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Spring 3-16-2017

## Newsletter Spring 2017

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### Recommended Citation

Wyandt, Christy M. and Miller, Katelyn, "Newsletter Spring 2017" (2017). *Newsletters of the Graduate School*. 7.

[https://egrove.olemiss.edu/gradschool\\_news/7](https://egrove.olemiss.edu/gradschool_news/7)

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

# Graduate School

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## Dear Students, Friends and Colleagues,

Welcome to the Spring 2017 edition of the Graduate School Newsletter! The Spring Semester is well underway and the flowers and trees on campus are beginning to bloom.

In this issue you can read about the accomplishments of some of our students and an alumna. We also highlight two of our nationally ranked graduate programs: Creative Writing and Chemistry and Biochemistry.

We hope you enjoy the newsletter and appreciate your support of the Graduate School at the University of Mississippi.

**Christy M. Wyandt, Ph.D.**

*Interim Dean of the Graduate School*

Professor of Pharmaceutics

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## Communication Sciences and Disorders Graduate Clinicians Work with Local Children



Plain and unassuming, just across from the Student Health Center, sits George Hall. George Hall, largely unnoticed by the general population, is home to one of the university's most remarkable offerings: the Hearing Impaired, Language and Literacy Lab (HILL) Program. The HILL Program is divided into two classes: a preschool-age class for children with moderate-severe language impairments (ages 3-5) and a transition class for children who have moderate-severe language impairments and difficulty transitioning between activities or into a school environment (ages 5-7).

Communication Sciences and Disorders graduate student and clinician Whitley Bieser described the transitions class, saying, "The HILL Transition classroom helps in creating a foundation for success in the profession of Speech-Language Pathology. A foundation consisting of patience, flexibility and creativity."

The students in the HILL program are typically on the autism spectrum and are largely nonverbal. In the classroom, there is a 1:1 ratio of graduate clinicians from the Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD) program, so each student receives individual attention. Graduate clinicians assisting transition class students work with them both in the clinic and at their respective schools, depending on their ability. Typically there are only four students per class every year, for a total of eight. The graduate clinicians are also assisted by undergraduate volunteers, and there may be more students if a child is actively being transitioned into school.

A typical day in class is just as hectic as any one might expect with children in the three to seven year-old age range. However, unlike other classrooms full of young children, the clinicians in the HILL Program actively encourage their students to speak and use their words. Some exercises include

prompts to describe a toy, the weather, or how they're feeling. After a period of free play time, the students are gathered up— often physically gathered into their clinician's laps— into a circle for a group activity. Clinicians use songs that encourage participation, including ones that address each child and name the day, following simple, repetitive rhythms. Older children are taken to their own schools, depending on the day and how much time they're assigned to spend there.

“Being a Speech Language Pathologist for a child with autism,” said Bieser, “challenges one to mold traditional teaching to supplement social, language and communication deficits. On top of that, one must provide needs for sensory processing impairments that may result in behavior problems.”

As the program is currently grant-funded program, the CSD program is able to provide these services without a cost to the students or their families. The only requirements are that children must be referred by a Speech-Language Pathologist. Students in the HILL Transitions class must also have documented transition issues by a teacher or SLP.

The HILL Program not only benefits local children with language impairments— the graduate clinicians' hours count toward their 400 mandatory practicum hours they must work before they can graduate. Practicum hours must be carried out at an American Speech Language Hearing Association approved practicum site, of which the HILL Program is one. Practicum requirements include school-based settings and medical settings, like hospitals, long-term care facilities, private practices, and veterans' homes; practicum sites can be found locally and all over the country. Graduate clinicians earning practicum hours must be supervised by a certified speech-language pathologist; Jennifer Johnson supervises the HILL Preschool class, while Amy Livingston supervises the Transitions class.

