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Letter from the Dean

What an exciting time to be a graduate student at The University of Southern Mississippi! As a Carnegie R1 research institution and a leading research university, Southern Miss is bustling with research and creative activity across all our campuses. Whether analyzing host-pathogen interactions in molecular biology laboratories, collecting samples from the Gulf of Mexico in a research vessel, performing in ensembles and theatres at home and abroad, or crafting poetry at an intensive writing residency, our graduate students are at the front lines of innovation, creativity, and discovery. The purpose of ARETE is to showcase the work of exceptional graduate students and the faculty whose mentorship prepares them for exciting careers after graduation.

The featured articles in this issue are as varied as the programs they reflect. Discover how a current student and a recent Ph.D. alumnus have revolutionized college courses through gamification, motivating students to master challenging concepts. Read about our rigorous Doctor of Audiology program, viewed through the lens of professors and students actively engaged in clinical instruction and research. Feel right at home in the Eagle’s Nest Food Pantry, a campus/community partnership conceived of and managed by the School of Social Work, which combats food insecurity on our Hattiesburg campus. Find out more about a non-traditional student’s research that emanates from her passion for understanding how mothers adapt to changing identities of their transgender children. See how economic development master’s students are contributing to the Mississippi Defense Initiative project, which seeks to foster economic growth in our state through an extensive defense network. Finally, get to know 2019 Graduate Assistant of the Year, Brianna Bingham, now a Ph.D. alumnus using her mathematical skills at the U.S. Army Engineer Research and Development Center in Vicksburg; and Professor Derek Patton, 2019 Graduate Mentor of the Year, whose mentorship prepares students for highly competitive jobs in polymer science.

Graduate students represent 18% of the Southern Miss student body and include a diverse group of talented people from all walks of life. Representing every county in Mississippi, all 50 U.S. states, and over 70 countries from all across the globe, our students truly reflect the global society in which we now live. After reading ARETE, I hope you are inspired to continue your education at Southern Miss or support our initiatives through your gifts. Southern Miss is known for its openness and hospitality, and we look forward to the opportunity to welcome you to our university.

Dr. Karen S. Coats
Dean of the Graduate School
Winner of the NASA/Mississippi Space Grant Consortium fellowship three years in a row, enthusiastic teacher, dedicated volunteer, and certified math genius, Brianna Bingham was an obvious choice for the 2018-19 Graduate Assistant of the Year. Her advisor, Dr. James Lambers, saw her potential even before Brianna came to The University of Southern Mississippi. Brianna was “an exceptionally qualified applicant based on her grades and test scores,” he notes, but she stood out in other ways, too. “I learned about her research for her master’s thesis, and I saw a natural connection to my own work. At that point, I knew that she could be a great asset to our Ph.D. program and to my own research program, as well.”

Brianna continues to be an asset at her new job at the U.S. Army Engineer Research and Development Center in Vicksburg, Mississippi, where she was recruited prior to her graduation in May 2019. Her new branch chief came to the spring 2019 job fair at USM specifically to speak with her, in fact. Dr. Lambers had spoken highly of Brianna, and her work and professionalism was obvious from their first meeting. They set up an interview on the spot, and she started work in June.

While Brianna notes that this is her first full-time job, it’s clear that she treated her time as a student like a full-time (or more) job, and she made the most of every opportunity that came her way. “She really did it all while she was here,” Dr. Lambers says. For instance, she served as an officer in the Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics (SIAM) student chapter. She also attended and presented at several conferences all over the U.S., sharing her research with the wider community of math researchers. Additionally, through her outstanding research, Brianna won a $20,000 fellowship from NASA for each of the three years of her Ph.D. work. One requirement of this honor was to conduct weekly K-12 outreach, which she completed at Oak Grove Middle School. She worked as a “resource math” educator, helping to create and implement Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) for students who had fallen behind in the general education math classes. The goal was to give those students “an extra push,” and eventually integrate them back into the main class with their peers.

Brianna had to balance this outreach with her own research and coursework, as well as her work as a graduate assistant. Dr. Lambers notes that, even with a somewhat unusual situation, Brianna was a beacon of excellence. “When she first joined our program, we needed her to teach MAT 099 right away, something that normally would not be asked of an incoming graduate student, even though she did not have formal teaching experience. In spite of being rushed into the classroom while also commencing her research and coursework in a new environment, she immediately distinguished herself as an excellent teacher.”

When asked what distinguished her work, she focuses on the emotional and personal connections she was able to make with her students, as well as the adjustments she made to her teaching style, something that many new teachers may have difficulty self-correcting. “I became very emotionally attached to students and their success. I would make sure I went above and beyond and made sure that they understood things,” she explains. When she first began teaching MAT 099, she spent a lot of time writing on a whiteboard, talking with her back to the students, focusing on getting the notes down on the board. She realized quickly that both she and the students spent most of the class writing things down, but little time thinking, understanding, practicing, or questioning the concepts in the lessons. After realizing that she had trouble engaging with the students in this way, she took the opportunity of a new class to change her methods. “I started to use guided notes,” she says. Instead of putting notes on the board during class, she created notes for the students to print and bring to class with them. The notes had pieces missing, like fill-in-the-blank worksheets. These allowed her to stay engaged with the students during the lesson, “where they were doing less writing and they were paying more attention to the method and why we were doing certain things. That was a big turning point in my teaching experience.”

In addition to classroom time, students also had time with Brianna one-on-one in the Math Zone, where she shifted to giving individual attention to students who needed it. She also took time out of her busy schedule to hold review sessions: these were not a required part of her teaching assignment, nor were they required for students, but they came for the additional help and practice, and for the comradery that formed in her classes. In her last semester, her class had only nine students. “I miss that last semester of teaching because I had a nice, small class that loved to participate, and they were all so supportive. They would study together. I remember at the end of class, right before a test, they’d say, ‘Hey whose room are we studying in tonight?’ They actually cared and they wanted to succeed.” Part of what gave the students this motivation is the level of care and encouragement Brianna showed. In addition to improved teaching methods, one-on-one help, and review sessions, she made sure to keep students informed of their progress, pushing them to succeed. “If they had a D, and it was close to a C, I would show them some things that they could do, like assignments they needed to work on, or what they needed to do to boost their grades on the next tests.” Just like the students in her K-12 outreach courses, her USM students got the individual educational plans they needed to improve and strengthen their skills.

On top of mentoring undergrads and tutoring middle school students, Brianna had...
Brianna at work in her new position at the U.S. Army Engineer Research and Development Center in Vicksburg, Mississippi
her own research to conduct here at USM. Dr. Lambers notes that it is highly unusual for a student to complete the program in only three years, but Brianna was able to hit the ground running on her research. Additionally, the NASA fellowship would only be available for three years of funding, and this helped to motivate Brianna to complete her work quickly. She received a full scholarship for her undergraduate degree in math at Tougaloo College, and she was part of a program called Bridge to the Doctorate at Jackson State, which paid for her master’s degree, with the stipulation that she commit to completing a Ph.D. afterwards. With so much financial good luck, Brianna was determined to finish her Ph.D. debt-free, as well. On top of this monetary motivation, Brianna came into USM with a project: “I didn’t have to go through that process where normally grad students have to figure out what project they’re working on. We had already talked about that before I got there, so when I started, I just jumped straight into the research.”

Her research began with her work at Jackson State, as a master’s student. Her work focused on Navier-Stokes equations, something that Dr. Lambers, who is the Graduate Program director for the School of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, also works on. Dr. Lambers explains: “Brianna’s dissertation focused on the Navier-Stokes equations, which model the motion of viscous fluids. Her master’s thesis work at Jackson State also dealt with these equations, in the context of modeling blood flow through the aorta for studying aortic aneurysms. Her work with me was about developing a more efficient method to solve these equations in a high-performance computing environment, by adapting my previous work on other equations to the Navier-Stokes equations, which are notoriously difficult to solve.” When asked if she found a solution, Brianna enthusiastically says, “Yes, yes I did. There was a lot of hard work. Navier-Stokes equations are not easy to solve, and what a lot of people do is they make a lot of assumptions, and they simplify the problem. We wanted to do something a little bit different and work on it in its entire form without making any simplifications.” In other words, Brianna and Dr. Lambers took the challenge head-on, and their hard work paid off. He notes that “Brianna excelled by always getting the job done no matter what it was,” a high compliment to pay for a student dealing with notoriously challenging equations.

Before coming to USM, Brianna excelled in everything math-related, and math was always her passion. As a child, when she went to the store with her parents, she saw other kids asking for toys or coloring books, while she would beg for math workbooks. One of the main reasons she has continued on her path to a Ph.D. was the support her mom showed for her obvious talents. Her mom ended her own education after a bachelor’s degree, choosing instead to begin a career and start a family, but she always insisted that Brianna should power through school without any breaks. “She always told me, finish school, just go straight through, so I did. I’m glad I took her advice because I was able to focus on school and just put my all into that without any distractions.”

Now, working full-time, she doesn’t miss much about graduate school, aside from the joy she found in teaching. When asked about her time as a graduate student, the first word that comes to her mind is “sacrifice.” She often felt guilty about taking breaks or spending time with friends or family, and she had to remind herself, “I’m human, I need a break, and I’m not taking an excessive break. I’m just taking a little break, one night off, then you set some goals for the next day.” Even when her coursework was complete, and she was on her own, studying for her comprehensive exams, she made a disciplined habit of sending herself to “class” each week. “Every Tuesday and Thursday, I would go on campus, and I would study for 2-3 hours, so even though I didn’t have classes, those were my classes. I think that helped me pass on the first try.” She also had daily goals, and she kept herself meticulously organized, advice she offers to all graduate students, particularly students working on their own to prepare for comprehensive exams. “You have to pace yourself, and you have to be super organized,” she says, detailing the ways she took notes, practiced exams, and quizzed herself with fewer and fewer notes as her test dates approached.

