Special Issue: A Focus on Women
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sampling the Archival Sea</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Assistant of the Year Rachel Mugge provides a closer look at her research on deep-sea microbiology.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Magic of Mentorship</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jameela Lares, PhD, explains how her path to becoming the Graduate Mentor of the Year was filled with surprises.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thriving Places, Thriving People</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet two alumnae whose training in the Master of Library and Information Science program has allowed them to meet the challenges of today’s information users.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hattiesburg History</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two USM history students explore the legacy of Black women’s activism in 1960s Hattiesburg.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding Perception</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn more about brain and behavior PhD candidate Catherine Dowell’s work with sight, touch, and the “feelies.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hearing the Past</strong></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read about how two female faculty are leading the way in major history and digital humanities projects at USM.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Designing to Forget</strong></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore the transformative art of USM’s Master of Fine Arts in theatre with an emphasis in design and technology.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2020 Hall of Fame</strong></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Join us in celebrating graduate student excellence in this year’s Graduate Student Hall of Fame.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graduate Alumni Spotlight</strong></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two USM alumni provide glimpses of their careers and insights into having the best graduate experience possible.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>USM Graduate Enrollment</strong></td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See how our enrollment numbers have grown for 2020-21.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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A note about the images in this issue: photos on pages 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 25, and the back cover were provided by the USM Image Center. Unless otherwise stated, all other images were provided by interviewees. We appreciate our interviewees’ willingness to share images when safe in-person photography was not possible this year.
Welcome from the Dean

Since the first issue of Arete was published in the winter of 2017, the purpose of the Graduate School magazine has been to disseminate the accomplishments of our graduate students and faculty to a broad audience and to showcase the innovative and diverse research, creative activity, and undergraduate instruction they engage in each day. Previous stories have included scholarship and graduate programming in all academic colleges, featuring student and faculty collaborators in disciplines ranging from the arts to the physical sciences.

This issue has the same goal, but with a special twist—in solidarity with the centennial celebration of the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution on August 18, 1920, which guaranteed women the right to vote, the winter 2020-21 edition of Arete focuses on the accomplishments of women. The advancement of women over the last 100 years has been steady, most recently culminating in the election of the first woman as Vice President of the United States, an accomplishment to be acclaimed regardless of political persuasion. Likewise, women’s contributions to the mission of Southern Miss—teaching, research, and service—are noteworthy. Today at Southern Miss, female students comprise more than 66% of the graduate student population, an increase of more than 26% from the previous year. Enrollment of women of color increased by 47% to represent over 31% of all female graduate students. Collectively, over 62% of female graduate students are Mississippi residents, indicating that our state economy will reap the benefits of adding Southern Miss alumnae with advanced degrees to the workforce.

Graduate students at Southern Miss are creating knowledge through original research and creative projects, and the articles of this magazine capture just a small sample of their work. With a nod to the women's suffrage movement, a featured article shares the story of women who were giants of the civil rights movement right here in Hattiesburg. Their unwavering commitment to equality, revealed by USM historians, resulted in passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which banned voter discrimination based on race. Other timely articles capture the work women are performing all across campus. I believe you will enjoy what you will learn from them. Did I mention that this magazine is entirely the work of a female graduate student? Karlie Herndon is pursuing a Master of Library and Information Science.

Happy reading!

Karen S. Coats, PhD
Associate Provost and Dean of the Graduate School
For a lucky few people, their true passion in life is clear early on. They build skyscrapers of Legos, write novels on school notebooks, or win logical debates over bedtime like a top defense lawyer. For others, their true calling comes a little later, but it is just as pronounced when it finally makes itself clear. For Rachel Mugge, her life’s passion whispered hints to her through grade school and her undergraduate years, but it was not until her entrance to the USM community that the siren song of deep-sea ecology fully captured her. “Growing up, I never had a clear idea of what I wanted to be,” Rachel explains. “All I knew was that I was absolutely fascinated by two extreme environments: space and the deep ocean.” Growing up in Ohio, Rachel didn’t have many chances to explore her fascination with the ocean, but she does remember what sparked her interest. “I did a project on Antarctic ice fish, and this is the first time I realized that living things can exist in the deep sea and that there is so much to learn about this desolate place.” This was in the first grade, and later, in eighth grade, Rachel had the opportunity to research in a university laboratory. “My eighth grade project investigated the effects of antimicrobial athletic socks. I was fortunate enough, through a family friend, to have access to a lab at the Ohio State University to plate and incubate bacteria that I had swabbed from my classmates’ shoes. This was definitely my first interest in microbial ecology.”

She completed her high school education and then a degree in biology at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Her fascination with extreme environments continued to flicker at the back of her mind, but aside from interning at a local aquarium, finding opportunities to do deep-sea research were limited. In 2016, as she approached graduation from Oral Roberts, she was still unsure of what direction her research should take. She hoped to gain exposure to coastal or marine science, and her mentors kept her broad goals in mind. “During my junior year at college, my undergraduate mentor forwarded an email to me about research internships at USM’s Gulf Coast Research Laboratory,” Dr. Chet Rakocinski was looking for summer interns to assist him on a few “ongoing projects in his benthic ecology lab, which sounded interesting enough.” She ended up working with Dr. Rakocinski for two summers, “learning about the Gulf Coast, the hypoxic zone, and the [Deepwater Horizon oil] spill.” Specifically, Rachel learned about “the effects of hypoxia on polychaetes.” Every summer, the northern part of the Gulf of Mexico becomes a hypoxic, or low-oxygen, zone. USM’s Gulf Coast Research Laboratory (GCRL) was in the perfect location for studying how low oxygen or other environmental stresses “can affect the physiology of coastal organisms.” Dr. Rakocinski and Rachel studied a specific type of organism called polychaetes, which Rachel describes as “a type of very small worm living in benthic, aquatic environments, and they are usually very abundant and can be used as an indicator species of changing environmental conditions.”

These benthic zones—or the lowest levels of a body of water—are exactly the kind of extreme environment that Rachel was fascinated by in her Antarctic research as far back as first grade. It was a perfect fit for Rachel. During her summers at GCRL, Dr. Rakocinski introduced Rachel to Dr. Leila Hamdan, “who studied microbial ecology in the deep sea and had just accepted a position at USM and was looking to hire lab members and graduate students. “As it happens, her area of research is exactly what I was interested in,” Rachel says. She spent some time working as a lab member with Dr. Hamdan, who was so impressed with her work that she offered Rachel “a graduate assistantship to study the effects of oil spill contaminants on the microbiome of historic shipwrecks while earning [her] Master of Science degree.”

Dr. Hamdan’s praise of Rachel is nothing short of stellar. "Rachel’s scientific contributions have been tremendous assets to my research enterprise. She helps me carry out the mission and vision of USM by unselfishly sharing her knowledge, creating an inclusive environment, and working with me and my colleagues to provide transformative experiences focused around our research.”

As another part of her work with Dr. Hamdan, Rachel set up a difficult and intensive experiment "to monitor development of biofilms on hull materials exposed to contaminants." The experiment took roughly four months to complete and required constant maintenance to ensure the simulation of deep-sea conditions. Her weekly monitoring of the experiment was also time-consuming and required a great deal of knowledge on molecular microbial ecology. Dr. Hamdan notes that Rachel “has also been collaborating closely with [Dr. Hamdan’s] colleagues at the Naval Research Laboratory to expand her knowledge about metal corrosion and electrochemistry, to shape and inform her PhD studies.”

As part of her work at GCRL, Rachel has also taken part in nearly a dozen research cruises, serving as a co-chief scientist on one in June 2018. When asked about these cruises, Rachel’s excitement is contagious: “Research cruises are, hands down, the best part of what I get to do!” Once the cruise is in the right location, the crew sends down a remotely operated vehicle (ROV) to be able to “see” a shipwreck. These shipwrecks are almost like a natural archive of what the sea has claimed from human sea-faring, but they also provide a rich location for learning about the types of organisms, such as the bacteria that Rachel studies, which live deep beneath the ocean’s surface. As she explains, “Processing sediment cores or deploying seafloor experiments are very
unique experiences and can serve as timely reminders of why our work is important, which can be especially helpful during tough days spent writing or analyzing data.”

While choppy seas and difficulties on board might make these cruises challenging, Rachel says she wouldn’t trade them for anything, and they also help her garner interest in the importance of her work when speaking to general audiences. “Whenever I give outreach talks in my local community of Ocean Springs, the majority of my audiences are residents of the Gulf Coast and were living here when the Deepwater Horizon spill happened in 2010.” Many of the residents recall the spill’s effects on the surface of the water and on shore, but there is much more to the spill than even the people who experienced its aftermath realize. “What many people don’t know is that some of the spilled oil from the wellhead became trapped in a subsurface oil plume and made its way to the seafloor. While it’s easy to assume that this does not matter (‘out of sight, out of mind’), I like to use this information as a jumping-off point to explain how the deep ocean environment is important because there are many shipwrecks and other built structures down there, which are capable of supporting the vast biodiversity of the deep sea, including bacteria, which is where my research is focused.”

Dr. Hamdan expands on what Rachel focuses on in her research. Her work seeks to discover if “microbially induced corrosion” of these human-made constructions, like the steel structures of some shipwrecks, “is accelerated in the presence of oil and dispersed oil,” such as the plume of oil Rachel mentions. According to Dr. Hamdan, “Rachel's research addresses the functional responses of biofilm-associated microorganisms on steel surfaces in deep-sea habitats. Her work, and her two first-authored publications in *Frontiers in Marine Science* and *Biofouling* have already made significant contributions to revealing the unforeseen consequences of the spill on the preservation of cultural artifacts on the seafloor.” While the natural archival conditions of the deep sea can preserve some of these structures for a long time, Rachel’s work is helping researchers understand how the introduction of different materials to the site may affect those conditions. This research has been so important, in fact, that Dr. Hamdan says it “contributed to my team being nominated for, and ultimately receiving, the National Oceanographic Partnership Program's Excellence in Partnering award.”

Rachel's contributions have impacted even farther-reaching audiences than the professional science community. She has immersed herself in her local community, in part by giving talks to local groups about her work. In 2019, Rachel gave her first outreach lecture to the First Presbyterian Church of Ocean Springs. The experience made her realize how much she enjoyed sharing the important work she does every day. Since that first talk, she has given “outreach talks to different audiences, including the local Genealogical Society, the Science Café at GCRL, and USM’s Ocean Science and Technology summer camp.”

Additionally, Rachel shares her time and expertise by judging science fairs. As a former science fair participant, she knows how important these projects can be for inspiring students and shaping their futures. “It is really inspiring to see the creativity that some kids have, and to see their excitement when they talk about their projects because, ultimately, they have the potential to become part of the next generation of scientists.” In her letter for the Graduate Assistant of the Year application, Rachel noted, “I have the opportunity to propel the next generation, especially young women, into science careers.”

