

THE  
*Medallion*  
50 Years



*Southern Miss*  
**HONORS  
COLLEGE**

S P R I N G 2 0 2 6



# LETTER from the DEAN

## Dear Alumni and Friends,

What an amazing year we have had celebrating the Southern Miss Honors College. July 1, 2026, marks the official founding of the Southern Miss Honors College, and our Honors College team enjoyed the opportunity to commemorate this anniversary with our alumni, families, and friends this spring. Each person on our team contributed to the events designed to highlight the history and future of the Honors College, and I would be remiss if I did not begin this letter by thanking them for their expertise, their commitment, and the joy they bring to supporting students every day. Rebecca, Laurie, Jaide, Kelli, Jessie, Kyle, Mary, and Rachel, thank you!

Our 50th anniversary celebrations would also not have been possible without the support of the Scianna family, the Office of the President, the USM Foundation, and the Alumni Association; our sincerest thanks to all for believing in what it means to support students in their research and dedication to academic excellence.

Speaking of our celebrations, I hope you will indulge me as I recap the highlights. Over the course of our celebratory events, we had over 150 alumni and friends join us to celebrate the Honors College and the amazing research and creative activities being accomplished by Southern Miss students. Our History of the Honors



College panel featuring Dr. Maureen Ryan, Dr. Andy Wiest, Ms. Paula Mathis, and Mr. Byron Glick provided insights into the history and future of the Honors College. Keynote speaker, Dr. Chris Anderson, spoke to alumni and students about the importance of research in his career and provided sage advice on what it means to find your passion and commit to meaningful research. Alumni, faculty, and students also had the opportunity to view *The Prof*, a movie written, directed, acted, and produced by Honors College students alongside the first dean of the Honors College, Dr. Wallace G. Kay.

Most importantly, we had the opportunity to see our current Southern Miss students in action as they presented their research and creative projects at the Undergraduate Symposium on Research and Creative Activity. Their work is just one example of the ways current Honors students continue to excel.

Our sincerest thanks to everyone who celebrated the Southern Miss Honors College and 50 years of rigorous, interdisciplinary, and forward-thinking education. Thank you for sharing your stories with us, stories that form a living testament to the University's



belief in intellectual ambition and the power of education to shape lives across time. We hope you will all look toward the next 50 years and help us determine our priorities in the years and decades to come. We are always interested in learning from our alumni about what they valued most during their time in the Honors College; please stay engaged and reach out and tell us how you would like to see the Honors College move forward!

Always,



Dr. Joyce Inman  
Honors College



## New Staff INTRODUCTION



### RACHEL JACKSON *Coordinator of Recruitment and Strategic Communication*

Rachel was born in Missouri but has called Hattiesburg her home since 1999. She received her bachelor's degree at Southern Miss in social studies education in 2017 and taught high school for five years in school districts across Mississippi. In 2022, Rachel returned to Southern Miss to work in the Office of Admissions and subsequently graduated with her Master of Education in student affairs in 2025. In her spare time, she is an avid reader of fantasy novels, a certified personal trainer, and a lover of animals.

"My favorite part of working in the Honors College is encouraging prospective Honors students to reach for their full potential. Helping students, whether through teaching or recruitment, has been my passion for nearly 10 years, and I hope to continue doing this for many years to come."



# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

## DR. CHRIS ANDERSON

Each year, we invite an alumna or alumnus to serve as the keynote speaker for the Undergraduate Symposium on Research and Creative Activity, and this year our speaker was Honors College alumnus, Dr. Chris Anderson (1995). While an undergraduate student, Dr. Anderson was involved in multiple activities, including the Honors Student Association, the Student Alumni Association, and Habitat for Humanity, and he was chosen for Who's Who in 1995. His Honors thesis, *Induction of Taxol Metabolism in the Rat by Dexamethasone*, built upon his work on a Department of Energy undergraduate research experience at the Medical University of South Carolina. After earning his bachelor's degree in chemistry as an Honors Scholar, Dr. Anderson earned an M.D. at Emory University and completed his general surgery residency at Vanderbilt University and his abdominal transplant fellowship at Washington University in St. Louis.

He joined the University of Mississippi Medical Center (UMMC) in 2011 and has served as professor and chair of the Department of Surgery at UMMC since 2015. He currently holds the James D. Hardy Endowed Chair in surgery, is medical director for the transplant service line at UMMC, is the surgical director for the Mississippi Organ Recovery Agency, and serves as the vice chair of the Council of Clinical Chairs at UMMC. In addition, he has published over 60 research articles, and his research has been cited more than 4,000 times.

