

# ALETHEIA

SHACKOULS HONORS COLLEGE NEWSLETTER



EXPLORING WOMEN  
IN LEADERSHIP  
WITH  
**LAURA HERRING**  
**FEIFEI ZENG**  
AND  
**GENTRY BURKES**

**SPRING 2018**

*Aletheia* is a Greek word normally interpreted as “truth” or “reality.” However, *Aletheia*’s original meaning suggests discovery or revelation, a notion that is more aligned with the traditions of education and enlightenment.



**MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™**  
JUDY AND BOBBY SHACKOULS  
HONORS COLLEGE

# **ALETHEIA**

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# A WELCOME FROM DEAN CHRISTOPHER SNYDER

*Dear Students, Alumni, and Friends,*



It is a pleasure to share with you some of the latest news and happenings at the Shackouls Honors College.

Through the direction of Dr. Tommy Anderson and Dr. David Hoffman, we are pleased to announce that several of our students have been awarded prestigious external scholarships and fellowships. These include a Fulbright winner, a Junior Public Policy and International Affairs Fellow, MSU's first Boren Scholar, a Humanity in Action Fellow, and the state of Mississippi's only Goldwater Scholar. You can read their stories in this issue of *Aletheia*.

Our Honors students continue to land competitive research and internship experiences across the country. We are fortunate to have as a sponsoring partner for many of these internships Mississippi

State's National Strategic Policy and Research Center (nSPARC). Graduating seniors this year received acceptances to the nation's top graduate and professional programs, including Columbia University Medical School, Georgetown University Law School, and the University of Florida's joint MD/PhD program.

We also welcomed a new member of the Shackouls Honors College team: Dr. Donald Shaffer, who took the reins as Mentor for the Presidential Scholarship Program. You can also read an interview with Dr. Shaffer in this issue.

Our students and alumni are doing great things in Mississippi, across the nation, and around the world. Thank you for being part of their success and supporting their quest for academic excellence.

*Best Wishes,*

**Christopher A. Snyder, PhD**  
*Professor of History and Dean of the  
Judy and Bobby Shackouls Honors College*

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The Zacharias Village, home to the Judy and Bobby Shackouls Honors College

# Becoming a Member of the Honors College

- There is no ACT or GPA minimum required for application.
- High school seniors who are admitted to Mississippi State University before Dec. 1, 2018 and have both at least a 30 ACT score (or SAT equivalent) and a 3.75 GPA will be invited to join the Honors College upon admission to the University.
- Transfer students or students who do not meet the above score requirements may go through the regular application process. The process requires one essay and two letters of recommendation.



Lucas Ferguson, 2017 Gates-Cambridge Scholar

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# Walk The Path of Honors



**MISSISSIPPI STATE**  
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**T**he Judy and Bobby Shackouls Honors College provides a true residential college experience for Honors students at

Mississippi State University. Located in Zacharias Villiage, Griffis and Nunnelee Halls provide students the benefits of a dynamic social life with attention to academic excellence.

The Honors College is home to the Honors Undergraduate Research Program, the Office of Prestigious External Scholarships for Undergraduates, the Presidential and Provost Scholarship Programs, and offers one of the most dynamic study abroad programs in the Southeastern Conference.

The Shackouls Honors College offers its students the chance to distinguish themselves in a significant way during their time at Mississippi State so that they may find themselves competing at the very highest level at the end of their undergraduate experiences.



*Field Brown, 2014 Rhodes Scholar*



**MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™**  
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HONORS COLLEGE

student success

**SPOTLIGHT**



Meet just a few of the  
outstanding students  
who prove the impact of  
Mississippi State University's  
Shackouls Honors College.



# Jesse Smith, MSU's Newest Fulbright Finalist

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*By James Carskadon*

*Photo by Megan Bean*

Jesse Smith, a member of Mississippi State's Judy and Bobby Shackouls Honors College, will travel abroad this year to the United Kingdom's Cardiff University, ranked among the top 100 universities in the world, as part of the flagship international exchange program. As a finalist in the UK-Cardiff University Partnership Award, he will research depression and drug addiction while pursuing a master's degree in public health.

"Personally, this is a great opportunity for cultural engagement," Smith said. "I love learning from different world views; I love connecting with the people that own those views; I love sharing what mine has taught me in return, and that is what Fulbright is all about."

David Hoffman, an associate professor in the Department of Anthropology and Middle Eastern Cultures, helped guide Smith through the application process as MSU's Fulbright Program Administrator and part of the advising team in the Shackouls Honors College's Office of Prestigious External Scholarships.

"This is great news for both Jesse and MSU," Hoffman said. "Fulbright is one of the most prestigious scholarships available to support post-baccalaureate study and research. His successful application is a tribute to the great research, teaching and service opportunities available to MSU undergraduates. There is no doubt that Jesse's exceptional application was a direct product of the close mentorship he received throughout his undergraduate career."

