



WONDER WHEMN

EMBRACE YOUR CROWN
LEAD WITH PURPOSE



WHEMN CONFERENCE 2025

February 27-28
Oxford, Mississippi

Hosted by the University of Mississippi



WHEMN MISSION

The mission of the Women in Higher Education – Mississippi Network (WHEMN) is to identify, develop, advance, and support women in higher education in Mississippi. The goals of the organization are to: (1) Promote and support women’s leadership in higher education, particularly in Mississippi. (2) Facilitate networking of women leaders in higher education with each other and with organizations and networks that have shared goals. (3) Develop collaborative partnerships with other institutions, organizations, associations, foundations, and businesses to help achieve the mission of WHEMN. (4) Enhance the visibility of women administrators on Mississippi campuses. (5) Assist in career development of professional women and women students in higher education, with particular emphasis on minority women. (6) Identify potential women leaders and provide mentoring. (7) Recognize achievement of women administrators through appropriate awards.

PRESIDENTS’ ADVISORY COUNCIL

Dr. Mary S. Graham

President, Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College

Dr. [Name] Millin

[Title] College

[Title] University For Women

UPDATE?

WHEMN CONFERENCE STEERING COMMITTEE

Charlotte Pegues, Chair and WHEMN State Coordinator

Emily Ferris, Co-Chair

Hilarie Bain
Ashley Baker
Virginia Chavis
Jenn Fos

Merrill Magruder
Shawnboda Mead
Mitzi Norris
Charlotte Parks

Rebecca Phillips
Jennifer Saxon
Jennifer Simmons
Lisa Stone

GREETINGS

FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

Hotty Toddy! We're so glad you've joined us in Oxford for the 2024 WHEMN Conference. This annual event is an amazing professional development and networking opportunity, which has a decades-long proven track record of identifying, developing, advancing and supporting women across all areas of higher education.



As a founding member, it is inspiring to witness the ongoing and growing impact of WHEMN. It began with the inaugural conference in 2004 with 57 participants, and now here we are hosting the 21st annual event with more than 400 participants from more than 25 higher education institutions across Mississippi. I extend my deep gratitude to Patti Gordon and Northwest Community College for their tremendous work on the 2022 and 2023 conferences. We are indebted to a long tradition of outstanding WHEMN events.

This year's theme, "Embrace Your Crown," embraces the notion of leadership and the role of women in our professional lives. We will celebrate trailblazing women who champion our profession through the representation of female leaders by sharing their stories, mentorship and support. I'm thrilled for all the ways you will learn and grow from the wisdom and experiences of our stellar speakers, panelists and other attendees!



I'm so grateful to have worked with a dedicated and talented team of women at the university on this event. They truly are Wonder WHEMN and have put together an event that I'm confident will provide long-lasting value for your professional development, encourage uplifting networking opportunities and feature timely topics to help advance your work in higher education.

We're so glad you joined us for the 2024 WHEMN Conference!

Charlotte Pegues
2024-25 State Coordinator



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SCHEDULE

NOTE: Track One and Track Two occur in different locations

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2025

The Gertrude C. Ford Center for the Performing Arts

8:00 a.m. Registration and Breakfast Refreshments

9:00 a.m. Welcome

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9:15 a.m. Morning Motivation

Erin and Ben Napier, xxxxxx

10:00 a.m. Break

Networking Break, Door Prizes and Announcements

10:15 a.m. Keynote Address

Dr. Lemia Jenkins, xxxxxx

11:00 a.m. Break

Networking Break, Door Prizes and Announcements

TRACK ONE Empowered Leadership in Higher Education (*Inn at Ole Miss*)

11:30 a.m. Networking Luncheon

“Leading with Purpose”

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12:45 p.m. Panel Session

“Navigating Workplace Politics with Confidence”

xxxxx

1:45 p.m. Workshop

Using Data and Analytics to Drive Decision-Making

2:45 p.m. Break

Networking Break, Door Prizes, Snacks and Announcements

3:15 p.m. Panel Session

Leadership, Mentorship, and Sponsorship

4:15 p.m. Break

Door Prizes and Announcements

TRACK TWO Innovative Change-Makers (*Student Union Ballroom*)

11:30 a.m. Networking Luncheon

“Leading with Purpose”

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12:45 p.m. Panel Session

“Strategies for Career Advancement in Higher Education”

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WONDER WHEMN
EMBRACE YOUR CROWN
LEAD WITH PURPOSE

SCHEDULE CONT.

- 1:45 p.m. Workshop**
Mastering Productivity: Time Management and Administrative Tools for Success
- 2:45 p.m. Break**
Networking Break, Door Prizes, Snacks and Announcements
- 3:15 p.m. Workshop**
Leveraging AI and Technology for Education and Transformation
- 4:15 p.m. Break**
Door Prizes and Announcements

SEPARATE TRACKS CONCLUDE

- 4:30-6:30 p.m. Free Time**
Travel to hotel to get ready for the game and/or discover the sights and sounds of Oxford
- 7:00 p.m. Pre-game Reception**
All American Club, SJB Pavilion
- 8:00 p.m. Women's Basketball Game**
Ole Miss vs. South Carolina, SJB Pavilion

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2025

The Sandy and John Black Pavilion at Ole Miss, Pavilion Club

- 7:30 a.m. Registration and Breakfast**
- 8:15 a.m. Welcome**
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- 8:30 a.m. Workshop**
"Smart Brevity: Communicating with Impact", Dr. Amanda Sams
- 9:15 a.m. Kenote Address**
"xxxx", Dr. Patrice Buckner Jackson (Dr. PBJ)
- 10:15 a.m. Break**
Networking Break, Door Prizes and Announcements
- 10:30 a.m. Panel Session**
Finding Harmony: Is Achieving Work-Life Balance Possible?
- 11:30 a.m. Closing**
Remarks by Provost Noel Wilkin and Awards Presentation
- Noon Adjourn**
Grab-and-Go Lunches Available



PANEL DESCRIPTIONS

NAVIGATING WORKPLACE POLITICS WITH CONFIDENCE

Track 1: Thursday, Feb. 27 • 12:45 p.m. • Gertrude Ford Center for the Performing Arts

This panel discussion will explore strategies to understand and maneuver through workplace dynamics. Participants will learn to identify key players, build alliances, and advocate for themselves while maintaining authenticity.