Of her work as a clinician at the HILL Program, Bieser said, “At the end of the day, the reward is so great for even the smallest accomplishments. This type of experience surpasses any knowledge one can gain from a textbook; this is where the real motivation is gained.”

by Katelyn Miller

THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

Graduate School

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## Medicinal Chemistry Doctoral Candidate Recognized for Drug Discovery



This year, Vedanjali Gogineni, a doctoral candidate in Medicinal Chemistry, won the 2016 Graduate Student Research Award in Drug Discovery and Development Interface from the American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists. She is one of only four annual winners, and along with her recognition came a \$250 prize and paid travel costs to the AAPS annual conference in Denver last November. The research that earned Gogineni this award was presented in a paper titled “Phytochemical Investigation of Secondary Metabolites in Psychoactive Medicinal Plants for the Treatment of Neurological Disorders”.

Gogineni earned her undergraduate degree in India and her master’s in New Jersey before she found herself at the University of Mississippi. As neither her bachelor’s nor master’s program had offered much by way of research experience, she worked as a pharmacy technician for a year and eventually joined Dr. Mark Hamann’s research team as a visiting scholar. With Dr. Hamann, she published her first paper, which was a learning experience that gave her the technical knowledge and practical experience she needed to move forward.

“At every step, I feel very fortunate,” she said, “because I didn’t get anything the easy way. It was always hard, and I had to fight for it. Publishing with Dr. Hamann— that was my first publication in my life, and it took me almost three years to get there. But it was published in *Chemical Reviews*, which has an incredibly high impact factor of about forty-eight.” Impact factor is a quantitative tool for ranking academic journals, measuring of the frequency with which the average article in a journal has been cited in a particular period.

Her success with Dr. Hamann also gave her confidence. “That’s what I learned from him— being confident, and I never looked back. Dr. Stephen J. Cutler invited me to the Ph.D. program himself, so every step was important.”

First published in October, her award-winning research took place in a lab that focuses on isolation and structural elucidation of psychoactive medicinal plants. In this case, they collaborated with a lab in El Salvador to examine *calea urticifolia*, a flowering shrub known to have, in some species, hallucinogenic effects. The team hypothesized that the crude extract would prove to have opioid/cannabinoid effects on pain receptors, as that is usually the case with hallucinogenic plants.

Instead, they discovered this species inhibited monoamine oxidase. They conducted bioassay-guided fractionation, fractionating the crude extract and testing each fraction to see which parts retained the inhibitive properties. The compound responsible for the inhibition was discovered to be acacetin, a compound that was not previously known to have such properties. Acacetin, they discovered, showed a preference for monoamine oxidase-B, which means that it could be used to treat Parkinson’s disease and Alzheimer’s. The possibility for translating this discovery into a drug that could treat these two conditions make Gogineni’s work all the more exciting and relevant.

The next phase of Gogineni’s research will involve working on synthetic analogs of the compound to improve the preference to MAO-B. Realistically, this could lead to a new clinical drug, as there are currently only two clinical drugs for MAO-B selectors. The lab will also be examining the other compounds found in the crude extract. There were six other compounds originally isolated; three of them were known compounds, which they tested for unknown activities. One compound came up positive with anti-cancer activities, which was never before reported. The other three compounds were previously unreported, with similarly unreported properties. This research provides definite potential for another paper in the future.

When Gogineni begins her work with synthetic analogs, she’ll be using computational molecular modelling. This process examines the compound, looks at the crystal structures, and sees what types of amino acids are present surrounding certain enzymes. This way, the process isolates where researcher can best make changes in synthetic analogs to make the compound more effective. Gogineni has already planned what analogs she will prepare and how she will prepare them.

The future looks bright for Gogineni, who will be graduating next December. She has two review articles under review, and has been invited to write a book on antiviral diseases with Dr. Hamann with Springer Publishing. Recently, Gogineni completed a 10-week internship in St. Louis, shifting her research to work on proteomics— the study of all proteins expressed by a cell, tissue, or organism— the use of which she says will drastically increase in medicine.