During his talk, Dr. Anderson reflected on the importance of learning the basics of research (as well as physics and chemistry) during his time in the Honors College and how learning these fundamentals, practiced and mastered over 30 years, has helped him produce innovations in liver transplant surgery. His talk illustrated the ways he has consciously chosen a professional and personal path of constant curiosity and research in his efforts to provide patients and their families with life-saving care. He also provided students with advice, namely to “build a better engine,” by welcoming challenges and embracing the “inflow” of learning challenging information and skills and then focusing on perfecting the “outflow” of research and creative activity in a subject about which they are passionate.



In March, Honors College alumni, Dr. Chris and Mrs. Theresa Anderson, graciously hosted a group of alumni at their home in Ridgeland.



# DICK COWART: *The Manthey Conference Room*

One of the most touching events during our Golden Anniversary celebrations involved a small group of friends who gathered to honor the memory of Ron Manthey (1976). Dick (1975) and Becky Cowart (1976) surprised their friend group of over 50 years by naming the Honor House conference room in honor of their friend, noting that Ron was a great scholar and an even better friend.

In his touching tribute to Ron and to the role of Colloquium in the lives of their friend group, Dick memorialized lifelong friendships that started with the intellectual exchanges in Colloquium and dedicated the conference room space to keeping those exchanges alive and vibrant for future generations of Honors students.

Alongside this investment, Dick and Becky Cowart have crafted a matching gift challenge to provide programmatic support for the Honors College. To spur current investment in this area, the Cowarts will match gifts to the Honors College Development Fund of \$1,000 or more, contributing up to \$25,000 in total. Further, these donors will be recognized in the newly created Laureate Circle. The Cowarts' challenge reflects their belief that lasting strength comes from shared participation.

"Today's Honors College students benefit from the Laureate Circle donations," Cowart explained. "As their careers mature, we hope they will likewise become Laureate Circle contributors and pay it forward to future generations."





# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHTS

## Where Are They Now?

### Salma Amer Dawoud

*Biochemistry, 2014*

**Location:** Minneapolis, Minnesota

**Current role and organization:** I graduated medical school in 2018, then went on to ophthalmology residency, neuro-ophthalmology fellowship, and then I completed my training in oculoplastic surgery in the summer of 2025. I just started my first job out of training in Minneapolis, and I love it.

**Tell us a little about your life now and how you like to spend your time when you aren't working.**

I had my first child in January of this year, and she is the light of my life!

**How did your experience in the Honors College prepare you for your current career path?**

The Honors College at USM helped me feel like I could achieve my goal of going to medical school when it seemed very daunting. My faculty mentors gave me academic support and encouragement. I also had mentoring relationships with upper classmen who were headed to medical school which was really helpful.

**For current Honors College students aspiring to enter your field, what advice would you give based on your journey since graduation?**

Medical training is a long road but worth it in the end! I studied abroad in England and Morocco when I was at USM, and those were definitely highlights of my time there. It may seem like you have to spend all your time focusing on getting into medical school, but once you start, it's hard to get time to travel like you can in undergrad. The Honors College was instrumental in helping me get the Gilman Scholarship to fund my study abroad in Exeter and the Critical Language Scholarship for going to Morocco.

My family has strong ties to the Southern Miss community. Like me, my siblings, pictured here at my wedding in Sedona, also attended USM. My father is currently serving as an associate professor at USM in computer engineering.



*"Being a mom is my favorite job!"*





# Amelia Steadman McGowan

*History (international studies, it was in history then) and Spanish, 2006*

**Location:** Fayetteville, Arkansas (but currently in Buenos Aires and Montevideo for the semester)

**Current role and organization:** Assistant Professor / Immigration Clinic Director - University of Arkansas School of Law

**Tell us a little about your life now and how you like to spend your time when you aren't working.**

I am a professor at the University of Arkansas School of Law in Fayetteville, where I direct the Immigration Clinic. The clinic gives second- and third-year law students the opportunity to represent clients under my supervision. Our clinic focuses on representing people seeking asylum and other forms of humanitarian protection in the U.S. My scholarship focuses on asylum and the Convention Against Torture, with a strong focus on the Americas.

Outside of work, I enjoy traveling, watching international soccer (I'm a huge fan of the Netherlands), sailing, and cooking. My latest cooking challenge is to cook a dish from all 48 countries appearing in the upcoming men's World Cup. I'm almost halfway through!

