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THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

Graduate School





Dear Students, Friends and Colleagues,

Welcome to the Summer 2016 edition of the Graduate School Newsletter. All of us enjoy the slower pace of summer but we are looking forward to a new academic year that will be upon us soon! We capped the 2015-2016 academic year with a series of wonderful commencement ceremonies beginning with the very special Doctoral Hood Ceremony. You can read about our Class Marshals, Melissa Graves and Bridget Piculell in this newsletter.

I am pleased that we have so many excellent students, graduate programs and alumni. It is our privilege to tell some of your stories in our newsletter. We welcome story suggestions and would particularly like to hear from and about our alumni.

It is a time of transition for the Graduate School as we say goodbye to Dean Kiss. He left the University of Mississippi to become the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. We wish him well in his new endeavors.

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

THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

Graduate School

MBA Program: Students Compete in Case Competition and Online Program Earns College Choice Accolades



This April, a group of four MBA students traveled to the Sam Walton College of Business at the University of Arkansas to compete in the 2016 SEC MBA Case Competition. The team consisted of Caroline Rohde-Moe, Ben Tedford, Colin Wattigney, and Lucas Harth. They were led by Faculty Advisor Dr. Walter Davis and accompanied by MBA Director Ashley Jones.

To be nominated for the team,

students must have excellent faculty recommendations and an exemplary performance in the Speaker's Edge competition. Lucas Harth said, "It was truly an honor to be selected as a representative for the University of Mississippi. I am grateful for the opportunity to compete against top candidates of the SEC universities and for the case competition experience. I would like to thank my teammates for their hard work and dedication, and Ms. Jones and Dr. Davis for their coaching and guidance. Even though we did not bring home the trophy, the real prize was the experience."

"The School of Business and the MBA program is incredibly proud of this year's team. Caroline, Lucas, Colin, and Ben delivered a high caliber presentation. Their talent and performance puts us on the same playing field with the SEC's best," said Jones.

The University of Mississippi's MBA students have been participating in the competition since the event launched in 2013. The annual event emerged when SEC officials aspired to develop an academic competition that stirs the same excitement as athletic competitions of the SEC. The event offers opportunities to make connections with MBA students from around the SEC, as well as with the companies that partner in the event.

The event was an opportunity to represent the best of the University of Mississippi's MBA program on a regional stage. Colin Wattigney said, "My team and I worked hard to compete against MBA students across 13 other universities in the SEC, and we held our own against the best of them. The competition was a great and valuable experience that I'm happy to have shared with my team."

The competition involves developing a strategic business plan for a company in 24 hours. The catch is, the team is only given the name of the company and limited information about the case prior to the event. They are given the specific details of the case when they arrive, and they must immediately begin to craft their plan, which will be presented to a panel of judges at the end of their allotted time.



Caroline Rohde-Moe enjoyed the challenge of the competition, saying, "Getting to be a part of the SEC Case Competition was a great opportunity to get real life experience and act as a consultant for 24 hours to help a company with a strategic issue. I really enjoyed it!"

Fellow team member Ben Tedford saw the competition as an opportunity to try their knowledge against their peers. He said, "Imagine a company sharing an issue with you and expecting you to propose a workable solution in 24 hours. That's the SEC Case Competition. It was a great opportunity to test what we have learned in our program against other schools."

Faculty advisor Dr. Walter Davis explained that, while the competition may only go on for 24 hours, the team put a semester's worth of work into preparing for it. He expressed his pride in the team, saying, "It's been an honor to work with our case competition team throughout the semester. Their dedication was contagious, and they represented the Ole Miss spirit with tremendous enthusiasm."

And while the campus-based MBA program has represented the university in the SEC-wide challenge, the online MBA program has recently been named the top in the nation by College Choice, judged on academic reputation, value, career success for graduates and overall cost.

Social Work Master's Student Recruited for National Leadership Immersion Program



Dr. Susan Allen, Master of Social Work Program Director, describes graduate student Patricia Tortora as a person who sees chances and chases them. “She just embraces opportunities wherever she encounters them,” she said, “and fortunately, we encounter opportunities for growth and learning every day, and in every place, when we have the vision to imagine it.”

