at USM in the fall of 2019. Since that time, Mark has published 15 peer-reviewed articles, serving as first author on nine of these publications, in highly impactful journals, and his work has led to three submitted patent applications.

Dr. Zhe Qiang, assistant professor of polymer science and engineering, nominated Mark as Research Assistant of the Year.

Dr. Qiang says, "Mark pioneers and leads new research directions, recruits junior graduate students, mentors undergraduate students and high school teachers, and performs outreach activities to the broader community."

Mark received numerous awards and recognitions for his academic accomplishments and routinely participates in USM Graduate School competitions and symposiums. Mark won first place in the poster category at the Graduate Student Research Symposium in 2022 and was a finalist in the 3-Minute Thesis Competition in 2021. The Graduate School recently inducted Mark into the Graduate Student Hall of Fame.

Mark said, "I have had the pleasure of mentoring multiple graduate and undergraduate students, which has been instrumental in my development as a young researcher. I hope to use the invaluable opportunities that I have been provided with at USM to continuously advance environmental sustainability in polymer science while inspiring younger generations of researchers."



MARK ROBERTSON

Each year, the graduate dean issues a call for nominations for RA of the Year from school directors and graduate coordinators. Nominees must be research assistants who demonstrate excellent academic standing, exceptional research or creative achievements, and exemplary attitude and character. Nomination packets are ranked by a committee of graduate faculty, and the top-ranked student is selected for the honor.



LIMARIE J. REYES-TORRES

## RESEARCH ASSISTANT OF THE YEAR 2022

Limarie J. Reyes-Torres, a doctoral candidate in biological sciences, was selected as the 2022 Graduate Research Assistant of the Year. Limarie was nominated by her major professor, Dr. Donald Yee.

At the time of receiving this award, Limarie had already published eight peer-reviewed articles, serving as the first author on seven of those.

Limarie is an NIH fellow and recipient of the Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award-Individual Predoctoral Fellowship to Promote Diversity in Health-Related Research. This highly competitive award demonstrates Limarie's skills in writing successful grant applications and in conducting high-level academic research.

Dr. Yee stresses Limarie's value as an essential member of his research team exploring how mosquito populations were affected in San Juan, Puerto Rico, after the devastation of Hurricane

Maria in September 2017. Dr. Yee rated Limarie among the top five percent of students at a similar point in their education.

Dr. Yee said, "Her motivation for research and teaching are an extension of some of the challenges she faced as a student in Puerto Rico, which historically has had issues with providing the best opportunities for its students," Dr. Yee continued. "Even as a high school student, Limarie consistently looked for additional opportunities to give back, including tutoring or mentoring other students. This quality is an important one for a scientist given the mentoring nature of the scientific process."

Reyes-Torres is very active in outreach and education activities for Southern Miss and the community; among her exceptional credentials, she holds certifications in vector-borne disease management from the Mississippi Department of Health and as an advanced mosquito identification specialist from the University of Florida.

20  
23

## JENNIFER PETERSON

The 2023 Teaching Assistant of the Year is Jennifer Peterson. Jennifer is pursuing her Ph.D. in English (creative writing), and currently serves as a graduate instructor in the School of Humanities. Jennifer has extensive teaching experience as an instructor of record for English composition courses, world literature, and technical writing. Jennifer's major professor is Dr. Adam Clay. Jennifer is from Greenville, South Carolina.

Jennifer is a respected and actively publishing poet, having 14 poems published in prestigious publications. She has considerable editorial experience, having served as an editor for multiple Mississippi publications, and utilizes this background in guiding her students with concise and constructive editorial feedback. Jennifer spends time mentoring her fellow graduate teaching assistants, assisting with curricular and programmatic design, helping coordinate assessments, and coordinating various professional development opportunities.

Dr. Joyce Olewski Inman, associate professor of English and interim associate dean of the Honors College, nominated Jennifer for Teaching Assistant of the Year. According to Dr. Inman, "Jennifer embraces her roles in our program, and she brings an unbelievable amount of enthusiasm and expertise to the classroom as a student and as a teacher."