Moderator: **Andrea Jekabsons**, Deputy Chief Human Resources Officer (UM)

Panelists: **Dr. Loretta Jackson-Williams**, Vice Dean for Medical Education, School of Medicine (UMMC)

Dr. April Stampley, Vice President for External Affairs, Academic Affairs (Rust)

Laura Hill, Associate General Counsel (UM)

Dr. Leia Agnew Hill (Meridian Community College)

STRATEGIES FOR CAREER ADVANCEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Track 2: Thursday, Feb. 27 • 12:45 p.m. • Student Union Ballroom

This panel discussion will focus on practical steps for career growth, including mentorship, professional development opportunities, and effective self-promotion.

Moderator: **Dr. Tonyalle Rush** (Northwest Community College)

Panelists: **Dr. Natalie W. Gaughf**, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (UMMC)

Dr. Christy Riddle, Chief Marketing Officer (DSU)

Tanya Kelly-Kirk, Associate Vice President for Physical Plant Director & Special Projects (Rust)

Bethany Mills, Executive Director of the Career Center (MSU)

Jess Turuc, Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life (UM)

USING DATA AND ANALYTICS TO DRIVE DECISION-MAKING

Track 1: Thursday, Feb. 27 • 1:45 p.m. • Gertrude Ford Center for the Performing Arts

Participants will learn how to harness data and analytics to make informed decisions in their roles. This workshop will cover data interpretation, practical examples, and how to advocate for data-driven initiatives within their institutions.

Moderator: **Dr. Almesha Campbell**, Jackson State University-

Panelists: **Susan Seal** (MSU), Dean/Executive Director

Dr. Viola Acoff, Dean of the School of Engineering (UM)

Dr. Mary Graham, President, Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College

MASTERING PRODUCTIVITY: TIME MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE TOOLS FOR SUCCESS

Track 2: Thursday, Feb. 27 • 1:45 p.m. • Student Union Ballroom

This interactive workshop aims to equip participants with essential skills for effective time management and administrative efficiency. Attendees will learn to optimize their daily workflows using modern tools and techniques, ultimately enhancing their productivity in higher education settings.

Facilitator: **Dr. Mary Jane Collins** (USM)

LEADERSHIP, MENTORSHIP, AND SPONSORSHIP: EMPOWERING WOMEN IN HIGHER ED

Track 1: Thursday, Feb. 27 • 3:15 p.m. • Gertrude Ford Center for the Performing Arts

In a world where leadership pathways can often seem daunting, this panel will illuminate the powerful roles that mentorship and sponsorship play in advancing women in higher education. Participants will hear from seasoned leaders who have successfully navigated these dynamics and discover practical strategies for cultivating supportive relationships. Through discussion, we will explore how to effectively mentor others, seek out sponsorship, and create pathways to empower ourselves and those around us to lead with purpose. This session emphasizes the significance of building strong professional networks, fostering inclusive leadership, and elevating women to their highest potential in academia.

Whether you're seeking guidance or are in a position to offer it, this session will provide actionable insights to help you thrive and uplift others in your professional journey.

Moderator: **Natalia Norwood** (UM)

Panelists: **Dr. Tina Martin**, Dean, School of Nursing (UMMC)

Dr. Kristin Richards, Associate Professor/Program Chair for Social Work (JSU)

Dr. Ethel Scurlock (UM)

Coranette Square (East MS CC)

Kelly Lester, Associate Provost for Faculty Success, USM (ACE Representative)

LEVERAGING AI AND TECHNOLOGY FOR EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

Track 2: Thursday, Feb. 27 • 3:15 p.m. • Student Union Ballroom

Dive into how AI and technology are reshaping higher education. This workshop will cover practical applications, ethical considerations, and strategies for integrating new tools into existing frameworks for enhanced teaching and learning.

Facilitator: **Erin Garrett** (University of Mississippi)

Coach Yo Are You Ready message, Hype game, instructions for reception/game – what do I do with this?

SMART BREVITY: COMMUNICATING WITH IMPACT

Friday, Feb. 28 • 8:30 a.m. • Pavilion Club

In this interactive workshop, participants will learn to communicate clearly and concisely in a world full of information. Discover techniques to distill your ideas into powerful messages for emails, presentations, and discussions. Leave equipped with practical tools to enhance your writing and speaking, ensuring your voice resonates in today's fast-paced academic environment.

Facilitator: **Dr. Amanda L. Sams** (University of Mississippi)

KEYNOTE

Friday, Feb. 28 • 9:15 a.m. • Pavilion Club

In her keynote address, **Dr. Patrice Buckner Jackson** (Dr. PBJ), author of *Disrupting Burnout*, will challenge

conventional views on work-life balance and reveal practical approaches to overcoming burnout. Drawing on her extensive experience in education and leadership, Dr. PBJ will share insights on reclaiming purpose, cultivating resilience, and building sustainable habits that empower professionals to thrive. Through inspiring stories and actionable strategies, she will guide attendees in rethinking their approach to wellness, encouraging them to disrupt burnout and create meaningful change in both their personal and professional lives.

FINDING HARMONY: IS ACHIEVING WORK-LIFE BALANCE POSSIBLE?

Friday, Feb. 28 • 10:30 a.m. • Pavilion Club

Explore the question, “Is achieving work-life balance possible?” in this engaging session moderated by Dr. PBJ, building on her keynote insights from *Disrupting Burnout*. Together, we’ll dive into practical strategies for managing stress, integrating wellness into demanding roles, and fostering a supportive environment that prioritizes self-care and well-being—empowering you to thrive both professionally and personally.