On her interest in proteomics, she said, “It has the ability to grow, just as I do.”

During her time at the university, Gogineni made the most of every opportunity available to her. She was required to take ten classes but ended up taking fifteen, simply because others seemed useful and interesting. All of her requests to attend conferences were eagerly approved— often, she said, before she even finished asking— and she had many opportunities to present her research.

“The department never got frustrated with me,” she said. “Maybe one day they’ll say, ‘You’re too ambitious, you’re spending all our money,’ or something! But they’ve never said no before...I missed all of this in my undergrad and in my master’s, so now I feel like a child in a candy store, wanting to grab every opportunity I can. Because of that, I’ve never gotten frustrated with myself either; I’ve never felt like it was too much work.”

And her work has certainly paid off. The same week she traveled to Denver to receive her research award, she also attended a conference held by Sigma Xi, the Scientific Research Society, and won a medal in their Chemistry Division.

Christopher McCurdy, former interim chair of the Department of Biomolecular Sciences and Gogineni’s advisor, praised her award to Ole Miss News, saying, “It is a significant accomplishment to be recognized by the AAPS with a graduate student research award. These awards are highly competitive, and such recognition speaks to the quality of Veda’s research. She is a deserving awardee and serves as a great ambassador of our graduate program.”

By Katelyn Miller



## Master of Arts in Creative Writing Program Named to Top 10



This year, the University of Mississippi Creative Writing MFA program was ranked among CollegeMagazine.com's top 10 MFA programs in the nation. Isabella Senzamici credited the size of the program, its notable alumni, and the various opportunities MFA students are given as merits in the program's favor.

"At Ole Miss," said the article, "students transform their passion for writing into a catalyst for social change. They teach community writing workshops, read at retirement

homes and judge writing contests to help budding writers understand the value and impact of their words."

Third-year poet and graduate student Molly Brown agreed that the value and impact of the written word are indeed known by her classmates, saying, "Students here are looking at the bigger picture for the literary world. They're students who have a voice, who have something to say. The program is generous and generative and responsible."

Matt Bondurant, a relatively new Assistant Professor in his second year with the program, said that the University of Mississippi is no stranger to praise for its literary merit. "The UM program has been on the map for a long time. When I was at Florida State 20 years ago, people knew about Ole Miss...It was always spoken about in very fond terms." He went on to say that the program has grown in the last five to six years with the addition of Tom Franklin and Beth Ann Fennelly, as well as even newer faculty.

"The program has only been gathering momentum, gathering steam in the last five years...I think the new hires are great. Of course, I'm one of them!"

Another new faculty member is Kiese Laymon, a native Mississippian who migrated back to his home state from Vassar, in Poughkeepsie, New York. Program director Derrick Harriell described Laymon as "a Southern jewel". Harriell also said he was also pleased to have Melissa Ginsburg join the MFA

program as full-time faculty, having previously been an instructor in the English department.

The English department was another factor that Harriell, Bondurant, and Brown were all quick to mention as a reason for the program's growth and success.

"There's a huge amount of respect that everyone has across the board for each other," said Brown.

According to Harriell, "We couldn't have the success we've had without the success and camaraderie with the English department at large."

And success is found in abundance in the MFA program's students. The program only admits eight new students each year, four poets and four fiction writers.

"My colleagues impress the hell out of me every day," said Brown. "So many people are doing so much exciting work and working so hard...The thing that sets The University of Mississippi apart is the combination of serious ambition and a wonderful, warm community. When one of us has a success, there's a sense that it's a success for everybody."

Harriell said that, over his time at the university, he's only watched the students grow, "not necessarily in number, but in terms of diversity. I think sometimes we think in terms of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, but we've grown diverse in personalities, familial backgrounds and all kinds of different, colorful things that shape a person's life...Writers feel like they can come here and not only write well but be themselves. It's a safe space to express themselves creatively and personally."