# TEACHING ASSISTANT OF THE YEAR

The Graduate TA of the Year Award recognizes an exemplary graduate teaching assistant for their outstanding contributions to Southern Miss through teaching, outstanding academic standing, scholarly accomplishments, attitude, and character. The recipients are nominated by the school director, graduate coordinator, or immediate supervisor.

By Caroline Neese



## ALICIA L. MACCHIONE

Alicia L. Macchione is a Ph.D. candidate in the psychology (brain and behavior) in the School of Psychology. Alicia's major professor is Dr. Don Sacco. Alicia is from Bloomington, Indiana.

In her time at Southern Miss, Alicia has worked as a teaching assistant in the School of Psychology, as an undergraduate mentor within the Evolutionary Social Psychology Laboratory, as a student counselor helping students receive funding from the Center for Undergraduate Research (EagleSPUR awards), and as a graduate assistant in the Office of Research Integrity (ORI). Alicia's unique excellence as a mentor and teacher at Southern Miss led to her selection as the 2022 TA of the Year.

In describing why she deserves this award, Dr. Sacco stated, "I think most impressive is the fact that fall 2021 was the first semester in which Alicia was an instructor of record, and her first course was Statistics in the Behavioral Sciences. This is considered the most challenging course for students in psychology to master, and instructors spend a significant amount of time in office hours providing additional tutoring in course content." Referring to her dual appointment with ORI, Dr. Sacco stated, "One might think that this would be too much for a third-year graduate student to balance, especially being so new to teaching. However, Alicia has excelled in all aspects of her employment. She received exemplary teaching evaluations for her statistics class (overall instructor rating: 4.8/5), submitted two first-author manuscripts, etc."

20  
22



# 2022 GRADUATE MENTOR OF THE YEAR DR. DANIEL CAPRON

By Caroline Neese

Dr. Daniel Capron, 2022 Graduate Mentor of the Year, is a licensed clinical psychologist and a Nina Bell Suggs Professor of Clinical Psychology in the School of Psychology. Dr. Capron earned his Ph.D. from Florida State University in 2015 and joined the faculty at Southern Miss that same year.

Dr. Capron is an accomplished author, publishing dozens of peer-reviewed articles and a book, and contributing to multiple academic book chapters. He and his students present their work at professional conferences nationwide. He is principal investigator (PI) or co-PI on grants and contracts totaling over \$5 million.

Dr. Capron was nominated by his clinical psychology doctoral student, Ava Ferguson. Ferguson noted his intentional concern for his students' professional success after completing the degree. She mentioned specific achievements, including writing successful grant proposals for NIH fellowships, presenting work at prestigious national conferences, and having manuscripts accepted into high-impact journals, which she credits to his mentorship expectations.

Ph.D. student, Nicole Caulfield, also supported his nomination. She said of his mentorship style: "I believe his students' success is due to Dr. Capron's effort to provide direction for self-improvement and reflection in a transparent and constructive manner. He is understanding of individual student needs and provides clear expectations on how students can achieve jobs in academia or research. His leadership has created a lab that has a collaborative, welcoming atmosphere because that is what Dr. Capron fosters. Moreover, Dr. Capron is professional in all his interactions, but importantly, he is also approachable and kind."

His colleague, Dr. Kelsey Bonfils, supported his nomination, saying, "While he is very supportive, Dan has high expectations for his mentees. This is demonstrated through his mentees' consistently high levels of success. He has had two graduate students complete the Clinical Psychology Ph.D. Program and both have gone on to productive research careers at a VA postdoctoral position and a faculty appointment at a top research institution."

Dr. Capron exhibits all of the qualities that make a successful and impactful mentor. The Graduate School commends Dr. Capron for his dedication to investing in students' personal and professional success and his commitment to excellent mentorship.

# 2023 GRADUATE MENTOR OF THE YEAR

## DR. EMILY BULLOCK YOWELL

By Caroline Neese

The 2023 Graduate Mentor of the Year Award recipient is Dr. Emily Bullock Yowell. Dr. Yowell is the Counseling Psychology doctoral program training director and a professor in the School of Psychology, in the College of Education and Human Sciences. Since beginning her appointment at USM in 2006, Dr. Yowell's efforts have centered around student mentorship and development. As a research mentor to doctoral, master's, and undergraduate students, Dr. Yowell puts her students' growth and career development at the forefront.