While self-discipline and careful organization were a big part of her accomplishments, Brianna credits part of her success to her mentors, three in particular who have been essential to propelling her on toward her goals. As an undergrad at Tougaloo College, Dr. Ravinder Kumar realized her potential early on and encouraged her to be a more well-rounded student. He also had her cover his classes if he needed to attend a conference or miss class, and she got some of her initial teaching experiences in this way. At USM, Brianna credits two people for being essential mentors: Dr. James Lambers and Ms. Emileigh Sones. Dr. Lambers saw what an excellent fit Brianna would make in his research project, and he coached her in the application for the NASA fellowship. She credits him with helping her develop as a researcher and a teacher, while she puts much of the teaching mentorship on Ms. Sones, who directs the Math Zone at USM. She remains in contact with all of her mentors, bouncing ideas off of them and sharing her successes.

Now, she’s happy to be done with homework, finished with waking up each day and ticking off the things she needs to get done. “I love it so far,” she says. Her job as a research mathematician is challenging, but she compares it to more school. “I’m working with the air systems team, so we do a lot of aerospace work. My favorite is math, but I’m learning a lot. They give you the opportunity to learn, and they don’t just throw you into a project and say ‘Okay, I need you to produce these things.’ It’s kind of like a continuation of school. I have time to learn.” She’s looking forward to growing more as a professional: “Everything worked out to where I am because I’m actually just very happy in what I’m doing, so I’m just looking forward to developing here professionally.” As the Graduate Assistant of the Year, and now a full-time research mathematician, Brianna is turning her experience as a life-long learner into an incredibly rewarding career.

By Karlie Herndon
As the Graduate Mentor of the Year, Dr. Derek Patton’s leadership and guidance style is clearly a success: five of his mentees have gone on to obtain National Science Foundation (NSF) graduate research fellowships as well as national and international post-doctoral positions, publish dozens of articles in academic publications, and make significant advancements in the polymer sciences field in laboratories across the country. Dr. Patton currently serves as the interim director for the School of Polymer Science and Engineering (SPSE), on top of leading the Patton Research Group and maintaining a strong mentorship role. He mentors students in SPSE and across The University of Southern Mississippi campus, through programs like the interdisciplinary Research Traineeship Program, funded by the NSF. Though he spends his time in a wide range of service and activities on campus and in national organizations, Dr. Patton’s passion is clearly centered on ensuring his students’ success.

Originally from Attalla, Alabama, Dr. Patton grew up knowing he was interested in pursuing a career in the sciences, but his path to polymers was not exactly direct. “Originally my career path was on a trajectory to do aerospace engineering,” he says. In high school, he started talking to teachers about chemistry and chemical engineering, but it was not until he worked as a technician in a metal finishing laboratory as an undergraduate that he switched to studying chemistry. “Actually, I went into grad school thinking I was going to do inorganic chemistry and then took one class [about] polymer ultra-thin films, so just seeing the application and the broad impact that polymers have on everyday life…everything we touch has something that’s plastic incorporated into it for the most part. It was that class that really captured my attention in polymers.” His graduate advisor, Dr. Rigoberto “Gobet” Advincula, was a strong leader, and when he moved from the University of Alabama Birmingham to accept a position at the University of Houston, Dr. Patton and several other graduate students went with him. When asked what qualities made Gobet the kind of advisor a student would follow to another state, Dr. Patton says that he was “a fairly hands-off advisor, but he had a unique way of using simple questions to drive you forward, but he didn’t put a lot of pressure on his students. He certainly had high expectations, but didn’t pressure or push us in a way that you feel like you’re stressed throughout grad school. The hands-off mentoring approach, it works for some. It’s difficult for others, but for me personally, I think that approach probably prepared me more for an academic career path.” By learning to ask the right questions and seek answers and solutions on his own, he learned how to work without the direct supervision and direction that an industry career might entail. Gobet’s influence not only shifted Dr. Patton’s career path, but it also—without his realizing it at the time—taught him how to be a mentor to his future students.

One of his now former graduate students, Cassandra Reese, notes that Dr. Patton “is a very supportive, engaged, and accessible professor.” Part of his policy is keeping an open door, and Cassandra points out what a boon his style was for her growth. “Although we rarely had scheduled meetings during my graduate career, his door was always open, and he was always available for me to speak to him about my research projects, fellowship applications, writing guidance, and professional development decisions,” Cassandra says. On top of these meetings, he provided her and other students with extensive feedback, which led Cassandra to publish five co-authored papers, attend 10 conferences, and win a position working with a Nobel-contender scientist as part of a research internship program in Australia. Cassandra says that though he has “an informal and relaxed approach to mentoring, he has high expectations for his research group and other graduate students in the Polymer Science and Engineering department.” Dr. Patton notes that his style has shifted over the years to better serve students. “As an assistant professor, when my first students came in, I was really hands on. I was side-by-side, in the lab, in the hood with them, walking them through synthetic procedures. As I’ve shifted from
assistant to associate [professor], the group gets larger and you start to create a little bit of a hierarchy in students (in terms of senior students can help junior students), so you can step back from that hands-on style and begin to focus on other skill sets that are not directly related to the hands-on lab skill sets.”

As he moved away from side-by-side work in the lab, he began to focus on students’ other skill sets: “writing and speaking and communication aspects—those are, in my opinion, done more as a hands-off approach, where I can engage with students through the feedback process to help them learn how to write and communicate better.” A major part of communication, as he puts it, is the student’s “story.” Storytelling might be the last thing that comes to mind at the mention of polymer science, but stories are an essential aspect of Dr. Patton's mentorship style. He has coached five students toward a winning NSF fellowship application, and with so many students with top grades and recommendations applying, the thing that pushes those students into the winners’ circle is their story. “Some students come in, and they know their story, and some have a story, and they just don’t know how to express it in the context of competing for a scientific fellowship.” The most recent NSF fellowship recipient, Reese Sloan, was a student whose story was waiting to be unearthed. Reese had “all the right elements on the academic side,” Dr. Patton says, but Reese struggled with how to make his application shine through his personal statement. Through conversations and their own storytelling sessions in Dr. Patton’s office, Reese’s story became apparent. Reese played soccer in high school, and was a co-captain and then captain on the Jones College soccer team. “He was highlighted by his coaches as being one of those leaders on the team that really drove things forward from the team’s standpoint, so through our conversations, I was helping him identify the value of that leadership through athletics, and how you translate that into science and a team science environment.”

The story of how a student has participated in the community and made an impact, and how he or she will fit into the larger collaborative environment in the future, is really the key to advocating for themselves as the right scholars for the fellowships. As Dr. Patton says, “connecting your background and what you’ve done and accomplished and telling the story of how that fits your future vision of your career path,” that’s what makes for an outstanding applicant. That’s why he’s had so many students go on to success, not only as NSF recipients, but in their grant proposals and job interviews. "If I can’t tell a story of what we do and the importance of it to a non-scientist or to a politician or to someone that’s going to fund the agency that ultimately funds the research,” he explains, “if you can’t tell it as a story that they can connect with, then it becomes less important to that person, so it’s always a big part of what we do on the science side.”

A big part of being a good storyteller is also being able to listen to others’ stories. When asked for advice on how to be a good mentor, he says, "learn how to be a good listener first and foremost. I think as a mentor it’s easy to just go in and start doling out advice. I don’t think that’s always the most helpful to a student who’s coming in with issues or challenges, either in life in general or in science. Become a good listener, then you can step back from that hands-on style and begin to focus on other skill sets that are not directly related to the hands-on lab skill sets.”
to each student’s needs in order to successfully coach and advise them all. With Reese Sloan, much of Dr. Patton’s guidance focused on conversations to dig up the true drive behind Reese’s goals in the field, and Reese’s soccer leadership surfaced through both of them being able to communicate openly. When asked about other students who come to mind as stand-outs in his mentoring career, Dr. Patton recalls Cassandra Reese and Dahlia Amato. Cassandra, mentioned above, now works as a postdoctoral research associate in the Engineered Materials Group at Los Alamos National Laboratory. She notes, “I am forever grateful for [Dr. Patton’s] mentorship and support, and I hope to utilize his mentorship style throughout my professional career.” When Cassandra entered the program, she met a few brick walls in her research. She was actually planning to enter a different research group, but through their many unscheduled conversations, Dr. Patton realized that Cassandra would be a great fit in his group, and she discovered an interest in the work the group was doing.

Dahlia Amato entered the program as “a high performer coming in from undergrad.” However, Dr. Patton says, “and I think she would probably agree, early in grad school, she didn’t have the highest self-confidence, particularly in her ability to engage in science and push a project forward.” Dahlia became such a stand-out member of the research group after Dr. Patton worked on “getting her to see the value that she brings to science, and again telling that story on paper so that others understand the value... it helped her self-confidence going through grad school.” Dahlia was one of the first applicants and finalists from Mississippi to apply for the prestigious Paul & Daisy Soros Fellowships for New Americans. She applied for many similar opportunities and was successful in them, and Dr. Patton notes, “The progression I saw in her from the time she came into the group to the time she left was this huge increase in self-confidence.” In other words, Dahlia came to see the value of her own story, the contribution she made to the narrative trajectory of the field, and the impact she could have through her work.