And support for writers comes not just from the MFA program and English department, but from Oxford as a city as well. Bondurant and Harriell both said that writers in Oxford are treated the way professional athletes are treated in other cities, in terms of respect and affection. Brown recalled a time when Jack Pendarvis walked into a bar on the Square after having just given a reading, and the whole bar broke into applause.

"Writers and writing are celebrated and appreciated," said Bondurant. "You feel like you're in a place that values what you do."

Brown said, of her experience with the university overall, "I've had a phenomenal experience here, and I couldn't have asked for a better place to get my MFA. My first book is coming in the spring, and I wouldn't have gotten it where it was and won a book prize without the faculty here." Molly Brown's book, *The Virginia State Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-minded* won the 2016 Lexi Rudnitsky First Book Prize and will be published in 2017 by Persea Books.



Harriell expressed his appreciation for the recognition, specifically by CollegeMag, saying, "It's a student-centered magazine, not the old guard naming the 'top' programs, but young people, whose voices I pay more attention to. These are the people who decide where they're going to college and who are doing really interesting, passionate work."

If precedent holds, it seems that more and more students will be doing their interesting, passionate work with the University of Mississippi's MFA program.

By Katelyn Miller

## Counselor Education Alumna Directs Haven Acres Boys and Girls Club



When Pontotoc native Stephanie Parrish came to the University of Mississippi, her goal was to become a child trauma psychologist. However, she came to realize that a career as a psychologist would involve more research than hands-on interaction with children. Since her motivation was rooted in directly assisting people facing hardship, she decided that counseling was the better

choice for her.

Counseling, like psychology, requires a graduate degree, as well as certification and licensure. After coming from Itawamba Community College to the university for her undergraduate studies, Parrish chose to remain in Oxford for her Master's. "I had fallen in love with the campus and the school during undergrad," she said. "As cliché as it sounds, I just felt like Ole Miss is where I was supposed to be. My original plan was to move to North Carolina after high school." Parrish is hardly the first to be swayed by the beauty of the university and the sense of belonging it conveys.

While her long-term objective is still to obtain her licensure in counseling, Parrish currently serves as the Unit Director for the Haven Acres Boys and Girls Club in Tupelo, a position she likens to that of a school principal. Her involvement in the BGC began while she was earning her B.A. in Psychology.

Of her experience there, she said, "I worked at the Oxford clubhouse as part of the College Corp. program during undergrad. At that time I worked with the seven, eight, and nine year-old girls. I fell in love with those kids and with the overall BGC mission, so I knew that I wanted to try to find a way to volunteer in some capacity with BGC after that assignment ended. I never imagined that I would be over a clubhouse at that time or even as I was finishing up my master's degree."

Indeed, Parrish earned her Master's degree in Counselor Education in August of 2015 and became Unit Director in November, a scant three months later. In her principal-like role, Parrish says, "My staff and I do homework help; I communicate with parents and help build and foster community partnerships. BGC

is primarily grant funded, so I have to monthly reports that show what programs we are running and how much participation we have.”

The Boys and Girls Club is after-school program serving children from ages six to eighteen, offering programs on character, leadership development, healthy lifestyles, and academic success.



Her position at the BGC more than fulfills Parrish’s original desire for hands-on interaction with children. “All of our programs are geared toward helping kids make good decisions in all aspects of life. I have about 65 kids that attend my club regularly,” she said, “and I try to really invest in their lives and help them in whatever way I can. My goal is to make sure my kids feel accepted and cared for, whether that is through my direct communication with them or through coming up with new programs and activities that they will enjoy...My short-term goal is to help my organization be more successful and more impactful in the community I serve.”

The BGC also provides Parrish with the opportunity see the children in her care grow in so many ways. She said, “For me the most rewarding things is seeing my kids succeed. Whether it is a child who goes from a D/F average to an A/B average or seeing kids who start out with very little social interaction make friends and start participating in the club and school... Everything I do or plan is with the goal of giving my kids the best experience possible—an experience they wouldn’t necessarily get if they weren’t at the club.” Her care and dedication to the boys and girls for whom the club is named make her speedy post-graduation promotion feel utterly deserved.