At MSU, Smith has accumulated undergraduate research experience with the university's Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering, Department of Psychology and Center for Advanced Vehicular Systems. He also spent a summer researching at the University of Mississippi Medical Center. Smith has studied traumatic brain injuries, spinal cord injuries and developed computational platforms for research use.

While pursuing his master's degree at Cardiff, Smith will work in the university's Centre for Development and Evaluation of Interventions for Public Health Improvement, a Center of Excellence for public health in the United Kingdom.



"I will be studying public health from a psychological perspective," he said. "My project focuses on learning what puts teens in Cardiff at risk for stress and addiction disorders. More importantly, I want to understand how to apply that knowledge to prevent the disorders from ever occurring. Fulbright allows me to do so while strengthening my own connections, as well as Mississippi State's and our country's connections abroad, opening up the opportunity for a lifetime of international collaboration in my work."

The Fulbright Program is the flagship international educational exchange program sponsored by the U.S. government and is designed to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and those in other countries. The primary source of funding for the Fulbright Program is an annual appropriation made by the U.S. Congress to the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Participating governments, host institutions, corporations and foundations in foreign countries and in the United States also provide direct and indirect support.

Recipients of grants are selected on the basis of academic or professional achievement, as well as demonstrated leadership potential in their fields. This year there were nearly 10,000 applicants to the program. ■

# Nicholas Ezzell

## Winner of the 2018 Goldwater Scholarship

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*By James Carskadon*

*Photo by Beth Wynn*

For the fourth time in seven years, a Mississippi State University student has received the highly coveted Barry Goldwater Scholarship.

Nicholas A. “Nic” Ezzell, a senior physics major from Laurel, is the land-grant institution’s newest recipient of the prestigious award and the only Mississippian to receive the honor this year. Ezzell, who has accumulated significant research experience as an undergraduate student, is a member of MSU’s Judy and Bobby Shackouls Honors College.

Established in 1986, the Virginia-based Barry Goldwater Scholarship and Excellence in Education Foundation serves as a memorial to the former U.S. Republican senator from Arizona and 1964 presidential candidate. In annually recognizing undergraduate majors in science, mathematics, engineering and computer disciplines, it helps ensure a continuing source of highly qualified professionals in these fields.

“The Goldwater Scholarship recognizes Nic’s remarkable achievements as an undergraduate researcher across disciplines—in both physics and chemistry,” said Tommy Anderson, professor of English and director of the Shackouls Honors College’s Office of Prestigious External Scholarships. “The scholarship is a testament to Nic’s dedication to path-breaking research and to sharing this research at conferences and in peer-reviewed scientific publications across the region and nation. The award recognizes as well the transformative mentorship Nic has received as an undergraduate researcher in the Shackouls Honors College and the College of Arts and Sciences.”

Ezzell is an aspiring computational physicist. At MSU, his primary research adviser is Associate Professor of Chemistry Nicholas Fitzkee. Ezzell also has researched extensively with the U.S. Department of Energy’s Oak Ridge National Laboratory, where he worked under the guidance of Miguel Fuentes-Cabrera.

This summer, Ezzell will return to Oak Ridge to work on the development of quantum computing software. Three years into his college career, Ezzell has presented his research to the American Physical Society and is a listed author on a paper accepted into *Biophysical Journal*, among other



research accomplishments.

“The Goldwater Scholarship is an encouraging message that my trajectory has yet to falter and that more than just my adviser and immediate peers recognize my potential as a serious scientific researcher,” Ezzell said. “In short, it’s an affirmation that the work I do matters.”

“I have many thanks to give to my mentors at Mississippi State,” Ezzell added. “Of critical importance was my primary research advisor Dr. Nicholas Fitzkee, who helped me navigate the world of computational protein biochemistry, but more importantly, that of problem solving as a scientist in general. For his mentorship alone, I would qualify my research experience at MSU as excellent, but I’d be remiss not to mention the assistance of countless others at MSU, such as Dr. Dipangkar Dutta, Dr. Thomas Anderson, and Dean Chris Snyder. I look forward to where my trajectory lands as I look toward graduate school and beyond.”

Since its inception, the Goldwater Foundation has recognized a total of 25 Mississippi State students—17 with the Goldwater Scholarship and eight with honorable mention awards. This year, 1,280 students from 455 institutions were nominated for a Goldwater Scholarship. The Goldwater Foundation named 211 new Goldwater Scholars. ■

# Khalil N. Markham Wins Prestigious Public Policy Fellowship

*By Sasha Steinberg*

*Photo by Beth Wynn*

A promising computer engineering student in Mississippi State University's Judy and Bobby Shackouls Honors College has been selected for a prestigious fellowship at one of the country's top 10 professional public policy and planning schools.

Khalil N. Markham of Biloxi will participate in the University of Minnesota Humphrey School of Public Affairs' Junior Summer Institute in Public Policy and International Affairs. The rigorous, seven-week academic and experiential learning program is designed to equip undergraduate students with the knowledge and skills to thrive in graduate programs and public service careers.

