

Faculty Members Awarded for Community-Engaged Work

Office of Community Engagement recognizes, rewards projects that emphasize community well-being

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Children at the Rosser Early Learning Center in Sunflower County enjoy growing fresh vegetables as part of the Growing Healthy Minds, Bodies and Communities program. Participating schools get hydroponic tower gardens to grow food in their classrooms, allowing teachers to add a hands-on nutrition component to their curriculum. Submitted photo

OXFORD, Miss. – This year's Excellence in Community Engagement Awards recognized three organizations led by **University of Mississippi** faculty and staff that are making a significant impact on the well-being of many in the Lafayette-Oxford-University community and across Mississippi.

"The award is to recognize excellence in community-

engaged work, particularly projects that have been impactful in the discovery, development and dissemination of knowledge that changes conditions within communities," said Cade Smith, assistant vice chancellor for community engagement. "It's about leveraging the best of what the university offers through mutually beneficial partnerships with the communities we serve."



This year's winner is Growing Healthy Minds, Bodies and Communities, an integrated preschool curriculum focused on teaching social and emotional skills alongside the required classroom curriculum.

The finalist with distinction for excellence in community engagement is LeadershipServ's, a servant leadership program aimed at training business leaders to improve the well-being of their employees.

The finalist for community-engaged service is the School of Law's Pro Bono Initiative, which pairs law students with Mississippi attorneys to offer free legal assistance to people who wouldn't otherwise have access.

The awards carry monetary prizes of \$5,000, \$3,000 and \$1,000, respectively.

Growing Healthy Minds, Bodies and Communities

The Growing Healthy Minds, Bodies and Communities program is a collaboration among Kenya Wolff, assistant professor of early childhood education and recent interim director of the Willie Price Lab School; Alicia Stapp, associate professor of health and physical education; Tess Johnson, program manager for the Department of Teacher Education; Laurel Greenway Lambert, associate professor of nutrition and hospitality management; Georgianna Mann, assistant professor of nutrition and hospitality management; Cathy Grace, co-director of the Graduate Center for the Study of Early Learning; and Stephanie Miller, associate professor of psychology and director of experimental training.

“The program started a couple of years ago when a few researchers and I were talking about what we were seeing in school – specifically with younger children,” Wolff said.

“There was a big push-down to get younger kids academically ready. They were bringing a lot of concepts down that were usually taught in higher grades with an emphasis on standardized test scores.”

Since early childhood years are key in the development of emotional and social skills, Wolff and her partners built a curriculum that complements the existing curriculum with important concepts and activities, such as yoga and mindfulness, gardening and nutrition, and anti-bullying and anti-bias.

“One of the things we know is that worry, stress and anger inhibit executive function,” Wolff said. “We teach children how to recognize those feelings and give them the tools for how to think about them and alleviate some of the stress.”



Kenya Wolff

LeadershipServ’s Excellence in Servant Leadership Program

The seed of LeadershipServ’s Excellence in Servant Leadership Program was planted when Jeremy Meuser, assistant professor of management, had completely different experiences working on nearly identical projects.



Jeremy Meuser

“In one, the business owners said it was a failure, and in the other, the business owner said it was a success,” Meuser said. The difference, Meuser realized, was not in the job, but in the leader.

“Owner A was perceived by his employees to be someone who developed initiatives for the sake of keeping everyone busy. Owner B was seen by his employees as someone who tries to fix their problems and make their jobs easier.”

That’s when he began to examine the concept of leadership and how to train more effective leaders.

“I had this moment of clarity where I said, ‘OK, leadership matters for the well-being of organizations, which means the well-being of the economy, which means the well-being of society, which means for the well-being of individuals, their ability to live and their mental health,’” Meuser said.

“And we know the sins of the parents are revisited in their children and emotional energy is transferred from a bad relationship with a supervisor into the home. So, leadership matters for all of our futures.”

Anyone interested in participating in the LeadershipServ’s Excellence in Servant Leadership Program can **contact Meuser**.

LeadershipServ's Excellence in Servant Leadership Program was developed in partnership with Jarvis Smallfield, of University of Illinois, and Donald Kluemper and Daniel Cervone of University of Illinois at Chicago.

Pro Bono Initiative

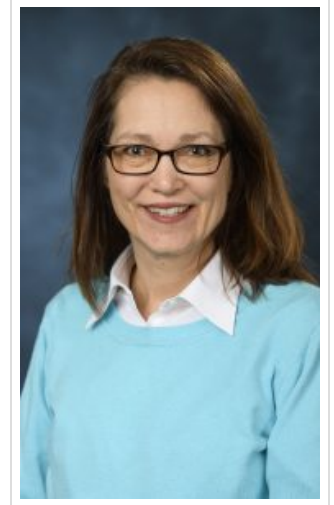
Ole Miss law students who volunteer for the **Pro Bono Initiative** have opportunities to work alongside Mississippi attorneys, get real-world legal experience and help people who would otherwise not be able to afford legal help.

"In addition to the service to the students, we are truly providing a service to people who might not get their issues resolved otherwise," said Kris Simpson, director of the Pro Bono Initiative and adjunct professor for Child Advocacy Clinic.

"The clinics are usually attended by lower income residents who can't afford an attorney. Our volunteers provide legal documents, assistance filling them out and advice through these clinics."

The initiative helps people resolve their legal issues by drafting legal documents, giving advice and helping them navigate the legal system. The program gives attorneys an avenue to give back to the community while exposing students to a side of the law they don't always see in the classroom.

"The Pro Bono Initiative has been around for 10 years, and I can't even begin to guess how many students have participated or attended and how many hours have been given," Simpson said. "It's thrilling for that work to be recognized, and to be recognized by the Office of Community Engagement definitely gives us a sense of achievement."



Kristine Simpson