Like Dahlia, Dr. Patton’s work places him and the SPSE in an important position to impact the field, not only through their own internal advances in polymers, but through collaboration with experts in a wide range of disciplines. He says this is one of the nicest things about polymer science: “it’s inherently interdisciplinary, and you come into polymer science, and you have a background somewhat in chemistry and chemical engineering, materials science, maybe even biological sciences, depending on what your focus is. So it’s inherently interdisciplinary, but we certainly can’t do everything.” Recently, he was approached with a collaboration opportunity with a top guitarist in USM’s music department to begin working on polymer-coatings for guitar strings, something that requires the knowledge and experience of a guitarist to find the right feel and sound. Similarly, the SPSE has been doing work with biology to work on bacteria-resistant polymers to help combat the rise of resistant, dangerous bacteria. When Dr. Patton first came to USM for an interview, he knew right away that this was the kind of place he wanted to be because, he says, “It’s faculty helping faculty, faculty helping students, students helping students. It’s just that family feel, which is rare for a program this size. In a lot of cases, it’s a lot more what I would call a cut-throat approach to science, and it really doesn’t operate that way, so that was really the thing that grabbed me the most when I walked in. I think you feel that all over campus.”

After a few years serving here, in the family-like feel of the USM community, Dr. Patton says he learned what really matters as a graduate student mentor. “The quicker that we as professors recognize that it’s more about the students than it is about us...the more productive the students become.” Through mentoring students and staying involved within the campus community, Dr. Patton is actively changing USM’s story, and the story of so many students, for the better.

By Karlie Herndon
According to the College and University Basic Needs Insecurity national report from April 2019, roughly 40% of college students experience a high level of food insecurity, a surprising number to say the least. The report defines food insecurity as “the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or the ability to acquire such foods in a socially acceptable manner.” This problem impacts students all over the U.S., from Ivy League universities to junior colleges. The University of Southern Mississippi is no stranger to this problem, with many students going without meals, or staff struggling to make ends meet when emergencies happen or paychecks are late. Students skip meals to pay for textbooks or rent, and accessing pantries off-campus is difficult for students who already have to choose between putting gas in their car or food on their plate.

In spite of this discouraging information, USM’s Eagle’s Nest is a positive place; as faculty advisor Dr. Tamara Hurst puts it, “It’s happy here.” The Eagle’s Nest is brightly lit, cheerfully decorated, and filled with welcoming volunteers and social work interns, who all understand the important role our on-campus food pantry plays each semester. Just outside the door, a concrete picnic bench invites visitors to sit and stay a while, and the hallway leading into the pantry features Seymour in all his glory, a colorful information display, and a chalkboard filled with greetings. A bright red, retro-inspired refrigerator makes a colorful splash in the clean white walls of the pantry, and a radio keeps the chill of silence away with USM Radio humming in the background. Compared to the charmless roof beams and bare concrete of some grocery stores, the Eagle’s Nest is a breath of fresh air. To make it an even more comfortable experience, only three visitors are allowed at a time in the pantry. “Nobody wants to be crowded or everybody looking at what you’re picking out and taking,” Dr. Hurst explains, and in a small space, that can make choosing items intimidating. The pantry offers food items like canned vegetables and soups, as well as personal items like tampons, shampoo, and toothpaste, when available, and having some privacy to choose items like this can make a huge difference to a visitor.

In fact, the Eagle’s Nest has always been a community-based project with the hope of reducing stigma, embracing USM students, faculty, and staff, and making a positive impact on the community. Dr. Hurst is proud to note that all of the Eagle’s Nest initiatives were student-founded. “We had a graduate student who really wanted to work in the non-profit area, and she was very interested in opening a food pantry, and so at that same time, we were looking for a project for our graduate students to get more involved in.”

Dr. Hurst was there at the beginning, and she continues to oversee the pantry as graduate students come and go, including the pantry’s founding student, Jennifer Martin. “I had no idea how to start a food pantry, but I knew that it would be a challenging, yet rewarding internship opportunity,” Jennifer says. To get the pantry started, Jennifer had to do extensive research on food insecurity, food pantries, on-campus programs, and funding for organizations like the Eagle’s Nest. Jennifer says, “I was the only student that was interested at the start. My fellow cohort members could not understand why I was so excited about starting a food pantry on campus.” Even through our email exchange, Jennifer’s energy is palpable, and it was her enthusiasm, research, and dedication that got the pantry up and running.

Dr. Hurst’s passion for the Eagle’s Nest is equally intense, and she knows just what it takes to keep the pantry running. “I always say if you can work this food pantry within a university setting you can do anything, because you have double the red tape. So there’s a lot of problem-solving here to make things work. You learn a lot, and it’s eye-opening to see what kind of issues are out there, what people are going through.” In an email exchange with Jennifer, she agrees wholeheartedly with Dr. Hurst.

“Starting the food pantry got me so excited about my future career possibilities because
I was able to experience it firsthand. It also gave me the nerve to go after opportunities that may seem out of my reach,” Jennifer says. After her work in the Eagle’s Nest, she went on to land her first postgrad school job as a community impact director at United Way of Lake and Sumter Counties. “I was then promoted to the chief program officer, and I just accepted a president/CEO position at the United Way of Northwest Alabama.” Dr. Hurst remembers the work Jennifer put in: “She worked so hard; for the longest time, she was the only intern here, and it was pretty overwhelming for her. We’re just SO busy, and so Jennifer was really working on figuring out donations, and client flow, and inventory,” basically doing the job of several people.

Now, the Eagle’s Nest has a lot more help from interns and volunteers, but the most important aspect from the start, aside from the people, was the space. It was essential to have a space that would be accessible to visitors, comfortable for browsing and choosing items, and large enough to store the many items that come through each semester. Dr. Hurst, gesturing to the storage area of the pantry, notes that it is often filled to bursting, particularly after food drives or large donations from local organizations. “Delta Sigma Theta, one of our sororities here, they do something every year for us. Our music department has been a huge help to us; they did some food drive concerts for us. The college of humanities, Dr. Max Grivno, he does a lot of food drives for us.” These are just the on-campus organizations Dr. Hurst can name off the top of her head, and nearly every month, more organizations hold donation drives.

Off-campus organizations regularly get involved as well. The local branch of Venture Church often does food or monetary donation drives for the pantry, with one in October that saw thousands of participants. A drive of this size can mean several thousand pounds of food for the pantry, or money to fund things like freezers or purchases of specific high-demand items. Dr. Hurst notes that the Eagle’s Nest also has “a partnership with Extra Table here in Hattiesburg, so they make a delivery once a month. We just got a delivery, and it was boxed milk, some packaged chicken breasts, soup, I think we got more black-eyed peas, which aren’t our favorite because students don’t know how to cook them.” As part of the pantry’s offerings, a custom-made cookbook sits on the table, ready for visitors to use to make the most of items, such as black-eyed peas. Though many students aren’t sure how to cook with this ingredient, many staff are, Dr. Hurst points out.

Jennifer was careful to create a pantry that would serve USM to the best of its ability. “I contacted other campus food pantries and learned their best practices, and some of their pitfalls. Once I had a solid understanding of the need and structure of a campus pantry, it was time to scale it to our USM culture,” Jennifer says. While our campus is not unique in its
level of food insecurity, it does have some distinguishing characteristics. Dr. Hurst notes that “we have a lot of international students that come in here. The interesting thing about international students is they're really restricted from what they can do: they can't work off campus. If they do work, they can only work a certain number of hours. Most of them don't have family support here. So we try to work with as many international students as needed or as possible. We provide spices to help bridge that country-of-origin-to-United-States food.”

Many risk factors can impact students’ food security, and some of those factors are slightly more common at USM, while different risk factors might be more prevalent in other communities. Two risk factors include being a first generation college student, or having low income. Dr. Hurst notes that only about half of the visitors to the Eagle’s Nest visit more than once, which tells her that the pantry is often filling temporary gaps where needed. Many first-generation college students may budget for tuition and books and even sign up for a meal plan, but there may be gaps when loans don’t come through when students expect, or when other expenses, like family emergencies, eat into cash reserves. Dr. Hurst recalls one staff member whose family had to put all their ready money into gas money, driving back and forth from Hattiesburg to Jackson while their child received medical treatments. She says of students in particular, “We’re really here to be of temporary assistance to keep them in school, so they don’t say this is too hard, I should just work and just leave. We really want them to stay and graduate.”

To further assist the USM community, the pantry participates in several programs to ensure that students, staff, and their families have what they need to remain a part of USM. Swipe Out Hunger is one such program with participation from campus food pantries all over the country. Students with meal plans get several “guest swipes” per semester, and with Swipe Out Hunger, students can donate up to two of those swipes, which will otherwise disappear if they go unused. The program is a partnership among Eagle’s Nest, Eagle Dining, and Aramark. “Aramark holds them in a sort of pot, and they will match those swipes. So if we gather 400, then we will have 800,” Dr. Hurst explains. “They’re redistributed to students without meal plans and staff who just need a meal in the Fresh. It makes you feel less ostracized, to be able to go in and eat with other people; it’s a social connection and a connection to the campus. That’s an important program. We do that in spring and fall.” This year, Eagle’s Nest partnered on this program with the sorority Delta Gamma, and unmatched, they gathered over 700 swipes, which means more than 1400 swipes to redistribute within our community.

All of these programs are things graduate students were passionate to get the university involved in, and Dr. Hurst is proud to give them credit for innovative ideas that are working well on campus. Another such initiative is the Backpack Program. Eagle’s Nest partners with the Center for Child Development on campus, and together, they fill backpacks with weekend-ready supplies for faculty, staff, and students with children. It’s meant to help families get through the weekend without going hungry, and it’s a fun way to provide assistance and make sure kids get the nutrition they need. Families sign up to participate, and depending on the age of their children, the backpacks might contain diapers and formula, or food for breakfast, lunch, and snacks.