**What are some current projects or initiatives that you are working on that you're particularly excited about?**

I'm currently spending my course-release semester in Montevideo, Uruguay, and Buenos Aires, Argentina, where I am building partnerships with local law schools and participating in a fellowship for academics and other professionals in the Americas working on migration and asylum



*Traveling in Uruguay*



*The Inter-American Court of Human Rights in Costa Rica*

issues. Since asylum is inherently international—both in terms of its roots in international treaties and its involvement of the international movement of people—sharing ideas with partners across the hemisphere has given me a much broader perspective, as well as an international community of colleagues with whom to share ideas and support.

**What is your favorite memory from your time in the Honors College?**

I have so many! Outside the classroom, I loved having so many experiences to broaden my cultural horizons. I especially enjoyed the Honors Forum speakers—Art Spiegelman's talk was a particular highlight—and the chance to hear our world-class Symphony Orchestra perform alongside legendary artists like Yo-Yo Ma. Combining those local cultural experiences with studying abroad in Vietnam and meeting friends from all over the world made me a much stronger scholar and person.

**How did your experience in the Honors College prepare you for your current career path?**

The Honors College prepared me for my career in many ways. I loved the small classes and the strong, supportive community of students, faculty, and staff, and the opportunity to study abroad. One of the most transformative parts of my experience was getting to write my Honors thesis. My career today is a direct result of that research. For my thesis, I explored the foreign policy origins of USM's Latin American Institute—an on-campus English school opened in the 1940s that served as a tool for U.S. "cultural diplomacy" during the Cold War. This project was one of my favorite college experiences;



it challenged me to view immigration not as a purely "domestic" issue, but as a deeply international one. That research is the reason I decided to go to law school and ultimately specialize in immigration and international law with a focus on inter-American collaborations. Now, I get to live it: my work has taken me to present at the Supreme Court of Argentina, consult with national officials and other academics across the hemisphere, and serve as a member of an inter-American asylum working group.

**For current Honors College students aspiring to enter your field, what advice would you give based on your journey since graduation?**

Seek out projects that spark your interest and push you outside of your comfort zone, starting with the Honors College. These experiences won't just expand your knowledge—they'll connect you with people and opportunities that can transform your career. I've also found great value in specializing. Because few academics study exactly what I do, I've been able to cultivate a unique voice. Lastly, prioritize developing your identity and interests outside of work, as well as your mental and physical health.



*Senate of Argentina*

## *Our current Honors College student body comes to us from...*

Alabama **31** • Arkansas **4** • California **1** • Colorado **1** • Florida **2** • Illinois **2** • Kentucky **1** • Louisiana **57**  
 Maryland **1** • Michigan **1** • Missouri **5** • Mississippi **324** • Nebraska **1** • North Carolina **1** • Ohio **1**  
 Oklahoma **1** • Pennsylvania **1** • South Carolina **1** • Tennessee **3** • Texas **2** • Utah **1**  
 Bangladesh **5** • Germany **1** • Ghana **1** • Nepal **31** • Indonesia **1** • Nigeria **10** • Pakistan **1** • Phillipines **1**  
 Ukraine **1** • Uzbekistan **1**

