

UM Awards Six Achieving Equity Grants

Grants to explore areas of diversity, equity, inclusion



The University of Mississippi has funded a total of six Achieving Equity Grants for faculty, staff and students to advance diversity, equity and inclusion through research and scholarship. Pictured on the top row, from left: Alicia Stapp, Brian Droubay, Georgianna Mann. Bottom row, from left: Peter Wood, Hannah Allen, Simone Delerme. Submitted photos

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The [University of Mississippi](#) is funding six Achieving Equity Grants for faculty, staff and students to advance diversity, equity and inclusion through research and creative scholarship.

First funded in 2020, the competitive seed grant program explores challenges common to UM and other institutions where the knowledge gained will lead to advancements in community and campus climate issues.

“The quality of the projects for the 2021 [Achieving Equity Grant competition](#) was outstanding,” said Shawnboda Mead, interim vice chancellor for diversity and community engagement. “The increased level of interest during this cycle is testament to the robust scholarly activity that is happening on our campus, specifically related to diversity, equity, access and inclusion.”

Sixteen UM faculty, staff and student investigators will contribute to the six projects that cover a broad range of issues where equity gaps exist. The projects are funded by the Office of the Provost and managed by the

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs in collaboration with the [Division of Diversity and Community Engagement](#).

“We were thrilled to see the high level of interest in our faculty to better understand a wide variety of diversity, equity and inclusion issues and challenges,” said Josh Gladden, vice chancellor for research and sponsored programs. “We look forward to seeing the outcomes of these projects and stand ready to help all faculty interested in diversity, equity and inclusion scholarship seek funding to build and support impactful programs.”

The projects are funded for activity periods of six months to two years, and their budgets range from \$1,000 to \$10,000.

The awardees and their research projects are:

Hannah Allen, an assistant professor of public health, is the principal investigator on a team conducting a daily diary study of Black, Indigenous and people of color, or BIPOC, students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate science, technology, engineering and mathematics programs. The study will explore the relationships between students’ daily exposure to bias and discrimination and health and academic outcomes, aiming to promote the health and achievement of students who have been historically underrepresented in the STEM workforce. Titled “Examining the Campus Environment for BIPOC Students in STEM: Daily Stressors with Links to Health and Academic Outcomes,” Allen is joined on the project by Kenya Bledsoe, an assistant professor of leadership and counselor education; Frank Fernandez, an assistant professor of higher education; and Marquita Smith, assistant dean for graduate programs and associate professor in the School of Journalism and New Media.

Simone Delerme, an associate professor of anthropology and the McMullan Associate Professor of Southern Studies, is the principal investigator of a team conducting an oral history project that documents how immigrants are incorporated into the sociopolitical and economic lives of communities that were not traditional migration destinations. The oral history project will be conducted with business owners on Summer Avenue in Memphis and will be linked to national immigration issues via the Hostile Terrain 94 exhibit scheduled for fall 2021 on the University of Mississippi campus. Carolyn Freiwald, an associate professor of anthropology, serves as co-principal investigator on the project, which is titled “Crossing Borders and Boundaries: Migration in the Mid-South.”

Brian Droubay, an assistant professor of social work, is studying how the World Health Organization’s forthcoming diagnosis of compulsive sexual behavior disorder might affect sexual minorities who are religious. The research is key to better understanding how the new diagnosis might affect lesbian, gay and bisexual people and to evaluate if it might lead to disproportionately pathologizing this vulnerable population. The project is titled “Religiosity, Internalized Homophobia and Endorsement of Compulsive Sexual Behavior Disorder Criteria.”

Georgianna Mann, an assistant professor of nutrition and hospitality management, is leading a team exploring strategies used by Mississippi school districts to ensure equitable distribution of school meals during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the study will provide a strong basis to expand similar research across the U.S., and assist with building resilient and accessible school meal programs. The results also will help to inform public policymakers. Laurel Lambert, an associate professor of nutrition and hospitality management, and Kritika Gupta, who is pursuing her Ph.D. in nutrition and hospitality management, are joining Mann on the project, which is titled "Identification and Exploration of Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Accessing School Meals in Mississippi School Districts during COVID-19." The project is a major component of Gupta's Ph.D. dissertation, which she hopes to complete by May 2022.

Alicia Stapp, interim assistant chair of teacher education and associate professor of health and physical education, is the principal investigator of a team that will implement and evaluate an accessible emerging parent education model that helps parents teach developmental skills through a whole child wellness approach at home. Building relationships with families as the parent education program develops increases the quality and effectiveness of parent education programming across Mississippi. Titled "Promoting Equity in School Readiness: Integrating Accessible Parent Education to Leverage Inequities in a Whole Child Wellness Curriculum," the project will be conducted by a team that includes as co-principal investigators Kenya Wolff, assistant professor of early childhood education; Stephanie Miller, associate professor of psychology and director of the Department of Psychology's Experimental Graduate Program; Tess Johnson, program manager for the School of Education's Department of Teacher Education; and Lambert and Mann.

Peter Wood, instructional assistant professor of theatre arts, is using his grant to start a BIPOC visiting artist and lecturer program. The project is designed to specifically offer directing and teaching opportunities to early-career directors who have recently completed their Master of Fine Arts within the past three years. Michael Barnett, chair and professor of theatre and film, is co-principal investigator on the project.

Fourteen proposals were received. Three external reviewers with general expertise and experience in diversity and equity issues reviewed each of the 14 proposals. Informed by these reviews, the vice chancellors of Research and Sponsored Programs and Diversity and Community Engagement made the final selections.

"The projects proposed by this year's recipients are critically important for addressing a range of pressing issues and inequities," Mead said. "I am looking forward to seeing the outcome of their commitments, which are central to fostering inclusivity at our university, within the state and throughout the world."

The **Office of Research and Sponsored Programs** also is committed to working with the investigators to seek the level of external funding required to expand and amplify the impacts of these efforts.

Some of the agencies and organizations proposed for external funding include the National Science Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, Bower Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, American Psychological Foundation and Mississippi Department of Education.

Last year, seven professors were awarded four grants through the program.