MSU's third PPIA Fellow in four years, Markham is receiving a \$1,000 stipend, meal stipend, housing accommodations and round-trip airfare. As part of the fellowship experience, he will engage in discussions with other emerging leaders from around the country who are driven to make a difference through service to their communities.

"My dad retired from the Air Force after 21 years of service, and growing up as a military kid made me want to find my own way to serve," Markham said. "I want to give back to not only help my generation, but also provide more opportunities for future generations."

Markham, who transferred last fall to MSU from Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, said he is passionate about finding ways to combine his interests in computer engineering and technology to help increase biodiversity and alleviate poverty. He is confident that the PPIA program will help him "grow out of my shell and find my own passion for civic engagement that connects those interests, but from a different perspective."

Markham said MSU Professor of English Tommy Anderson inspired him to push beyond intellectual boundaries and helped him become more confident in his writing skills during the PPIA application process. Anderson also serves as the honors college's prestigious external scholarships director and College of Arts and Sciences' interim assistant dean for undergraduate affairs.



"I enjoy learning from people from all walks of life, and Dr. Anderson is one of them," Markham said. "He gave me feedback and was willing to help me grow, but I had to meet him halfway. He challenged my mind and taught me to never be satisfied. It's good to be grateful, happy and enjoy your success, but you need to keep going. It's about the journey, not the end result."

"I want to be a sponge and soak in knowledge, but I want to let it out and share with people, too. Everything you do is for the people behind you," he said. "I want to make doors of opportunities visible and open for others, but encourage each person to walk through or step over the threshold on their own."

Chris Snyder, honors college dean and MSU professor of history, praised Markham for taking the initiative to make connections with Anderson and others on campus who have provided valuable support throughout his MSU experience.

"Khalil's enthusiasm and ambition were obvious from our first meeting. As a transfer student, he recognized how important it is to establish relationships with faculty, staff and peer leaders in the honors college," Snyder said. "In doing so, he has discovered opportunities like the PPIA Fellowship Program and mentors like Dr. Anderson to help him tell his story well in the application process." ■

# Trey Wallace

## Humanity in Action Fellow

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*By James Carskadon*

*Photo by Megan Bean*

A senior industrial engineering major at Mississippi State will take part in a prestigious international program this summer after being named a Humanity in Action Fellow.

Trey Wallace, a Starkville native and member of the Judy and Bobby Shackouls Honors College, will travel to Warsaw, Poland, next month, where he will join students from around the world who are receiving the Humanity in Action Fellowship. Humanity in Action programs explore past and present examples of resistance to intolerance, with a goal of encouraging future leaders to be engaged citizens and responsible decision makers.

At MSU, Wallace has been involved with several campus organizations such as Alumni Delegates and the Student Association. He also helped start No Lost Children, a student organization that advocates for children of Syrian refugees through local educational programs and fundraising.

“Trey’s selection as a Humanity in Action Fellow recognizes his uncommon commitment to public service across the globe,” said Tommy Anderson, MSU professor of English and director of the Office of Prestigious External Scholarships. “He has spent much of his adult life working to make communities stronger by raising awareness of the global health disparities in underserved communities. I think Humanity in Action saw Trey’s keen understanding of how the global is inextricably tied to the local. Trey’s leadership at MSU is unique in that it shows other students that global service must emerge from a foundation that is committed to making local communities stronger too.”

Since coming to MSU, Wallace has studied abroad in France and Italy, in addition to completing internships in South Africa. Last year, he interned at St. Dominic Hospital in Jackson, where he assisted with efforts to better allocate resources and serve patients.

“I think there’s a lot of applications for industrial engineering in humanitarian work and human rights,” Wallace said. “I think most engineers end up working in industry, working on products, things like that. That’s great stuff to do, but I was really interested in the personal impact that you can have in humanitarian work. That’s what drew me to Humanity in Action and in a broader sense draws me to



humanitarian work as an engineer.”

Wallace, who holds MSU’s Charles and Pat Lee Presidential Endowed Scholarship, said his international experiences at the university have prepared him for his upcoming fellowship. He plans to graduate from MSU in December and pursue graduate school in the fields of public health and international development.

“My goal is to work in non-profit management and humanitarian crisis response,” Wallace said. “While I’ve had some experience working with organizations related to these things, I haven’t had any formal classroom education about it. I also don’t know much about the history of human rights and humanitarian work throughout Europe. This program will give me more of the formal education that can go along with the experiential education I’ve had.”

The Humanity in Action program is interdisciplinary and features daily lectures and discussions with renowned academics, journalists, politicians and activists, as well as site visits to government agencies, non-profit and community organizations, museums and memorials. ■

# MSU's first Boren Scholar 'excited' to study abroad in China

*By Sasha Steinberg*

*Photo by Megan Bean*

A microbiology major in Mississippi State's Department of Biological Sciences is embarking on a study abroad experience in China this fall with help from a \$10,000 David L. Boren Scholarship.