Moderator: **Dr. Patrice Buckner Jackson** (Dr. PBJ), Founder and Executive Trainer, EduCare Training and Consulting, LLC

Panelists: **Dr. Josie Bidwell**, Director, Office of Well-being (University of Mississippi Medical Center)

Dr. Rolonda Brown, Dean of Academic Affairs (Coahoma Community College)

Ra’Sheda Forbes, Vice President for Access, Opportunity, and Success (Mississippi State University)

Dr. Kristy McRaney, Director for the Center for Behavioral Health (University of Southern Mississippi)

MEET THE WHEMN PRESENTERS

KEYNOTES

Erin and Ben Napier

stars of HGTV's Home Town and owners of Laurel Mercantile Co.

Feb. 27, 9:15 a.m. — Morning Motivation

Erin and Ben Napier are the hosts of HGTV's Home Town, Home Town Takeover, and Home Town Kickstart. They are also successful business owners, authors, and active members of their community in their hometown of Laurel, Mississippi.

Erin is an artist, designer, entrepreneur, and New York Times bestselling author. She graduated from the University of Mississippi and started her career in corporate graphic design before founding her own international stationery company, Lucky Luxe. She is also a founding co-owner of Laurel Mercantile Co. and Scotsman Co.

NAPIER

Ben is a woodworker, author, entrepreneur, founder of Scotsman Co., and co-owner of Laurel Mercantile Co. He is a past president of Laurel's Main Street America chapter dedicated to promoting the rebirth of their historic downtown district.

In 2023, Erin and Ben founded the non-profit Osprey—a family initiative for parents choosing to delay social media and smart device use in childhood. Their passion is for small-town revitalization, American craftsmanship, and fostering low-tech childhoods for communities across the globe.

Dr. LeMia Jenkin

strategic public affairs and communications executive

Feb. 27, 10:15 a.m. — Opening Keynote Address

Dr. LeMia Jenkins is a strategic public affairs and communications executive who serves as President of Brownkey Consulting Group which works with companies across the globe specializing in public affairs, strategic communications, marketing, business development, and strategy. Previously, Jenkins served as the first-ever Chief Public Affairs & Sustainability Officer and Chief Communications Officer at Pinterest.

Prior to Pinterest, Jenkins was the Director of Global Communications and Media Relations for Walmart and the Director of External Affairs for Caesars Entertainment. Earlier in her career, she served as Communications Director for the Hillary for America campaign and as the first Director of Federal Relations for Jackson State University, following her work as a senior communications and policy strategist for several Members of Congress.

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As an influential expert and leader, Jenkins has received a number of awards and recognitions across the industry for her work. In 2021, PR Week recognized her as one of the industry's "In-House Elites" and one of the year's "Women to Watch" honorees. She was also a featured speaker at Fortune's Most Powerful Women Summit and named one of Essence's 8 Black Women to Watch in Corporate America.

Jenkins holds a Bachelor of Arts in Public Relations from Tougaloo College and earned a Master of Public Health (Marketing and Health Communications) from The George Washington University. She has studied Healthcare at the Hebrew University in Israel and has a Doctorate in Education from the University of Mississippi.

Dr. Patrice Buckner Jackson

author and Founder and Executive Trainer, EduCare Training and Consulting, LLC

Feb. 28, 9:15 a.m. – Closing Keynote Address

Dr. Patrice Buckner Jackson, known in her community as Dr. PBJ, gives educators the strategies for accomplishing purposeful work without burnout. Dr. PBJ is an educator of almost 25 years and an Executive Coach for more than 10 years. She holds a doctoral degree in Education Administration, served in executive leadership at colleges and universities, and facilitated leadership training as a faculty member for the Center for Creative Leadership. Dr. Jackson worked in higher education at many levels, from student assistant to President's Cabinet and is the recipient of several professional awards and accolades.

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Dr. Jackson founded EduCare Training and Consulting, LLC through a purpose of pouring into those who pour out so much. Much of her work is specifically focused on equipping and refreshing educators. Compassionate work can carry a high price tag: your mind, body, spirit and relationships may be in distress as you serve the needs of others. Dr. Jackson leads her community to serve well without paying an ultimate price.

Dr. PBJ is the creator and host of the Disrupting Burnout podcast as well as the author of the Amazon best-seller, *Disrupting Burnout: The professional woman's LIFELINE to finding purpose.*

PANELS & WORKSHOPS

FEB. 27, 12:45 P.M., TRACK 1: PANEL DISCUSSION: NAVIGATING WORKPLACE POLITICS WITH CONFIDENCE

Andrea Jekabsons, *Deputy Chief Human Resources Officer, The University of Mississippi – Moderator*

Andrea serves as UM's Deputy Chief Human Resources Officer, Encompass Co-Chair, and Project Director for the University's Workday HCM implementation. She is passionate about employee engagement, connection, and commitment, as these impact the organizations success as well as student attraction and student retention. Prior to joining Ole Miss in 2006, Andrea worked in a variety of industries, including healthcare, wireless, and technology. She is a worksite wellness advocate and recreation enthusiast that enjoys long walks with her dog, exercise programs, camping, and traveling. A California native and a Humboldt State University graduate, Andrea relocated to Oxford in 2005 with her husband who is a UM faculty member and their two children.

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Dr. Loretta Jackson-Williams, *Vice Dean for Medical Education, School of Medicine, University of Mississippi Medical Center*

Dr. Loretta Jackson-Williams currently serves as the Vice Dean for Medical Education at the University of Mississippi School of Medicine. She grew up in Indianola, MS where she attended the public schools. In 1987 she completed her undergraduate studies at Tougaloo College with a degree in chemistry.

In 1994, she completed her studies at Boston University School of Medicine in Boston, Massachusetts with a doctorate in biochemistry and a medical degree. From Boston, she moved to California to complete residency in Emergency Medicine at

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Highland Hospital in the Alameda County Medical Center of Oakland, CA. After completing a year at Highland Hospital as an attending physician, she and her young family returned to their home state of Mississippi.