One major initiative on campus is the Eagle’s Nest’s partnership with the Office of Sustainability, which conducts dorm move-out days each semester. In addition to collecting items like discarded microwaves and forgotten textbooks, the move-outs have become a windfall for the pantry. “In the spring [of 2018], we got 1,700 pounds of food. So that’s what would have gone to waste in the dorms. Of course it’s very labor-intensive; we’ve got to go through all of it, and we can’t use all of it. But that’s still a huge amount of food that we’re able to use and then redistribute to people that need it. This whole room was full. I mean it was mounded everywhere.” Dr. Hurst notes that things like expired or open foods are removed, but anything that appears to be safe and sealed is fair game. “We’ve gotten things that I had no idea what it was; I’d never seen it before and had to Google it, but it wasn’t expired and I still put it out there, and there were people who knew what it was,” she says, laughing.

“One other thing we do that I’m pretty proud of is we have a Thanksgiving meal every year,” Dr. Hurst says. “We open it up to volunteers and our clients. Carterville Baptist Church in Petal has been cooking the food, so last year, they did something like two turkeys and a ham and all the side items, mac and cheese and greens and sweet potatoes.” It’s a nice way for people to gather on Thanksgiving and enjoy a meal together, taking part in that important social aspect of dining. Volunteers serve the food, and visitors choose what they want. “We don’t make assumptions about what people eat,” Dr. Hurst explains. This event had roughly 60 participants in 2018, and she says international students really enjoy it, many of them experiencing this American tradition, and possibly the taste of turkey, for the first time. “They’re like, ‘Is it the real Thanksgiving meal with that bird like in the pictures? Yes, it is!’”

While the pantry does plenty of outreach, Dr. Hurst says the best thing people can do to help out is to tell people about the Eagle’s Nest. “Word of mouth is really important,” she says, but it’s also helpful to just stop by, bring friends, and make sure faculty know about the service. Professors can include information about campus food pantries on syllabi, to ensure students know it exists. And, of course, the pantry is always open to donations.

By Karlie Herndon
Challenges in Communication: Maintaining Relationships in Beijing and Mississippi

Spend an hour with Amy Ellefson, and you’ll find yourself wishing you had more time with her. This Ph.D. candidate is a world traveler, a mother of five, an interstate student commuter, and an advocate of LGBTQ+ rights. In just an hour with her, this interviewer walked away with better tactics to handle conflict, a clearer understanding of cultural differences in communication, and possibly even a cured cold. Amy Ellefson just makes you feel better.

Born in North Central Iowa in a tiny town called Rockford, Amy now lives with her husband and children in Omaha, Nebraska, where they’ve been located for 26 years, and she spends bursts of time here in Hattiesburg to conduct her doctoral work and fulfill her duties as a graduate assistant. She jokes about not moving very far from Rockford to Omaha, but part of her research has taken her all the way to Beijing, China. In the first semester of her Ph.D. program, she happened to come across a call for proposals on the National Communication Association’s email thread. To her surprise, her proposal was one of only two chosen, and she found herself in China in spring 2019 at the Communication University of China (CUC) in Beijing, where she conducted research and gave lectures on qualitative research, a method that many Chinese researchers do not utilize.

Her own research involved heading to a tourist market and conducting on-the-spot interviews. Specifically, her goal was to “gather information about the conflict communication used by Chinese women in varied contexts—in this case, work and home or school and home,” Amy explains. She had trouble finding participants outside of the campus community, so she took matters into her own hands. “I just went to a market and made friends and had them do electronic consent through Qualtrics. I had a translator who worked with me to translate things for me, and then I interviewed them at the market.” Participants included nine shop owners at the tourist market as well as 20 students at the CUC.

In preparing for this project, Amy developed two main research questions. 1) “How are Chinese women maintaining their guangzi (interconnectedness) at home and work or school?” and 2) “What choices are women making daily in their conflict communication and conflict management to maintain meintze (face) for themselves and others?” The most significant discovery Amy made, she says, was finding that many of the women had a very different understanding of a short-term relationship than many Americans might. “A five-year roommate relationship was described as ‘temporary’ and a ‘plastic relationship’ unworthy of problem solving.” She jokes about having a roommate who refuses to wash the dirty dishes for five years and contemplates the implications of this finding. “I mean, maybe if we weren’t always trying to resolve things, we could let more stuff go. I don’t know! I am an ‘address it head-on’ person. I am a ‘we’re going to sit down and talk about this’ person.”

Finding that the women in the study perceived relationships so differently was eye-opening, and may have helped Amy mimic one of her top researchers and writers, Arlie Russell Hochschild, whose research for the book _Strangers in Their Own Land_ (2016) took her from Berkeley, California, to Louisiana. While there, Hochschild, a democrat, worked to understand the Donald Trump supporters in the area. Amy points out that “it’s hard to step outside yourself, right? It’s hard to step outside and go, ok, I need to understand this other thing, and even if I can’t understand it, there’s value in knowing about it, and everyone is important, and everyone has something to teach us.” This is a lesson that Hochschild has taught her, and a method of research that Amy is happy to imitate.

Amy did embark on more research that took her through a similar process of getting to know people here in the South, research that she is currently transforming into her dissertation. In spring 2018, Amy received a $700 grant from the Committee on Services and Resources for Women at

Amy welcomes students to the Speaking Center at Cook Library, where she is the co-coordinator.
USM, which allowed her to travel through Mississippi in the summer and conduct interviews. For this project, her main goal was to “gather information about the experiences” of people in two unique groups—transgender Mississippians and their mothers—“related to living in Mississippi as part of those groups.” To find participants, she used something called the “snowball sampling method.” By first speaking with a transgender friend of hers, Amy was able to spread her search for participants by word of mouth: one friend tells a few friends, those friends tell a few more, etc., until a “snowball” or network of people is created.

In part, her research was influenced by the passing of House Bill 1523, a bill which the LGBTQ+ community pushed back against. The bill, “which still stands as a law in the state...legalizes refusal of service by any private or public employee based on three ‘sincerely held religious beliefs.’ Those three beliefs are: that marriage is between one man and one woman; that people should not have sex outside such marriages; and that a person’s gender is set at birth.”

Amy notes that nearly every transgender adult participant mentioned this bill, which is rare in the nation—most states have rejected similar bills. The very existence of the law puts a strain on transgender Mississippians and their families. As one mother pointed out in the study, it is “difficult to talk to people who don’t believe your child exists.”

Before beginning her interviews, Amy prepared research questions and her plans for the interviews. Her questions were as follows:

RQ1: How do families in Mississippi talk with their transgender family members?
RQ2: How do families in Mississippi talk about their transgender family members?
RQ3: How do the mothers of transgender adults experience shifting identities?

To conduct the interviews with some structure, but with the freedom to allow for unique answers, Amy used four scripted questions to begin each interview, then allowed the conversation to open up naturally, while always steering the conversation toward her research questions.

As the mother of two trans children herself, Amy was very personally interested in this topic, and this information helped a lot of the transgender participants open up to her. Surprisingly, the six mothers she has spoken with were still reluctant to discuss their relationships with their transgender children, even when finding out about Amy’s own experiences. There is a lot of literature about the overlapping or shared identities of children and their mothers, especially birth mothers, who have been considering their child’s gender identity even before they were born. “Part of my argument is that because the mother is carrying the child and because [gender identity] does start so early—what are you having, a boy or a girl, how are you decorating—all of these things, societally, we tend to aim those at the mother. I don’t know this, but anecdotally, it seems like that would be a stronger connection, and I haven’t done the research on the other side [to look at the possible overlapping identities of fathers and their children], and it doesn’t exist at this point.”

In her many conversations, one thing came up consistently. “Although I have interviewed only six mothers, the overwhelming emotional reaction to a child’s revelation of transgender identity is grief related to a sense of loss. This has proven difficult to explain; however, it’s not a fee-
ling of losing a child or a loved one, but of losing shared identity and experiences.” She found these mothers all felt grief and frustration in issues of communication about their child’s changing identity in connection with their own. “There is a grieving process that parents go through, and according to what they have said, it seems to have less to do with their child’s gender identity than it does their own connected identity. It’s a loss of something.” Amy spoke with many families, and heard similar stories across the board. “I had one mother tell me, you know I have conversations with my friends, and I can no longer talk about him as he was when her name was Cassie and she was three. I can no longer talk about ‘her,’ and so there’s this switch that you go through communicatively where she had a three-year-old girl, but she now understands that that child wasn’t a three-year-old girl, and there’s this other identity. How do I talk about them now, and how do I communicate that?” Parents seem to be having a similar experience, and Amy believes this research needs to be shared to benefit others.

Amy’s work always has the bigger aim of being put to use in improving communications and resolving conflict. One of the main things she heard from the adult “children” (“calling them children feels weird,” Amy notes) was how important family support is for them. Coming out is a difficult and trying event for many young people, but even more so for trans people. “For trans folks, it’s harder, because you don’t come out just once. Every time you step out your front door, you’re basically coming out, especially if you don’t pass.” That initial support from a parent, particularly a mother with whom a child’s identity is more likely to overlap, is essential to a trans person’s future health and well-being. Amy notes that something like 45% of trans-identified people attempt suicide, which is seven times the percentage of people across similar age groups. “It’s staggering,” Amy says. “If we can figure out what makes a difference, then we can make those statistics different.” In other words, finding out what helps a trans person feel supported and educating others on how to provide that support, can be life-saving.