As MSU's first Boren Scholar, senior Donielle D. Allen of McCalla, Alabama, is participating in the School for International Training's "Health, Environment and Traditional Chinese Medicine" program. Support for Allen's study abroad experience also is made possible by the Otilie Schillig Leadership Scholarship she is receiving as an MSU Presidential Scholar in the Judy and Bobby Shackouls Honors College.

This year, 794 undergraduate students applied for the Boren Scholarship. Of this group, Allen and 220 others were awarded the scholarship by the Washington, D.C.-based Institute of International Education on behalf of the National Security Education Program.

"We are exceedingly proud of Ms. Allen's achievement and hope she is just the first of many Boren Scholars here at MSU," said David M. Hoffman, an associate professor and graduate coordinator in MSU's Department of Anthropology and Middle Eastern Cultures. Hoffman also serves as the Boren campus representative, critical language scholarship adviser and Fulbright program adviser in the Shackouls Honors College's Office of Prestigious External Scholarships.

Boren Scholarships provide funding opportunities for U.S. undergraduate students to study less commonly taught languages in world regions critical to U.S. interests and underrepresented in study abroad, including Africa, Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, Eurasia, Latin America and the Middle East. In exchange for funding, Boren Scholars commit to work in federal government for at least one year after graduation.

During her time abroad, Allen looks forward to expanding her knowledge of traditional Chinese medicine, an interest she developed while overcoming a challenging health experience. While growing up in Crystal Springs, Allen experienced inflammation and swelling in her joints. Doctors prescribed her different medicines, but none worked. Through independent online research, Allen learned about the healing



properties of turmeric, an herb that has been used in Chinese medicine for thousands of years.

"I decided to give turmeric a try, and it worked. The pain was gone, and I was able to sleep better," she recalled. "My interest in traditional Chinese medicine as a child made me want to become a doctor, but I'm excited to see how this trip to China could shine a light on other career opportunities."

Allen said she is grateful to the Shackouls Honors College for connecting her to life-changing opportunities like the Boren Scholarship program. She expressed particular appreciation for the guidance of MSU Professor of English Tommy Anderson and Associate Professor of English Donald Shaffer. Anderson directs the honors college's Office of Prestigious External Scholarships, and Shaffer serves as mentor to the university's Presidential Scholars.

"Making connections and relationships is a big part of being a Presidential Scholar," Allen said. "The honors college is a place for me to call home because I can fully express myself, discuss things that are most interesting to me and receive support for what I want to do. Dr. Anderson has been on the forefront of finding opportunities like the Boren Scholarship, and Dr. Shaffer has been great too." ■

# the path of forging leadership

The Shackouls Honors College is home to a diverse and expansive student body. Being a member of the Honors College is about actualizing intellectual curiosity into visible and productive results. It is from this alchemy of education, expertise, support, and genuine interest that leadership is forged.

The three women profiled below – Gentry Burkes, Laura Herring, and Feifei Zeng – embody the very best of the ideals of the Honors College and the ideals of Mississippi State University. These three women – who hail from all corners of the globe – are a testament to the fact that the next generation of great leaders are molded in Starkville, Mississippi at the Shackouls Honors College.

## Gentry Burkes English Major and Entrepreneur

Gentry Burkes is a Los Angeles, California native with deep roots in Mississippi. In fact, everyone in her family attended college in the Magnolia State, which made the then high school senior commit herself to attending college anywhere but Mississippi.

“But then I visited Mississippi State, and I really liked it,” she said. “Then I met with Dr. Anderson and Dr. Snyder at the Shackouls Honors College, and

they made me feel so welcome that I decided to come here.”

Burkes can boast a impressive list of awards, recognitions, and leadership roles she has earned during her time at MSU, including being named most Outstanding Freshmen at the Shackouls Honors College, serving as an officer in her sorority, serving on the editorial executive board of the literary magazine *The Streetcar*, and being designated to the President’s List for academic achievement every semester she has been in college.

Burkes is a musical artist and business owner. She is the founder and owner of StarkVegas, LLC, a music production company she founded as a freshman through a grant awarded to her through the MSU Entrepreneurship Center.

In the summer of 2017, she and her company produced a song for the Sunflower County Freedom Project, an after school organization in Sunflower County, Mississippi. The song “Dreams and Nightmares” was written and performed by the group’s hip hop club.

“It’s the thing I’m most proud of accomplishing since I’ve been at Mississippi State,” said Burkes. “The kids wrote the song and sang and rapped the lyrics. It speaks to things that are important to them and their experiences and is just great.”

The song “Dreams and Nighmares” is available for purchase from [starkvegasproductions.com](http://starkvegasproductions.com), with proceeds benefiting the SCFP.

According to Burkes, the mentorship, academic direction, and support she

received through the Honors College helped her not only grow as a leader, but understand that her goals and aspirations were attainable.

“I remember talking to Dr. Anderson about my idea to start a business and rather than look at me like I was crazy, his reaction was, ‘Okay, let’s figure out how to make it happen,’ she said. “The support and encouragement I’ve gotten through the Shackouls Honors College has given me the confidence to understand that I can follow any path where my passion might be.”