As a woman in a STEM field, Rachel has a lot of hope for balancing the gender imbalance in these areas in the near future. “Even though there have been recent changes, STEM careers still tend to be male-dominated, and it's important to have women in the sciences because our contributions are just as valuable,” she explains. As an incredibly successful early career scholar, Rachel has the power to encourage and inspire other young women who have an interest in STEM fields. “I love sharing my experiences and career journey with young women to show them how I did it and that it’s okay to be smarter than all the boys or to be the only girl in your physics class! I think that, as women, we often feel the need to make ourselves small, but it is important to encourage ourselves and other women around us, especially in science, to have confidence in our intelligence and what we can bring to the table.” She is not alone in these views, and Dr. Hamdan has been a constant source of inspiration for the young women on her team. As Rachel says, “She leads by example and has encouraged me to find my voice as a woman in science, and I am privileged to have her as a mentor.”
Rachel has certainly found her voice. She has two first-authored publications and a third nearly complete, and she has contributed to eight more collaborative publications. In writing about her own accomplishments, she is confident and clear about her contributions to many important activities. Her peers and colleagues applaud her knowledge of the field, and she applies this knowledge through service as a reviewer for three scholarly peer-reviewed journals: Biofouling, PLoS One, and Environmental Science and Pollution Research.

Not only this, but she is an active participant in several key groups. Dr. Joe Griffitt, associate professor and interim director of the School of Ocean Science and Engineering (SOSE), has served as a member of Rachel’s MA and PhD advisory committees. He notes that “Rachel is an active and engaged member of the SOSE community, as can be seen by her involvement in Graduate Student Senate, the Marine and Estuarine Graduate Student Association, and the Women in Science group.” According to Dr. Hamdan, her contributions as a team member representing USM at the international Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation’s 2019 conference “resulted in the most successful social engagement event in the Federation’s history.”

When she talks about her time here at USM, Rachel acknowledges the challenges that graduate-level work can present, but she’s also grateful for her time here. “I actually have [my] first-grade project framed in my office, and it serves as my motivation whenever I am overwhelmed with the pressures of graduate school.” Even so, she says her “path to USM has not been straightforward, but [she is] grateful to be where [she is] right now, as a PhD student. USM has provided the tools, resources, and environment to facilitate [her] learning, and [she is] confident this has set the stage for a successful career.”

Having already contributed so much to her field, we’re confident that this year’s Graduate Assistant of the Year is destined for continued excellence.

Congratulations, Rachel, you make us all proud to be part of the Golden Eagle community.

By Karlie Herndon
The Magic of Mentorship: Graduate Mentor of the Year, Dr. Jameela Lares

Jameela Lares, PhD, English Program

She may not have been summoned to Hogwarts by owl, but something magical seems to have called Dr. Jameela Lares, 2020’s Graduate Mentor of the Year, to Hattiesburg.

Dr. Lares was born and raised in Burbank, California, near Disney Studios, with Walt Disney “presiding over my childhood benignly like a local spirit,” she says. She attended schools in Southern California in a time when California was flush with cash and heavily investing in education for its young people. “At one time,” she notes, “if it were a country, it would have been the sixth or seventh richest country in the world because aerospace and entertainment were all centered there.” In fact, her school “regularly sent people to Harvard and Yale. It was like being in a top private school, but it was paid for with all the money that California used to have.”

With such an amazing start, Dr. Lares had high standards for herself and the people around her, but she also made room for her personal life. “I was accepted into Occidental College, and just like Obama, I dropped out, only he went on to Columbia, and I got married.” She later completed her undergraduate work at California State University at Fullerton, then she and her husband lived in North Africa for several years. As a lover of languages, Dr. Lares studied French at Centre Audio-Visuel in Tunis, where she earned a Certificat d’Etudes Françaises, the equivalent of having studied French at a French University for six months. When they returned to the U.S., she took jobs teaching and working at a law firm, but she also continued her studies with an MA at the University of California Los Angeles. She then received a three-year fellowship to complete a PhD at the University of Southern California.

After completing her dissertation, Dr. Lares responded to nearly 50 job openings for professors across the United States. One of those calls was a Renaissance position at The University of Southern Mississippi. When she received a postcard from USM requesting a writing sample, she thought, “Whatever possessed me to apply to Mississippi? I had seen how horrible [some areas of the country] were to Black people, but Mississippi was worse.”

Dr. Lares has always believed in equality, and her work in a law firm in Tennessee had given her a chance to see firsthand the mistreatment many people of color in the South faced at the time.

Even so, a job is a job, and Dr. Lares went to the post office in Pasadena, California, to mail a writing sample. “I handed the packet to the guy behind the desk who happened to be Black, and he looked at it, as one will, and then his face changed. He said, ‘Hattiesburg.’ He showed it to the guy next to him who was also Black and said, ‘Hattiesburg!’ They were both from Hattiesburg, Mississippi. I said, ‘Well, what’s it like?’ ‘Oh it’s a wonderful place.’”

When she explained that she was looking at a job at USM, they told her, “Go! You’ll love it!” Several months later, she had a message on her answering machine that said not only did the English department at USM want to interview her, but that they were also so impressed with her work on Milton that they had revised the job to be a Milton professorship, a legacy hire to replace a retiring Milton specialist. That night, Dr. Lares joined a friend for dinner at Panda Express. When she opened her fortune cookie, the tiny slip of paper confirmed the events of the day: “Job prospects look bright.” She ended up traveling to Hattiesburg, and within just three days of returning home, USM offered her the job. She was the only applicant they even interviewed for the position.

“It’s sort of a mystical experience for me,” she explains. It is certainly a fascinating story, but the simple truth of the matter is that Dr. Lares is a passionate, brilliant scholar, a dedicated teacher, and she has “never met a stranger.” When she explains her enthusiasm for teaching, she says, “I find teaching a continual high. I really, really get excited teaching. I mean I’m always teaching.”

In his recommendation of Dr. Lares, Dr. Matthew Casey, interim director of the School of Humanities, explains how even the wonderful collection of items in her office, from the "small porcelain crocodiles on her desk" to "the replica coins from the biblical era," become jumping off points for her energetic teaching.

Dr. Lares has made a name for herself as someone with unlimited zest for teaching, writing, research, and mentorship. In fact, her propensity for enthusiasm was one of the major themes in her letters of support for Graduate Mentor of the Year. Dr. Casey noted that Dr. Lares’s “passion for scholarship and love of learning is especially impressive when you consider that she is a full professor with decades of work at USM.” One student recommender, Dr. Gregory J. Underwood, is the only tenured professor of English at Pearl River Community College, where he serves as English department chair. Dr. Underwood received his PhD in spring 2020 under the direction of Dr. Lares after more than 10 years away from the program. “After a decade and a half,” Dr. Underwood says, Dr. Lares was “unfailingly agreeable in helping me achieve my re-immersion into graduate study and writing.”

In another unusual situation, Dr. Lares happily became the “adoptive mentor” to Dr. Dan Childers, whose first choice of mentor (for his area of expertise) left USM just as he was beginning the PhD program. “Dr. Lares could not have been more gracious, welcoming, and committed to guiding me through the end of my program,” he says. In considering her own mentorship style, Dr. Lares speaks again of paying forward the energy and effort that her mentors poured into her, especially at the University of Southern California: “I had a tremendous amount of really good mentorship, which I always want to pass along. I feel like I have a great deal of
karmic debt. People dedicated themselves to growing me up as a scholar.” Indeed, Dr. Childers described her mentorship style as that of a “proud academic parent,” one who is the first and loudest to sing the praises of her students and colleagues.

Like her own mentors, Dr. Lares is always willing to support a student’s individual interests and play to their individual strengths. “One of the most remarkable things about her is that once she’s in your court, she’s really in your court,” Allyson Hoffman, creative writing PhD candidate, explains. “I’ve had other professors tell me that Jameela has said good things about me to them. She is one of the [kindest and most] supportive people I’ve ever met.” Even in the interview for this article, Dr. Lares—a mentor and member of my dissertation committee—took the time to ask me what I’m working on. By the end of the day, she’d found books on her own shelf that I needed, set up a time to give them to me in the midst of pandemic chaos, and congratulated me on my own achievements. Since our first meeting, she has provided opportunities for me to guest lecture in her literature courses, a great way for PhD students to get a breadth of teaching experience before entering the job market.

Dr. Lares also finds a way to work with students to create publications, something that is practically a requirement for humanities PhDs entering the workforce. As a student in Dr. Lares’s ENGL 559 Milton for Mississippi course, Kayla Schriever, English literature PhD candidate, wrote about feminist issues and gender in Paradise Lost. When the course ended, Dr. Lares reached out to Kayla to co-author an essay for a collection called Women (Re)Writing Milton: A Global Perspective. “While Jameela was well-versed in Milton’s writings, she was less familiar with current feminist criticism. Remembering my focus on gender and sexuality throughout the semester, she asked if I would collaborate with her and if I would be willing to co-author the article at 50% authorship.” Kayla says, “I happily accepted.”

As the process of writing began, Kayla says Dr. Lares “was very concerned that she not take advantage of my time. She ensured that we wrote up our responsibilities and divided them equally, and when editors unintentionally diminished my contributions or forgot to CC me on emails about our article, Jameela ensured they acknowledged my contributions.” In speaking about Kayla’s work, Dr. Lares is nothing if not impressed. “I don’t know that Kayla Schriever needed much mentoring. She was always done with whatever she had to do before I was, and she’s been very nice about it, but I finally got around to doing it and sent it to her, and, of course, she sent it back the same day!”

Dr. Lares is also wonderfully generous with her network of scholars and publishers around the world. Kayla made note of her extensive travel and that she “geniusely extends her wealth of experience and connections [to students], helping them to navigate the often murky waters of academic networking.” Allyson joined Dr. Lares for her biannual British Studies course, which takes students all over England to visit sites that are important to children’s literature. “British Studies was wild. Jameela just goes,” Allyson says. “She knows so much and has so much to share, and she did. We got to talk to people that we probably wouldn’t ever have had the chance to otherwise, like Ann Thwaite, who wrote the A.A. Milne biography,’ the main influence for the 2017 film Goodbye, Christopher Robin. “It wouldn’t have been the same with anybody else,” Allyson notes.