Currently, she is responsible for the daily operations of the School of Medicine while providing leadership and representation for the school as needed by the dean. She is committed to delivering an exceptional educational program to produce competent, capable and compassionate physicians for the state of Mississippi and beyond.

Dr. April Stampley, *Vice President for External Affairs, Academic Affairs, Rust College*



Dr. April A. Stampley, Vice President for External Affairs, Rust College, has 15 years of experience in higher education. Prior to Rust College, Dr. Stampley served as Coordinator of Academic Initiatives and K-12 Partnerships and Instructor in the Division of Academic Affairs at Alcorn State University. As the Coordinator of Academic Initiatives and K-12 Partnerships, Dr. Stampley provided leadership and coordination for Dual Enrollment/Dual Credit, Community College Transfer Articulation, C2C Program, management of outreach/engagement programs and provided support of all educational partnerships.

As an Instructor, Dr. Stampley is experienced in teaching undergraduate courses, which included freshman seminar courses-University Life and Survival Skills. During Dr. Stampley's instruction in these courses, she prepared freshmen and sophomore students for college life inside the classroom and beyond.

Dr. Stampley earned a bachelor's degree from Alcorn State University, a master's degree from Belhaven University -Leadership, and a doctorate degree from the University of Southern Mississippi -Higher Education Administration. Dr. Stampley's academic specialty is in the interface of higher education administration, accreditation, external affairs, leadership development, institutional research, educational policy, and strategic planning.

Dr. Stampley holds membership in various professional and civic engagement organizations, and she is extremely active in numerous Chamber organizations in North, MS.

Laura Hill, *Associate General Counsel, The University of Mississippi*

Laura Hill serves as the University of Mississippi's Associate General Counsel. In this role, Hill focuses her attention on providing legal support to the University's research mission, as well as its privacy, IT security, and compliance areas.

Prior to joining the University of Mississippi in 2019, Hill spent 10 years as Associate General Counsel for the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson, MS. In that role, her practice included providing regulatory and compliance guidance in healthcare, research, academic affairs, and business law matters.

Hill is a graduate of Mississippi College School of Law. She holds a Bachelors of Arts in International Political Science with minors in French and History. She and her husband, Blair, and stepdaughter Chloe reside in Tupelo where they enjoy loving on their four dogs, hosting dinner parties with friends, and traveling as often as possible.



Dr. Leia Agnew Hill, *Vice President of Institutional Advancement and Executive Director of the MCC Foundation, Meridian Community College*

Dr. Leia Agnew Hill is the Vice President for Institutional Advancement at Meridian Community College, where she also serves as the Executive Director of the MCC Foundation. With over 25 years of experience in fundraising, marketing, and branding, she holds a B.A. in Communication from Mississippi University for Women, a graduate certificate in Social Media Marketing from the University of Florida, an M.A. in Educational Leadership from the University of Mississippi, and an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from the University of Southern Mississippi. Dr. Hill has led several award-winning initiatives in corporate branding and social media marketing.

Her leadership journey includes participation in a variety of prestigious programs, such as Leadership Lauderdale, the State Executive Development Institute, the Mississippi Community College Leadership Academy, the Mississippi Alliance of Nonprofits and Philanthropy Executive Leadership Program, the Mississippi Community College Policy Fellowship Program, and the National Council for Marketing and Public Relations (NCMPR) Leadership Institute. She has served on boards for the United Way of East Mississippi and the Boys and Girls Club of East Mississippi and currently contributes to the boards of the Women's Alliance of Meridian, the Executive Council for NCMPR, Great Southern National Bank, and the Lauderdale County Tourism Commission.

In recognition of her exceptional contributions, Dr. Hill has been honored as one of Mississippi's 50 Leading Businesswomen by the Mississippi Business Journal, NCMPR's Communicator of the Year (D2), and received the Women in Higher Education Mississippi Network Leadership Award in 2024. Additionally, she has been awarded both the William F. Scaggs Highest Flying Eagle Award and the John A. Johnson Outstanding Staff Member Award from Meridian Community College.

FEB. 27, 12:45 P.M., TRACK 2 — PANEL DISCUSSION: STRATEGIES FOR CAREER ADVANCEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Dr. Tonyalle Rush, *Vice President For Student And Enrollment Management, Northwest Community College — Moderator*

Dr. Tonyalle Rush is the Associate Vice President for Student Services and Enrollment Management at Northwest Mississippi Community College. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies with emphases in Biology, Counselor Education, and Computer Technology and a Master of Science in Counselor Education with an emphasis in Student Affairs in Higher Education from Mississippi State University. She completed her Graduate Certificate in Psychology from Western New Mexico University. She earned a Doctor of Education in Higher Education from The University of Mississippi.

Dr. Rush is currently the Immediate Past President of the Mississippi Community College Student Affairs Association, the Mississippi State Director for the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), and a member of the Southern Association for College Student Affairs (SACSA). She is a 2017 Mississippi Community College Leadership Academy (MCCLA) graduate. She is a 2023 graduate of Leadership DeSoto. She is currently in the Community College Policy Fellows Program (CPFP).

Her mission in life is primarily focused on helping students achieve their maximum potential. She loves to volunteer, read, travel, and enjoy life in her spare time!

Dr. Natalie W. Gaughf, *Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, University of Mississippi Medical Center*



Dr. Natalie W. Gaughf is the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at the University of Mississippi Medical Center (UMMC), where she supports the academic mission across UMMC's health profession schools. Since joining UMMC in 2002, she has held numerous faculty and leadership roles, including positions in the Schools of Dentistry, Medicine, and Population Health.

A licensed psychologist, Dr. Gaughf earned her PhD in counseling psychology from the University of Southern Mississippi, with advanced training through a clinical psychology residency and health psychology postdoctoral fellowship. She has been recognized for her contributions to the field of psychology through education and advocacy. Currently, she oversees the development of the UMMC Honors College and the UMMC Museum of Medical History. Her work embodies a deep commitment to advancing academic integrity and innovation in higher education.