In a related, quantitative project, Amy is working with two other researchers to find out more about support through something called “responsiveness.” Amy explains that “in health communication literature, responsiveness is how supported, valued, and cared for you feel when you disclose something.” The researchers have surveyed trans people in 40 states and 15 countries, with about 80% of responses from people aged 18-24. “We found a very clear connection between that moment of disclosure [of being transgender] and the responsiveness, and eventual health and social quality-of-life.” Initial perceptions of support, value, and care from one’s most trusted friends and family members can have far-reaching impacts, and Amy notes that responsiveness doesn’t have to be anything major. Responsiveness can be as simple as saying “it’s ok” and reiterating that you love someone, or using someone’s preferred gender pronouns.

The combination of these two studies reveals several important implications. “Finding out that parents go through a grieving process, there should be support for that grief, and there should be help. But this person is still here, so yes, you feel like you’ve lost something, but you haven’t really, you’ve lost some of your ideas.” Parents deserve some kind of guidance or help through the grieving process, but their children will benefit from parents who know how to continue to be there for them as they go through such a difficult time, especially when support is essential to their future health and happiness.

When asked what she’s looking forward to, Amy admits that her secret hope is to take what she’s learned and turn it into a guide for parents with trans kids. “It’s pretty clear that the relationship between LGBTQ+ and their parents is critical to their survival, but [...] the situation is so much riskier for trans folks, that I really would like to have something for parents that they could look at and go, ok, lots of people have gone through this, what I feel is ok to feel, but I need to do these things to make sure that my kid is ok, or to have a continued relationship.”

How do families in Mississippi talk with their transgender family members?
How do families in Mississippi talk about their transgender family members?

Amy hopes to continue work like this after graduation, projected for August 2020. “I will be really happy to be in a position where I teach and help be a role model, help young people figure out where they’re headed or how to navigate things.” As Amy wraps up her work at USM, she looks forward to finishing the work of exams and dissertation writing, but her future goals make one thing absolutely clear: Amy will continue to work to improve gender and family communication, to make more people feel better than before their lives were touched by this passionate researcher.

By Karlie Herndon
Small Program, Big Impact:
USM’s Doctor of Audiology Program

“And though she be but little, she is fierce.” So says Shakespeare’s Helena, in A Midsummer Night’s Dream (Act III, Scene 2, Line 335), and so says Dr. Kimberly Ward, referring to the small but impressive Audiology Doctorate Program (Au.D.) at USM. Dr. Ward serves as the audiology clinical education coordinator, and she knows firsthand how hard the Au.D. students work, as well as how important their work is. With just 35 students in the program at the moment, the program is small but competitive, with only the most obviously passionate students entering the program each year. “Our admission process is very competitive, and we’re very intentional on choosing individuals who really have the passion for it,” Dr. Ward explains. They look for people “who are willing to put in the work and are willing to go out into the world, wherever that may be, and make an impact.”

As a relatively new program—the first class graduated in 2005—this small program continuously makes impressive impacts locally, regionally, and beyond. It’s the only Au.D. program in the state of Mississippi, and students come from all over the U.S., and some internationally, to attend. Many remain in Mississippi and surrounding states when they graduate, but students routinely land top jobs all over the nation, with some joining the military and representing the Golden Eagles throughout the world. One current student, Troy-Ann Mott, hails from the Bahamas, where there is currently only one practicing audiologist in the nation. Dr. Ward notes that the program has a 100% job placement rate, and all of the enrolled students pass the required national examination.

Part of students’ success in finding jobs lies in the exponential growth in demand in the audiology field. Over the last decade, audiologists and speech-language pathologists have been among the top 10 growing jobs, and for good reason. “Our profession can’t put out enough people quickly enough,” Dr. Ward notes. She explains several of the reasons behind this shift in demand for hearing and speech special-
ists. First, the baby boomer generation has begun to reach an age where presbycusis, or natural age-related hearing loss, is the norm. Dr. Ward mentions that recent studies in the field have shown a correlation between untreated hearing loss and greater cognitive decline, and so the need for treating presbycusis is real for a large number of Americans now.

Another reason for the high demand for audiologists came about because of the medical strides we’ve made in helping premature newborns survive much earlier births. “We know when they’re that young, everything’s not fully developed, so there is a greater chance for complications such as hearing loss, and speech and language difficulties,” Dr. Ward explains. All 50 states now have mandated infant hearing tests as well, to ensure early detection and intervention. Similarly, children are being exposed to damaging levels of noise with exposure to iPads and TVs, and anyone with their headphones up too loud is at risk.

With medical advances, legal interventions, and technological changes like these, more and more audiologists are finding work in every sector of the population. According to Dr. C. G. Marx, associate professor, USM’s Au.D. program has “seen a marked increase in the pediatric population that we serve as new faculty with expertise in this area have been hired. These changes have allowed us to address an identified shortage of pediatric audiologists in our state (and perhaps nationally) so that students interested in this area now have excellent on-campus opportunities to experience the evaluation and subsequent intervention activities with this patient population.”

The kind of experience Dr. Marx mentions is likely the most important aspect for the students’ success, both in the program and after graduation. Up until January 1, 2020, audiology students across the nation were required to accrue 1,800 hours of clinical experience, but USM’s Au.D. students consistently bank upwards of 2,200-2,400 hours before they graduate, giving them a significant boost in the job market. Dr. Marx notes that “students participate in the evaluation of hearing and remediation of hearing and communication difficulties with patients ranging in age from newborn to geriatric.” Much of that experience comes through the more than 1,500 appointments the on-campus clinic takes each year. “We are a very well-rounded clinic,” Dr. Ward says, noting the variety of services offered, such as cochlear implant evaluations, cochlear implant mappings, and hearing tests for people of all ages. The clinic is even able to “provide hearing aids to those who are less fortunate through a special program called Hear Now,” and faculty and staff receive a 50% discount on services.

Christine Vong, a graduate Au.D. student, credits the professors as the most beneficial aspect of USM’s Au.D. program. “USM’s Audiology program has...
a well-rounded comprehensive clinical exposure, and the faculty are experts in their fields. Their clinical supervisors are great and want their students to succeed,” she says. Their success is tied to the funding the program receives and the kind of equipment professors are able to train the students to use. According to Dr. Marx, “We are also fortunate to be able to obtain state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment that students utilize to perform these various procedures [in the on-campus clinic]. As technology has changed in our field, we have worked diligently to upgrade diagnostic equipment to take advantage of the latest innovations in our field.” Ensuring that students have access to the most advanced equipment helps them stay competitive, particularly for those jobs at top institutions and clinics across the nation.

For gaining experience off-campus, the program has partnerships with the states of Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana for students’ practicum hours; while here at USM, students put their knowledge to use in as wide an array of populations and specializations as Dr. Ward can find, including ear, nose, and throat (ENT) clinics, pediatric wards, clinics that serve adult and geriatric patients, and vestibular (related to the inner ear and balance) practices. “They can have a taste, if you will, of all those and decide their future direction,” she says. In their fourth year, students must take part in an externship, where they spend their final year of the program working in the field before graduation. Students must apply for these competitive positions, and USM has seen students find externships at the San Diego VA, the Boston Medical Center, Silverstein Institute in Florida, Texas ENT, and St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital, as well as many private practices and more local hospitals.

Several students use their time outside of class, assistantships, and practica to begin research into specialized areas; a group of three graduate students recently worked together to conduct research about the newly available over-the-counter hearing aids. The group consisted of Troy-Ann Mott, Christine Vong, and Elizabeth McCutchen. Troy-Ann was able to use the research in the annual Three-Minute Thesis (3MT) competition here at USM, where students must give a compelling summary of their research in under three minutes to a general audience. Troy-Ann placed as runner-up in the competition, explaining that “over-the-counter hearing aids has been a hot topic in

the audiology community for a while now. I heard various arguments regarding whether or not it would be detrimental to the field of audiology. Most of the discussions were between national organizations that oversee audiologists’ certification. I was curious to find out what was the public’s opinion on the matter.” The debate about these devices centers, for the most part, on their safety and efficacy; as each device is generic and not fitted or adjusted by a trained professional, whereas prescribed hearing aids would be adjusted and custom-controlled for each individual’s needs. Audiologists are concerned that people may rely on these devices rather than seek proper treatment for hearing loss.

Troy-Ann, Christine, and Elizabeth conducted a survey of “adults of different ages, socioeconomic status, and racial/ethnic backgrounds to reflect [the] public’s opinion on over-the-counter hearing aids in South Mississippi.” The team’s work is clearly of importance to the field, providing information to audiologists who may not be aware of public opinion: knowing what the population they serve might think about a particular device can only help audiologists be of better service to that population. Troy-Ann notes that “this can help improve the way audiologists counsel patients who are seeking hearing aids and thus help the patients to be better informed.”

Christine Vong worked with Troy-Ann on this over-the-counter hearing aid research, and she also worked with Dr. Ward to conduct research on a topic that interested them both: implicit bias. Implicit biases, Dr. Ward explains, are “biases that we subconsciously and unconsciously show toward others, but that’s not necessarily the way we think we feel about it.” An audiology example that Dr. Ward mentions is when an audiologist might see the way a person is dressed, assume the person is low-income, and prescribe a less-expensive (but also less sensitive) device for a patient. Without giving the patient the same options that other patients might receive, that audiologist is letting implicit bias impact his or her work with patients.