In discussing her mentorship style, Dr. Lares emphasizes how important her own mentors were. Even as an undergraduate, she had people looking out for her, including Professor Rosemary Boston, who encouraged her progress as a scholar. Once she began graduate school, she had mentors who—in their excitement to mentor her—proclaimed, “We’ve made you into a project!” One person in particular was Professor Larry Green. “At one time, Larry had five PhD students, and so to save time, he found a classroom, and he would meet with us every two weeks. He would just go around the table and ask where we were,” Dr. Lares explains. She says this method caused the students to think, “‘Well I can do better than that!’ you know, so he had us all going against each other, in a good kind of a way.” In addition, Dr. Green was the first person to encourage Dr. Lares to submit a proposal to a major conference, and he ended up directing her dissertation on Milton and rhetoric. “One of the mentoring patterns that I picked up from Larry Green is he used to have me over all the time. He and his wife would always have people over—he knew everybody in the world, and she knew everybody else, and they had this constant stream of people through the house.” In other words, openness, friendship, and community: Dr. Lares emulates these things now in her own mentorship style.

Dr. Green wasn’t her only impactful mentor, however. “One of the really powerful people for me at UCLA was a Miltonist named Christopher Grose. When I left UCLA, he called me and said, ‘I’m sorry you’re not here,’ because I had told him I would be wanting him to direct me. He said, ‘but if you ever need me, let
me know.’ Every six months he would call me and say, ‘I just want to remind you, that if you ever need me...’ These are great models for me.”

Because of the mentorship and the almost supernatural journey that guided her to USM, Dr. Lares has always felt she should pay forward her good fortune. “Given the history I’ve laid out for getting this job, I’ve always wanted to give something back to Mississippi for hiring me.” This was the driving force for what she hoped to be a major annual project, Milton for Mississippi, though the 2020 pandemic made the second installation of the project all but impossible. The project is a way to let Mississippians engage with the 17th century writer John Milton in a way that will encourage, inspire, and ignite a passion for language in the already talented pool of Mississippi artists and writers. “Mississippi has no lack of good writers, and I think there might be some kind of local, native love of language,” Dr. Lares explains. The project includes radio readings of Milton’s works (including one I happily contributed after some gentle coaching from Dr. Lares), two public lectures, and a day-long read-aloud of the 10,000 lines of Paradise Lost.

When asked about Milton, Dr. Lares cannot contain her excitement. She explains that he knew roughly 10 languages. He wrote “amazingly malleable” poetry. He wrote a history of England in his search for a good Arthurian epic but eventually turned to the Bible for inspiration for Paradise Lost. He also served as “Oliver Cromwell’s Secretary for Foreign Tongues, which meant that it was his responsibility—and by the way he was blind at this point—to translate and answer all diplomatic correspondence.” In other words, she says, “I like him because he’s really good.”

It’s wonderful to hear Dr. Lares talk about Milton, and to know that so many of her students and peers feel about her as she does about him: we like her because she is really good.

By Karlie Herndon
Thriving Places, Thriving People: A Look at USM’s Master of Library and Information Science

At the start of 2020, Gallup released a report that revealed a stunning fact: Americans visit libraries more than they participate in any other cultural activity. Delving into the report reveals that Americans visit libraries roughly twice as often as the next most popular activity—going to the movies—and that the youngest group, the so-called digital natives and tech-savvy millennials, were the most frequent library users.

Libraries aren’t what they used to be: hushed and stuffy spaces ruled by strict spinsters with no tolerance for noise or rule-breaking. Libraries today offer classes, makerspaces, books, movies, magazines, and video game loans. Library cafés have only added to what many in the field call the “community living room.” In the midst of a global pandemic, libraries quickly pivoted to provide curbside pickup, online story times, and social media updates from library cats practicing social distancing from their purple-haired and tattooed staff. With so much on offer, library and information science professionals’ work is more important than ever.

No longer gatekeepers, librarians, archivists, museum curators, and other information specialists now act as guides in an overwhelming sea of information, technology, and change. USM’s Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) prepares students for the demanding work of finding the unfindable, ensuring inclusion and equity for underrepresented groups, and preserving the past for future users. The MLIS is the only American Library Association (ALA) accredited program of its kind in Mississippi, and it has been excelling in student research, job placement, and satisfaction for years. In 2020, Online Schools Report named USM’s MLIS number one in the nation. With no out-of-state tuition, diverse course offerings, three different specializations to choose from, and all-online, all-evening classes that can fit into most working professionals’ lifestyles, it’s no wonder the program earned this honor. Since becoming director in 2015, Dr. Teresa Welsh has seen steady growth in the program and in “the quality and diversity of our students who are located across the U.S. We have a few Canadians in the program along with some Americans stationed abroad in China and Japan.”

With roughly 280 MLIS students currently enrolled, the program represents a huge number of graduate students here at USM. Some of the main things that have encouraged the program’s growth include “our wonderful, dedicated faculty who actively engage with our students,” Dr. Welsh explains. In addition, she says that USM’s program is unique for two key reasons: first, “a British Studies class on Libraries, Archives, and Special Collections offered each summer in London; since 2007, 227 LIS students have earned credit in this study-abroad program,” she explains. Another unique feature is that the “Kaigler Children's Book Festival held at USM each spring since 1968 is sponsored by the School of Library and Information Science. Major children's and young adult authors and illustrators are featured as keynote speakers, and about 500 librarians, teachers, scholars, and students attend each year.”

Even just this sampling of facts demonstrates the variety and diversity of the program’s offerings and the types of people it attracts, and while many people with the childhood dream of being a librarian enter the program, it pulls a lot of mid-career students and professionals in, too. Even Dr. Welsh completed “an undergraduate degree in anthropology with a minor in classical studies from USM,” as well as a year of graduate work in anthropology, before moving into an MLIS at the University of Tennessee. Like many, she had a “lifelong love of libraries and archives,” and she continued on to an LIS PhD at UT. One graduate of USM’s program, Carrie Mastley, now works as the manuscripts librarian at Mississippi State University Libraries, but she didn’t start out knowing she’d like to pursue information science either. She earned both a BA and MA in English, a secondary teaching certificate, and a Teaching English as a Second Language certificate. After a few years teaching seventh grade and then university English courses, Carrie and her active-duty military husband relocated to Scott Air Force Base in Illinois, where there isn’t reciprocity for teaching licensure. With few job opportunities (“It’s literally situated in a cornfield,” Carrie says.), she began to explore her interests to find something she could happily spend her time on. “I grew up reading books. If I showed an interest in reading, my mom was going to get me the book I wanted;
Carrie processes oversized prints from the Frank and Virginia Williams Collection of Lincolniana.

that’s just the kind of family I grew up in. My aunt was a librarian for a middle school for nearly 30 years, so libraries have always been a special part of my life." After researching schools, she found nothing but good things about USM, particularly its fully online aspect, but Dr. Welsh sealed the deal. "I talked to Dr. Welsh on the phone, and she was just so friendly. I called the general line, and she was the one who answered the phone. I didn’t have to go through three people to get to the director. She asked me about my goals, what did I want to do with this degree, to help me figure out what path I needed to go down, and she just really helped me figure it out."

One thing that made Carrie nervous was the online aspect: she had never taken or taught an online course, and she was concerned about the learning curve, but she’s amazed by how well she, her professors, and her classmates all got to know each other. Carrie was also a little concerned about doing social science research, but in the end, the program was carefully designed to prepare her to write publishable articles. In fact, three of her course papers have recently been published, something she couldn’t imagine at the beginning of her coursework. "The ability to do research," Dr. Welsh explains, "is so important in our field in areas such as collection analysis, content analysis of literature, publication pattern analysis, citation analysis of scholarly impact, patron surveys or observational studies, and historical studies of libraries or archives." Carrie notes how well the program succeeded in preparing her: "They really got me comfortable with the processes involved in developing a formal research topic in our field. That is huge for the work that I do now because I work in an R1 research institution where I have to complete research for my job."

Research is an essential part of information science, but Carrie also notes how important service is to this career field. "Everything we do is service-based. If you don’t have a heart for service, you need to find something else to do because librarianship and working in an archive, it’s all about providing a service. That’s your top priority: connecting your patrons with the information that they need to be successful." With her background in English, much of her previous graduate work had been theoretical. The MLIS was a surprise for how much practical information it provided. In addition to the MLIS, Carrie completed a Graduate Certificate in Archives and Special Collections, which included a practicum at the Columbus-Lowndes Public Library’s (CLPL) Local History Department. Her lifetime mentor and friend, Mona Vance-Ali, not only inspired her love of archives and history, but she also worked as Carrie’s mentor throughout the practicum and helped her network. Carrie eventually landed a job as a collection processor of the Frank and Virginia Williams Collection of Lincolniana at Mississippi State University, which led to her current position. There, she processed a lifetime’s worth of books, memorabilia, statues, and everything else you can think of related to Abraham Lincoln. With hands-on experience that also applied to her coursework, Carrie became an ideal candidate for her newest job.

Many other students come into LIS as their first career choice. One such student, Laura Valliant, has found the MLIS to be one of the most challenging and rewarding tasks she’d ever undertaken. After 23 years of being a homemaker and mother, she realized she needed more. Hailing from Mexico, Laura notes that her husband was a very traditional man, and he wanted her to be a supporting presence rather than pursue her own interests. And so, with just $20 in her hand, she left her life with him behind and began working as a page for a small public library in Los Angeles. "The community was 99% Hispanic, and the librarian needed a bilingual employee. Spanish is my first language," Laura explains, but she had some basic English skills. "Once I started working, I realized that I needed to learn formal English to communicate effectively, so I decided to enroll in college." Much of her work included language acquisition, but "[she] worked hard to accomplish [her] academic and professional goals." Laura’s life as a single woman putting herself through college was never easy, she explains. On "some occasions, I had three part-time jobs in a week combined with part-time classes. Other times, I had a full-time job combined with full-time school (16 credit units), but zero free time for me. However, I enjoyed every moment..."
in school and at work!” As her English improved, she also moved up the ranks of the library staff. Eventually, her colleague Stuart Goldman, a reference librarian at the Los Angeles County Library and USM MLIS alumnus, recommended this program.

One of the things that has amazed Laura about the program is just how much she learned that she applies directly to her work in libraries. “I started as a page. I was promoted as a library aide, and then supervisor I, and supervisor II, and paraprofessional, and now having my degree, I can become a professional librarian. I have passion for this career.” From her duties of checking the book drop to supervising over 20 employees, Laura’s work on the MLIS is nothing short of inspiring, but she credits so much of her success to the way the program works. In her classes, she designed websites and instructional videos, created materials for users that have gone onto her library’s website, and put her knowledge of library management theory to work nearly every day. “I was telling my [new] husband, I was excelling in my skills washing dishes and going to the grocery store. I didn’t know that I would be able to learn and manage a computer and be in a library because when I started as a page, I didn’t know what a book drop was!” Laura remembers receiving her first paycheck and realizing the kinds of things she could do with it, and her first thought was to buy herself a bed. “It’s easy for someone who has everything in life to not value those little things. For me it’s a big step; it’s a big jump in my life, thanks to the program.”

