Moving Forward: Progress in Graduate Education at Southern Miss

Dean’s Report (November 2014)

Student Spotlight

Daniel McNair, Master’s student in the Department of Biological Sciences, won both 1st and 2nd place awards in the 6th Annual (2014) Triarch "Botanical Images" Student Travel Award competition, sponsored by the Botanical Society of America. In addition, three of his photos were selected for covers of the regional botanical journal Castanea. Daniel’s major professor is Dr. Mac Alford.

Three Minute Thesis Winners

The 1st Annual Three Minute Thesis competition was held November 4-6, and it was a big success. Sixty-eight students competed in the preliminary competitions on Nov. 4-5 in the Thad Cochran Center. Eight finalists were selected and received a $250 award:

1) Social and Educational Sciences and Business finalists
Master’s: Elizabeth Fair, Department of Psychology, Major Professor: Dr. Tammy Barry
Ph.D.: Emily Schmidtman, Department of Psychology, Major Professor: Dr. Emily Bullock-Yowell
2) Physical Sciences & Mathematics finalists
Master’s: Daniel McNair, Department of Biological Sciences, Major Professor: Dr. Mac Alford
Ph.D.: Katrina Knauer, School of Polymers and High Performance Materials, Major Professor: Dr. Sarah Morgan
3) Life, Health, and Environmental Sciences finalists
Master’s: Adam Collier, Department of Psychology, Major Professor: Dr. David Echevarria
Ph.D.: Elizabeth Jones, Department of Coastal Sciences, Major Professor: Dr. Andrew Evans

4) Arts and Humanities finalists
Master’s: Hillary Scales-Lewis, Department of Theatre, Major Professor: Dr. Monica Hayes
Ph.D.: James Curtis, Department of English, Major Professor: Dr. Jameela Lares

On November 6 the finalists competed for the title of Grand Champion and the chance to compete regionally at the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools Three Minute Thesis Competition in New Orleans in early March.

- Grand Champion: Katrina Knauer, ($1000 award)
- Runner Up: Elizabeth Jones ($750 award)
- People’s Choice: Emily Schmidtman ($500 award)
Graduate School Staff Changes

- Jackie Gargiulo joined the Graduate School staff on November 3 as Accountant. Jackie holds a bachelor’s degree in Business Administration from the University of Mississippi and a bachelor’s degree in Accounting from USM. She is an experienced accountant, most recently serving as Account Specialist for the School of Music. Jackie will manage all fiscal operations of the Graduate School and assist with budget planning.

- Whitney Chambers resigned as Sr. Graduate Admissions Specialist to assume a position as Assistant Coordinator of Student Success at Pearl River Community College in late October. An advertisement to fill the vacated position garnered 34 applications. Review of applications is complete, and interviews will begin soon.

Initiatives:

- Recruitment and Enrollment:
  - Recruitment Fairs. During October and November the Graduate School recruiting team, including Carolyn Cawthon and Sharon Poole, attended recruiting events and collected prospect cards at the institutions in Table 1, completing fall recruiting trips. Prospect data were collected, and prospect information will be supplied to appropriate program coordinators. In addition, the team met with the education director at Fort Rucker, U.S. Army Aviation Center, near Enterprise, AL to discuss their program needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th># Prospect Cards Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belhaven College</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of West Florida</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Memphis</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Impact. Ten students from Rust College will be on campus on Wednesday, November 19 to tour the campus and visit prospective departments. These students were introduced to USM when our recruiting team attended a fair on the Rust College campus earlier this semester. The group will be hosted by the Graduate School.
Professional Development for Students and Graduate Faculty

- **Effective Graduate Student Mentoring workshop.** With approximately 10 participants, this workshop was not well attended by faculty, but excellent discussions of key issues in graduate student mentorship were held in roundtable format. We are grateful to the talented discussion leaders who gave their time to prepare for and lead these sessions. These faculty included Dr. Kathy Yadrick, Chair and Professor of Nutrition and Food Systems and Associate Dean for Research, College of Health; Dr. Kenneth Swope, Professor of History and Director of Graduate Studies; Dr. Catherine Rand, Director of Bands and Associate Professor of Music; Dr. Marie Danforth, Professor of Anthropology; Dr. Christopher Barry, Associate Professor of Psychology; Dr. Michael Madson, Associate Professor of Psychology; Dr. Janie Butts, Professor of Systems Leadership and Health Outcomes; Dr. Frank Moore, Distinguished Professor of Biological Sciences; and Dr. Chad Miller, Associate Professor of Economic Development and Tourism.

Respondents (n=5) to an evaluation of the sessions revealed a gain in confidence in key aspects of mentorship and an overall rating of 4.48 on a Likert scale (1 = no confidence; 5 = full confidence).

Graduate School Promotion/Student Engagement

- The Graduate School sponsored a Homecoming tailgate located on the east side of McCain Library. An estimated 50-75 students attended and enjoyed snacks and beverages with Graduate School staff and Graduate Student Senators.

Improved Efficiency

- **Six Sigma Quality Analyses of Graduate School Admissions Operations.** This project, led by Dr. Sarah Morgan, Professor, Department of Polymers & High Performance Materials, is progressing through the first phase which includes team meetings with admissions staff. One component of this project was to produce an "Aging Report" that examines the time required for individual applicants applying to specific programs to progress through the admissions process. These data will allow us to determine steps in the process where bottlenecks or delays occur, including those for which the applicant, the Graduate School, or the Program is responsible. As examples, the following two graphs (with programs redacted) show how applicants who applied for Fall 2014 admission progressed from submitting the application and paying the fee to final notification from the Graduate School about the admission decision.
Legend:
Applied_Fee_Paid = Applicant submitted application and paid application fee
Fee_Paid_GPA_Review = Application and fee received, waiting for supporting documents (letters, transcripts, GRE, etc.)
GPA_Review_Ready_For_Review = Grad School staff evaluating transcripts for GPA prior to releasing to departments
Ready_Review_Audit = Department has received application, reviewing application prior to a decision
Audit_Status = Grad School has received decisions from department, decision letter not yet sent
Status_Print = Decision letter sent to applicant by Grad School

Aging Reports for Two Representative Graduate Programs Showing Individual Applicants Progress through the Admissions Process (Fall 2014)