Christine works as a graduate assistant for Dr. Ward, who got the project started. Christine, who grew up in California but is part of an East Asian culture, was also born with congenital hearing loss. She says, “I was interested in this project because I have seen the effect of implicit bias in my personal and professional life,” something that Dr. Ward did not realize was the case until discussing the topic with Christine. Christine and Dr. Ward presented their research at the recent American Speech-Language-Hearing Association’s 2019 Convention, giving the talk, “Implicit Bias: Is It in Your Clinical Practice?” Dr. Ward was highly impressed with Christine’s presentation skills, and prior to the presentation, Christine “assisted Dr. Ward in collecting articles on implicit bias.” Additionally, she “collected narratives from students in the speech and hearing sciences field on the effect of implicit bias for our presentation. Dr. Ward is furthering her research on the
The Mississippi Defense Initiative Grant: 
Building a Stronger Economy

Walking through the grand entryway of the Trent Lott National Center, a visitor might expect to find stockbrokers with a Bluetooth in each ear, men and women sporting luxury power suits, and sleep-deprived interns making coffee runs and hoping to be noticed. What you’ll find, instead, is a group of down-to-earth, welcoming people, ready to share their stories and tell you all about their projects. This was exactly my experience in meeting with Andy Kilgore, the main staff member on the Mississippi Defense Initiative (MDI) grant project here at USM, which operates through the Center for Economic Development and is funded by the United States Department of Defense’s Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA).

Andy works with several graduate assistants each year, from August to August, and this year, the line-up of GAs has a diverse set of skills and backgrounds, each of them making real impacts in the defense economy of Mississippi. While they work for the grant program on finding ways to stimulate the local defense economy, the GAs complete a master’s degree in economic development (MSED).

This year, the group is actually in phase 2 of the grant. The first phase was focused on defense diversification, which entails trying to find ways for defense companies to expand their markets from military-only markets to military and civilian buyers. For instance, “Military items that could be used by the Department of Homeland Security, law enforcement or first responders; and there are always purely civilian-market-driven uses for items first built for the military,” Andy explains. When he and his team began research for the grant, they quickly discovered that defense diversification is already happening in Mississippi. “When we went into phase 2, we kind of took the defense diversification out and said we’re going to work within the military network that we’ve established, and we’re going to assist them in any way possible. We’re also going to focus more on the military communities that are around our military facilities, our bases. You’ve got a lot more military bases in Mississippi than most people think.” He quickly proves his point by ticking off over a dozen facilities and bases in the state, and he mentions additional locations later in the interview. In other words, the grant still has plenty of research and work to do in the region.

“We’re building a Mississippi defense ecosystem,” Andy says. “What we’re trying to do is make an ecosystem of Mississippi work. If somebody were to come and ask a question, and I don’t know the answer, I can push it out to somebody who does.” The MDI grant personnel excel in answering questions and making connections.
Defense and polymers might not be the
first pairing that comes to mind, but that’s
one of the projects Andy and the team have
coordinated. Geoff Carter is the president
of Hyperion Technology Group—a sensor
company in Mississippi—which worked
with University of Mississippi’s sensor
department to create a concussion monitor-
ing mouth guard. Andy’s group is working
on bringing the mouth guard prototype to
USM’s kinesiology and polymer schools,
which have worked on helmets with similar
technology. MDI has also worked to bring
Carter’s technological ideas to the speech
pathologists in the DuBard School in the
form of an anti-stuttering device. “They’re
trying to figure out if there is a broader
market for that—can they bring that out
into the economy and help people? Since
we’ve got the academics down here, we’re
trying to link them together,” Andy ex-
plains.

After retiring from the U.S. Army in
2014, Andy was working as a contractor
in Dubai. Originally from Philadelphia,
Miss., Andy wasn’t sure that he’d end up
back in his home state, but not long after
starting work in Dubai, his wife bought
a house here in Hattiesburg, which was a
strong enough pull to get him back state-
side permanently. After attending USM’s
yearly True South Economic Development
Course, Andy interviewed for and was
offered the position in charge of the MDI
grant. Since then, he’s been working on
connections among agencies from NASA
Stennis, to the Mississippi Band of Choctaw
Indians (MBCI) from Neshoba County, to
Vertex, an aircraft maintenance company in
Madison, Miss. A true ecosystem of people
and talents, Andy and the graduate assis-
tants find the right people for the right jobs
to get things moving in an economically
fruitful direction.

This year, the three GAs include Bran-
don Atkins, Caroline Cenci, and Lauren
Duke. Brandon is from Hattiesburg, and
he did his undergraduate degree in sport
management and political science at USM.
After three years into his degree, he knew
he’d be able to get a graduate assistantship
in sport management, but he was unsure
about how he might put that to use in his
future. “When Andy and I had our inter-
view, it was just a rush of information...but
he can articulate it in such a way that makes
it seem interesting.” Specifically, Brandon
looks “at the maintenance and repair of
land, sea, and air vehicles for the military
and just seeing how we can improve that
industry and use what we have.” The grant
provides unique opportunities for gradu-
ate assistants to get real experience while
they’re learning in a classroom. “All of our
Ga positions allow us to practice what we
learn in class every day,” Brandon says,
something that doesn’t happen for every
graduate student.

Caroline is working on a similar task,
but she focuses more on land-specific sys-
tems, often vehicles like tanks. “I’m doing
some industry-specific research on North
American Industry Classification System
(NAICS) codes. Each company will have a
number assigned to them, and each number
means they do [a certain type of manufac-
turing]. I’m looking at tank manufactur-
ing, or land-based combat systems.” She
researches what is currently
happening in Mississippi, and
she finds out whether there
are any resources here in the
state that might be put to use.
Caroline went to LSU and
majored in economics, but she
says her undergraduate program was more
theory-based. Like Brandon, she notes just
how helpful Andy has been throughout
her time on the MDI, and how much she’s
getting out of it. “I have gained not only
hard skills like writing and data analysis
but also communication and teamwork skills,
both of which will benefit me in my career,”
she says.

The GAs come from a broad range of
backgrounds, with Lauren Duke coming
into the MSED program with an English
degree. “I like to throw myself into things
that I don’t know anything about,” she says,
but she was “super interested in public pol-
icy.” She came into the program knowing
very little about MDI or economic devel-
opment, but Andy and Dr. Chad Miller, di-
rector of the MSED program, both saw her
potential to grow and be an essential asset
to the research involved. Lauren’s GA work
has been slightly different from the others
in that she has worked on a nursing project
for Grenada, Miss., and a real estate devel-
opment project with the District at Mid-
town. A lot of her work has been making
phone calls and compiling company lists. “I
didn’t really see the value in it or see what
the big picture was, but now, I understand

“We’re building a Mississippi
defense ecosystem.”
The big picture, of course, is coordinating groups, companies, and experts in Mississippi to make sure economic stimuli, a strong work force, and top organizations stay here in the state. For instance, many government contracts used to stay in Mississippi through the work of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians in Neshoba County. Andy explains that for a long time, nearly all of the wire harnesses on American cars came from Neshoba County, and MDI sees a huge potential for economic growth there through the Choctaws’ 8A small business status. This classification allows them top priority on available government contracts if they can show they’ll be able to complete the work. “We’re trying to bring in some more high-tech businesses,” Andy explains. “They’ve got a very successful construction business there, and they can partner with Yates construction, which is across the county in Philadelphia, which is one of the better nationally known construction companies in the U.S., and they can win contracts. They’ve done that before, so we’re trying to take that model and use it for other things. They’re actually opening up a cybersecurity company there right now, and that was basically through efforts of the grant.”

Cybersecurity comes up often in our discussion of the grant’s projects, but another top priority of MDI is the Blue Economy, which includes any economic activity tied to a coastline. With its position on the Gulf Coast, Mississippi is a prime location to continue the efforts of building the Blue Economy in the U.S., efforts that, thus far, have been focused mainly near San Diego in the west, and Woods Hole, Massachusetts, in the northeast. “Now we’ve got a contract trying to help Gulfport bring in a Blue Economy innovation district,” Andy says. When the City of Gulfport drew up a strategic plan a few years ago, the plan didn’t include USM’s Marine Research facilities or connections with the Navy. Now, MDI is helping the city “bring in an independent consultant to look at how to build out that part of the plan [to] update it to make sure that they weren’t forgetting what could be a very huge part of their economy.” Every year, there is an event on the coast called Oceans in Action, which brings in roughly 200 Blue Economy businesses. “We’re trying to build out a Blue Economy cluster here on the Gulf Coast. Oceans in Action is one of the big things that helps us do that. It helps us get national and international press, and it helps us get all these Blue Economy people in one place.” By networking and strategizing with so many companies, the event helps to find new ways to build up the Blue Economy in Mississippi, creating a stronger economy and ensuring healthy economic development in the future.

With the future in mind, all of the MDI team have things they’re looking forward to. Andy hopes to secure a phase 3 of the grant, and with so many successful on-going projects, we can all hope that his wish is granted. “I spent 30 years in the military working for the nation. It’s rewarding for me to be able to come back and work for the state and some local entities. I like doing that,” Andy says, and it’s clear that he’s passionate, knowledgeable, and effective in this position.

The GAs also have plans for when they graduate. “I’m really looking forward to measuring my progress and seeing where I am at the end of the year,” Lauren says. She’s hoping to receive a Fulbright in Spain, which will be a big change. “I’m really excited about the idea of moving and getting a really cool job,” Brandon plans to continue with school. “Going forward after this, I want to go to law school and get my law degree and MBA at the same time. I’m kind of looking for D.C. or New York,” Caroline says her ideal future plans would involve an internship in Europe, “but if that doesn’t happen, I would really like to go to the Northeast, maybe Boston or D.C., do some policy analysis or data analysis. I’d also like to get an MBA at some point and maybe get another master’s degree.”