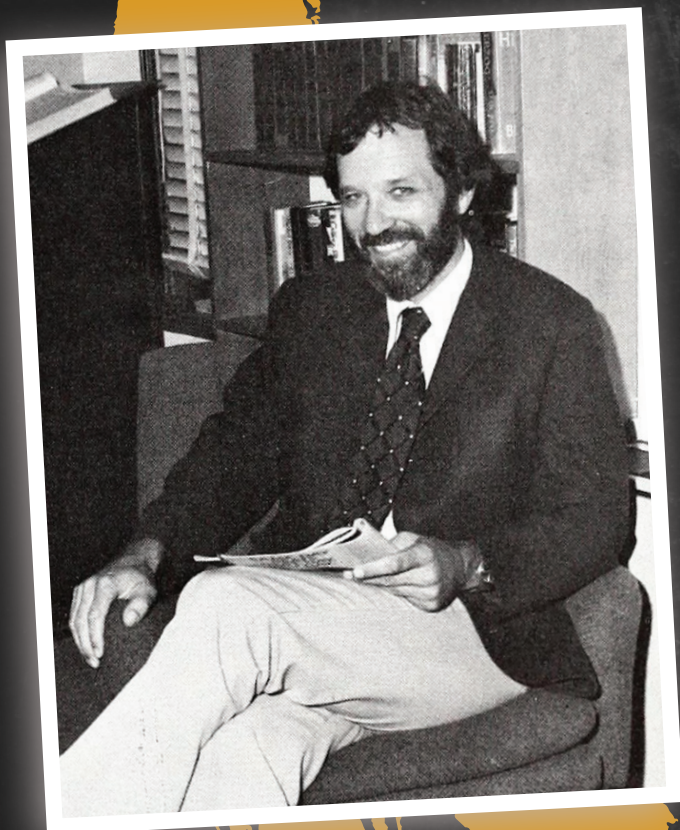




# DR. WALLACE G. KAY

## *DISTINGUISHED HONORS PROFESSORSHIP*

---



As we celebrate the 50th anniversary over the course of 2026, we invite you to join us in honoring the past and investing in the future by contributing to the Dr. Wallace G. Kay Professorship Endowment. Dr. Kay played a foundational role in shaping the Honors College at Southern Miss. As the driving force behind our founding, he led the development of the program in its earliest stages and was instrumental in its formal establishment on July 1, 1976.

This endowment will support a faculty member whose teaching, research, and service reflect the values Dr. Kay championed—innovation, interdisciplinary inquiry, and student-centeredness. Reaching the goal will ensure the endowment provides sustainable, long-term support for faculty excellence. Every gift — no matter the size — moves us closer to ensuring Dr. Kay's legacy continues to inspire future generations to think critically, grow intellectually and lead with purpose.

*Scan here to support  
the endowment.*





# HONORS COLLEGE

*through the*



DECADES

70s







# 80s



# 90s







# 2000s



# 2010s





# 2020s





# NATIONALLY COMPETITIVE PROGRAMS AND AWARDS:

## Golden Opportunities at Southern Miss

A point of pride in the Honors College is the Office of Nationally Competitive Programs and Awards (NCPA), which helps undergraduates, graduate students, and Southern Miss alumni find and secure prestigious scholarships and fellowships for research, study abroad, and graduate school opportunities. This year, Southern Miss was recognized by the U.S. Department of State as a top Gilman Scholar producer for mid-sized institutions, over the program's 25-year history. The NCPA director, Mary Beard, supports students across the Southern Miss campus, connecting the Honors College to the wider Southern Miss community and helping all students with their goals for academic, professional, and personal growth.

Ms. Beard works with students as they navigate the extensive process of applying for the most competitive awards, including Fulbright, Truman, Gilman, and Goldwater. The Barry Goldwater Scholarship is one of the most prestigious undergraduate awards dedicated to students interested in pursuing a PhD in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. Ashe Davis, a junior Honors College Scholar and Ocean Springs native, is the most recent Southern Miss recipient of the prestigious Goldwater award. Ashe, a polymer science and engineering student, is the 30th student in the history of Southern Miss to receive this honor.

Ashe was selected from a pool of approximately 5,000 applicants nationwide, a testament to her exceptional promise as a researcher. Ashe began conducting research during her freshman year, which is strongly encouraged for those seeking top-tier awards like Goldwater. This early start allowed her to build an

admirable resumé. In 2025, Ashe was selected as one of the University's and state's first Beckman Scholars, and she has also co-authored an article in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, one of the world's most cited scientific journals. Ashe credits much of her success to her mentor, Dr. Tristan Clemons, who helped her understand her potential and nominated her to apply for Goldwater.

According to Ashe, her research "investigates the application of a phase separating peptide delivery system for the treatment of Parkinson's Disease," and she believes the "hands-on lab experiences" she has had at Southern Miss have set her apart from other applicants. Ashe plans to attend graduate school and focus on materials science. Her ultimate goal involves advancing dental practices through new composite materials.

Ashe is one of many students who finds support through the Office of Nationally Competitive Programs and Awards. We are proud of all of these scholars and look forward to supporting students as they seek to expand their academic journeys. Students interested in learning more about competitive programs and awards can reach out to Ms. Mary Beard for more information.



Ashe Davis



*In the last year, the Honors College awarded  
\$260,304 of donor-funded scholarships to  
28 STUDENTS for a total of  
30 INDIVIDUAL AWARDS.*



*Honors team with  
Blaze the Goldendoodle*



*Dr. Peterson's seminar class at  
the Mississippi State Penitentiary*





# STUDENT FEATURES

The Honors College is a community of exceptional students who strive for academic excellence, intellectual curiosity, and meaningful engagement with the world around them. These scholars challenge themselves with rigorous coursework, engage in research and creative projects, and contribute to the community through service and leadership. We are excited to showcase some of the exceptional achievements and experiences of our Honors College students, highlighting their diverse passions, goals, and aspirations. Whether pursuing careers in STEM fields, the humanities, or the arts, our students are poised to make a positive impact on the world, and we are proud to feature their stories!