Parrish cites a handful of professors she worked and studied with at the university as mentors who contributed to her success and skill level. Her advisor, Dr. Marc Showalter, was, she said, “absolutely invaluable in helping me achieve my Master’s degree.”

Showalter offered glowing praise of his former student, saying, “From the first time I met Stephanie, it was clear that she wanted to make a difference in the world and to help people. During her practicum and internship, she continued to develop her counseling skills and created positive and caring relationships with her clients. She was always looking for ways to grow as a professional and as a person.”

Along with Dr. Showalter, she also mentioned Dr. Josh Magruder as a standout professor; she sought out not only as many of their classes as she could take, but also their advice and guidance. During her internship at the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Parrish worked with Dr. Rebekah Reysen, who she credits along with Dr. Showalter for fine-tuning her skills and helping her see what kind of work she hopes to do.

Her former advisor was quick to give Stephanie credit for her talents and caring for the children with whom she works. “Since she’s been at the Boys and Girls Club,” he said, “she has made such a difference in the lives of so many kids. She obviously loves the kids she works with and cares very much about them and wants to help them. It’s been so wonderful to see her have an opportunity to do this work and for the community to get to see just how much she has to offer. I had no doubt that Stephanie would be a success wherever she landed and that has certainly happened. I could not be more proud of her. She is a fabulous representative our program and the counseling profession.”



Magruder, another influence, remembers Parrish fondly. “She was bright, eager to learn, worked well with others, but her passion for counseling set her apart from other students. The passion she had for her client and how to advocate for them was always impressive.”

Parrish’s passion for helping children is not limited to either counseling or the BGC, but rather the world as a whole, and she encourages others to find their passion in philanthropy as well. “The message I try to communicate to others is to really get involved and find some sort of community service project to be passionate about. There are so many people in need in our society, and the world really needs more examples of caring and love. Whether you choose the Boys & Girls Club or some other service project, do something for others. That is the legacy people will remember. Our generation is uniquely positioned to make a big impact on America and the world in general.”

By Katelyn Miller

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## Chemistry and Biochemistry Department Awarded for Advancing Diversity



This fall, the local section of the American Chemical Society (ACS) awarded the University of Mississippi Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry the Stanley S. Israel Regional Award for Advancing Diversity for the Southeastern Region for 2015. The nomination package listed several recent achievements by the department, which centered around attracting and retaining more women and underrepresented minorities. The award will

furnish the department with a Stan Israel plaque and a check for \$1,000 to continue its efforts in diversification.

Nathan Hammer, Associate Professor in the Chemistry department, said in his announcement, "Our nomination letter cited our recent efforts in mentoring a diverse graduate population, recruitment of a diverse faculty and undergraduate student cohort, and our summer REU program. Thank you to everyone who helped make this happen!" Later, he added, "We've worked very hard to increase the accessibility of our BS Chemistry Degree by supporting students during the summer and adding a new Biochemistry track for pre-med students."

The department hired its first African-American woman as an Assistant Professor in 2014. Additionally, two graduates of the University of Mississippi Chemistry department have gone on to achieve similar positions at other institutions. Dr. Margo Montgomery-Richardson, for one, is now an Assistant Professor at Alcorn State University; Dr. Shana Stoddard is now an Assistant Professor at Rhodes University. Though not a UM graduate, Dr. Sharifa T. Love-Rutledge, who made history by becoming the first African-American woman to graduate from the University of Alabama, participated in a summer program at UM before attending Tougaloo College.