Dr. Christy Riddle, *Chief Marketing Officer, Delta State University*

Dr. Christy Riddle serves as the Executive Director of Delta State University Student Success Center. In this role, she provides leadership to five divisions: Academic Advising Services, Academic Support Services, First Year Seminar, International Student Services, and Okra Scholars, a First in the World project supported by a major grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education. Dr. Riddle has 19 years of experience in higher education and earned a Ph.D. in Human Capital Development from the University of Southern Mississippi.



Tanya Kelly-Kirk, *Associate Vice President for Physical Plant Director & Special Projects, Rust College*

Tanya Kelly Kirk holds a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry from Rust, a Master's in Higher Education from Southern New Hampshire University, and is currently pursuing an EdD from University of Southern Mississippi showcasing her continuous commitment to professional development in academia.

As the Associate Vice President Physical Plant and Special Projects at Rust College, she coordinates campus maintenance and renovation programs, supervises staff, and manages fiscal budgets to ensure the college's facilities are in optimal condition for student engagement and special projects as assigned by the President. Kelly-Kirk has served in various leadership roles at Rust College, including Associate Dean of Students for Housing and Judicial Affairs, where she focused on student life, leadership development, and risk management while fostering a safe and inclusive campus environment.



An active member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, she has held several key positions, including Graduate Advisor, Membership Chairman, and Steering Committee member for the 90th Southeastern Regional Conference.

Bethany Mills, *Executive Director of the Career Center, Mississippi State University*

Bethany Mills, Executive Director of the MSU Career Center, is a proud alumna of Mississippi State University and a Mississippi native. She completed a bachelor's degree in secondary education/chemistry in 2006 and a master's in counselor education/community counseling in 2009.

After 12 years of working at the University of Georgia's Career Center, Bethany joined the MSU Career Center team in December 2021 to help make a difference in students' career success after college. In the last three years, she has grown the Career Center team from 16 staff members to 19 staff members and restructured the office. She has also helped to increase employer engagement to hire our students through career fairs and events and built partnerships across campus to address new opportunities for students to achieve career success.

Jess Turuc, *Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life, The University of Mississippi*

Jess Turuc has worked as a fraternity and sorority professional on four college campuses over the last 15 years and currently serves as the Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life at the University of Mississippi. In this role, she oversees a community of just over 10,000 fraternity and sorority members.

She earned a Bachelor of Arts from Michigan Technological University and a Master's degree in Higher Education Administration from Georgia Southern University. Turuc serves as the co-chair of the NASPA FSL KC and chair of the FSL specialty for the Higher Education Consortium Certification program. She enjoys serving in volunteer roles to elevate the fraternity and sorority experience across the nation, collecting Delta SkyMiles, watching reality television as well as Golden Girl re-runs and cheering on various sports teams, especially the Rebels!



FEB. 27, 1:45 P.M., TRACK 1 — WORKSHOP: USING DATA AND ANALYTICS TO DRIVE DECISION-MAKING

Dr. Almesha Campbell, *Vice President for Research and Economic Development, Jackson State University — Moderator*

Almesha L. Campbell, Ph.D., RTTP, is the Vice President for Research and Economic Development at Jackson State University, where she oversees Grants and Contracts, Sponsored Programs, Research Compliance, Technology Transfer, Federal Relations, and JSU Global.

She has secured over \$12 million in federal grants, serving as PI or Co-PI for programs like the NSF Mid-South I-Corps Hub and the NIH REACH Hub. Dr. Campbell co-led the development of the JSU Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship and created the JSU Innovation Fellows Program, integrating cutting-edge technologies like virtual reality into STEM education. As the first from an HBCU to be Chair of the AUTM Board of Directors, she is nationally recognized for her leadership in innovation and research translation.

Dr. Campbell holds degrees from the University of Central Florida and Jackson State University and is committed to broadening participation in innovation and entrepreneurship among underrepresented minorities.



Susan Seal, *Dean of the College of Professional and Continuing Studies, Mississippi State University*

Dr. Seal is the inaugural Dean of the College of Professional and Continuing Studies at Mississippi State University. She was previously the Executive Director for Mississippi State Online which is now housed within the College. She has over 28 years of experience in various leadership roles including VP and General Manager of a private industry organization and Director of Outreach for an international non-profit organization as well as many roles within higher education.

Dr. Seal is currently the Co-Chair of the Council of Chief Online Learning Officers for the national professional organization, UPCEA, and the Chair of its Southern Region. Additionally, she is president-elect of the Starkville Rotary Club, one of the largest in the state.

Dr. Viola Acoff, *Dean of the School of Engineering, The University of Mississippi*

Viola L. Acoff serves as the Dean of the School of Engineering at the University of Mississippi. She joined Ole Miss from the University of Alabama, where she has served as associate dean for undergraduate and graduate programs since 2014. She earned her bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees in materials engineering from the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Dr. Acoff has published more than 80 peer-reviewed papers, secured more than \$13 million in externally funded grants and has served as a consultant to industry-leading corporations, in addition to serving on multiple boards and in more than two dozen professional service roles. She has taught undergraduate and graduate courses in welding metallurgy, physical metallurgy and scanning electron microscopy and has an active research group involving welding metallurgy and characterization of metals. A recipient of numerous national and international awards, Dr. Acoff was recognized as one of the Most Influential Black Corporate Directors by Savoy magazine, and as one of the Most Influential Corporate Directors by WomenInc. The Engineering Council of Birmingham named her its educator of the year in 2016.

Dr. Mary Graham, *President, Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College*

Dr. Mary S. Graham became president of Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College in 2010. A Mississippi native, she holds a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration and both her master's and bachelor's Degrees from The University of Southern Mississippi. Under her leadership, MGCCC has received numerous accolades, including being named a Top 100 associate degree Producer by Community College Week, a STEM Jobs Approved School, a Military Friendly School, a Military Friendly Spouse School, a Fit Friendly Workplace, an ACT College and Career Readiness Exemplar, an American Culinary Federation accredited culinary school as well as a Top Ranked Nursing School by RegisteredNursing.org.