Tortora’s career with the Social Work Department has been characterized by opportunities that she has taken advantage of, both locally and on a national stage. This March, she attended the National Association of Social Workers – Mississippi Chapter’s annual conference as the University of Mississippi’s nominee for Student of the Year. While there, she also assisted with the student research poster presentations and judging.

Tortora also participated in Project Lift, funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. She was chosen from a nationwide pool of young leaders, aged twenty to thirty, studying and working in the behavioral health field. After the participants were flown to Bethesda for a two-day introductory trip, they undertook a seven-month “leadership immersion program”, which consisted of guest lectures, monthly mini-projects, and one overarching project. Tortora said that one of the perhaps unintended benefits of the program involved honing her time-management skills, as her group partners were divided between Mississippi, California, and New Jersey.

"We were all working eight to five and dealing with three different time zones," she shared, "so we really learned how to budget our time!"

The program's biggest project involved retaining and recruiting people into the behavioral health care field. Tortora's group created a booklet she described as a "school survival guide" for students entering the behavioral health care field, be it in psychology, sociology, social work. The guide walks students through what the many field-relevant acronyms stand for, points out scholarship opportunities, and discusses graduate school options.

Tortora said, "There was a really helpful chapter, which I thought was the best part, on self-care and mindfulness. You have to take care of yourself, because you can't help other people unless your cup is full."

The booklet was published at the end of the program in the fall, and Tortora is hoping to get a PDF version live online as a free resource.

Of the program as a whole, she said, "Everything we learned was really relevant. It was trying to make us better leaders in the behavioral health care field so we could relay the information we'd been taught to our coworkers and peers and make our agencies that much better."

Currently, Tortora works in the Department of Social Work in the Child Welfare Training Academy. After graduation in May, she plans to begin a three-month internship at Mill Creek in Pontotoc, a behavioral health clinic for adolescents from seven to twenty.

"That's the population I want to work with," she said, "adolescents and teenagers. It's a very developmental time period, and that's a population that gets ignored a lot. Teenagers are usually the last to get adopted, since more families want small children, and they get kind of thrown aside. I want to work with them and make sure they feel good. There's a quote: 'It's easier to build strong children than fix broken men.' People think once you're a teenager, you're basically an adult, but you're just starting, really. "

Following her internship, Tortora will begin working on licensure for clinical status. Social workers must have two years of clinical supervision in therapy to attain Licensed Clinical Social Worker status. She intends to eventually become a therapist.

During her time at the University of Mississippi, Tortora has found a special niche within her department. She said, "This department has been wonderful. It's a very small department, so we all know each other inside and out. They've been incredibly helpful, encouraging me to find things I'm passionate about. They brought up grad school to me, helped me figure out what I'd need to get in, and gave me a job here. Graduation is actually very bittersweet. I just feel like I had a social work family with my classmates and my department. But we can't stay forever! There's only so much you can learn from

books before you get out in the world and work with people. Every person you meet is going to teach you something, so you have to be there for that, and open to it.”

Dr. Allen is one of many who appreciates Tortora’s perspective on lifelong learning and relationships. She said, “One of Patti’s most outstanding traits is her willingness to engage with others... It is exciting to observe her developing her professional identity, and knowing she will be such an asset to the profession of social work, and advocate for social justice and equality for all persons.”

McLean Fellow Rebecca Bramlett Tackles Prison Programming and Community Engagement



Few people think about prisons, and even fewer are moved to dedicate their time to improving them. Fortunately, Criminal Justice Master's student Rebecca Bramlett is one of those few. Having graduated Magna Cum Laude from Mississippi State University with a degree in Criminology, Bramlett has come to the University of Mississippi to further her mission of working in the prison system and reforming the way inmates spend their time.