## NICHOLAS GAVIN (Freshman)

**Major:** Political Science/Pre-Law

**Awards:** Southern Miss Homecoming Freshman Beau and Special Olympics Partners of Service Award

**Passions:** I am passionate about leadership and driven by a genuine curiosity for history, government, law, and policy analysis. I enjoy understanding how systems work and using that knowledge to inspire others and contribute to meaningful change.

**Involvement:** Student Alumni Association, Speech and Debate Team, Student Eagle Club, Baptist Student Union, Luckyday Advisory Board, Southern Miss Homecoming Freshman Beau, SGA Senator for the College of Arts and Sciences, Mock Trial Team, Eagle Connection, Luckyday Preview Team

### **Tell us about your experience in the Honors**

**College:** My experience in the Southern Miss Honors College truly shaped who I am as a student and a leader. The small, discussion-based classes allowed me to connect deeply with my professors and classmates, and those conversations pushed me to think more critically and to share my ideas more confidently. I also found a genuine sense of belonging through the Honors community by spending time with other motivated students, which made campus feel like home. The personalized advising and flexibility within the curriculum helped me explore what really interests me, especially my passion for leadership, history, government, law, and policy analysis. Honors College

didn't just support my academic goals; it helped me discover my direction and the kind of impact I want to make.

### **What is your most memorable experience in the Honors College?**

My most memorable experience in the Southern Miss Honors College was participating in an active learning research trip to the Gulf Coast focused on exploring pathways to peace. This experience stood out because it took learning beyond the classroom and allowed me to engage directly with real-world issues through research, discussion, and collaboration. Being immersed in the Gulf Coast environment helped me better understand the social, historical, and policy-related factors that influence conflict and peace-building. The trip challenged me to think critically, listen thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, and connect academic concepts to lived experiences. It reinforced my passion for leadership and understanding how informed dialogue and research can contribute to meaningful change.

### **What have you become passionate about researching during your time in the Honors College?**

During my time in the Honors College, I've become passionate about researching the connections between the past, the present, and the future, especially in how peace is understood and pursued.





**What is your plan after graduating?** Following the completion of my undergraduate studies, I intend to apply to the University of Mississippi School of Law to pursue a Juris Doctor degree. This path aligns closely with my academic interests in law, policy, and leadership, and supports my long-term goal of contributing to the legal and public service fields.

**Favorite Quote:** "Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate."  
- John F. Kennedy



## CONNOR WHITECOTTON (Sophomore)

Connor Whitecotton is an Honors College Presidential Scholar from Seabrook, Texas, double majoring in English and history with a minor in digital journalism. Following graduation, he plans on attending law school, where he hopes to specialize in education or maritime law. Connor currently serves on the Academic Committee for the Honors College Leadership Council, contributes to *The Student Printz* with the Southern Miss Student Media Team, is the vice president of Canterbury Student Ministry, and is a member of Sigma Tau Delta.

When discussing his experience so far in the Honors College, Connor shares, "I originally planned to attend a much smaller college, and I was worried I would not find such a tight-knit community at USM. The Honors College has given me amazing classroom experiences, some of my best friends, and kind, intelligent people who genuinely care about my well-being and success. It has given me everything I hoped to get from my college experience and more." He continues, "My freshman Colloquium class spent fall break in Gatlinburg, Tenn., and the Smoky Mountains. Besides the beautiful scenery and amazing food, it gave me a chance to disconnect with anxiety and technology and connect with friends and nature."

Connor, who is currently a sophomore, is taking Dr. Peterson's seminar, *Incarceration in Mississippi: Past, Present, and Beyond*, this semester. Dr. Peterson's class allows the students to undertake their own research projects out of the University's archival collections on Parchman and correspond, learn, and serve with Mississippians who are currently incarcerated. Connor explains how this class has affected his research interests: "I have become passionate about incarceration in Mississippi, especially how literature connects with incarcerated residents. Dr. Peterson's class has afforded me the chance to attend a weekly class at Forrest County Jail and hear some amazing poetry. I cannot wait to dive further."

Connor is interested in writing, music, being outdoors, and traveling. He recently received an Honors College study-abroad grant that will help finance his Honors Abroad trip to Germany this May with Dr. Haley, Dr. Heinhorst, and Dr. Inman's seminar class, *Understanding Germany: Then and Now*. "I am immensely grateful for the opportunity to travel with faculty and friends and learn about a country that has fascinated me for such a long time."