Graham served on the board of directors of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). She is a member of the Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) Presidential Advisory Board. Graham served on The Commission to Redesign the Mississippi State Flag. Graham also serves on the following: member of the Mississippi Power Association Board of Directors, and on the Mississippi Humanities Board of Directors.



FEB. 27, 1:45 P.M., TRACK 2 – WORKSHOP, MASTERING PRODUCTIVITY: TIME MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE TOOLS FOR SUCCESS

Dr. Mary Jane Collins, *Nurse Anesthesia Assistant Program Coordinator, University of Southern Mississippi – Facilitator*

Mary Jane Collins is the Co-Director of the School of Leadership and Advanced Nursing Practice, Nurse Anesthesia Program Coordinator, and Associate Professor at The University of Southern Mississippi. She earned her Doctor of Health Administration from the University of Mississippi Medical Center, completing a post-doctoral fellowship in Health Policy. Dr. Collins holds leadership positions on several state and national boards, committees, and professional organizations, currently serving as a Fellow of the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists. Her research interests include educational innovation, pharmacology, health policy, and quality initiatives. A native of Iuka, Mississippi, Dr. Collins practices clinical nurse anesthesia in Meridian, where she lives with her husband, Al, and three daughters.



FEB. 27, 3:15 P.M., TRACK 1 – PANEL DISCUSSION, LEADERSHIP, MENTORSHIP, AND SPONSORSHIP: EMPOWERING WOMEN IN HIGHER ED

Natalia Norwood, *ADA Specialist/EORC Investigator, The University of Mississippi – Moderator*

Natalia Norwood is a legal professional specializing in ADA compliance. As an ADA Specialist and EORC Investigator at the University of Mississippi, she ensures adherence to federal regulations across the institution.

Natalia is also an Adjunct Professor for Criminal Justice and Legal Studies, where she helps students develop practical legal skills. She has led impactful mentorship programs for university employees as well as initiatives for youth in Oxford, Mississippi. Natalia is the first staff member of the Sarah Isom Center to be awarded a fellowship and research grant, supporting her ongoing study of the impact of the ADA on employment outcomes for women with disabilities in Mississippi.



Dr. Tina Martin, *Dean of the School of Nursing, The University of Mississippi*

Dr. Tina Martin has served the School of Nursing in various roles since joining UMMC's faculty ranks in 1999. Prior to being named Dean of the School of Nursing in March 2024, she served as interim dean. She also has had other administrative positions including associate dean for administration since 2022-2023, assistant dean for accreditation and evaluation from 2016 to 2022 and interim assistant dean for undergraduate programs from 2020 to 2021. From 2009 to 2016, she was the director of UMMC's Accelerated BSN program. She has also held academic appointments in the School of Health Related Professions and the School of Medicine.

She was named to UMMC's Academy for Excellence in Education in 2022 and was a 2020-2021 American Association of Colleges of Nursing Elevating Leaders in Academic Nursing Fellow. She currently serves as a board member for the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE).



Dr. Kristin Richards, *Associate Professor and Program Chair for Social Work, Jackson State University*

Dr. Kristin Richards is a distinguished social work educator and leader with a focus on servant leadership, workforce development initiatives, and financial capability. She served as the BSW Chair at Jackson State University, a Contributing Faculty member in the DSW program at Walden University and has taught financial planning at Delta State University for more than a decade. Dr. Richards has published numerous articles and presented at local, state, and national conferences. She has taught thousands of students, providing them with a robust education and inspiring them to excel in their professional endeavors for the betterment of child welfare and related systems. Her commitment to student success at the doctoral level is evident in the time and effort she invests in her students' academic and professional development, guiding them through professional conference presentations and publications.

As a recipient of numerous grants, Dr. Richards currently serves as a Title IV-E Principal Investigator. In this role, she collaborates with program directors from all eight public institutions in Mississippi, aiming to improve workforce development, create an improved and increasingly stable child welfare workforce in Mississippi, and enhance outcomes in child welfare within the state. Additionally, Dr. Richards works closely with The Forgotten Adoption Option, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to overcoming barriers to facilitate non-kin adoptions from foster care.



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Dr. Ethel Scurlock, *Dean of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College and Associate Professor of English and African American Studies, The University of Mississippi*

Dr. Ethel Scurlock is Dean of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College and Associate Professor of English and African American Studies at the University of Mississippi. Prior to being named Dean, Dr. Scurlock was also the Director of African American Studies and Senior Faculty Fellow of the Luckyday Residential College at the University of Mississippi.

She is a native of Memphis and earned her BA in English from the University of Tennessee and M.A. and Ph.D. from Bowling Green State University of Ohio. Dr. Scurlock's teaching and service has been recognized with many awards during her tenure at UM, including College of Liberal Arts Teacher of the Year, UM Humanities Teacher of the Year, the Elsie M. Hood Outstanding Teacher of the Year, the Black Alumni Trailblazers Award, and the Donald Cole Award for Faculty and Staff.



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Coranette "Chris" Square, *Dean of eLearning and Computer Science Adjunct Instructor, East Mississippi Community College*

Coranette Square is the Dean of eLearning and a Computer Science Adjunct Instructor at East Mississippi Community College, where she has dedicated 18 years to advancing education and innovation. In addition to overseeing the Department for Teaching and Learning, she is a lifelong learner and a doctoral candidate in Business Administration with a specialization in Computer Information Technology and Project Management, expected to graduate in the summer of 2025.

Passionate about education and technology, Square is committed to leveraging cutting-edge innovations to enhance organizational efficiency and leadership development. With expertise in technology, leadership, and project management,



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she strives to empower organizations to adapt to the evolving demands of the digital age. A strong advocate for women in leadership, Square believes in fostering inclusive environments that inspire growth and collaboration. She also enjoys staying ahead of advancements in education, business, and technology, using this knowledge to inspire meaningful change and drive progress. Outside of work, Square enjoys traveling, reading, cooking, and spending quality time with her daughter.