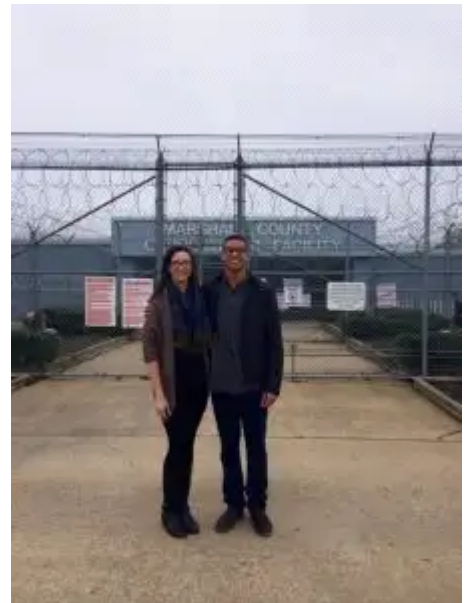
Caring for prisoners seems to be a something of a family business for Bramlett, whose late grandfather shared her calling and taught her not to fear a highly stigmatized group of people. She said, "I've always had a fascination with prison. My grandfather was a prison minister, so from a young age I've always thought that prisoners weren't bad people, they made bad choices. That was instilled in me forever, and it's carried through now that I understand crime a little better."

Even now, Bramlett has begun to gain practical experience in the field, including a summer internship in the Shelby County prison and her current work with the McLean Institute on campus. During her time in Shelby County, she saw just how dire the conditions were for inmates not provided with the necessary resources to succeed. Specifically, she noted how a GED program had not been offered in months, despite the fact that it was a requirement for many prisoners' parole. A lack of funding and people amounted to a situation in which prisoners were set up to fail.

This summer, Bramlett will be working with the Marshall County correctional facility, a private institution that has better funding and will make a better testing ground for the program she hopes to implement. While the precise details of her project are still in the planning phase, she gave an overview of its primary objectives, saying, "Right now we're working on an entrepreneurship education program, just developing a good program to help soon-to-be released offenders develop an entrepreneurial mindset. Because seventy percent of ex-offenders in the Delta are unemployed which only increases crime... If you can't get a real job— the fast food restaurant won't hire you— you start a lawn-care business. It's the mindset of 'This is my responsibility, and I can do this.'"

Her goals include not only instilling an ambitious mindset in inmates, but also providing practical resources to help them thrive after their release. Specifically, she said, “We’re thinking about partnering them with a mentor in the community, so when they leave they’ll have a certificate from the university and a mentor. They can ask for recommendations or ask about their mentor’s connections. Because that’s what you need, to connect people back to the community that they’re going to after they leave prison.”

Currently, the correctional facilities she’s worked with do offer some kinds of programming and training, but Bramlett questions their relevance in the modern Delta area. “Vocational programming isn’t senseless,” she said, “but are there jobs for chair-makers or steel manufacturing, especially in the Delta? There aren’t really factories in the Delta anymore...Idle hands are the devil’s workshop, and if we filled that time with programming more, maybe we’d see crime go down.”



This past year, Bramlett has stepped outside of her normal scope of correctional facilities and also gotten involved in community-building projects in Jonestown, Mississippi, as part of her McLean fellowship. She supervises a group of undergraduate Student Engagement Fellows, who all design programs to institute in an underserved towns in the Delta. All of the students chose to focus on Jonestown, and they’ve

traveled there two weekends a month to work on the initiatives they’ve created. Each of the students has a different program, some of which include a Student Dietetic Association with workshops on healthy eating, a health fair, an ACT workshop, financial literacy courses, and a “transforming your community” workshop.

Primarily, Bramlett’s role involves going with the students, making sure they have all the necessary supplies, helping them facilitate their programming, and planning the logistics. She expressed how gratifying her participation has been, saying, “It’s exciting to see a community get involved and students get involved with a community they previously had no connection to at all.”

Bramlett summarized the McLean institute’s goal as “having transformative service. You want to implement something that stays and keeps growing in the community to make a lasting difference.”