Part of her work on the MLIS involved an extensive research paper, titled “A Collection Analysis of the Mexican American Literature in Los Angeles County Public Library System.” Collection analyses examine the types and numbers of materials a library or library system contains, using those figures to assess the value of the collection for the library’s specific community. “It’s very important to develop the collection for the needs of the population. If you are in California, in a small city, 90% Hispanic population, the collection needs to be focused in that direction,” she explains. “It’s good to offer all kinds of [materials], because we need to be aware of what is in the global world,” she says, but she notes that a library should primarily aim to meet the needs of the local community in terms of interests, languages spoken, level of education, and other factors. Her research found that the Los Angeles County Public Library System is doing a good job of meeting the needs of the local communities, and she learned a lot from this enormous system’s exemplary policies, even implementing similar policies in her management roles.

The endless support from the program’s director, Dr. Teresa Welsh, has been a big part of her empowerment and rise to success. Laura calls Dr. Welsh “an exemplary woman with high ethical values, and she’s always available to her students. She is a resilient leader and a lovely person who guided and supported me to achieve my academic and professional goals. She’s always encouraged us to understand the global world. She’s patient, and she encouraged me to apply to a grant. I got the grant, and it has been a wonderful, wonderful journey.”

Though Laura feels inspired by women like Dr. Welsh and Sky Patrick, director of the Los Angeles County Public Library System, one of the most inspiring parts of Laura’s story is her impact on her daughter. Now in her late 20s, Laura’s daughter first studied biochemistry with the plan to become a doctor. Recently, marriage and motherhood, as well as a freeze on positions in California due to the pandemic, have caused her daughter to consider a different career, and she looked no further than Laura for inspiration. Of course, Laura suggested that her daughter pursue an MLIS here at USM. “She’s going to do well if she chooses to join the program, but let’s see, let’s see.”

With so many people reassessing their priorities in 2020 and 2021, USM’s MLIS is poised to receive any number of new students, eager to begin a career of service and learning. But like Laura says, let’s see what this exemplary program has in store.

By Karlie Herndon
One hundred years. In the expanse of human history, one hundred years is only a page or two in the book of time, but this past century unfolded extensive changes for the women of the United States. In 1920, our nation passed a hard-won amendment granting women the right to vote, and after 10 decades of exercising that right, the centennial of the Nineteenth Amendment even saw the election of the first woman to the Vice Presidency of the United States.

But what many people have overlooked in this celebration is the fact that this right—which was not even granted in Mississippi in 1920, and was not officially ratified in our state until 1984—didn’t affect all American women equally. Specifically, women—and men—of color had to continue fighting for this essential right for another 45 years.

Black Lives Matter and nationwide demands for racial equality raged throughout 2020, and the old adage about learning from history rings truer than ever. Several scholars in our USM community are working to ensure that we do, in fact, learn from our past, remember the people who fought for the rights we enjoy today, and recognize the people who are still fighting. Meridian McDaniel, a history MA student, and Olivia Moore, a history PhD candidate, are both working to tell the stories of Black activists here in Hattiesburg, a city that played a key role in passing the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the legislation that finally barred racial discrimination against voters.

Meridian’s work began when she was an undergraduate student here at USM, when Dr. Kevin Greene suggested she research a Hattiesburg local who was part of a highly influential team of Black women activists in the ‘60s: Victoria Jackson Gray. “She’s one of three women who were part of multiple organizations and a big part of the movement for Mississippi,” Meridian explains. Gray worked alongside Annie Devine, as well as Fannie Lou Hamer, a former sharecropper, whose speech to the Democratic National Convention in 1964 was televised, earning her national recognition. Gray’s contributions were less public, but Meridian is working to help share the story of this powerful and passionate woman.

Meridian is originally from St. Louis, Missouri, and she’s always found strength and support with other women, which is part of what drew her to Gray’s story. Her high school was established by the Sisters of Loretto: “Their values are faith, community, justice, and respect, so it’s very community-oriented. Empowering women was my high school’s thing! I got to be around all these really strong women in high school, so it all lines up that I’ve been around all these empowered women, and I’m studying a woman who was very empowered and very strong and very smart,” Meridian explains. As a history student, forward.

Gray was born in Palmers Crossing in Hattiesburg, and she became an independent business owner, selling beauty products door-to-door. This allowed her a greater measure of job security than, say, someone working as a teacher who might be fired for speaking out about civil rights. Her brother ran an electronics shop on Mobile Street, the center of the Black business district at the time. Having the freedom to make her own money and a point of contact on Mobile Street gave Gray the mobility and the home base to inform local Black citizens about voting rights, network between different organizations, and help coordinate the efforts of voter registration, a main focus of the civil rights movement in Mississippi. Women’s path to leadership was less clear than men’s, who could often rise to leadership positions through the church, like Martin Luther King, Jr. did. “Gray was a bridge leader in Hattiesburg,” Meridian explains. Many Black women would serve as bridge leaders: people who made strategic connections between organizations, leaders, and communities. For example, Gray helped bring in leaders from outside of Hattiesburg, like Hollis Watkins and Curtis Hayes, and “she helped introduce them to the churches and the people in Hattiesburg and on Mobile Street, to help integrate the different groups of people.” A divorcee, Gray was a single mom of three, working to pay the bills, as well as make local, regional, and national change during the 1960s. Gray and her cohort worked to establish Head Start, organize Mississippi Freedom Summer—a huge movement that pushed for increased African American voter registration in 1964—and even form the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, where Black women were able to rise into more formal leadership positions, bringing challenges and voicing their arguments to the Democratic National Convention.

“She put herself out on the line for what she believed in. She really put herself out for Hattiesburg to get the movement to come here,” Meridian says. “It’s just weird to me that there’s not more about her when she was this national figure.” Though Gray passed away in 2006, many
of her hand-written speeches and other documents are in USM’s McCain Library and Archives, where Meridian has happily spent a good deal of time researching Gray’s life. Soon, she’ll begin work on her MA thesis, which she plans to use as a bridge to her PhD work, continuing the research on Gray, as well as men’s and women’s leadership styles in the civil rights movement in Hattiesburg. She’s working as a teaching assistant with Dr. Rebecca Tuuri, whose confidence in Meridian has pushed her to take on challenges like graduate school; Meridian notes that Dr. Tuuri has been her main female role model since she’s been in college.

When I spoke with Dr. Tuuri about Black women activists in Hattiesburg, her passion for these amazing women was palpable. “Race was at the heart of suffrage for white women,” she explains. Many white suffragists around the turn of the 20th century used racial supremacy as an argument for giving white women the right to vote, a tactic that left Black women the task of fighting for not only gender equality but for racial equality too. In the 1960s, “Mississippi women led the movement to enfranchise women,” Dr. Tuuri explains.

Dr. Sherita Johnson, director of USM’s Center for Black Studies, first put me in contact with Dr. Tuuri. Dr. Johnson was excited to share that she had attended a month-long virtual conference in summer 2020, hosted by the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH). The theme of the conference was “African Americans and the Vote,” and Dr. Johnson noted that one speaker, Dr. Martha S. Jones, spoke about her new book, Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All. In an intricate narrative that follows Black women from the beginning of U.S. history into the 20th century, Dr. Jones clarifies several points about Black women’s fight for equal rights for everyone in the U.S., echoing what Dr. Tuuri mentioned to me. “These women were at the backbone of Freedom Summer ’64. Young people came down to get involved, and women were the ones feeding and caring for them. They did all of the work except for major leadership roles. They worked for that right [to vote],” Dr. Tuuri says, stressing that final verb.

Dr. Tuuri’s passion doesn’t stop with her research and advocacy for Black activism. An advocate for her graduate students, Dr. Tuuri put me in contact with Meridian, as well as Olivia Moore, a PhD candidate who has worked closely with Dr. Tuuri. Now, Dr. Tuuri is on Olivia’s dissertation committee, chaired by Dr. Kevin Greene. Olivia’s work also focuses on the civil rights movement and the ways that activists in Hattiesburg pushed for change in the 1960s. Her dissertation, currently titled, Fractured Activism, examines “fractures between civil rights leaders and activists and groups,” specifically in Hattiesburg. “I feel that when we speak about the civil rights movement, we sometimes have a tendency to present it as this unified movement or moment,” she explains. Another common error is to portray the civil rights movement as two-sided, with non-violent folks on one side, armed resistance on the other, or conservative versus radical activism. “You do see division, but it’s always portrayed as two conflicting ideologies, so what my research is doing is looking at the ground level at these differences between activists and the arguments and the debates and the disagreements that they were having. I’m interested in human emotion and human disputes, and I feel that these are really important to understanding what really went wrong with the civil rights movement because in the later period, you do see a breakdown of the movement and a lot of division.”

Olivia brings a very different perspective to her research than many of her peers in the History program: she hails from Plymouth, in the southwest of England, and she came to USM as part of a study-abroad program. “Mississippi was the first place in the United States that I ever visited,” she explains. “I really wasn’t sure what to make of it because as I’m sure you’re probably aware, most British people don’t go to America to go to Mississippi!”

Randall, Herbert. Mobile Street Looking South; 1964. Photo used with permission of the photographer. Housed in USM Special Collections.

Olivia absolutely fell in love with Hattiesburg, and even in her exchange program, she began the work of collecting oral histories, sitting in with other students as they spoke to local people.

Race is an important part of Olivia’s research, of course; she’s also deeply interested in how class and status within the Black communities of Hattiesburg impacted these fractures in the civil rights movement. “Sometimes when we talk about the Black community, we do paint it as a homogenous entity, and I really want to look at it more closely and show that there wasn’t actually just one Black community within Hattiesburg. There were multiple different Black communities across different geographical spaces just in Hattiesburg, one city, let alone the whole state of Mississippi.”

For the last few years, Olivia has been working alongside two prominent Black women in Hattiesburg on a project that has finally come to fruition in the form of a book. The Class of 1968:

A Thread Through Time, created and edited by Doris Townsend Gaines and co-edited by Carolyn Hall Abrams has debuted as a 2021 book by Page Publishing. Both Olivia and USM education professor, Dr. Thomas V. O’Brien, had a hand in the creation of the book. It all began when Olivia sat in with two Hattiesburg High School students who were interviewing the first class of local students who attended high school in the time of integration. The interviews were part of a joint project between the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage at USM and Hattiesburg High School. “They were interviewing them about various topics—their upbringing, civil rights—but the overarching theme that they were trying to get at was resegregation.” When Brown v. Board made segregation in schools illegal, what happened in a lot of formerly white-only schools was that, once Black students began to attend, the white students left, and schools like Hattiesburg High were essentially resegregated through white flight.