Burkes plans to finish her degrees soon in English and history, but her true passion is music. In the summer of 2018, she will begin an internship with noted music critic, Dr. Anthony DeCurtis. DeCurtis is Distinguished Lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania and has written for *Rolling Stone* magazine for more than 30 years.

“I want to work in the music business when I get older, and I’m hoping he can give me some ideas,” said Burkes.

*Pictured right: Gentry Burkes, Feifei Zeng, and Laura Herring.*





## **GENTRY BURKES**

- MOST OUTSTANDING FRESHMAN
- MSU SOCIETY OF SCHOLARS
- TWO TIME WINNER OF THE NSPARC INTERNSHIP GRANT
- RECIPIENT OF THE MSU ENTREPRENEURSHIP CENTER START-UP GRANT



## **LAURA HERRING**

- SHACKOULS HONORS COLLEGE DEAN'S AWARD
- SPANISH HONORS SOCIETY
- NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY CONFERENCE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DELEGATE
- CORNELL UNIVERSITY STUDY IN TURIN, ITALY



## **FEIFEI ZENG**

- CORNELL UNIVERSITY STUDY IN TURIN, ITALY
- HARVARD PROJECT FOR ASIAN AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS CONFERENCE DELEGATE
- GLOBAL GOVERNANCE FORUM AT PRINCETON
- HONORS COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENT OF THE YEAR AWARD



# Laura Herring

## A Voice For the Voiceless

The child of a military family, Laura Herring attended four different high schools before coming to MSU.

Herring, who is an International Business major, is an aspiring diplomat who has already spent time studying Spanish in Madrid, studying international policy in Turin, Italy, and interning for the U.S. Consulate in Milan.

Perhaps her most notable achievement is the founding of the No Lost Generation chapter at MSU. No Lost Generation is an international refugee advocacy group focusing on the human rights crisis in Syria. Through the organization, Herring has proven a tireless advocate for refugees and is committed to educating the community about the problem.

“I really became interested in the Syrian refugee crisis after my study abroad experience with Cornell in Turin, Italy,” she said. “When I returned to Turin after my first summer there I began working with the Women and Children Migrant Center, and I really saw the things refugees are forced to go through in a forced migration situation.”

As an extension of her efforts in this area, she has developed a simulation refugee camp exhibit, which is designed to give people a glimpse into the reality and hardship a refugee must face. Not only has she presented the exhibit at the University, but she has also taken it to other Mississippi schools.

“When I first heard about the No Lost Generation group, I knew it needed to be at Mississippi State, and I knew that I could be the one to bring it here,” she said.

Herring recounted what she has learned and witnessed from her work as a refugee advocate in her essay “No Lost Generation in the Deep South: In Vital Lifelines: How College Students are Reenergizing Refugee Relief,” which will be published in an upcoming collection by Rutgers University Press.

“It is important for women to take leadership roles, especially in the areas of refugee and migrant concerns,

because there are so many specific issues within these areas that directly affect women,” said Herring.

According to Herring, the experiences and support she has received through her Honors College mentors have provided her with both the inspiration and resources to evolve into an effective leader.

“There is never anything that is impossible through the Shackouls Honors College,” she said.

# Feifei Zeng

## Utterly Unconventional

Feifei Zeng is without question one of the most energetic, recognizable, and involved members of the MSU student body. A transfer student majoring in International Business, Marketing, and Foreign Language (with an emphasis in Spanish and Supply Chain Management), Zeng embodies the ideals and values of the Shackouls Honors College.

Her path to MSU is anything but conventional. Born in China, Zeng and her family migrated to the city of Treviso, Italy when she was 11 years old. She later came to the United States to attend Carl Albert State College, a community college in Poteau, Oklahoma. There, she became heavily involved in the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. It was during a trip to the Phi Theta Kappa national conference that she met an admissions counselor from MSU.

“I was unfamiliar with MSU, but the admissions counselor made it seem so enticing,” said Zeng. “So I visited the campus and fell in love with it. After I finished my studies in Oklahoma, I decided to continue my studies at State.”

Common wisdom suggests that transfer students often have a hard time transitioning to a four year university, not so for Zeng. During her relatively brief time at State, she has taken advantage of nearly every program offered by the Honors College. She has studied abroad in Turin, Italy. She has attended conferences and studied at Harvard, Stanford, Peking University,

and Princeton. She has been a member of the Honors Council, studied abroad again at University of Oxford, and was named the Honors College 2017 Transfer Student of the Year.

At Harvard, she was chosen as MSU’s Campus Ambassador for the newly formed Harvard Undergraduate Women in Business. Through her efforts, she was able to raise nearly \$13,000, which allowed for 23 MSU students to visit Harvard and take part in the Women in Business program.

“Women’s empowerment is a big passion of mine,” said Zeng. “I have been blessed with many supportive female mentors during my time at State.”