## ASHLYN LE (Junior)

**Major:** Marketing with a minor in social media content and strategy

**Awards:** President's List, Dean's List, Service Hours: Gold Level of Achievement, Certificate of Recognition for

Completion of "Applied" Portion of Tri-Star Student Development Program, President's Volunteer Service Award: Gold Status

**Passions:** Storytelling, pickleball, volunteering, playing flute, calligraphy, painting, helping family

**Involvement:** Honors College Leadership Council (first-years mentor for two years), Luckyday Scholar (residential scholar for two years), Golden Eagle Pickleball Club (founder, vice president for two years), Cintas Business Ambassador Program (student ambassador and marketing liaison), GEWW Crew (two years), Student Government Association (Freshman Associate, communications member, co-undersecretary of marketing), Student Alumni Association (student ambassador for two years), Vietnamese Student Association (historian intern, member for two years)

### Tell us about your experience in the Honors

**College:** Being part of the Honors College has really pushed me to become a better scholar, opening my eyes to different fields of study and connecting me with other students who are like-minded and just as driven. I would've never expected the copious amount of knowledge I would learn by being an Honors Scholar, especially as I start my undergraduate Honors thesis journey. I also received an Honors grant to study abroad in Italy! This will be my fourth time studying abroad.

**What is your most memorable experience in the Honors College?** My most memorable experience in the Honors College is my group of mentees last year. I was honored to co-mentor with one of my greatest friends (who I created so many memories with studying abroad and being in Honors Colloquium) to

a group of students that had so much passion for their fields, and I have loved seeing them grow into the leaders that they are today—especially my girl Gracie Barlow, who has shown so much love to her peers and her community while being on top of her collegiate responsibilities.

### What have you become passionate about researching during your time in the Honors College?

I have become passionate about the brand archetype theory originated by Carl Jung and developed by Mark and Pearson. I want to fill the gap of applying brand archetypal theory to higher education student organizations and students' perceived meaning and influence of archetypes in the student organizations at Southern Miss.

**What is your plan after graduating?** After graduating, I hope to become a graduate assistant for the College of Business and Economic Development, especially for the School of Marketing and obtain my MBA.





# MIKAILA BELK (Senior)



Makaila Belk is a senior Honors Scholar from Columbia, Miss., and is majoring in psychology with a double minor in criminal justice and child advocacy studies. She has received several awards, including Outstanding Sophomore and Junior in the School of Psychology, Honors College Emerging Leadership Award, 2026 Who's Who, and is a Citizen's Scholar, Luckyday Scholar, Anderson Honors Scholar, Pathway Scholar, as well as a Zed Burns Scholar. Makaila has held several positions on campus, including being an ambassador and an RA for Luckyday; a member and VP in the Honors College Leadership Council; member, secretary, and even president of the Psychology Club/Psi Chi Honors Society; a School of Psychology Ambassador; and a member of Lamda Sigma, all while holding her place on the President's List her entire four years!

Makaila shares that her most memorable experience so far is her first Fall Bash during freshman year. She had just joined HCLC's community life, and being involved in both planning and executing such a large event was incredibly rewarding. She says, "I was able to walk around, try the different activities, and talk to other Honors Scholars...I wasn't just working the event. I was actually getting to enjoy it! As a freshman, it can be daunting to get involved...but I dove in headfirst and enjoyed every second, an experience that later inspired me to become co-VP!"

When asked about her Honors experience, Makaila continues, "My time in the Honors College has been an experience that has truly shaped me for the better. I never would have gained the confidence in my leadership abilities that I have today without its support and opportunities. I also don't think I would have discovered such a strong interest in research without the experiences integrated into the program." For her thesis project, Makaila is examining how experiences of peer relational victimization relate to students' intentions to drop out while exploring the role of trauma symptoms in that pathway and how supportive friendships might buffer these effects. "Overall, it has pushed me to grow in ways I never could have imagined and has allowed me to gain connections with faculty I never thought possible." As a freshman, Makaila was able to present at the Undergraduate Research Symposium, something she credits to her research in Colloquium freshman year. She will also be attending SEPA 2026 and presenting again at UGS this year with her Honors thesis! Makaila also received the Honors College study-abroad grant twice, which has allowed her to travel to London and Ireland as an undergraduate!

Upon graduation, Makaila, whose passions include anything art-related (especially painting), traveling, and youth counseling, plans to continue her education at Southern Miss in the counseling master's program. Makaila has volunteered at the Forrest County Juvenile Detention Center for the past three years, which ultimately made her want to work with this population. She hopes to gain hands-on experience in the applied side of her future career as a counselor and advocate for justice-involved youth in detention facilities. She also hopes to pursue a Ph.D., which would provide her with advanced knowledge and research skills and create programs that make a meaningful impact.





