

*McLean interns

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as FAQs about college and financial aid, a timeline of application and scholarship deadlines for Mississippi schools, and a list of free or affordable summer programs for high school students that can be distributed to students and community partners.

She also conducted virtual college advising sessions to share these resources and answer questions about the college and scholarship application process.

“Due to COVID, I spent the majority of my time working through teleservice,” Ash said. “Quickly, I found this to be a wonderful opportunity to reimagine how to engage with young people. Since I no longer have to travel to engage with students, this means that I can spend more time creating resources that can be given to students across several school districts.

“Even though I was not able to meet students in person, I still was able to have rewarding conversations with a number of them about how to achieve their post-high school plans.”

At the North Panola School District, two summer interns assisted with preparations for returning to school amid the uncertainties of COVID-19.

Mohamed Marzouk, a sophomore pharmaceutical sciences major from Cairo, Egypt, conducted research to support students, parents and caregivers in transitioning to an online learning environment. These resources and tutorials will be used as the district holds all classes virtually this fall.

Velsie Pate, instructor in the Intensive English Program from Oxford, created a presentation on “Incorporating ELL Students into Mainstream Classrooms with a Sense of Belonging.” Pate also created a list of affordable internet service providers and produced materials for a workshop designed to support parents and caregivers implementing virtual learning at home.

Brooke Sykes and Tina Truong spent the summer at the Boys & Girls Club of North Mississippi – LOU

Barksdale Clubhouse, where they provided math and literacy-based programming to students in the 6-to-9-year-old classroom.

Sykes, an Oxford native who recently graduated with a master’s degree in biology, and Truong, a sophomore biochemistry major and pre-dental student from Madison, also incorporated life skills such as conflict resolution, goal setting, healthy eating and physical fitness.

Though social distancing was enforced, the interns were still able to connect with students. Thanks to rigorous health and safety protocols, no cases of COVID-19 were identified during the six-week program.

Food Security

Before graduating in May with an undergraduate degree in English, Lexington native Curtis Hills had served as an Innovation Scholar with the McLean Institute’s Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development initiative, as well as an M Partner intern. Before leaving Mississippi to serve as an Emerson National Hun-

ger Fellow, Hills contacted the McLean Institute about starting a food bank.

The McLean Institute connected Hills with community leaders already in the process of establishing the non-profit Lexington Food Pantry in Hills’ hometown.

As a McLean public service intern, Hills worked with the pantry to create by-laws and an organizational mission and vision. He assisted at weekly mobile food distributions, which distributed an average of 600-700 boxes of fresh produce and 1,800 gallons of milk.

Neely Griggs, a senior majoring in public policy leadership and business from West Point, and Jaycee Brown, a senior social work major from Crystal Springs, worked at Rust College Community Development Corporation, or RCCDC, and helped distribute food to families in Marshall County while following safety guidelines provided by the CDC.

Both sites promoted food security during the uncertain times of COVID-19

and provided nutritional relief to families by providing healthy produce and balanced meals.

“I was able to see firsthand the care and friendships that are found in Holly Springs between community leaders and members,” Brown said. “Traveling around the quaint town and delivering meals to residents allowed me to recognize the importance of the work RCCDC is doing.”

Community Development

Not only did the McLean public service interns use education and nutrition to produce change for individual students and households, but they also engaged in community development on a systemic level.

Griggs and Brown created a grant decision matrix for RCCDC and learned new ways to identify and apply for funding resources.

“I worked with the Rust College Development Corporation focusing on building capacity inside the organization, mainly concerning grant writing, and I created materials to help formalize their grant application strategy,” Griggs said.

“I also worked with the Holly Springs Career and Technical Center to increase visibility for the program. I was inspired by the passion and excitement that the community leaders at the Rust College Development Corporation and their partner organizations had for creating positive change in their community.”

Looking to a Hopeful Future

The interns’ skills were strengthened through professional development workshops such as sessions on social media strategy during COVID-19, graphic design using Canva and grant writing.

Through these experiences, interns formed meaningful relationships, and several students will continue working with their summer host sites.

Brown is working on social media pages for Rust College CDC, while Griggs plans to pursue more opportunities with the Career and Technical Center. Truong will continue to volunteer with the Boys & Girls Club, and Hills continued with food distributions long after his internship concluded.

“Cultivating sustainable, long-term partnerships is at the heart of our work to fight poverty in Mississippi,” said Albert Nylander, professor of sociology and director of the McLean Institute. “Although COVID-19 has altered our day-to-day practice of community engagement, the McLean Institute will continue to support the work of our partner organizations and we look forward to welcoming more UM students into these efforts next summer.”



I can’t remember a nicer August than we’ve been having in my area. It has acted more like May. The mornings have been nice, the rain adequate, and I’m having to mow my yard every few days. While its acted more like May, it has felt more like September. I feel rushed to get fully prepared for deer season. I still have a field to plant and a couple of tree stands to hang before I can think about getting all my equipment together. And then until November, I’ll watch and wait. Watch my trail cameras and wait until I see a buck I want to hunt. Sure, I may harvest a doe for a friend in need, but for me, I’ll watch and wait for that buck until closer to the rut.

As many of you know, during that time, what shows up in the woods may not have been seen on a camera anytime before. The neighboring bucks will begin moving away from their home territory to look for that first doe in heat. This is when the hunting gets good. And for me, since I only have so many days I can hunt, I don’t want to waste my time and energy on unproductive

times. Sure, I love just sitting in the woods, but I also like the hope and anticipation of a harvest.

I think everything in life works best when there is an anticipated outcome. Even doing nothing can have an anticipated outcome. It’s that rest will occur. When we do nothing without an anticipated outcome, we say we’re bored. There’s a difference. The fear, however, in thinking only about the outcome, is we can fail to enjoy the process. We can get so wrapped up in the results, we forget about some of the delightful details that gave us the best chance for the success we expect.

Each day I make a to-do list. It is a list of outcomes I want to accomplish. But the outcomes are nothing without a plan to achieve them.

Today, what will make my day unforgettable will not be all I was able to accomplish, but it will be something special, or different, or unexpected, that will turn one mundane outcome, into a memory. And memories are the things we share with others.

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Curtis Hills, a recent UM graduate, works at a mobile food distribution this summer organized by the Lexington Food Pantry. (Submitted Photo)



Volunteers, including University of Mississippi students, help with a mobile food distribution in Lexington organized by the Lexington Food Pantry. Through the university’s McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement, several students spent the summer engaged in communities across the state. (Submitted Photo)



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