On her studies at the university and experiences in Oxford, as compared to her time at Mississippi State, Bramlett said she feels “much more accepted and at home here. It’s significantly more

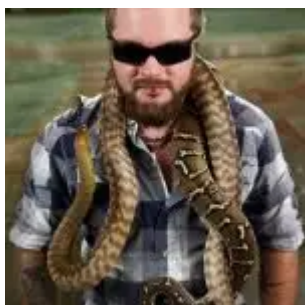
progressive, and people are more politically engaged here.”

She also appreciates the more personal aspect of her classes, saying, “What’s been really impressive with the Legal Studies program here is that the faculty is willing to engage with you, both in and out of the classroom. It’s also very practical. We have a lot of military and ex-military on staff and in the faculty– it’s less theory, and it’s interesting to get a more practical view of criminal justice, which is what I came here for.”

In the future, Bramlett has her eyes on improving prisons on a national scale and feels that she’s starting on the right track to do that. She said, “I would love to work for the Federal Bureau of Prisons, so this is a good launching pad for that, and the connections I’m making are important. And also I think it will create a better understanding of programs in prisons, and what changes we can make in programming in prisons, because it’s very lacking.”

According to McLean faculty and project manager J.R. Love, Bramlett is well on her way to making a real difference in communities and correctional facilities through her fellowship and beyond. Speaking of her performance in her fellowship, he said, “Rebecca Bramlett is an outstanding member of the McLean Institute in her role as an Innovation Fellow with the Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development initiative. She has engaged in community development work that is helping advance the mission of the McLean Institute in fighting poverty through education. Her thirst for knowledge, curiosity, and interpersonal skills allow her to build authentic partnerships in the community, which is a true asset in her work with the McLean Institute.”

Biology Doctoral Candidate Discovers New Species of Viper



As time moves on, discovering a new species of anything becomes more and more difficult. Ph.D. Candidate Tim Colston proves that it is not, however, impossible. Recently, Colston was part of a team that discovered a new species of viper, *Bitis harensa*, on the east side of the Ethiopian Rift Valley. The path to this discovery was a long one with an unexpected conclusion.

Colston's story began when he traveled to Ethiopia in 2012 as a Fulbright scholar to collect data on snake communities along an elevational gradient. Working in the highland mountain ranges in eastern Ethiopia, he learned that there was a species of viper endemic to the west side of the Rift Valley, though there was no hard evidence of any equivalent species on the other side. However, given the similarity of the environments, as well as some stories about a large, charismatic viper in the area, he fully expected to find one.

"As far as charismatic goes," he said, "it just means that when someone sees this snake, they know it's dangerous, and they remember it."

Plenty of researchers had looked for this viper in the past with little success. Interviews with locals, as well as a single, unreliable sample from the 1970's didn't offer much to go on. But in 2013, some clear-cutting of forest land turned out to offer an unexpected stroke of luck. Recounting the story, Colston said, "In 2013, one of my coauthors was with his driver who knew he had been looking for the snake. Luckily, they came across one that was in the middle of the road in a newly-cleared road in this mountain area that I had spent months surveying. I had shown the driver pictures, so when he saw it, he said, 'That's the snake Tim's looking for!' It's one of the least known snake species in the world, there have been only a handful of sightings. They live in very dense forests, they probably live underground



most of the time. With that additional sighting, we were confident in describing it as a new species and trying to garner it some sort of special conservation status so that people don't go in and destroy that patch of forest."

Since then, there have been two more specimens collected by Colston's colleagues in Ethiopia, providing enough biological data to compare this species to the one on the eastern side of the Rift Valley.



The requirements for describing a species as new varies with the type of animal. "With vertebrates, it's more of a combination of many things," Colston explained. "Are they genetically isolated, with some sort of barrier to interbreeding with other species? It can be a hard barrier like the Rift Valley. We don't actually have the genetic data back yet, so we don't know exactly what the differences are, but I suspect it's a fairly old difference. These species have been separated for a while."

Colston is currently pursuing his Ph.D. in Biology, investigating how snake communities are structured and the evolutionary processes that lead to community formation around the world. So far he has conducted research in Ethiopia, Brazil, Mexico, Guiana, and the southeastern United States.