Dr. Yowell sets high expectations for her graduate students, encouraging them to present and publish their work to grow their professional skill set. Dr. Yowell publishes extensively with her students as co-authors in high-impact journals in her discipline, and they give conference presentations regularly. She has facilitated their involvement in relevant professional organizations to socialize them into their future



profession and broaden their professional networks.

One of Dr. Yowell's mentees, doctoral candidate Kendall Klumpp, noted, "Dr. Yowell models appropriate professional boundaries while fostering the relationship of a future colleague. Her encouragement allowed me to consider a variety of career options without fear of judgment or failure, and her active participation in my training has helped me build confidence in my ability to face internship as an excellent clinician."

The Graduate School is proud to recognize Dr. Yowell's excellence in mentorship. Her students successfully navigate and complete their degrees in a timely manner. She equips them for success beyond graduation as well by providing them with continuing opportunities to grow personally and professionally in ways that enrich them both personally and professionally.



# USM Graduate Enrollment, Fall 2022

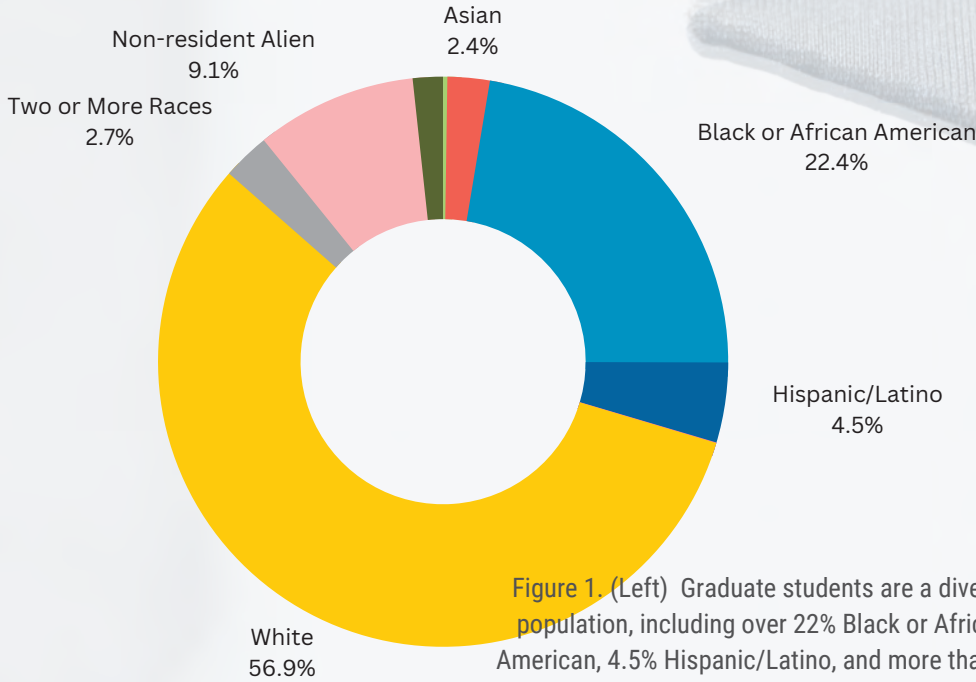


Figure 1. (Left) Graduate students are a diverse population, including over 22% Black or African American, 4.5% Hispanic/Latino, and more than 9% non-resident alien (international) students. Twenty-eight percent of graduate students are first-generation, and females represent two-thirds of the graduate student population.

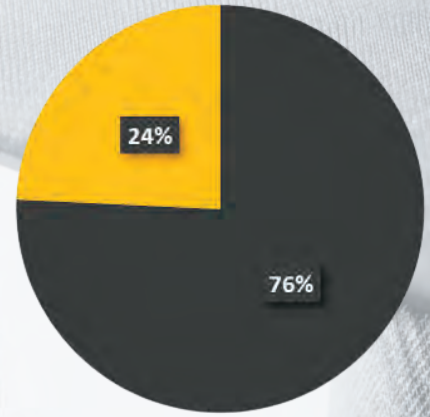


Figure 2. (Above) Fall 2022 Enrollment. At 3,266 students, graduate students comprised over 24% of the total student population in fall 2022.

