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## UM Creates Department of Higher Education

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## UM Creates Department of Higher Education

**Interim chair Neal Hutchens plans to launch a new minor and increase campus partnerships**

SEPTEMBER 11, 2017 BY ANDREW M. ABERNATHY



Faculty members serving in the new UM Department of Higher Education Faculty are (from left) Phillis George, Whitney Webb, Brandi Hephner LaBanc, John Holleman, Amy Wells Dolan, K.B. Melear, Neal Hutchens and George McClellan. Photo by Kevin Bain/Ole Miss Communications

OXFORD, Miss. – The **University of Mississippi School of Education** is home to a new Department of Higher Education, with legal scholar Neal Hutchens as its interim chair and professor.

The new department, which has eight full-time faculty members, several affiliate faculty throughout the university and more than 200 graduate students, was previously part of the university's **Department of Leadership and Counselor Education**. It will function as an independent unit within the School of Education.

"To be part of creating a new department is a rare and unique opportunity," Hutchens said. "We have built a vibrant and expanding team of higher education faculty and students, and this department allows us to be a visible part of the university community and establish an identity in terms of how we serve the university, the state and beyond."

The creation of a new department at the School of Education follows the recent growth of new online and hybrid degree programs designed for working higher education practitioners.

The department offers four graduate programs including online and traditional master's degrees in higher education/student personnel, as well as Ph.D. and a hybrid Ed.D., which is a professional doctorate that combines online and face-to-face learning for higher education professionals.

"We are extremely excited to launch our new Department of Higher Education," said David Rock, UM education dean. "The growth of our new professional doctorate and master's degrees for working professionals supports the need for this new organizational unit."

"We are also creating new possibilities for undergraduate courses in the higher education arena that may even expand into a minor in higher education for the entire campus."

The department serves as the academic unit overseeing multiple undergraduate courses, including EDHE 105, a course taken by hundreds of **Ole Miss** undergraduates each year and a collaboration with the university's **Division of Student Affairs**.

As interim chair, Hutchens hopes to launch an undergraduate minor in higher education, strengthen and build new partnerships with units throughout campus, and implement an outreach and engagement plan to highlight the accomplishments of faculty, students and alumni.

An expert in first amendment and free speech issues, Hutchens joined UM in 2016 after serving as the professor in charge of higher education at Pennsylvania State University. He also held faculty positions at the University of Kentucky and Bary University.

Hutchens earned a Ph.D. in higher education policy from the University of Maryland, a law degree from the University of Alabama, a master's degree from Auburn University at Montgomery and a bachelor's degree from Samford University.

"We have a really strong collection of individuals among our full-time and affiliate faculty," Hutchens said. "They are strong scholars and just really good people. It is an honor to be part of this team and to serve as our new department's interim chair going forward."

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