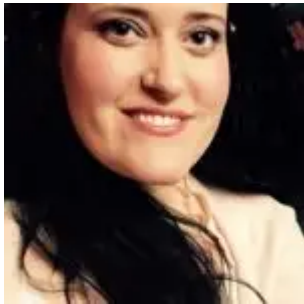
After earning his Master's Degree from the University of Oklahoma, Colston came to the University of Mississippi specifically to work with Brice Noonan, his major advisor. On his choice of advisors, Colston said, "I knew I wanted somebody obviously very strong in their career, a great researcher, but also someone younger, with a lot of drive and a newer lab. I was his second Ph.D. student when I came. I knew I wanted to work on community assembly, thought I'd keep working in South America and expand from there. Brice has been working in the Guiana Shield since the beginning of his career, so it was a good fit."

Colston also found an unexpected influence in Colin Jackson and his research in microbial ecology. "My research program has really been transformed by adding this microbial ecology component," he said. "If I hadn't come here and met Colin, who knows if I would've gotten involved in that? And now, all of my post-doc plans involve microbial ecology."

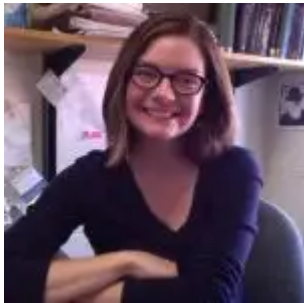
"Tim was already a good field biologist when he joined our graduate program," said Jackson, "and during his time at the University of Mississippi, he's also become an excellent scientist."



Doctoral Students Selected to be Class Marshals



The class marshals for this year’s doctoral hooding ceremony are Melissa Graves and Bridget Piculell. Melissa Graves is the current interim director for the Center for Intelligence and Securities Studies and will be earning her Ph.D. in History. Bridget Piculell is earning her Ph.D. in Biology.



Both Graves and Piculell have studied in other institutions in the past but also had experience with the University of Mississippi prior to beginning their doctoral studies. During her undergraduate program at UC Santa Cruz, Piculell took part in an undergraduate research project with her current advisor, Jason Hoeksema, who was working as a post-doctoral researcher. She said, “When I decided to apply to graduate schools, I looked him up!”

Describing the focus of her work, Piculell said, “My specific area of research is the interaction between loblolly pine trees and ectomycorrhizal fungi (a type of symbiotic fungi that grows on the roots). My dissertation research was focused on determining how differences in host plant genetics can influence the fungi that are on the roots.”

Graves has had a longer relationship with the University of Mississippi— after earning her Bachelor’s degree from Hardin-Simmons University, she received her J.D. from the University of Mississippi School of Law. Afterwards, she also earned her Master’s Degree in History, which focused on religious fundamentalism. Graves said, “When I started, I was interested in American religion. I wrote my master’s thesis on women and Christian fundamentalism. But, with the Ph.D., I realized that I wanted to pursue an academic career in intelligence studies; working at the Center for Intelligence and Security Studies influenced that. So, for the dissertation, I shifted my emphasis to the FBI.”

Graves spoke highly of her experience with the history program, saying, “The history graduate program is incredibly challenging, but I’ve worked with some of the best scholars I’ve ever had the privilege to know. It’s baptism by fire, but I know that I’m a much stronger scholar for having been in such a difficult program.”

Both consider their choice to attend the University of Mississippi an excellent one. Graves cited the availability of funding as a very positive factor. She said, "I was able to work and have my classes paid for under the Staff Scholarship. I couldn't have asked for a better situation—great program, and no more loans!

Piculell said, "I have loved it here. The Biology department is wonderful, and you couldn't ask for a prettier campus or a nicer group of people."

While Piculell isn't sure who nominated her to be class marshal, she is "very excited" about the position. Graves named her nominator as Dr. Ward, chair of the history department, saying, "[he] nominated me because I received an assistant professor position at The Citadel, where I'll begin in the fall."

Dr. Ward is accordingly proud of his nominee. He said, "Dr. Graves has been remarkable for both her intellectual creativity and her ability to make steady progress with her research and writing while also having a significant managerial responsibility on campus."

The doctoral hooding ceremony took place on May 13th.