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Red and Blue Celebration Honors Graduating Staff Members

Annual event recognizes 23 UM employees for overcoming challenges, earning degrees

MAY 5, 2022 BY EDWIN B. SMITH



Adrienne Edney (left), coordinator of outreach programs for the Office of Professional Development, Events and Services; Seth Austin, manager for athletics broadcast for Ole Miss Sports Productions; and Logan Kirkland, a photographer for University Marketing and Communications, celebrate together at the annual Red and Blue Celebration. The three were among 23 university staff members honored during the event. Photo by Thomas Graning/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

OXFORD, Miss. – **University of Mississippi** staff members who have earned degrees while working were recognized for their accomplishments Wednesday (May 4) at the annual Red and Blue Celebration of Achievement.

Twenty-three employees who are receiving bachelor's, master's, specialist or doctoral degrees during **2022 Commencement exercises** this weekend were honored at noon in Gertrude C. Ford Center for the Performing Arts. Co-sponsors for the celebration include the offices of the Chancellor and Provost, and University and Public Events.

During the ceremony, graduates were honored with red-and-blue cords presented by Noel Wilkin, provost and executive vice chancellor for academic affairs. Other program participants included Chancellor Glenn Boyce; Deetra Sims-Wiley, Staff Council president-elect; and Ginny Chavis, acting associate provost.

"It is wonderful to have so many of our employees take advantage of the amazing educational opportunities that are available on our campus," Wilkin said. "This benefit is a great way for people to advance their education while working for the university, and I know it takes incredible dedication and hard work.

"Every one of our graduates this year is to be commended and congratulated for advancing their educational goals while being an employee."

Participating employees came from departments across campus, including the schools of Education, Engineering and Law, Graduate School, Office of Admissions, Division of Outreach and Continuing Education, University Marketing and Communications, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, University Libraries, International Programs, Human Resources, ID Center, Institute of Child Nutrition, Police and Campus Safety, and Ole Miss Sports Productions.

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Campus Briefs

Students Learn 'Real Politics' in Washington, D.C., Winter Session

OXFORD, Miss. – Eleven University of Mississippi students spent their winter break learning about the people who work behind the scenes of the American government in Washington, D.C. Lead by Jonathan Klingler, assistant professor of political science, the students of Pol 391: Applied Politics met not with candidates, but with the people who make candidates'

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Young Alumna Gives Back to School of Accountancy

OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy's new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying "thank you." "It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

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Ole Miss In the News

Reuters: Keep an Eye on the Money Supply

U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to abate. The Federal Reserve's



Deetra Wiley (center), president-elect of the UM Staff Council, cheers as staff members who will be receiving degrees during Commencement exercises this weekend are recognized during the annual Red and Blue Celebration. Photo by Thomas Graning/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

Several recipients recalled the challenges they encountered as they earned their degrees.

Jessica Evans, staff assistant for **UM Law Career Services**, said it has been a long and trying road to earn her master's in higher education and student personnel.

"As a first-generation and low-income student, it technically took me seven years to finally complete my undergrad degree in 2018," the Nashville native said. "I started the master's program in 2018 full steam ahead, but was then thrown for a loop when I lost my grandparents – who were more like parents to me – within 17 days of each other in 2019."

Evans took time off to focus on grieving and dealing with her new normal. The hindsight of her undergraduate experience taught her that it's OK to ask for help and ask early, and that taking time off is OK.

"I started the program back in the spring of 2021," she said. "Now, here I am, a first-generation student, on track to graduate with a 3.5 GPA and have a career in a field that allows me to be an encouraging voice to students."

Debilitating breast cancer that twice interrupted her studies and demanding internship hours were two hurdles that Precious Pratt Thompson overcame.

"I am a five-year breast cancer survivor," said the Calhoun City native, who is receiving her bachelor's degree in social work. "The challenge I faced was between doing my internship and continuing to work (as **ID Center** coordinator) here at the university.

"The social work internship requires 400 hours, which is a full-time job. I did (temporarily) resign to be able to complete my internship."

Meredith Fleming, executive assistant in the **Division of Outreach and Continuing Education**, found managing her time with family, work and school was the most challenging part of her journey.

"My husband and I have two young boys, work full-time, and are involved in our church and community," said the Batesville native who has earned a master's degree in higher education and student personnel. "Making sure I did not shortchange our family time or jeopardize my work and other obligations was important to me.

"The support of our parents and the encouragement from the members of our cohort were vital to my success and completing my degree on time."

Fleming wasn't the only staff member who found juggling personal and work responsibilities a chore.

"Between work, school and family, it's been a juggling act to keep any one from overtaking the other two," said Wade Griffin, of Oxford, a pre-press technician for **Printing and Creative Services** who is receiving his master's in integrated marketing communications.

"Managing my time, often down to the minute, has helped me stay focused."

Pam Norwood, a graduate admissions specialist, is also receiving her master's in higher education. The Batesville native said that she did not believe that she could actually complete the degree program after being admitted.

"Immediately, I began to doubt my capabilities after reading the syllabus for one class," Norwood said. "Fear of failure overwhelmed me at one point, but I was determined not to allow my fear to overshadow the possibility that I could actually achieve this degree if I stayed on

task."

Norwood's class was the first higher education cohort. She found her peers to be very supportive.

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Provost Noel Wilkin (left) congratulates Anxhelo Xhafkollari, network administrator for the Institute of Child Nutrition, during the annual Red and Blue Celebration in the Ford Center. Xhafkollari completed his master's degree in engineering science in December. Photo by Thomas Graning/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

"They continued to reassure me that I could be successful in the higher education program if I remained committed," she said. "That helped a lot. And I did master it!"

Joshua Tucker, a law school recruiter, said he turned a joke from his father into motivation to pursue a terminal degree.

"When I decided to pursue my Ph.D. after receiving my J.D., my dad told me, 'You need to be trying to get a J-O-B instead of a Ph.D.,'" the West Point native said. "Dad chuckled after that statement. However, of the two of us, he was the only one laughing."

Tucker did both.

"It was challenging pursuing a doctorate degree while working full time, but with the support of my network, I was able to do both," he said. "Thank you to those who have been supportive throughout the entire journey."

The Red and Blue Celebration was originated by members of the Staff Council in April 2018.

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