Following her Harvard experience, Zeng became a founding member of the organization MSU Undergraduate Women in Business.

“Our goal is to make a positive impact on campus,” she said. “We want to prepare the next generation of business leaders through mentorship, leadership opportunities, and exposure.”

Only six months old, the organization is now 100 members strong. Zeng remains the president and driving force of the group.

“The earlier women can learn about empowerment and the earlier we can learn to support one another the better,” she said.

Zeng has also been named MSU Senior Homecoming Maid, earned the Spirit of State award, and won the prestigious President’s Commission on the Status of Women Student Leadership Award, of which only two are given each year.

Zeng lays much of her success at the University at the feet of the faculty and staff of the Honors College.

“The people in the Honors College have never said, ‘We will tell you where to go,’ instead, they say, ‘Tell us where you want to go, and we will help get you there,’” she said. ■

*For video interviews featuring Burkes, Herring, and Zeng, visit [honors.msstate.edu](http://honors.msstate.edu).*



# marooned in OXFORD

**E**ight hundred years ago the University of Oxford was founded, but since 2012, it has been a part of Bulldog Country. Each year, a select group of students from the Shackouls Honors College spend six weeks living, working, and playing at arguably the most prestigious and well-known academic institution in the world.

Shackouls students are able to request funds to help pay for the Oxford experience. In fact, all of the students who are part of the most recent trip received some funding through the Honors College.

“The Honors College constantly gives the most funding to students for study abroad at this University,” said Honors College Dean, Dr. Chris Snyder.

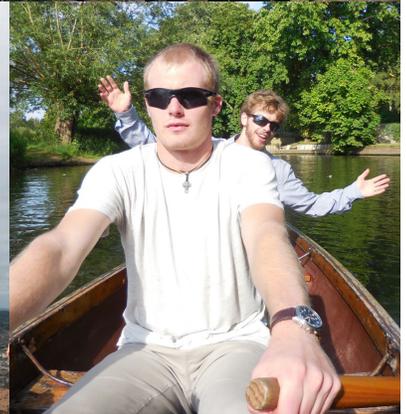
Before leaving for Oxford, students are able to submit academic areas in which they show an interest, and are matched with Oxford professors who will tutor them over the course of their stay within those fields.

“We have students studying everything,” said Dr. Eric Vivier, English professor and Honors College Faculty Fellow. “We have students studying differential equations, students studying dystopian literature, gender and medieval literature, chemistry, and students studying Winston Churchill.”

Students also have access to the one of the greatest research libraries in the world.

The experience is not all work; students frequently make trips throughout Europe to destinations like Dublin, Edinburgh, London, and Paris.

“Whether you are an engineer or an English major, Oxford has something that will make you better,” said Snyder. ■





# undergraduate research

By Sasha Steinberg, Photos by Beth Wynn



**A**nimal and dairy sciences, biochemistry, biological engineering, chemical engineering, human sciences and psychology were among academic programs well-represented during Mississippi State University's recent Spring Undergraduate Research Symposium.

Hosted by the university's Judy and Bobby Shackouls Honors College, the annual competition received 165 submissions from students conducting faculty-guided research. Projects were assigned to one of four categories—arts and humanities, biological sciences and engineering, physical sciences and engineering, and social sciences. Certain categories had multiple award winners due to the large number of submissions.

In recognition of the university's Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, a community engagement track also was included.

A team of 46 campus faculty and graduate students representing a cross-section of academic areas served as competition judges. Featured speaker for the symposium was John Bickle, professor and head of MSU's Department of Philosophy and Religion.

David Shaw, vice president for research and economic development, said undergraduate students are an

integral part of the multi-faceted research underway at MSU.

"Pursuing research opportunities is a critical part of academic life on our campus, and our students are recognized for their commitment to discovery, creation and exploration in our labs, studios, library, research farms and beyond," Shaw said. "We are pleased that members of our faculty are committed to providing undergraduates with meaningful roles in the overall research enterprise and promoting interdisciplinary research as an important component of scholarly activity." ■





# All the Worlds

## *Put A Little Drama In Your Honors College*

**T**he Shackouls Honors College provides students the opportunity to expand themselves both creatively and intellectually regardless of their major or discipline. This sentiment is especially apparent in the college's theatrical presentations. Produced and directed by Dr. Donna L. Clevinger, Honors College Senior Faculty Fellow and Professor of Communication/Theatre, scripts are selected to challenge students to participate in learning from different perspectives. Often these perspectives lead students to new discoveries. These factors are as important to graduating seniors as they are to entering freshmen.

"In our productions, most of the students are not theatre majors," said Dr. Clevinger. "In our shows we have business majors, engineers, and

accountants. It's very exciting to see them discover talents they never knew they had."