At the end of the interview—Olivia still feels such awe at the poise and professionalism of the high schoolers conducting it—Olivia began speaking with the two women who had answered the students’ questions. It turns out that the interviewees, Doris Townsend Gaines and Carolyn Hall Abrams, were looking for a historian to help them on a project. Mrs. Gaines and Mrs. Abrams attended Rowan High School, which was an all-African American school until the students started to join Hattiesburg High School. “What they wanted to do was to interview these students who were from their graduating class, which was the class of 1968, about their experiences [at the schools and] what it was like just growing up in segregated Hattiesburg. Their goal was to get all their class members who were still living to write their own memoir of their experiences and compile all of those memoirs into a book. This book would essentially be a treasure trove of information about what it was like to be Black in Hattiesburg during this period, which was really, really cool.” In the end, Olivia and Dr. O’Brien added “academic voices,” mostly assisting with arrangement and talking to publishers. “We really wanted this to be their authentic voices and experiences,” she explains, and individuals’ choices to use, for instance, “gonna” instead of “going to,” were honored as authentic speech. Memoirs included traditions like Thanksgiving feasts and Christmas mornings, as well as historical events, such as where people were when Martin Luther King, Jr. was shot.

Olivia warned me at the start of our interview that she could go on and on about her work, but she’s delightfully effervescent when she talks about the work on the book. “They’re such cool women. I just find them so incredible. And, of course, Carolyn Abrams is the mother of Stacy Abrams. It’s pretty cool, pretty historic,” she says. “I’m not even from Hattiesburg, and I’m like, gotta claim [the Abrams family]! It was my first home in the United States, so I think that’s why I like to see myself as a proud Hattiesburger.” With the book project complete and a dissertation to finish, Olivia, like Meridian, is eager to continue the work of shedding light on the real people of Hattiesburg who made the civil rights movement a reality.
Feelies. They may sound like the sensation you get when you watch a holiday romance or hold a baby, or maybe they’re something that’s off-limits at dance clubs (Warning: No feelies on the dance floor). The truth of what feelies are is perhaps even more surprising.

In the 1960s, American psychologist James J. Gibson commissioned a set of clay sculptures with similar characteristics, but they would otherwise be unique in the world of objects: items that wouldn’t be mistaken for anything else. The goal was to create small sculptures with no pre-defined use value in the real world in order to examine human perception at its most basic level. What the sculptor produced—10 unique objects that resemble the blobs that form when a child squeezes Play-Doh through her fingers—came to be known as feelies.

When PhD candidate Catherine Dowell first heard of feelies, she had already been working in a lab, “showing and handing people these plastic molds of super weird-shaped bell peppers.” Catherine grew up in Kentucky and had interests in everything from marine biology to law, but a class in high school sparked her interest in psychology, spurring her to take another psychology course in her first year of undergraduate work at Western Kentucky University. “The professor teaching it made sure to cover a lot of different areas and not just all the classic studies. What really caught my interest was the biological aspect of it, like the neuroscience. I just thought that was fascinating.” The more she thought about it, the more she began to realize how complicated humans—particularly the way our brains work—really are. Catherine recalls thinking, “that feels like something that I could spend forever looking at and never really finish. That’s got to be job security! I’ll never run out of questions to ask. It won’t get boring.” Her interests led her to major in psychology and minor in biology, and in a conversation with her advisor in her second year, she discovered that her advisor’s husband ran a research lab on campus where he studied perception.

When I ask Catherine to explain how perception fits into psychology—often touted as the study of the mind, but more concretely, it’s the study of behavior—she’s happy to clarify. “Basically,” she says, “everything starts with perception, and everything can build off of it. I guess people don’t really think about perception as psychology because it’s just such a basic thing. We’re doing it all the time, but if we didn’t know how we did it, then we wouldn’t really know how we were experiencing the world.”

She mentions how many people learn language: words were sounds before they contained any other information. Your knowledge of an apple, for instance, is in your brain because at some point you saw, smelled, held, or tasted an apple. Perception research often relies on physical reactions in the body and brain, measuring eye movements or salivation levels, but it is the first and most basic influence on behavior.

Though the study of perception can be very much rooted in biology and neuroscience, it often involves labs full of people instead of test tubes and machines, and Catherine knew she wanted to work with people. “I like interacting with the people that come in. I like doing these funny little things that aren’t at all serious, like tell me about your childhood kind of questions.”

Western Kentucky University offers a joint undergraduate master’s program that allows students to begin a master’s degree while completing undergraduate work, and Catherine took this opportunity to get a running leap into her graduate education. During that time, she had the opportunity to teach a methods class, and she realized she would need a PhD to teach someday. “I liked teaching. I liked telling people about all this stuff. You know, my family’s had to listen to me explain all of these things, and they’re just like oh, wow, sure.”

Catherine laughs at her family’s response, but her enthusiasm for discussing perception is palpable in our interview. Perception is a niche area of psychology, but she notes that it pairs well with a lot of other areas, like neuroscience and cognition, but she was trying to find a program with a little more emphasis on perception itself. She applied to several programs, and ended up touring five or six schools. When she got to her Southern Miss visit, she was exhausted. In recalling the
things like pressure, or even in the technology that allows phones to sense a light tap versus a hard tap. In part, the work that Dr. Norman, Catherine, and other perception researchers do seeks to resolve a debate in the field of perception, one instigated by the feelies’ creator, James J. Gibson. “Gibson’s idea was that all the information out there in the environment is kind of contained as energy,” Catherine explains. “We detect that energy through our senses, and the idea is, regardless of how you receive it, whether it’s through hearing or vision or touch, that information is still in the same form, still the same energy. You just have to detect it.” This is known as a bottom-up theory of perception, meaning that all of the information is a constant in the environment, but other psychologists believe in a top-down theory, in which people use their prior knowledge and experiences, as well as context and attention, to process the information they perceive. Research with the feelies and other perception studies seek, in part, to move toward a better understanding of how brains use perceived information.

Now in her third year of a PhD in the Brain and Behavior program, Catherine has been an essential part of some major research projects involving the feelies and perception. One of these projects involved creating artificial limbs that mimic the human brain’s perception of touch through other perception studies seek, in part, to move toward a better understanding of how brains use perceived information.

Now in her third year of a PhD in the Brain and Behavior program, Catherine has been an essential part of some major research projects involving the feelies and perception. One of these projects involved creating artificial limbs that mimic the human brain’s perception of touch through later studies or in other fields, like the creation of artificial limbs that mimic the human brain’s perception of touch through
aren’t working on specific problems, but Catherine explains that she and her team are looking for perception research, “When we talk about possible applications for perception research, it’ll be interesting to see.”

completely different from anything else, but we don’t really have any hypotheses about where this is going to come out because it’s obvious what they would be best for, and all of those options are perfectly valid options. We don’t really have any hypotheses about where this is going to come out because it’s completely different from anything else, but it’ll be interesting to see.”

When we talk about possible applications for perception research, Catherine explains that she and her team aren’t working on specific problems, but hoping to build the foundational understandings of perception, affordances, and even how the lack of use-goals (like finding an object to use in a specific task) impacts affordance descriptions. However, she notes that there are so many applications that perception research can have, specifically because perception is the most basic form of information relay to the brain. “Anything you can imagine, if we collect data on it, you could probably apply it at least somewhere down the road,” she explains. She mentions examples such as treating PTSD through the help of perception research, since PTSD begins with the perception of something traumatic. The lab at USM has a virtual reality (VR) area, and understanding perception is key to making a realistic VR experience for users. Prosthesis enhancements come down, again, to studying things like haptic perception, and even the design of a mousepad might make use of perception research. “People often have just one idea about what psychology is, and so, I just get really excited trying to explain to them the different things and sometimes, it’s more interesting to them than the original stuff they thought.” Speaking of a former lab member, she says, “We’ve had someone who went and worked in Boston and was working with people [with visual impairments], and they worked on a device that would fit in your mouth and give you a series of stimulations to your tongue to help you navigate.”

When we spoke in November, Catherine was excited for upcoming conferences, where she often meets some of her biggest inspirations, particularly some of the women in the field. She explains that women are “definitely pushing our way through, and at the conferences, I think especially in perception, there’s a lot of women, definitely a lot of big names. I got to meet a couple of the big name women psychologists at that conference [in the Netherlands], and they were just absolutely wonderful.” While perception is a small area within psychology, she notes that about half of her interviews for PhD programs were to work with female principle investigators. “I think psychology’s a great area for women to be in right now, and I definitely think perception is one of those areas where the playing field is a little bit more level.”

With more feelies research, a dissertation to begin, and NIH grants to write, Catherine has plenty on her plate in the coming years. While COVID restrictions have slowed down the in-person research in the lab, she’s hopeful about future research and conferences, and she’s forever excited to share more about her work and the work of the perception lab team here at USM.

By Karlie Herndon
Hearing the Past: Digital Humanities, Governors’ Papers, and Women at USM

What do scanners, stolen horses, and civil rights have in common?

It isn’t the start to a bad joke. In fact, the thing they have in common, at least when it comes to a major project here at USM, is something called the digital humanities (DH), a field that has been gaining traction with the rise of technology in education and research.

“Digital humanities is really hard when you’re trying to give an elevator talk of exactly what it is, but basically, it is using technology, mostly computers and software, to help us better understand humanities topics, and that encompasses a whole host of different things.” Dr. Stephanie Seal Walters, USM’s digital humanities liaison for the School of Humanities, explains just how much DH can help researchers accomplish, from mapping out the use of certain cookbooks in Mississippi, to digitizing gravestone rhetoric, to analyzing children’s picture books—and these are just a few of the projects represented here at USM.

Dr. Walters has been working with USM faculty and students for several years while completing her dissertation on Virginia Loyalists after the Revolutionary War, a project that utilized software to map the networks of Loyalists that crisscrossed the state. Dr. Walters came back to USM after completing her PhD coursework at George Mason University in Virginia, but she was no stranger to USM: all four of her grandparents and both of her parents attended Southern Miss. “I remember when it was time to apply for colleges. I applied to one school, and it was Southern Miss.” When she finished her BA in history, she knew she wanted to continue working with her mentors here. Dr. Kyle Zelner was one of her main advisors, and when she knew she wanted to continue on to a PhD, she “realized that the market in humanities was really changing. You have to find something to market yourself if you want to stay in. Digital humanities was becoming a buzzword when I entered my program. Dr. Zelner said I should really look at George Mason because they have a world-class DH program.” Later, when she was considering returning to Mississippi with her husband and one-year-old daughter, the DH liaison position opened up, like the “bat signal” calling her back to USM.

During her time as DH liaison, one person in particular has been her “number one customer by far”: Dr. Susannah Ural. “I’m trying to get her to call herself a digital historian,” Dr. Walters says.

“Digital humanities is really hard when you’re trying to give an elevator talk of exactly what it is, but basically, it is using technology, mostly computers and software, to help us better understand humanities topics, and that encompasses a whole host of different things.” Dr. Stephanie Seal Walters, USM’s digital humanities liaison for the School of Humanities, explains just how much DH can help researchers accomplish, from mapping out the use of certain cookbooks in Mississippi, to digitizing gravestone rhetoric, to analyzing children’s picture books—and these are just a few of the projects represented here at USM.