# COLLOQUIUM HIGHLIGHT *EXPLORATION*



As the Honors College celebrates our 50th anniversary, we also want to highlight the things that set us apart but that we do every day. We value active learning, and at each stage in our curriculum, we provide students with opportunities to create knowledge of their own. Whether they are working in a lab, undertaking independent research, or travelling with their peers, we want students to discover things that excite them. During their first year in the Honors College, students take Honors Colloquium, a year-long class designed to foster academic curiosity and deep engagement with interdisciplinary ideas. It is also in this class where many students first find their communities and begin to explore the world around them.

It's fitting, then, that this year's Colloquium theme was "exploration." Each class looked at the ways that humans have explored and navigated the world. Some classes focused on physical explorations and crossings, while others mapped the ways that we (re)define achievement. Others examined topics like reflection, pathways to peace, and boundaries, both real and imagined. During fall break, students and faculty took active learning trips to various destinations, where they reinforced the ideas that were born in the classroom. Destinations included places more local, like the Mississippi Delta, the Gulf Coast, and New Orleans, while others travelled a bit further to Tennessee and Texas. In all these places, students were tasked with exploring sites, even if familiar, with new eyes and from different perspectives. They were asked to take a deeper dive into learning.

Dr. Matthew Casey's Colloquium class travelled to Houston for fall break. Dr. Casey assigned readings about urban spaces and city life, as well as those about art. Specifically, he led students in discussions about the "power dynamics in the art world." Students visited a modern art complex called the Menil Collection, as well as the studio of a graffiti artist that was being transformed into a community center. Dr Casey asked students to consider questions like these: "Why are some art forms seen as respectable and others less so? How do the galleries, their settings, sponsors, and audiences push the way we think about the art?" While students sought to answer some of these questions before they left for



Houston, the trip helped them to make their ideas more concrete. They now had evidence to support their answers to their complex research questions.

As a foundational class, Honors Colloquium is important for students. It is often in this class that students find their first community on campus. It is also a class where the professor works alongside students to create meaning. Dr. Matthew Casey explained, "Colloquium is extremely rewarding because it shows what you can achieve academically with creative assignments, high expectations, and a strong sense of community. My job is to take students with diverse viewpoints, perspectives, and interests and to ensure that, by the end of the semester, they are operating at a high academic level and have a good sense of academic research. It is my job to get them to that level, and the only way to do it is to be there with them every step of the way."



# OH, THE PLACES WE'VE BEEN!

ACTIVE LEARNING TRIP  
DESTINATIONS FROM  
THE LAST 10 YEARS.





## SEMINAR HIGHLIGHT

### *Coming of Age in a New Age*

Following the year-long Colloquium class, Honors freshmen transfer into the Seminar course sequence in their sophomore year. Instead of having an assigned theme, each Seminar class is developed by Honors faculty fellows to focus on a theme of their choosing. With topics ranging from incarceration, storytelling, and space, these courses combine professors' expertise with students' curiosity to answer interdisciplinary questions. This year, one of our Seminar classes focused on a universal experience: coming of age.

Throughout this course, Professor Sellers and her students set out to "learn how people become who they are, but also how stories create personal and social change." Prof. Sellers approached this class through an interdisciplinary lens, intentionally connecting the class readings to themes and topics in psychology, sociology, art, and music. One student noted that the Seminar course materials overlapped with their work in both a psychology and art class, which enriched their work in all these classes, highlighting the importance of an interdisciplinary approach in supporting students' overall development as well-rounded thinkers and doers both in the Southern Miss and broader communities.

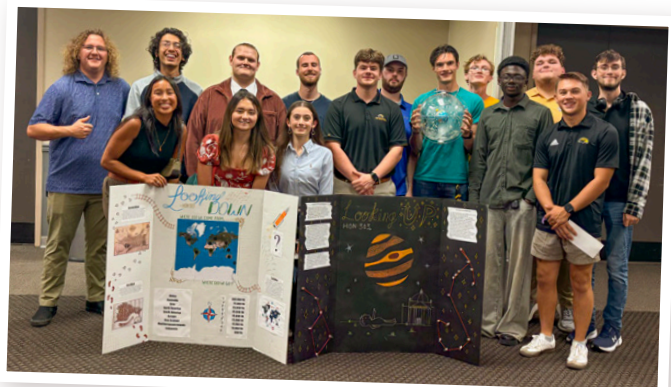
In developing the course, one novel formed the nucleus of the class: Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You*. A literary mystery, the novel details the experience of an immigrant family following the unexpected death of one of its members. From there, the class read and discussed nonfiction about adolescence and the phenomenon that is "growing up," both culturally and socially. The course also considered other works of media like *Stranger Things*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *Lady Bird* to understand how narratives portray this journey in different genres and how these journeys, while all different, ultimately lead to the same destination: adulthood.