Though each grad plans to leave Mississippi, Andy is here to stay. But who knows—with so many exciting projects underway in the state, the MDI’s work may be the key to keeping folks like Brandon, Caroline, and Lauren here in Mississippi.
Gaming the Classroom: How Games Engage Today’s Students

Vinay Kodipelly and Dan Childers couldn’t be more different. Vinay grew up in India, knowing from a young age that he wanted to be a mathematics teacher. As a graduate student at The University of Southern Mississippi, he designs computer programs, teaches first-year math courses, and works to improve educational materials for math teachers all over the world, all while running a non-profit math institute back in India. Dan, who hails from St. Louis, Missouri, received a bachelor’s degree in Illinois, then came to USM’s Graduate School to study with a John Donne scholar, who unfortunately relocated during Dan’s first semester. In spite of this setback, he earned a master’s degree and a Ph.D. in English at USM, with specializations in humanism and Renaissance literature. Now, he teaches composition and literature courses at Pearl River Community College.

General education, or gen-ed, courses, like first-year math and English courses, are the ones first-year college and university students often dread. “Why do I need this?” or “This is useless,” are common complaints heard in gen-ed classes. While teachers know the importance of the information and skills students learn in the class, it can often be a challenge to communicate that to students in a tangible way and motivate students to put in the necessary effort. The burden on teachers to make the classes exciting—on top of following a set curriculum, often including a required text and standard learning objectives—can lead to teacher burnout and a lack of student motivation.

With the daunting nature of this work before them, and in spite of the differences between them, Vinay and Dan both turned the challenge of gen-ed courses into opportunities to engage students in an entirely new way. Both Dan and Vinay decided to completely transform their classes through the use of games and visualization of their courses’ oftentimes intangible content.

Vinay, a graduate assistant in the Center for Science and Mathematics Education, explains that a rigorous education and nothing but a chalkboard in the classroom were the norm for him growing up. Speaking of his education in India, he says that “if you wrote a very big problem on the board, and if you asked me to solve it, I would solve it easily, but if you asked me where you could apply it, I would have no idea at all. There were talented people who were able to connect to real-world applications depending on their mentorship, depending on the education they had, but that was a once-in-a-while thing.”

Once he began teaching students here in the U.S.—beginning in Colorado and then moving here to Mississippi—he found that students trained in American educational systems have been given more exposure to the application of concepts, but less of the foundation in the theory, and less focus on the importance of learning the concepts before trying to apply them. “I make them visualize right from the beginning. That is where the seed kind of started, so then I started finding ways to visualize, then I ended up getting an idea of how [we could] visualize everything in a game,” he explains.

Finding ways to present material in different and compelling ways was important for Vinay when he began teaching in the U.S. He struggled to convince his first-year algebra and calculus students to see the useful and exciting applications of the math they were learning, so he developed a game for them to play that takes them through all of the math on their final exam. The students can take a virtual person through a sort of obstacle course, using equations to calculate things like slope in order to move on to the next section of the game. “Students should enjoy it. If they’re not
Vinay facilitates students in each lesson through some form of visualization of theoretical math concepts. He says that students come to him often with questions about applying concepts, and he happily jumps into researching ways they could put it to use in their real lives; he also has each student complete a project in which they apply mathematical concepts in their own majors, and they share their ideas with the class. He works with students in each lesson to apply what they’re learning to real-world entertainment scenarios, like building roller coasters. “I teach calculus normally with just a board...and teaching the same thing by starting the lecture with okay, how about we build a roller coaster today, using calculus? That makes quite the substantial difference.” Even with just a whiteboard in front of him, he might draw a stick-figure walking a few miles to illustrate distance. He says, “It starts with a question and ends up with a very nice environment where students actually learn.” With so many students coming into higher education with the internet, TV, iPads, and smartphones at their fingertips, rather than fight the growing changes in learning preferences, Vinay finds ways to communicate with a generation of learners who have grown accustomed to discovering information visually.

The game aspect is one that is particularly compelling to students, as Dan Childers discovered. When Dan began working at Pearl River Community College, he encountered a stark lack of enthusiasm among his World Literature students. “Talking to 24 people and having four that are with you is kind of depressing,” he jokes. “When it’s something that you really love and then you get such indifference, that hurts a lot more.” He was on the verge of giving up on teaching literature, when he had an idea that changed his teaching style forever.

As part of an orientation course Dan taught, which required students to join a campus club, he discovered that most of the clubs were focused on academic interests, but very few were just for fun or hobbies. “The video game club [I decided to create] was a huge success. It became the biggest club on campus with about 40 people that showed up at every meeting, and a lot of those students got to know me as an instructor because of the video game club.” After so much success with the club, and as a nearly last-ditch effort, he decided to “gamify” his classes.

As an avid gamer himself, Dan had a lot of experience playing immersive video games and role-playing games like Dungeons & Dragons, which require a deep involvement in the characters and the world of the game. He wanted something immersive for his class as well, and his first attempt at gamifying was an application of a fantasy-themed game to his World Literature course. He was about two weeks into the course, getting little enthusiasm from the students, and he just decided to give it a try. The course is based on Joseph Campbell’s theory of “the hero’s journey”; Campbell was a scholar “who originally looked at hero literature and mythology around the world and determined that a lot of it has a lot of similarities.” After initial success in the course, Dan has been adding to and tweaking it over the past four years. The gamification elements include a fantasy shop, in which students can make purchases of items that will be helpful for them in the course. “They get the money to buy those things through doing various side exercises and side quests.” For example, a student might purchase a word-count reduction on an up-coming paper or a make-up date for a late essay, and side quests include activities like taking online quizzes or visiting the Writing Center with an essay draft.

The course also includes a card game, which Dan continues to work on each semester. “That’s probably my favorite thing, honestly,” Dan admits. Throughout the semester, the students must read the assigned literature, and the card game requires them to know the characters in the literature inside and out. “When we’re reading mythology, they’ll get Isis and they’ll get Hercules [for example], so they get the card, and then we decide in class how to distribute the points. We give each character maybe 15 points total, and we’re like, okay, how smart is this character, how strong is this character, how much willpower do they have, how lucky are they, what’s their status in life,” etc. Distributing the
points is a way to discuss the story and the characters, the various plot points, and the characters’ actions and their consequences. This method of learning the materials has been wildly successful in the course, particularly with non-traditional students who might find the other gamification elements less compelling. One semester, one of Dan’s students dropped all of his other courses, but continued to come to World Literature in order to play the collectible card game. The student mastered the game to such a degree, learning every character by heart, that he was able to pull a C grade up to a B on the final exam. Not only that, but the student continues to come to Dan’s office semester after semester to play the game and collect new cards. “He plays over 100 games a semester even though he isn’t in the class.”

Dan also found the gamification method was compelling for himself as an instructor, and he dove into creating a completely different theme for his composition course. He structures the course as a reality TV game show called The Hustle, and he acts as host, even going so far as to pretend to be a club bouncer in the hallways before class, complete with “diamond-encrusted Elton John sunglasses” and a “guest list” clipboard. Students participate in the “seasons” of the show, and as the course is focused on media culture, it’s easy to incorporate selfies and celebrities into the curriculum. With pop music and a disco ball entrance walk for each student, the class even garners the attention of passersby. “One time my chair was walking by, and a student was walking by at the same time, and they said, what class is that? I want to be in that class!” Students earn money in this class through media-related or writing-related exercises, like sending Dan a photo of themselves in a group of people who are “alone together,” which means that they’re in the same space, but completely absorbed in their phones or computers—a recent media phenomenon that the students learn about in class. Students can make enough class cash to buy the “Kardashian Brunch,” which means they show up for the final exam, eat a donut, drink a bottle of water, and get an A. “Now that’s very expensive, that costs $25,000, which is about 75-80 extra assignments they have to do, but this past semester, half my students did it.”

In anonymous surveys, Dan says a staggering 94% of students prefer the gamified class over a traditional course. Not only that, but it’s been a way to draw in students that wouldn’t be motivated through traditional methods. “The advantage, from my perspective, is, it has a lot more flexibility as a classroom experience,” Dan says. Even an A student wants to have a donut for the final exam, and through the many side exercises they do, every student is experiencing writing and communication in new ways, perfecting their “hustle,” as it were.

Dan plans to continue tweaking his courses and has even begun doing some negotiating recently, through something like a bet. In weekly check-in meetings with the students, Dan can motivate them to put in some extra effort in certain areas by betting them to go the extra mile. He might say, “You didn’t do so great on the last reading quiz. If you can get an A on the next reading quiz, I’ll give you $1000.” It’s a way to direct each student into more productive efforts, and to give them chances to succeed in the game.

While Vinay’s methods may not have the same whole-course makeover that Dan’s does, his methods, like Dan’s, have made an impact for students. Vinay is set to graduate this academic year, and he’s hoping to land a job where he can continue to create educational mathematics materials that will engage and motivate students. When asked if he might take a position in a movie or game-design company, he says, “I did get some job offers in software development [after completing my master’s degree], but I didn’t go for them because I know I want to be a mathematics educator.” On top of going on the job market, Vinay says, “I want to expand my active learning institute” in India by offering students more opportunities beyond career paths in engineering “through application-based courses” and training for “industry-related jobs.”

It’s clear that Dan and Vinay are onto something, and as students representing USM’s Graduate School, they show the creativity and innovation in which our graduate students excel.

By Karlie Herndon
Graduate Alumni Spotlight:
Our Impact on the Greater Community

Aman Kaur
Master of Public Health, emphasis in Epidemiology and Biostatistics, 2017

Current Position and Job Duties: Research biostatistician at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. My work entails statistical analyses and study designs of biomedical, nutrition, social studies data and the like. The dual-major MPH degree directly influences my work: I utilize my epidemiological knowledge to assist and improve the study designs and methods of the researchers (faculty, Ph.D. students, and post-docs on-campus).