One of Dr. Ural’s major projects that is gaining steam is The Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi (CWRGM) Project. Simply put, the project digitizes and transcribes government correspondence, as well as the letters that Mississippians mailed to their governors during and after the Civil War, to make them available for schools, researchers, and the public to examine and keyword search the collection. At a deeper level, this project is delving into the context, concerns, and consequences of the war on average citizens, something that historians have had a hard time locating, and something that is vastly time-consuming in a collection like this one, which contains roughly 50,000 pages of documents. “It’s not that these people are voiceless,” Dr. Ural says, “it’s that we can’t hear from them, we can’t find them in the written records. The idea that sometimes the working class or sometimes the middle class or sometimes women or sometimes people of color are voiceless, it always makes me crazy because, no, they were talking, we just can’t find them. We can’t hear them.”

CWRGM is actually a collection of correspondence that the Mississippi Department of Archives and History preserved for its research and historical value. Archives have become a major resource for putting a megaphone at the mouths of individuals whose voices
have otherwise gone unheard, and for establishing historical narratives that are outside of the mainstream media. For Mississippians living through the Civil War and Reconstruction, their governors were the people they turned to with their concerns. As Dr. Ural explains, “Nineteenth century Americans really did write to their governor like we use social media.” If a soldier came and took your horse or your cow, if you experienced hardship, if you had any concerns, you wrote to your governor. “It seems trivial to us, although if you think about a woman complaining that soldiers came and took her horse, well her horse is everything. Her horse is how they plow the fields; her horse is how they have any kind of transportation. It’s a big deal. If you think about it, we would never know that woman. We might be able to find this woman in a census record, and that’s about all we will ever know about her or anybody from her world. But the governors’ papers let us into that world.”

Dr. Ural was first inspired to explore this world more deeply when she spoke with a friend about the Civil War Governors of Kentucky project. Kentucky was the first in the nation to do a Civil War-era governors’ papers project, and the Kentucky project includes correspondence from 1860 to 1865, from the time Abraham Lincoln was elected President to the end of the Civil War. Dr. Ural wanted to continue beyond that date with this project. She notes that the collection is very diverse in terms of gender, location, and economic status of the letter writers, but because of the practices and prejudices of slavery, the letters through 1865 are almost all from white Mississippians. “In a state that was over 50% African American, you’re missing over half of the voices and the experiences. If you take it through Reconstruction, you start to get African Americans writing in to the governors as well. It becomes a really great way to look at that kind of change, too.”

While Dr. Ural was well-versed in the historical context, she is finding the letters just as surprising as users accessing them for the first time. “I think probably the biggest surprise for me was how quickly freedmen started asserting their rights.” In fact, one letter (see image, next page) in particular stood out to Dr. Ural when she spoke with her in May: “We have a letter from the late summer of 1865, so just a few months after the war ended, where a formerly enslaved man has hired attorneys up near Oxford to write on his behalf. He can write, but he wants formal representation to the governor, protesting attacks on his business. It’s awesome! It’s not this kind of slow, gradual process where a freedman was trying to navigate his way, I mean it’s BAM! He basically was able to run a side business while he was enslaved, and he’s immediately transitioning into being this business owner as a freedman.”

Dr. Walters, who is now the senior assistant digital editor on the project, was also thrilled to find this letter in the course of her work of getting many of them online. “He basically writes the governor of Mississippi and says, ‘I’m not paying taxes. I was enslaved my whole life. I have paid my taxes to Mississippi.’ I don’t know what the response from the governor was, but I think it’s phenomenal.”

Dr. Ural has expansive and incredibly well-laid plans for the project. She hopes that the Mississippi project coordinators can work together with other states to “connect our collections to see, [for instance] how did people in the upper South respond to the Emancipation Proclamation as opposed to people in the Deep South? How did they respond to invasion by armies and things like that? As we get more and more states doing these projects, we’ll have Northern states responding to these same pressures. For scholars and researchers, it becomes this incredible way to look at how people in different regions responded to national crises and national, sweeping changes.”

More locally, this project is providing opportunities for educators and students to get involved in the work of DH in preserving, transcribing, and understanding history. “The biggest problem the teachers always talk about is that they want to use original sources in the classroom, but they don’t have time to sift through all this stuff on top of everything else,” Dr. Ural explains. Part of the grant CWRGM received from the National Archives allows the project team to hire local educators to create “souped-up lesson plans.” Dr. Ural notes how important it was for her to ensure that K-12 educators, “veterans in the field,” were the ones creating these lesson plans for their students. Over the summer, several Mississippi educators worked with CWRGM to create lesson plans with specific documents that Dr. Ural and her students digitized and transcribed in the spring. The sample documents site went live in September, with Dr. Walters designing the website. Though many documents are available through the Mississippi Digital Library website, the sample site contains documents, transcriptions, and lesson plans that have been carefully curated into a set of themes: memory and commemoration; emancipation and citizenship; civilians and divided loyalties; and soldiers and military experience. CWRGM also has plans for podcasts on the site, an addition that will give educators a chance to include audio materials and discussions from practicing historians in their lessons.

The project has students as early as fifth grade transcribing documents as part of their lessons, diving into handwritten, cursive documents that may look like another language to many readers today. Dr. Ural spoke with a teacher in New Hampshire who had her fifth graders doing similar work. The teacher told Dr. Ural that “the fifth graders actually did the best because they’re just so uninhibited. They don’t get frustrated. They just think it’s interesting: it’s kind of like a puzzle.” The chance to actually sit down and transcribe what a letter writer was saying not only allows these young students to get involved with an enormous and important project that will be available for generations to come, but it also allows them to experience the writer’s life in a more personal way. “It lets them be a part of it, to be a part of the process of history, which often they find really exciting,” Dr. Ural explains. For many students, history can seem a little too distant to be interesting or to feel “real,”
The project also has funding to employ undergraduate and graduate researchers here at USM. The work can all be done remotely, which makes this a perfect opportunity during the era of social distancing. "It's a great way to give them these marketable skills," Dr. Ural says. "It's also just a nice way to be able to employ students in pretty difficult times." These student researchers will not only replenish their bank accounts, but they'll also gain experience that will help them improve their own research and communication skills. Dr. Ural mentions that many students may spend hours and hours doing research, putting together senior capstones, theses, and dissertations. These brilliant ideas may be buried in a lengthy, jargon-filled document, but with DH, "you can actually present online in this digital format that teachers are going to be able to use, that the public can benefit from, that a local historical society would want. What DH does, it enhances your ability to analyze and question, but it also enhances your ability to communicate your research with groups that we haven't traditionally always reached in the humanities."

This is a skill that researchers at any level and from any discipline can use, and that's part of the beauty of DH. Dr. Walters gets excited thinking about just how far-reaching DH can be, and she says that oftentimes, a student will hear "digital humanities" and say, "Oh no, I can't do that." Dr. Walters says, "Oh no, yes you can!" In fact, she says, "DH can definitely be a one-size-fits-all method, which I appreciate because I can grab an 80-year-old emeritus professor and an 18-year-old who just came out of high school, and I can offer them all something."

This is part of the driving force behind one of the newest offerings that the Graduate School rolled out for spring 2021. Through efforts once again spearheaded by Drs. Ural and Walters, there will soon be a one-course DH badge available for graduate students from any discipline at USM. The badge can be affixed to students' CVs and resumes to highlight their skills in this up-and-coming field. As Dr. Walters said in early September, "I checked the history job market last week, and I only saw three new postings for history positions, and every one of them asked for a digital historian." These valuable courses will include a buffet-style introductory course that will help students find out what kinds of DH tools they find most compelling, and the second course will allow them to assist on ongoing projects that faculty have underway at USM. "That's what I'm excited about. Through these collaborations and through these projects, we're giving our graduate students this phenomenal training and also making them highly competitive on the job market."

What is also so wonderful is to see two women collaborating to bring innovations in fields that are often very male-dominated. Both history and DH (a tech field) draw many men. Both Dr. Ural and Dr. Walters are bucking stereotypes and making waves, but Dr. Walters notes just how well USM has done this for some time. "That's what I'm excited about. Through these collaborations and through these projects, we're giving our graduate students this phenomenal training and also making them highly competitive on the job market."

Dr. Ural is equally positive about the progress she's seen in the military history field. "I remember one professor saying, 'I'm glad you're here, we're really trying to reach out to women whether or not they're exceptional or particularly qualified for this.' I remember running into that kind of stuff that I don't see as much anymore, which I think is really good. I think, though, that we still have a lot of issues." Dr. Ural notes that many universities across the U.S. don't have a paid maternity leave option, which can make it difficult for many women to juggle family and career. She's hoping to see more of "the kind of things that make it possible for dual career couples to also work as scholars, to have that kind of support, so that the university as a whole is a welcoming environment."

When I ask both women to tell me what they're looking forward to, Dr. Walters mentions her hopes for those three positions she saw posted: "I'm ready to see those positions say Southern Miss, Southern Miss, Southern Miss. I think it's going to happen, and I think that's why I'm just really stoked about it. We thought this was going to take years, but it shows how much people want it!" She adds, "Digital's here to stay, and COVID kind of proved it."

Dr. Ural is hoping to continue searching through the governors' papers to create a book. She's equally as excited as Dr. Walters to see all their hard work on the DH badge come to fruition: "I'm really dedicated to what this could offer to the university. I love working here. I love being here." Southern Miss is lucky to have such outstanding women among us.

By Karlie Herndon
Designing to Forget:
USM’s Theatre MFA in Design and Technology

There are a few experiences many of us take for granted: climbing a staircase without tripping, enjoying a drink without spilling down our chins, or watching a show about zombies and feeling that those zombies could be real. While these are vastly different experiences, something went into each of them that many of us may never think about: design and technology.

USM’s Master of Fine Arts in theatre, with an emphasis in design and technology, is a degree that does exactly what many of us forget about in our day-to-day lives: the rigorous and deeply creative work that goes into designing sets, costumes, and makeup that are so well-made that we in the audience forget about them. We forget that the queen is really a woman from Arkansas, or that the cobweb-clad boy can’t really fly. It’s in the work of these artists that we find that escape from reality, that moment in the theatre or sitting on our couches that is truly magical.