Over the past five years, the Chemistry department's graduate population has included a 30%-50% ratio of female students and 10%-15% of minority students. The undergraduate B.S. Forensic Chemistry

program is made up of 76% female students. Various department-wide programs and initiatives have made these numbers possible. Some include a new awards celebration, which has recognized many female students, and a welcome picnic for undergraduates at the beginning of each year, which has been linked with increasing the number of female and minority students. Another increase in female students came when the department modified the B.S. Chemistry program to include an optional Biochemistry emphasis— an attractive enticement for pre-med students. At present, the department has over 300 undergraduate students and over 60 graduate students.

By Katelyn Miller



## 3-Minute Thesis Winners Share Secrets to Success



This year's 3-Minute Thesis competition showcased seventy-eight of the university's best and brightest graduate students, and three emerged victorious. First place in the master's category was Hailey Hodge of the Art department. First place in the doctoral category was Anna Katherine Black, of Clinical Psychology. The grand prize winner was master's candidate Jessica Heppard, of Biology.

Thesis topics ranged from radioactive light to the fear avoidance model as it applies to migraine and basking behavior of the endangered ringed sawback turtle. All presentations were limited to three minutes,

accompanied by a single slide, and the use of notes was strongly discouraged. When it came to presenting their complicated, nuanced research to the judges in such a short period of time, all three winners had a secret to their success.

Jessica Heppard credited succinctness and the ability to make her work understandable to those not well-versed in biology, saying "I made sure to describe the aims and impacts of my study up front and in my concluding remarks to contextualize my work for judges outside of my field."

Similarly, Hailey Hodge believed her presentation had the potential to capture anyone's interest, and she took special care to make it something that the judges could enjoy. She said, "I am a very multi-disciplinary artist. With my background in the sciences and my work in the arts, my research appeals to a wider audience than just the art department I study under. I think that because my research is relatable to a broader spectrum of people, through light, cancer, loss of sight, and memory was important in this competition. I've been taught the importance of a good story isn't necessarily in the research, but in how the viewer/reader can personally relate to it. Rather than boring the judges with my process, I decided to tell my story about how and why I make the work I make."

Anna Katherine Black also knows the importance of telling a good story, as she minored in Creative Writing at the University of Alabama. She said, “A lot has to do with my creative writing background.”

It also helped that she was a finalist last year and was able to go into the competition with a better idea of what the judges were looking for. Per Black, “It’s hard to make migraines exciting and something people want to listen to!” And while she says that she hasn’t had much experience with formal public speaking classes, she did say that “in the department, we have a lot of opportunities to present. I also taught a big 201-level Intro to Psychology class.”

In their time at the university, the winners— all of whom received their undergraduate degrees at other institutions— unilaterally reported feeling encouraged and supported by their respective departments.

“I feel that our department is very open to collaboration,” said Black, “especially my advisor, Dr. Smitherman. He’s very productive and always trying to get his students to engage in more research... Whenever you want to get involved, the department is on board, the professors are on board.”

Hodge also praised the support of her department’s faculty, saying, “I’ve been able to study closely under the faculty on my committee, which is a great aspect of the MFA art program here. The department, as well as the grad school, has helped fund me to go to conferences and shows where my work has been exhibited. I have been given most of the resources I need to experiment with materials and make the work I want to make, and I have 24 hour access to the facilities. I’ve received tons of support here.”

“Everyone is very helpful and welcoming,” said Heppard, who received her bachelor’s degree at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. “Gotta love that southern hospitality!”

Two of the three winners are keeping their plans for the future open, but Anna Katherine Black has a multi-step plan for her career. It involves applying for internships, going through the interview process, graduating, taking an internship, and doing post-doctoral research in psychology. She hopes to work with adults with medical and psychological conditions specifically comorbid conditions in which medical issues have a causal relationship with psychological issues, and vice versa. Examples of comorbid medical/psychological conditions include chronic pain and depression, anxiety and insomnia, and PTSD and substance abuse. We look forward to good things from Sheppard and Hodge as well!

Jessica Heppard: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpP3VsuEtpA>

Hailey Hodge: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ChSy2k-sYXc>

Anna Katherine Black: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WgoyJxxRstw>

by Katelyn Miller