Dr. Kelly Lester, *Associate Provost for Faculty Success, USM (ACE Representative)*

Kelly Ferris Lester (EdD, MFA) is Associate Provost for Faculty Success and Professor of Dance at the University of Southern Mississippi. Lester's work focuses on educational development, leadership, community building, and support of academic enterprise through the lens of student and faculty success. Lester was the founding director of USM's Center for Faculty Development and led the CFD to be recognized as a Movement Maker at the 2023 National Higher Education Teaching Conference.

Lester serves on the American Council for Education (ACE) Women's Executive Leadership Council and served the National Dance Education Organization (NDEO) as President (2020-22) and on its Board of Directors since 2011. Lester recently received an Outstanding Service Award from SUNY Brockport Alumni Association in recognition of her service to higher education and dance education.



FEB. 27, 3:15 P.M., TRACK 2 – WORKSHOP: LEVERAGING AI AND TECHNOLOGY FOR EDUCATION AND TRANSFORMATION

Erin Garrett, *Director of Strategic Communications, The University of Mississippi – Facilitator*

Erin Garrett, APR, has more than 12 years of experience in higher education marketing and communications. Currently serving as strategic communications director for the University of Mississippi's marketing and communications department, she is co-chair of the university's AI working group for marketing and communications. In previous roles, she led communications for UM's Southaven regional campus and its School of Pharmacy.

Garrett received a B.A. in journalism with a public relations emphasis in 2011 and a M.S. in integrated marketing communication in 2020. She received her Accreditation in Public Relations in 2015.



FEB. 28, 8:30 A.M. – WORKSHOP, SMART BREVITY: COMMUNICATING WITH IMPACT

Dr. Amanda L. Sams, *Assistant Professor of Integrated Marketing Communications, The University of Mississippi – Facilitator*

Dr. Amanda Sams Bradshaw is an assistant professor of integrated marketing



communications in the School of Journalism and New Media at the University of Mississippi. Her overall research agenda focuses on the nexus of social network communication and individual decision making. Specifically, she examines how both organic interactions and paid messages on social network platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube) which are typically health related, inform individuals' decision making and identity formation –as individuals, as patients, as parents, and as caregivers.

She is the faculty advisor for the University of Mississippi Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) and the chair of IMC Connect!, an annual event hosted by the School of Journalism and New Media, which brings together senior leaders in IMC from both research and practice. Bradshaw is an active member in the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), the Public Relations Society of America, and the Association for Marketing & Healthcare Research (AMHCR). Dr. Bradshaw received her Ph.D. in Mass Communication from the University of Florida, where she specialized in health communication research. She obtained her M.S. in Integrated Marketing Communications from West Virginia University, and B.A. in Journalism from the University of Alabama.

FEB. 28, 10:30 A.M. — PANEL SESSION, FINDING HARMONY: IS ACHIEVING WORK-LIFE BALANCE POSSIBLE?

Dr. Patrice Buckner Jackson (Dr. PBJ), *Founder and Executive Trainer, EduCare Training and Consulting, LLC — Moderator*

Dr. Patrice Buckner Jackson, known in her community as Dr. PBJ, gives educators the strategies for accomplishing purposeful work without burnout. Dr. PBJ is an educator of almost 25 years and an Executive Coach for more than 10 years. She holds a doctoral degree in Education Administration, served in executive leadership at colleges and universities, and facilitated leadership training as a faculty member for the Center for Creative Leadership. Dr. Jackson worked in higher education at many levels, from student assistant to President's Cabinet and is the recipient of several professional awards and accolades.

Dr. Jackson founded EduCare Training and Consulting, LLC through a purpose of pouring into those who pour out so much. Much of her work is specifically focused on equipping and refreshing educators. Compassionate work can carry a high price tag: your mind, body, spirit and relationships may be in distress as you serve the needs of others. Dr. Jackson leads her community to serve well without paying an ultimate price.

Dr. PBJ is the creator and host of the Disrupting Burnout podcast as well as the author of the Amazon best-seller, *Disrupting Burnout: The professional woman's LIFELINE to finding purpose.*

Dr. Josie Bidwell, *Director, Office of Well-being, The University of Mississippi Medical Center*

Josie Bidwell serves as a Professor at The University of Mississippi Medical Center School of Medicine with a secondary appointment in the School of Population Health. She obtained her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the University of Mississippi Medical Center in 2004 and Master of Science in Nursing from the same institution in 2006. She received her Doctor of Nursing Practice degree from UMMC SON in 2013.

She is currently practicing as a Lifestyle Medicine Clinician with the department of Preventive Medicine where she also serves as the Clinical Director



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for the department. She is a board-certified Diplomate of the American College of Lifestyle Medicine and the International Board of Lifestyle Medicine.

In 2022, she was inducted as a Fellow of the American College of Lifestyle Medicine. She is the first nurse to receive this designation. She is the host of Southern Remedy Health and Fit on Mississippi Public Broadcasting Think Radio. Dr. Bidwell was inducted into the UMMC Nursing Hall of Fame in May 2021. She was appointed as the Director of the Office of Well-being at UMMC in July 2024.

Dr. Rolonda Brown, *Dean of Academic Affairs, Coahoma Community College*

Dr. Rolonda R. Brown has worked in the field of education for nearly 25 years. She has served for nine years as Chief Academic Officer and Dean of Academic Affairs at Coahoma Community College where she has led successful efforts to enhance the academic experience through retention and recruitment initiatives and the elimination of barriers to student success.

Prior to joining Coahoma, Dr. Brown served as an assistant professor at the University of North GA, visiting professor at Liaocheng University (Liaocheng, China), adjunct community college instructor, and high school teacher. She has earned three degrees all from the University of Mississippi – a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism, Masters of Education in Curriculum and Instruction, and Doctorate of Philosophy in Education.

Her career as an educator has brought her great fulfillment, and she believes her work with community colleges has been the most important work of her life.