In the fall of 2017, faculty, staff, and students from MSU and surrounding colleges and universities, as well as local community members, gathered in the Zacharias Village courtyard to watch the honors college's annual Classical Week production. Once again, the Griffis Hall patio served as a backdrop for the outdoor presentation on September 26-27. Sitting on blankets, chairs, or the grass and eating their dinner, audiences saw Plautus' Roman comedy, "The Pot of Gold," which was also a part of MSU's 2017-2018 Lyceum Series. On Thursday, the 28th, invited scholars spoke about the production during the college's Classical Week Lecture series. The afternoon lectures were made possible, in part, through a

grant from the Mississippi Humanities Council.

For the 2018 spring semester, Dr. Clevinger created a new course entitled "Honors Seminar in Fine Arts -From Page to Stage." The course explored the question: What does it take to produce a play for public performance? The ten students who enrolled in the 3-hour course found that it took a lot of hard work and plenty of sacrifice. Each of the students wrote their own script, directed another student's script, and, through in-class auditions, two other students were cast in the play. Together the "Student Playwriting-Directing-Acting Showcase," so named by the class, presented ten-10 minute plays on Tuesday, April 17, in the Griffis Hall Forum Room. These students also served as backstage crews: moving furniture and props, running sound and



# a stage



*And all the men and women merely players...*

*William Shakespeare  
As You Like It  
Act II, Scene VII*

music, and helping change costumes.

“My favorite part has just been the creative process,” said Honors student Payton Billingsley in an interview with the *Starkville Daily News*. “I’m an engineering major and I’m surrounded by numbers all day, so this has been a really fun way to mix things up and use a different part of my brain.”

Clevinger added, “I am very proud of the fine work these students have done throughout the semester and the work they have put into the plays.”

In the fall of 2018, Dr. Clevinger will produce Sophocles’ *Oedipus* as part of the Honors College Classical Week celebration. ■





“Blue”  
*Stone Vincent*



# the streetcar

Mississippi State University's Creative Arts Journal

**W**hen we took over as Co-Editors-in-Chief for *The Streetcar*, we considered Volume Five our transition volume. For the first time in the journal's brief history, we were leading a staff entirely comprised of students who were not present for its conception. Furthermore, *The Streetcar* was not something that had to be explained anymore; there were people who just knew what it was. We had a reputation to uphold, and our primary goal was just to make sure the journal looked and felt the same as it had over the past four years. And we accomplished this goal—Volume Five's contents changed, given the new submissions of poetry, art, and short fiction over the year, but its format stayed entirely the same. We needed to get our feet wet before we could make the changes we had envisioned. When we returned as Co-Editors for Volume Six, we decided our feet were wet enough.

Volume Six then became our transformation volume. We transformed the layout of the journal to include more artwork and an aesthetically-pleasing design. As always, the contents of the journal changed significantly from the year before, and many of the accepted submissions seemed to express a desire

for change and transformation.

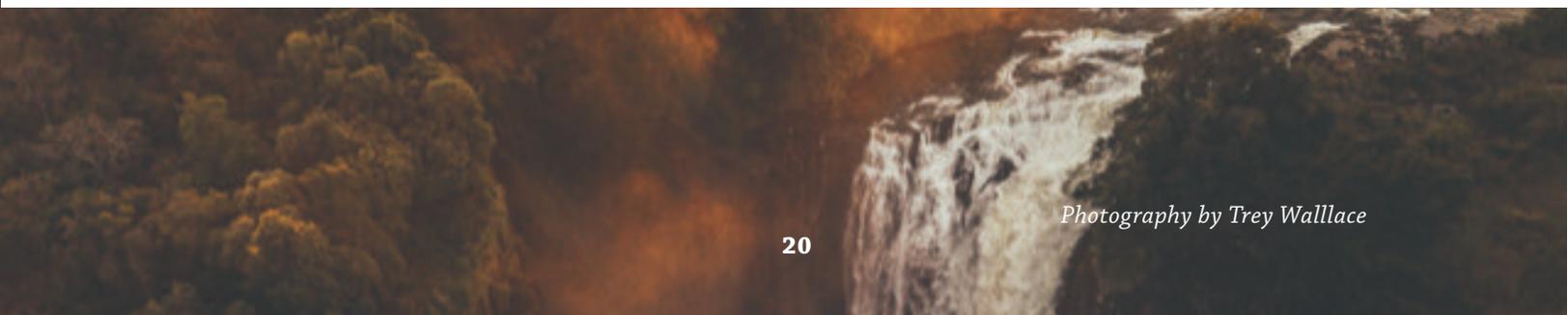
This was, of course, complete coincidence, as our staff of 15 votes on and discusses submissions anonymously. We received over 100 submissions from students across MSU's campus, from many different majors and disciplines. How fitting, then, that the pieces that were judged best were the ones that signaled how much things change. The short fiction pieces "Leaving the Station" and "I Am a Barber" discuss changing career paths, making big decisions, and learning something about yourself along the way. The poem "Five Yous" depicts five past relationships and how the speaker is transformed by these past relationships, and "Dreamers" discusses change the speaker wishes to see in this country. And finally, the art pieces "Three," "Blue" (see page 19), and "Anxiety" explore one of the most-captured images, the human face, and how manipulating it can transform expressions.