## Headcount by Country

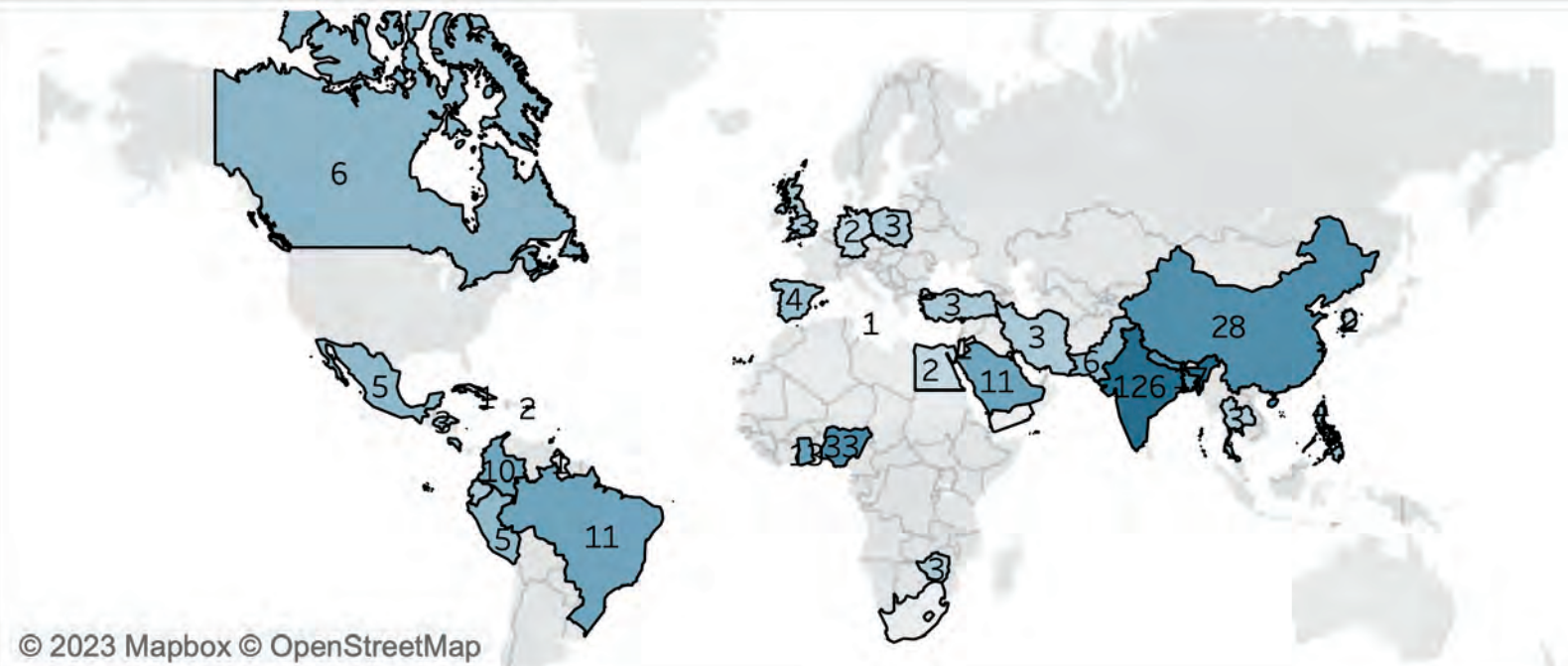


Figure 3: Graduate students represent all 50 U.S. states and 40 countries across the globe. The largest international graduate student population is students from India, at 36% of all international graduate students.



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI**

The Graduate School  
118 College Drive #5024  
Hattiesburg, MS 39406

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## Apply to USM Graduate School Today

1. Prepare and collect your application materials.
2. Complete the online graduate application and pay the application fee before the deadline.
3. Request official test scores (if required).
4. Request official transcripts from previous institutions.

For more information and to begin your application,  
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- recruitment, retention, and promotional initiatives to attract the best and brightest students.

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