Even in designing masks to protect local police from COVID this spring, the art of making something forgettable—something that doesn’t impede breathing or speech or comfort—proved to be a design and technology challenge. USM’s Kelly James-Penot, Costume Shop supervisor for the School of Performing and Visual Arts, took on this challenge. She enlisted her graduate assistants (GAs) in the task from remote locations, using the opportunity to discuss natural versus synthetic fibers, alternates to elastic ties, and functions like breathability. What might seem like a simple task of putting straps on a rectangle became an in-depth project, well-suited for her students’ skills and educational needs. “There was a lot of logistics in that because Mackenzie Dunn was finishing her degree from Alabama, while Erin Jester was completing her degree from Florida, and obviously, I was going to have to mail whatever we were working on,” Ms. James-Penot explains. “We ordered the supplies, and I got them shipped to them. We had a weekly check-in: how’s the progress, what are you finding, oh that tip seems interesting, let’s all try that next week.” She and the GAs worked together on Teams, discussing patterns and progress, and once they had a good prototype, they had to decide who needed the masks the most. “Because I live in Poplarville, Mississippi, I reached out to the Pearl River County Sheriff’s Department, and they got back to me the next day with the reply: Yes, please! The students would send their completed masks back to Mississippi, and then I would coordinate with the Sheriff’s Department for contactless pick up from the driveway.”

As a child, Ms. James-Penot learned to sew at an early age from her sewing-enthusiast mom. Her mother was the first in their family to go to college, where she began a home economics degree before putting that on hold to be a full-time mom. When she returned to school, that degree no longer existed, but as she earned a general education degree, she modeled a drive for education that stuck with her daughter. On top of learning very early the importance of sewing, Ms. James-Penot also began acting in local productions as a child, and her passion for theatre and performance grew from there. “I was always involved with the arts, played in the orchestra, marched with the marching band in high school. I don’t think there was any aspect of it that I wasn’t involved in,” she explains. When it came time to go to college, her family was stationed in Meridian, Mississippi, her father’s job in the military having carried them all over the United States. She first attended a community college to take advantage of their scholarship program, then auditioned for the theatre program at William Carey, choosing a small school to get the most personal experience she could.

During her time in college, Ms. James-Penot was involved in many different performances, even singing with the choir at Carnegie Hall, but it was a production of Much Ado About Nothing that her cohort at William Carey produced from start to finish that solidified her future. “With that program being so small, we did it all. If you’re cast in a show, you’re also building the set, you’re also hanging lighting instruments, and because I could sew, I got put on costumes. I remember one night in rehearsal, I kept looking at the clock, and I was like, are they done with my character yet? I need to get back up to the shop and get back to that gown I’m working on. That was the real lightbulb moment for me, realizing that I would much rather be in the shop than on stage.” Ms. James-Penot went on to design a show for the competitive Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival, where she placed first at state, then regional, then national levels, which earned her a trip to New York. She saw Broadway shows and toured the design district, but the trip flipped the switch on another lightbulb for her: she realized New York was not where she wanted to be. Fast forward through completing her terminal degree at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, working with the Utah Shakespearean Festival, the Santa Fe Opera, the Houston Grand Opera, and freelancing while living in New Orleans. Ms. James-Penot saw her current position open up at USM, and she and her “Southern boy” husband knew it...
was the right next step. “I didn’t want to get into the academic world until I had enough professional experience to mentor others in preparation for the industry. I had a really strong mentor in undergrad, and I wanted to be that for someone else.” In fact, her mentor, Shannon Robert, is now at Clemson, and she and Ms. James-Penot often adjudicate at festivals together.

“I really felt like she was invested in me and my success,” Ms. James-Penot says.

Now, Ms. James-Penot puts a similar investment into her students at USM. She does a lot of hands-on, workshop-style teaching for undergraduate and graduate students in the costume studio, guiding them in the costume design and technology aspects of theatrical productions. In defining what costume technology is, Ms. James-Penot explains that it’s “everything from the construction, the cutting,” down to “working with the student to shift the color in the dye.” Even with something as simple as a modern T-shirt and jeans, costume technology is an integral part of building items that are couture fit to each actor, coated in water-resistant material, as in one show Ms. James-Penot recalls, or fitted with electrical lights as in another show.

The GAs who helped her create masks in the spring have since graduated, and three new MFA students joined her studio later in the summer of 2020. Taylor Busch hails from Charleston, South Carolina, and she earned a BFA in musical theatre from Anderson University. She explains that her first assignment in college was working in the costume shop, where she got her first taste for costume technology. “I just really fell in love with being in the costume shop. I really liked the whole process, so I wanted to learn more about it and started taking costuming classes.” When she finally realized that costume design and technology were the areas she most wanted to pursue, it was already her junior year. Instead of changing her major, she stuck to her original plan, knowing that she could go to graduate school to deepen her costume technology and design education.

Rebecca Earehart knew from a young age that she was interested in clothing design. Originally from Tollesboro, Kentucky, Rebecca received a BFA in theatre from Morehead State University, but even as a child she would sit and draw row upon row of people, focusing on their clothes. Additionally, she says, “there was always something about movies and television that I always loved. I would just devour the extras on all of the DVDs, and I just wanted to know [everything about the] behind-the-scenes.” She originally went to college to study things like editing and camera work, but she ended up taking a theatre elective that offered extra credit for being a dresser in a production of Cabaret.

“I did the makeup, helped them do the quick changes, and I just fell in love with it.”
She realized, “This is it. This is the marriage of costuming and entertainment that I’ve loved so much. I just knew that’s what I wanted to do.”

Madison Queen joined USM from the western reaches of the United States, from Klamath Falls, Oregon. She earned a degree in makeup and costuming from Southern Oregon University. “I actually started out in special effects makeup,” she explains. Madison has been curious about how designers make fiction into reality since she was a child: “I was just such a big fan of the show, The Walking Dead. So since I was 11, because that’s when it came out, I’ve been wanting to know how to make zombies!” Even though she was interested in makeup, she quickly realized that she could hone two major skills. “I took my first costume class, and it just clicked. I actually like it better than makeup. I still love both, but I definitely have found the right passion.” Since coming to USM, one experience in particular has been exciting for Madison: “Someone who works on The Walking Dead gave a lecture and a demo [in a class], and that was incredible. That was so cool that they were able to provide that for us.”

Aside from their shared love of costume design and technology, all three graduate students found their way to USM through great conversations with USM’s incredible representatives, Ms. James-Penot and Theresa Bush, assistant professor of costume design and technology at USM. Madison went to the Southeastern Theatre Conference, and she met Ms. Bush and Ms. James-Penot in the graduate school interviews. “I’d eventually like to teach costume technology, and so I was looking for a grad school that would let me further my technology skills because I’m more advanced sewing than I am designing, but would also really heighten my design skills and get them to the same experience level that I have in technology.” Her conversation made all these things sound doable through USM’s program and, “so far, it’s been everything that I thought it would be,” Madison says.

Rebecca hadn’t planned on coming to graduate school, but as she waited for the job fair to open at the Southeastern Theatre Conference, she stumbled upon the USM graduate school booth and ended up talking with Ms. James-Penot and Ms. Bush for about 20 minutes. She thought, “This sounds like such a good program. I would just love to go there. I was supposed to come and tour, but then COVID happened. I ended up doing a tour virtually, and the first time I was in Mississippi was when I was moving down here to come to school.” Even before she moved to Mississippi, Rebecca began design work on a fall production with Ms. Bush via Zoom. “There’s so much that she has to teach you, and I’m just gobbling it up.” The restrictions that the pandemic created were especially tricky for theatre faculty, staff, and students. Ms. James-Penot explained how intimate the tailoring and dressing of an actor can be, and in the age of social distancing, that closeness and ease of zipping up a gown or pinning a hem became a tedious exercise in eyeballed measurements, spoken directions, and purchased items rather than preferable couture methods. In the costume studio, where she could usually come to a student’s station and offer assistance, her work now consists of playing Hot and Cold from six feet away. “[Ms. James-Penot] makes the joke all the time that we’re going to be much more polite people after this is over,” Rebecca says, laughing about their enhanced verbal communication in the workshop in light of COVID restrictions.

Taylor also had great conversations with Ms. James-Penot and Ms. Bush, who
“totally saw a drive in me and a wanting to be in higher education, and I really liked that,” Taylor explains. “I decided to come visit, and once I saw the campus, I absolutely fell in love with it. Learning about the collaborative process here is very different than anything I’ve been used to, so that really drew me in as well.”

Collaboration is something that Ms. James-Penot also noted as an incredible part of the program. “I’ve worked on some really exciting collaborations with faculty in dance and art that I wouldn’t have considered if we hadn’t formed” the School of Performing and Visual Arts, she says. “Last year I received a grant through the College of Arts and Sciences to work on a piece with two dance faculty and one of our faculty from art who specializes in graphic design.” She purchased two parachutes, and made one “into a giant skirt for the dancer and the other one into a giant cape. So much of what we do in costumes is to make sure we don’t impede the performer’s movement.” For example, “if it’s too tight and they can’t move their arms, we’re going to add gussets to make sure they have their full range of movement. What was awesome about this collaboration is that I was intentionally putting the performer in something that would inhibit their movement.” The outcome was something collaborative and innovative,
giving everyone involved a challenge outside of their comfort zone to produce something fresh and fascinating.

This year has brought even more chances for collaboration and innovation. Under the direction of Assistant Professor Jay Morris, Southern Miss Theatre’s technical director, the scenic design students constructed individual pods, complete with green or blue screens, so that individual performers can act in their own pod in front of a camera. “We have an incredibly talented cohort of graduate students. Using technology, they figured out how to capture our performers’ entire bodies in individual spaces and combine them together in a virtual space using perspective, so it looks three-dimensional for our audience members,” Ms. James-Penot explains. Several shows have been produced virtually already, and with each production, students, staff, and performers find new ways to improve the virtual productions.

As we all look forward to returning to a world without a pandemic, Ms. James-Penot and her GAs all look forward to more learning and interactions. “It’s interesting how we’ve slowed down, and that’s good. We’re all just doing the best we can to safely continue to create, but I do miss the high-speed energy of when we were in full swing with everyone here,” Ms. James-Penot says. Hopefully, the fall will bring a return of a shop without taped-off six-foot spaces, one-way foot traffic, or Hot and Cold games of teaching, but even with all the restrictions, new graduate students are getting a solid experience. These tireless artists’ unforgettable designs will continue to enchant audiences and make USM proud, no matter what challenges come their way. As Rebecca noted, “If there’s someone who is thinking about coming here, I would take the chance and do it, because it’s been worth it.”

By Karlie Herndon
2020 Hall of Fame: Celebrating Graduate Student Achievement

Each Hall of Fame graduate student’s name, degree program, and brief description of their graduate research is included below.

Aaron Wesley Romero Broussard
**MBA**
Aaron's capstone project simulates running a business over an eight-year period. It examines how to successfully manage a corporation by making decisions regarding research and development, marketing, sales forecasting, and human resources.

Will Ford
**Economic Development MS**
Will has completed numerous economic development research projects for the Trent Lott National Center's clients. His work includes conducting economic impact analyses for new and existing jobs in various regions; creating comprehensive industry performance analyses based on job growth, sales, and regional impact; and secondary data analyses for economic development organizations.