Highlights at USM Graduate School: Dr. Elaine Molaison generously mentored me and shaped my non-technical skills that parallel using emotional intelligence at work apart from crude intelligence. Dr. Hwanseok Choi was my program advisor and mentor. I highly value his professional advice, challenges in classrooms, offered opportunities, and tips for job hunting. Ms. Suzanne Omran (director, ISSS) encouraged me to keep going during my down times and was one of the few people who constantly cheered for me to jump higher. International students need this kind of encouragement! Ms. Vickie Reed (program coordinator) offered me practical advice and suggestions whenever I needed.

Advice to Graduate Students: Reach out to your mentors/advisors and ask questions, and then ask more questions, and then some. Alternatively, observation is a great way to learn—try to be in meetings even if you have nothing to contribute, listen to professional discussions, observe body language, communication styles and tone of people, and above all be mindful. Your mindfulness shall open more job opportunities for you than your skill to create that complex spreadsheet.

Colin Colbourn
MA in War and Society, 2009
Ph.D. in U.S. History, 2018

Current Position: Lead historian for Project Recover, a non-profit dedicated to locating and recovering missing military personnel from American conflicts

How USM Prepared Colin: At USM, I not only received an education from one of the best military history programs in the United States, but I was also able to conduct research and travel the world with the support of my professors and the History department. My extensive research at archives around the country, funded in part by departmental travel grants, and my travel to former places of conflict around the globe such as Italy, Saipan, Iwo Jima, and Vietnam, made me a competitive candidate for a fellowship with the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), which I began in 2013. When I started with Project Recover in 2016, my work at USM and the completion of my Ph.D. was important because education is one of our core values, and our close partnerships with universities meant that I had a tremendous amount of support to reach the finish line and represent USM within my organization.

Advice to Graduate Students: I sought every opportunity I could to travel, both in the U.S. and abroad, for research and professional development. While our professors can help us tap into some great networks, I often tried to create other networks, even non-traditional networks, that could help me once I emerged from USM and left Hattiesburg. These could include working with colleagues from other fields, going to small conferences where you can spend more time with the attendees, and actively seeking out international networks.
Callie Branstiter  
*Master of Library and Information Science, 2014*

**Current Position:** Learning and development specialist at SRI International, a leading research and development company in Menlo Park, California

**Highlights at USM:** I was fortunate to complete a number of practicums as part of my graduate course work. I completed an internship at the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art in Washington, D.C., as well as an internship at the deGrummond Children's Literature Collection at USM. These practicums helped me get valuable experience under my belt. I also really enjoyed working as a graduate assistant in the School of Library and Information Science at USM in Hattiesburg.

**Advice to Graduate Students:** Make plans. Don't be afraid to consider a career path that looks different from other graduate students in your program. Although my job title is no longer “librarian,” I still do many of the same things that I did during my time as a librarian and have expanded my overall opportunities for career growth.

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Chris Gillen  
*Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology, 2018*

**Current Position:** I am currently a psychologist working in the Forensic Evaluation Service for the South Carolina Department of Mental Health. In this role, I conduct court-ordered evaluations, including competency to stand trial, criminal responsibility/capacity to conform, and sexually violent predator (SVP) evaluations for the state.

**Highlights at USM Graduate School:** One of the most significant highlights I have as a graduate student was when Dr. James Coyne visited USM as part of the Hildman Colloquium in Psychology. His presentation focused on the importance of critically examining scientific research and scientific skepticism, values that have profoundly shaped my own beliefs of what it means to be a competent psychologist.

**Advice to Graduate Students:** Remain open to opportunities and experiences that arise during graduate school. The goals people enter with in graduate school do not necessarily equate with the goals they have as they walk across the stage at graduation.

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Jennifer Hooper  
*Master of Science in Economic Development, 2019*

**Current Position:** Business attraction specialist for Wabash Valley Power Alliance, a generation and distribution electric cooperative that is headquartered in Indianapolis

**Highlights at USM Graduate School:** I had the pleasure of working as a graduate assistant with the Trent Lott National Center, which provided me the opportunity to conduct research and complete in-depth reports for businesses, government-funded agencies, and other types of organizations throughout the Southeast. This work experience allowed me to capitalize on the skills and research tools that I was learning from the MSED courses and provided a year of work experience on my résumé that was relevant to my career aspirations.

**Advice to Graduate Students:** Take time to understand your strengths and weaknesses, then create a strategy to enhance your strength set, which will offset your weaknesses. No one knows everything, so never be afraid to admit that you don’t know something, but always be willing to learn. Carry yourself with confidence but always remain humble and learn what sets you apart from others, and use that to your advantage in every way possible.
Elise Jordan Juergens, Ph.D. student, Nursing (Leadership). Juergens’s research examines self-care and self-sacrifice among medical-surgical nurses. Nurses often deny themselves basic self-care needs, but this research reveals that nurses care for themselves in many abstract ways. The study also found that nurses take care of each other through collaborative self-care.

Morgan Watkins Bradwell, M.S.W., Social Work. Bradwell has worked on numerous research projects that have examined health and behavioral health among Mississippi residents. She graduated in May 2019 and is currently working at USM as a research coordinator with the School of Social Work.

Ashleigh N. Bristol, Ph.D., Polymer Science and Engineering; Three Minute Thesis Grand Champion. Bristol’s research focuses on determining the structure/binding interactions between bio-inspired polymers and various proteins in vitro. Bristol defended her Ph.D. in August 2019 and is currently a post-doctoral fellow at Merck.

Mollie Clair McKay Johnson, Au.D. student, Audiology. Johnson gained over 2,000 hours of clinical experience doing her practicum at the G.V. Sonny Montgomery VA in Jackson and at a variety of other clinics. She is now working as a clinical audiologist at Ear, Nose, and Throat Physicians of North Mississippi.

William Hunter Holt, Ph.D. student, Criminal Justice. Holt’s dissertation is a qualitative analysis of former and current criminal offenders and addicts who all attend the same church. The research project also examines how the church has reached out to such persons, attracting them to visit and then retaining them as regular participants and members.

Andrea E. Blake, Ph.D. candidate, Higher Education Administration. Blake’s research focuses on intersectionality and student development of traditionally marginalized groups in higher education contexts. Her goal is to contribute to giving voice to silenced identities and contribute to social change among underrepresented student populations.

Nelson is a graduate assistant within the school assisting professors and administrators with their various research projects, as well as serving as the College of Nursing and Health Professions’ student senator in the Graduate Student Senate.

Mary A. Stephens, Ph.D. candidate, English. Stephens’s project explores the young, non-normative body in young adult literature, and questions the ways in which disability and weight are perceived and treated in young adult texts. She seeks to present a more developed perspective of the young body and its relationship with disability.

Laura W. Whitmore, Ph.D. student, Marine Science (Marine Chemistry). Whitmore’s project uses the distributions of various trace metals to help unravel the sources of material, including water, in the Arctic Ocean, to help us understand how changing temperatures might influence the Arctic and ocean circulation and climate.

Leah Danielle Williams, M.S. student, Sport Management. After graduation, Williams plans to pursue a career in collegiate sports marketing by obtaining a job within a university athletic marketing department. She notes sports have always been a major passion, and she is looking forward to years of doing exactly what she loves.
USM Graduate Enrollment, Fall 2019-20

Number of Graduate Students Enrolled by Country

- Angola, 1
- Argentina, 3
- Australia, 4
- Bahamas, 4
- Bangladesh, 7
- Barbados, 1
- Botswana, 1
- Brazil, 24
- Cambodia, 1
- Cameroon, 3
- Canada, 5
- China, 28
- Colombia, 8
- Congo, The Democratic Republic of, 1
- Costa Rica, 1
- Cuba, 2
- Ecuador, 4
- Egypt, 5
- El Salvador, 2
- Estonia, 1
- Ethiopia, 4
- Fmr. Yugoslav Rep. of Macedonia, 1
- France, 2
- Georgia, 2
- Germany, 2
- Ghana, 9
- Guyana, 1
- Honduras, 22
- Hungary, 1
- India, 50
- Iran (Islamic Republic of), 3
- Italy, 1
- Jamaica, 5
- Japan, 7
- Korea, Republic of, 3
- Kuwait, 4
- Malta, 1
- Mexico, 6
- Morocco, 1
- Nepal, 71
- Netherlands, 1
- Nigeria, 31
- Pakistan, 14
- Panama, 3
- Peru, 6
- Philippines, 2
- Poland, 2
- Portugal, 1
- Puerto Rico, 2
- Republic of Serbia, 1
- Saint Lucia, 1
- Saudi Arabia, 7
- Singapore, 1
- Slovenia, 1
- South Africa, 1
- Spain, 7
- Sri Lanka, 3
- Sweden, 1
- Switzerland, 1
- Taiwan, Province of China, 6
- Thailand, 6
- Trinidad and Tobago, 2
- Tunisia, 1
- Turkey, 4
- United Arab Emirates, 2
- United Kingdom, 13
- United States, 13,681
- Uruguay, 1
- Uzbekistan, 1
- Vietnam, 4
- Virgin Islands (British), 1
- Yemen, 1
- Zimbabwe, 2

USM Graduate Students by Ethnicity

- Asian: 2%
- Black or African American: 17%
- Hispanic/Latino: 3%
- Nonresident Alien: 6%
- Two or more races: 2%
- White: 69%

USM Graduate Students by Sex

- Female: 64%
- Male: 36%
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1. Gather documents, including recommendation letters
2. Submit application and $60 application fee
3. Request graduate exam scores, i.e. GRE scores (if required)
4. Submit official transcripts

*For more information, and to begin your application, visit [usm.edu/graduate-school](http://usm.edu/graduate-school).*