*Professor Sellers' class preparing for Sophomore Showcase*

The course asked big and, for some, potentially difficult questions, which required both the instructor and the students to think deeply about their own coming-of-age experiences and empathetically about others' experiences. Students highlighted that, though the conversations could be difficult, they ended up bringing the class together and helped them to see from others' points of view, even those that they might normally never have. One key strategy to developing the skills of introspection and reflection necessary to have these conversations was the reading journals that Prof. Sellers required students to do to accompany their readings. In a technologically oriented, fast-paced world, the journals required students to slow down and think through their responses to the readings, classmates' comments, and the course materials in ways that, according to the students, helped them to both better understand the readings, their classmates' points of view, and their own personal coming-of-age experiences.

Ultimately, the class led students on both a journey inward to better understand their development as adolescents and young adults, as well as outward to better connect with others through this shared, universal experience. Along with picking up interdisciplinary tools, research skills, and an eye for critical reading, the students developed the interpersonal skills necessary to becoming engaged, competent, and resourceful scholars within the larger Honors College and Southern Miss communities.





# MISSISSIPPI *Honors Conference*

On a rainy morning in late February, eight students gathered at the Honor House at 6 a.m. and climbed sleepily into a 12-passenger van. Dr. Tuuri was escorting the students to the annual Mississippi Honors Conference at Belhaven University in Jackson. By the time the group arrived, the sun was shining, and the students were ready to present their research that spanned an impressive range of topics.

The Honors students presenting in STEM-related fields showcased their cutting-edge research projects. In the posters category, Neta Nnabuenyi and Nishrenika Pokhrel highlighted their work on NIPPI-mediated PP1 inhibition and Oxime-Functionalized Coumarin-Quinoline molecular probes, respectively. Prabin Bajgai presented on AI in financial time series forecasting and won second place in his STEM Oral Presentation category. And in the Health Sciences Oral Presentation category, Danie Joseph won first for her presentation about jumping patterns for dancers, and Scarlett Scott won third for her presentation on the impact of exercise on working memory. Danie reflected on the experience. "I thoroughly enjoyed participating in the Mississippi Honors Conference," she said. "While it was competitive, the low-stress environment helped me build confidence in presenting at a professional level. It was especially unique since we participated in touring our host college, Belhaven University, and the Eudora Welty home, one of Jackson's historical landmarks."



Meanwhile, in the Social Science Oral Presentation category, Suvi Lama won first place for her presentation on the importance of digital connectivity for rural LGBTQ+ students. Suvi remarked that the conference was "a valuable experience that allowed me to receive meaningful feedback from faculty across the state while also connecting with fellow undergraduates and learning more about their research."

El Smith won third place in the Humanities Oral Presentation category for their presentation about the role of art in raising awareness about and concern for victims of the AIDS crisis. In the Creative Works Oral Presentation category, Ashley Lewis described the creation of her compelling documentary about the restoration of Southern Miss after the 2013 tornado. Lewis remarked that "being able to present my research to a panel of judges and fellow Honors College Scholars served as great practice for professional presentations."

After a successful day of showcasing their scholarship, the group returned to Hattiesburg proud of their accomplishments. Once back, they celebrated at Jutamas Thai restaurant with a delicious dinner that included Thai iced teas for the entire table.







THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI**

Honors College  
118 College Drive #5162  
Hattiesburg, MS 39406



*HCLC at 50th Anniversary breakfast*

## HOW TO STAY CONNECTED

***Interested in connecting with us  
and supporting the Honors College?  
There are many ways to do so!***

### **HONORS COLLEGE**

Honor House  
118 College Drive #5162  
Hattiesburg, MS 39406  
honors@usm.edu | 601.266.4533

**f Southern Miss Honors College**

**@ HC\_SouthernMiss**

### ***Want to support the Southern Miss Honors College as we celebrate our 50th anniversary?***

Our work with Honors Scholars and the University community at large is greatly enhanced by the generous contributions of our donors, and no donation is too small to be meaningful. You can contribute to the Dr. Wallace G. Kay Distinguished Professorship, support students who need financial assistance to study abroad or advance their research agendas, fund educational costs for students through scholarship endowments, and increase the impact of the Honors College for students across the institution. For more information on how to support the Honors College, call 601.266.4533 or visit [usm.edu/goldenanniversary](https://usm.edu/goldenanniversary).

### ***Are you an Honors College graduate who wants to update your information?***

Use this QR code to access our  
Honors College alumni form.