When we were not debating pieces or preparing the journal, we were putting on events in order to inspire creativity within the student body. In the fall, we held an Open Mic Poetry Night for a packed room of students eager to share their creative work. We also held our

third-annual Six-Word Story contest on Twitter. Participants were asked to tweet us a story using only six words and the hashtag #TSC6Words. The winning submissions are published at the back of Volume Six. In the spring, we held our first-ever short fiction open mic night called First Page, where we asked volunteers to read the first page of their works in progress.

Overall, our past four years on staff with *The Streetcar* have taught us that the creative arts are alive and well at Mississippi State University. We wondered, initially, if we would have the same five English majors submitting written pieces or the same three artists submitting art, but this has not been the case. The sheer number of submissions we see from majors and classifications all over campus is an indicator that there are students who crave a creative outlet, who want their voices to be heard, and who desire to share their work with others. We are happy that *The Streetcar* can be this outlet for them, and we cannot wait to see the journal's metamorphosis.

Morgan Hydrick and Robert Frey  
Co-Editors-in-Chief  
2016-2017  
2017-2018



Photography by Trey Wallace



## An Interview About Honors with Dr. Don Shaffer

*Dr. Donald Shaffer serves as the Mississippi State University's Mentor for the Presidential Scholars Program (which is housed within the Shackouls Honors College) and Director for African-American Studies in the College of Arts & Sciences. He holds degrees in English and literary studies from Jackson State University and the University of Illinois, Chicago. He also holds a PhD in English and literary studies from the University of Chicago.*

**Aletheia: What do you feel are some of the benefits of being a member of the Honors College.**

*Dr. Shaffer:* We talk a lot about community here and I know a lot of universities use that concept generically, but here when we talk about communities we really mean it. We have a very organic community here of scholars. But the way that we structure that community is important as well. There are intellectual values that are shared among the faculty and staff of the Honors College that include ideas like leading a life of the mind, pursuing knowledge for its own sake and understanding how those concepts share a space with social justice. We have two Honors residence halls, and within those spaces are classrooms, Honors faculty and staff offices, and common areas. Students have ready access to mentors, research advice, and academic counseling. It's all encased within the scope of the Honors College both intellectually and physically, so

when we talk about community, we really mean it.

**Aletheia: What does it mean to be a mentor to students of the Honors College?**

*Dr. Shaffer:* It means a variety of things. I'm someone to talk to about courses. I'm someone to talk to about career path and trajectory. I help facilitate students when they are applying for external awards and scholarships. When students are establishing a research project, often I act as a liaison between the student and their research professor. Sometimes I talk to students about their majors and try to help them create a triangulation of interests. There are a lot of different moving parts when mentoring students and one size does not fit all, but mainly it means being there for our students when they need me as a shoulder to lean on, as a voice of reason, or someone to push them to do their best during their time at this University.

**Aletheia: You are officially the mentor to the Presidential Scholars; do you ever mentor students who are not Presidential Scholars?**

*Dr. Shaffer:* All the time. Honors students often approach me about their writing, and I encourage them to come and visit me. I want them to talk to me. My door is open not just for the

Presidential Scholars, but to our other Honors College students as well.

**Aletheia: At the Honors College, it is often said "from here you can get anywhere." Do you think people from this Honors College can legitimately compete with anyone else in the world?**

*Dr. Shaffer:* I've seen our students do just that. I've seen our students go to places like Stanford or Harvard, and not only compete at that very high level but come back enriched. Furthermore, I've talked with folks from places like the ones I mentioned, and they tell me how much our students brought to their programs, beaming about all that our students have been able to accomplish. Not only do our students compete with people from these other places, they stand toe-to-toe with them. What students have at Shackouls is a dedicated team of faculty and staff who are here to support them, and it's access to that group of people that make us such a strong institution. We are not going to let people fall through the cracks. We are going to make sure that all our students have access to opportunities and programs that will help them be the very best they can be. ■

*Dr. Shaffer can be reached at  
dshaffer@english.msstate.edu*

## 2018 Honors College Award Winners

### HONORS COUNCIL TEACHING AWARD

DR. BARTON MOFFATT

### HONORS COLLEGE FACULTY MENTOR AWARD

DR. MELANIE  
LOEHWING

### OUTSTANDING FRESHMAN

BRADY KRUSE

### OUTSTANDING SOPHOMORE

JOY CARINO

### OUTSTANDING JUNIOR

MARTIN MCCANDLESS

### THE JOHN L. TILLEY OUTSTANDING SENIOR AWARD

SARAH ADISON  
PHILLIPS

### THE JACK H. WHITE OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARD

STEPHANIE DURR

### OUTSTANDING IN THE ARTS AWARD

MORGAN HYDRICK  
AND ROBERT FREY

### OUTSTANDING RESEARCH AWARD

CIARRA SMITH

### THE DEAN'S AWARD

LAURA HERRING



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