Ra'Sheda Forbes, *Vice President for Access, Opportunity, and Success, Mississippi State University*

With over 15 years of experience in higher education, Forbes serves as the first ever Vice President for Access, Opportunity and Success at Mississippi State University. Forbes has a longstanding commitment to cultivating excellence through transformational learning experiences. In her role, she continues to strive to provide individual mentorship to students seeking personal, social, and intellectual support.

Forbes' work on the Student Success Taskforce amplified the importance of creating pathways and programs for students into higher education. In her role, she oversees units that administer programs that broaden college access and support student success across the University. Forbes serves as the strategic leader of an array of programs and departments, housing key departments like the Holmes Cultural Diversity Center, Office of Inclusive Excellence, and the Office of Pre-College and Opportunity Programs all with the principles of accountability, excellence, community, and support to achieve the optimal outcomes for students who MSU touches.



Dr. Kristy McRaney, *Director for the Center for Behavioral Health, The University of Southern Mississippi*

Dr. Kristy McRaney is an Assistant Clinical Professor in the School of Psychology at the University of Southern Mississippi and serves as the Director of the USM Center for Behavioral Health (CBH). A licensed psychologist, Dr. McRaney specializes in the comprehensive evaluation and treatment of mental health disorders in children. Under her leadership, the CBH plays a pivotal role in expanding access to high-quality, evidence-based behavioral health services throughout Mississippi,



SPEAKERS

NEED UPDATES FOR THIS WHOLE SECTION

CONFERENCE EMCEE

Erica Avent is currently an assistant professor of teacher education at the University of Mississippi. Prior to this position, she was the coordinator with the LuckyDay Residential College. She has inspired and motivated Mississippi school children for 17 years, as a classroom teacher in grades 3-6 and as a school and district administrator.

A native of Forest, Mississippi, Dr. Avent served as a board member for the Mississippi Association of Educators. Additionally, she is a past mentor teacher with the Mississippi Teacher Fellowship Program. She is a National Board Certified Teacher who earned her Ed.S., M.A. and B.A from the University of Mississippi. In 2020, she received her Ed.D. in Elementary Education with an emphasis on African American teacher recruitment and retention in K-12.

She has expertise in community engagement, teacher mentorship and student success in K-12. She is a seasoned educator who has developed community initiatives and programs targeting the inclusiveness of African American students and communities. Her focus has been on helping diversify the teacher pipeline so that all students can see representations of African American teachers in their schools. She currently resides in Oxford, Mississippi, with her husband, Shawn, and her daughters, Aubrey and Jordyn.



AVENT

WELCOME, THURSDAY, FEB. 29, 8:30 A.M.

Charlotte Fant Pegues, WHEMN state coordinator and vice chancellor for Student Affairs at the University of Mississippi, leads a team of professionals who are committed to providing exceptional services and creating an environment where all students can be successful. During her 30 years of service to the university, she has served as assistant vice chancellor for student affairs, director of admissions and assistant provost and registrar. Dr. Fant Pegues earned several degrees from the university including a B.A. in Psychology, an M.A. in Education and a Ph.D. in Leadership and Counselor Education. She holds an academic appointment in the School of Education as an assistant professor of leadership and counselor education. She and her husband, Tee, enjoy living in Oxford and love being a part of the university community and family.



PEGUES

NETWORKING LUNCH / THURSDAY, FEB. 29, 11:30 A.M.

Jeanna D. Wilkes brings over eleven years of experience in higher education, currently serving as special projects coordinator and assistant professor of preventive medicine at the University of Mississippi Medical Center. She was pivotal in enhancing master's and doctoral programs in population health science, biostatistics and data science in UMMC's newest school, the John D. Bower School of Population Health, which is the fourth of its kind in the U.S. Dr. Wilkes contributed to graduate and doctoral programs and student success and development as a director of student life and orientation and graduate admissions and studies coordinator while at Delta State University.



WILKES

Holding a doctor of health administration degree from the University of Mississippi and an MBA, a Master of Commercial Aviation and a Bachelor of Science from DSU, Dr. Wilkes is engaged in various grant-funded projects and has made contributions to initiatives such as the NHLBI's Graduate Training and Education Center with the Jackson Heart Study, U.S. HHS's Assets for Independence, and U.S. Department of Education TRIO SSS. Her expertise includes advising first-gen undergraduates, NCAA Division II student-athletes and international students, and developing student success and faculty excellence programs. Dr. Wilkes researches faculty burnout and wellness, notably contributing to the Bower Foundation's IHL Faculty/Provider Burnout study, Quality of Academic Life and recently presented The Teaching Huddle, a faculty orientation model at the 2023 SACSCOC Conference.

Beyond her professional pursuits, Dr. Wilkes passionately advocates for #GiveBlood and #Recycle initiatives, and her interests include outdoor exploration and trivia.

STRIKE A POSE: SHAPING THE WONDER WOMAN IN YOU / THURSDAY, FEB. 29, 12:45 P.M.

Andrea Jekabsons has served as chief human resources office for the University of Mississippi since March 2020. She is passionate about employee engagement, connection and commitment as these impact an organization's success as well as student recruitment and retention. Prior to joining Ole Miss in 2006, Andrea worked in a variety of industries, including healthcare, wireless and technology. She is a worksite wellness advocate and recreation enthusiast that enjoys long walks with her dog, exercise programs, camping and traveling. A native to California and a Humboldt State University graduate, Andrea relocated to Oxford in 2005 with her husband who is a faculty member and their two children.



CLOSING REMARKS / FRIDAY, MARCH 1, 11:30 A.M.

Glenn F. Boyce serves as the 18th Chancellor of the University of Mississippi. **As chancellor, he has strengthened how Ole Miss builds leaders, empowers student success, drives progress through research and economic opportunity and champions communities. Under his leadership, the university has reached record enrollment numbers, broken ground on the largest single construction project ever on the Oxford campus and launched the largest comprehensive campaign in the history of Mississippi universities to generate at least \$1.5 billion in private support. His career spans more than 40 years across secondary and post-secondary education including as Commissioner of Higher Education for the State of Mississippi where he led the state's university system.**





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*Special Projects Coordinator, Office of the
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