Raymond Jones
**Kinesiology (Exercise Physiology) PhD**
Raymond's research focuses on sedentary behaviors and cerebrovascular blood flow, especially in minority populations. Using noninvasive techniques, such as Doppler ultrasound, he examines the blood flow response to prolonged sitting.

Hallie Ray Jordan
**Psychology (Counseling) PhD**
As a member of the Behavior and Addiction Research (BAR) Lab, Hallie developed a research program focused on the intersection of mental health factors (e.g., posttraumatic stress) with social, cognitive, and behavioral predictors (e.g., drinking motives, protective strategies) of alcohol and marijuana-related outcomes.

Kendall King
**Speech and Hearing Sciences (Speech-Language Pathology) MS**
Kendall served as a graduate assistant at the DuBard School for Language Disorders. She completed practica at DuBard, USM’s Speech-Language Pathology Clinic, Oak Grove Primary School, and North Mississippi Medical Center-Acute Care.

Delores McNair
**Child and Family Studies MS**
Statistics show the critical need to provide resources and programs to families to prepare children for school for academic development and achievement. Yet, many children who enter school do not meet the standards for school readiness. Delores's research evaluated the decline in kindergarten readiness in public school districts.

Amy Moody
**Marine Science PhD**
Groundwater input to the Sound is known to cause low oxygen, excess nutrients, and harmful algal blooms. Amy's research examines groundwater discharge into the Mississippi Sound from coastal aquifer systems. Her goal is to determine if the groundwater in this region is causing low oxygen events, leading to fish kills.

Janice Taleff Scaggs
**Nursing DNP**
Intrapartum nurses’ beliefs influence nursing behavior and nursing interventions during labor and birth. Janice utilized the Intrapartum Nurse’s Beliefs Related to Birth Practices instrument to establish that 93% of nurses who participated in the survey have birth beliefs that more closely align with normal birth practices. The results of the survey illustrate that the nursing culture values normal birth and indicates education and training that builds knowledge and skills to support intended vaginal birth is likely to be successful.

Lucas Somers
**History (United States) PhD**
Lucas's dissertation looks at the establishment of schools for formerly enslaved children and adults in Kentucky and Tennessee following emancipation. Building on existing scholarship, this study explains why freedom did not guarantee revolutionary change for freed people during and after Reconstruction.

Joshua Tropp
**Polymer Science and Engineering PhD**
Joshua's research utilizes polymeric materials for the optical and electronic detection of environmental pollutants in complex aqueous environments, such as seawater. His research interests include chemical sensing, polymer synthesis, and supramolecular chemistry.
Veshell Lewis
PhD, Science Education, 2019

What is your current position and what kinds of duties does that entail?

For the past 10 years, I have worked in education as a science teacher, and currently I’m an intervention specialist in the Jackson Public Schools District. As an intervention specialist, I provide academic intervention and support to general education students with academic skills deficits and/or below grade level performance. In addition, I have taught undergraduate classes for the past three years as a science content adjunct instructor at Belhaven University.

How did graduate school at USM help prepare you for this role?

Being a non-traditional teacher, I was confident in my science content knowledge, due to my undergraduate and graduate education in biology; however, I longed to gain a deeper understanding of how to improve the quality of my teaching through effective teaching pedagogy. As a science education doctoral student at The University of Southern Mississippi, I gained an in-depth knowledge of pedagogical practices, research methods, science curriculum, history of science education, teaching strategies, biology content, and science education programs focused on K-12. In addition, I was strongly encouraged to participate in professional development and teacher training that would enhance my knowledge and presentation skills. The science education coursework, professional development, and teacher training helped me become an effective teacher, professional development facilitator, and interventionist.

Please tell us a little about your webinar with NASA.

The webinar took place on August 13, 2020. I was contacted by Mariél Colón Robles, NASA scientist at NASA Langley Research Center, and was asked to participate as a presenter for the Cloud Challenge. In 2018, I served as a teacher intern at NASA Langley Research Center in Virginia. During the internship, I worked with various NASA scientists and educators, including Mariél Colón Robles.

The Cloud Challenge webinar consisted of various scientists and educators who worked together to provide teachers and parents with GLOBE cloud activities. I highlighted the GLOBE activity, Cloud Fun, and introduced Elementary GLOBE books. In addition, I briefly explained the benefits of nature journaling.

I really enjoyed presenting the activity. I hope the video provided a great learning experience for teachers and parents.

Are there any women, in particular, who are your inspiration or mentors?

I have been blessed with the pleasure of experiencing a remarkable graduate education at The University of Southern Mississippi. Yet, I am most appreciative of the opportunities for inspiration freely bestowed by the faculty. Dr. Sherry Herron, associate professor emerita of science education for the Center for Science and Mathematics Education, is an incredible woman who inspires others by leaving them feeling encouraged, confident, and ready to make the most of their lives. Dr. Herron’s passion for education can be seen in her actions and heard in her voice. Her passion for education inspires others to move beyond themselves. As a past student of Dr. Herron’s, she always encouraged me to take opportunities to learn about concepts that I was most passionate about. I took those opportunities and learned more about myself along the way.

Do you have any advice for other graduate students?

Believe in yourself and surround yourself with others who believe in you, too.
Impacting the Greater Community

Jeremy Noble
PhD, Counseling Psychology, 2014

What is your current position, and what kinds of duties does that entail?

I am the command psychologist for the 75th Ranger Regiment, which means I am responsible for the psychological well-being of approximately 3,500 Army Rangers. I primarily function as an operational psychologist. Operational psychology is a relatively new field of psychology that is technically defined as “the providing of services through a consultative relationship that enables individuals to more effectively understand, develop, and influence an individual, group, or organization to accomplish tactical, operational, and strategic objectives.” In plain terms, my job is to apply psychological principles to my organization’s practices in order to maximize its performance and the performance of its members.

How did graduate school at USM help prepare you for this role?

I found my passion for psychology and cultivated a strong work-ethic as a graduate student, and that was largely due to the learning environment created by the faculty. My major professor, Dr. Michael Madson, modeled exactly how a teacher/coach/mentor should operate. His leadership style has shaped my own. The quality of training provided by the Counseling Psychology department was also exceptionally high. When I began my pre-doctoral internship, I was adequately prepared to meet the demands of a rigorous program.

Are there any women in particular who have been role models or mentors for you in your profession or here at USM?

Drs. Bonnie Nicholson, Emily Yowell, and Melanie Leuty are all admirable psychologists and human beings. Either directly through clinical supervision or indirectly through observation, each has been influential in my professional development in some way.

What’s something you’ve accomplished that you’re proud of?

The position I currently hold is a rather difficult one to obtain. All job applicants for the 75th Ranger Regiment, to include psychologists, must pass a series of intense physical events and rigorous interviews before being selected to serve in the organization. However, before someone can attend Ranger selection, they must first be recruited/invited by someone in the Ranger Regiment based on goodness of fit for the organization. My recruitment into the Ranger Regiment was partially due to the strong skill-specific foundation instilled in me by the Counseling Psychology program at USM. As a postdoctoral resident, I was required to complete an oral examination that consisted of reviewing a psychological assessment case and fielding questions from a panel of psychologists around diagnosis, recommendations, considerations, etc. Fortunately, USM’s Counseling Psychology program conducts its own oral examinations of a similar fashion, so I had prior experience in this practice. The exam went exceptionally well, and afterwards, one of my residency faculty members, a prior Ranger psychologist, approached me and inquired about my interest in assessing for the 75th Ranger Regiment. If I had not received the quality of training I had at USM, I’m confident I would not have the job I have today.

Do you have any advice for other graduate students?

1) Prioritize well. The most successful and productive people in the world are masters at prioritization.

2) Understand your values. Graduate school is stressful. You are task-saturated, your income is next to nothing, and you are constantly fighting a case of imposter syndrome. Despite this, it will be important to regularly participate in activities that you find fulfilling and enjoyable. When your behaviors and values don’t match, your mood will suffer, which will lead to a degradation in performance.

3) Be sure to take the time to appreciate where you are and who you are with. Whether it means staying for an extra round at Keg & Barrel or agreeing to play on your classmates’ intramural flag football team, take full advantage of your current social network. Your future self will thank you.
USM Graduate Enrollment, Fall 2020-21

Heat Map Index by Enrollment
Darker colors correspond to increasing number of students.

Number of Graduate Students Enrolled by Country

- Angola, 1
- Australia, 1
- Bahamas, 2
- Bangladesh, 5
- Brazil, 14
- Cameroon, 1
- Canada, 3
- China, 27
- Colombia, 7
- Cuba, 1
- Egypt, 3
- Ethiopia, 1
- Fmr. Yugoslav Rep. of Macedonia, 1
- Ghana, 7
- Guyana, 1
- Honduras, 2
- Hungary, 1
- India, 53
- Iran (Islamic Republic of), 3
- Jamaica, 4
- Japan, 2
- Jordan, 1
- Korea, Republic of, 2
- Kuwait, 2
- Malta, 1
- Mexico, 5
- Nepal, 17
- Nigeria, 12
- Pakistan, 1
- Panama, 1
- Peru, 4
- Philippines, 2
- Portugal, 1
- Puerto Rico, 2
- Saudi Arabia, 5
- South Africa, 1
- Spain, 3
- Sri Lanka, 1
- Taiwan, Province of China, 2
- Thailand, 5
- Trinidad and Tobago, 1
- Turkey, 1
- Ukraine, 1
- United Arab Emirates, 1
- United Kingdom, 3
- United States, 2,944
- Uruguay, 1
- Uzbekistan, 1
- Venezuela, 1
- Virgin Islands (British), 1
- Yemen, 1
- Zimbabwe, 1
### Graduate Enrollment by College (Fall 2019 vs Fall 2020)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Fall 2019</th>
<th>Fall 2020</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts and Sciences</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1,056</td>
<td>5.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and Economic Development</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>4.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and Human Sciences</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing and Health Professions</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4,700</td>
<td>5,232</td>
<td>10.95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Increase in Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity

- Black/African American: 42% increase
- Hispanic/Latinx: 19% increase
- Asian: 18% increase
- Nonresident Alien: 9% increase
- White: 12% increase
- Nonresident Alien: 9% increase
- Hispanic/Latinx: 19% increase
- Asian: 18% increase
- Nonresident Alien: 9% increase
- White: 12% increase

### Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity

- **Black/African American**: Fall 2019: 440, Fall 2020: 692, % change: 57%
- **Hispanic/Latinx**: Fall 2019: 82, Fall 2020: 144, % change: 71%
- **Asian**: Fall 2019: 57, Fall 2020: 104, % change: 82%
- **Nonresident Alien**: Fall 2019: 144, Fall 2020: 161, % change: 144%
- **White**: Fall 2019: 1,765, Fall 2020: 2,051, % change: 165%
- **Total**: Fall 2019: 2,000, Fall 2020: 2,500, % change: 250%
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