

2021



ANNUAL REPORT

FROM THE DESK OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DR. DALLAS BREEN

The past two years have seen a dramatic change in the way we are all navigating our work, relationships, and social lives. Here at the John C. Stennis Institute of Government and Community Development at Mississippi State University, we have remained vigilant in our efforts to provide the premier research, service, and training. People across our state and nation have come to expect our offerings in our 46 years of operation. 2021 followed suit from 2020 and saw our projects

increase, our reach expand to other states, and our staffing to change to bring on new talent. The incredible faculty, staff, and students worked tirelessly to convert our trainings to a hybrid format, providing opportunities for individuals to learn while remaining safe and secure in their own environment. As we move into 2022, we are continuing to offer both in-person and virtual trainings, service, and applied research to all who request our services, and will do so with the same professionalism and unbiased, non-partisan approach as we have throughout our existence. It is an honor to continue to serve the people of this great state and nation, and it is my sincere hope that more will seek out our assistance to enable them to be more informed and educated public officials, government employees, and citizens of this great nation. If I, or anyone in The Institute, can ever be of assistance, I hope you will reach out and allow us to serve your needs.

Please continue to remain vigilant in your pursuits to remain safe and navigate new challenges that are put in front of you. We are here to serve and welcome connecting with you all in the coming years.



Dr. J. "Dallas" Breen



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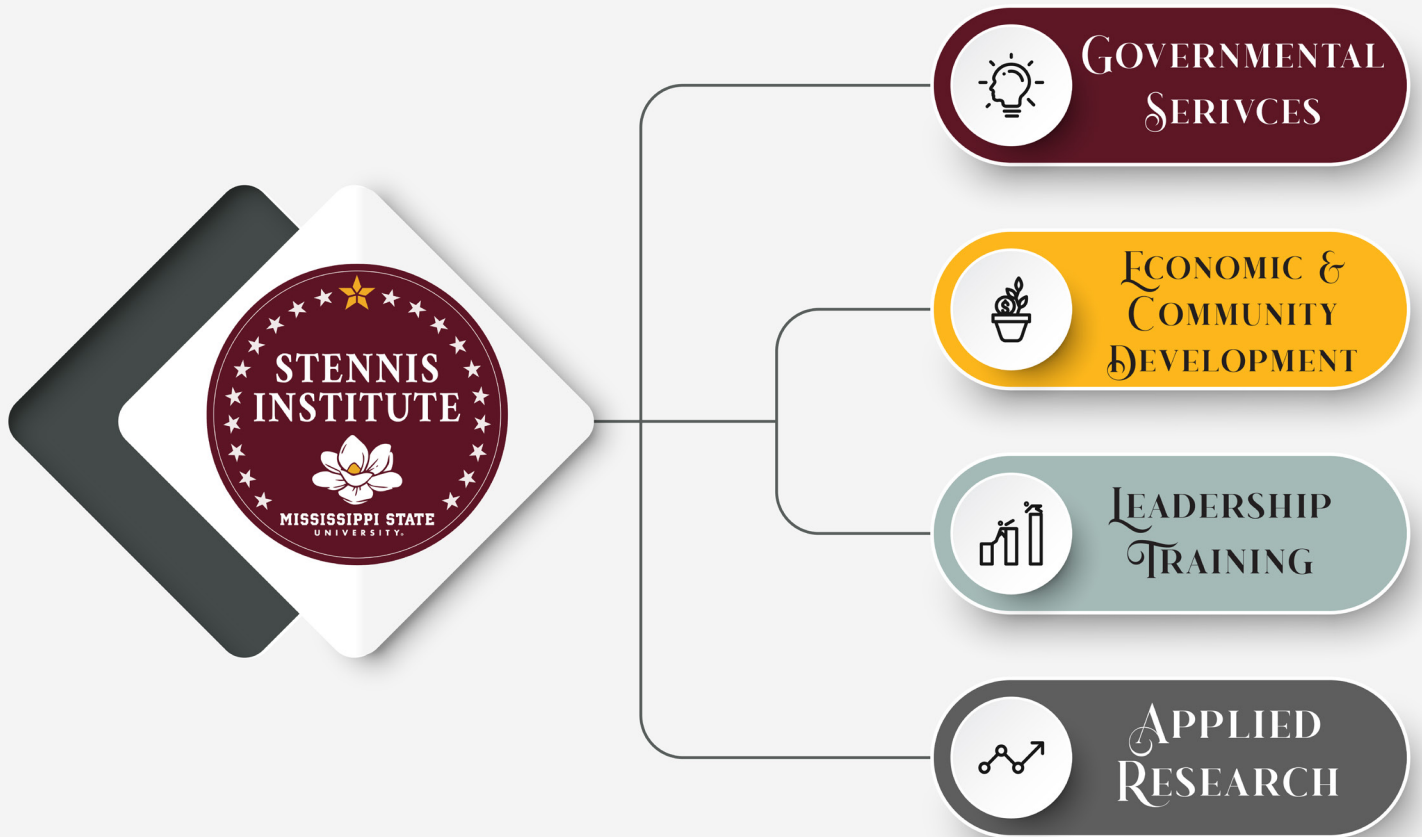
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STENNIS HIGHLIGHTS



EVERYTHING YOU NEED FROM THE COURTHOUSE TO THE CLASSROOM



STENNIS-MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION 2021

By: Reagan Conner

The Stennis-Montgomery Association (SMA), is a student-led organization at Mississippi State University (MSU) that is affiliated with the John C. Stennis Institute of Government. SMA is a non-partisan student organization heavily involved on the MSU Campus. The purpose of the organization is to provide opportunities for students to learn more about the role of politics in Mississippi. Ultimately, the Stennis-Montgomery Association will allow Mississippi State University's influence in the arena of political decision-making to become as prominent as the other great successes of the "People's University."



STENNIS MONTGOMERY
ASSOCIATION

 MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY
JOHN C. STENNIS INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT

The Stennis-Montgomery Association (SMA) allows students of all backgrounds and academic disciplines to become active on the political scene. The mission of SMA is to educate students on the importance of government, help students gain insight into potential career pathways in related fields, and provide students with networking opportunities that could open doors to help them in their journey toward success. All members of SMA have the opportunity to hear from guest speakers, meet like-minded peers, receive updates on relevant internship opportunities, and participate in voter registration drives. Additionally, each year the most dedicated members of the organization visit Washington D.C., to meet and network with MSU alumni and other prominent political figures.

Members of SMA that desire to attend the Stennis Institute sponsored trip to Washington D.C. are expected to have been highly involved in the organization throughout the year. Typically, in order to be considered, a student must have attended most meetings and volunteer events, volunteered in other ways in the community, attended the day trip to Jackson, MS, for a visit to The Mississippi State Capitol, and written a short research paper on either Senator Stennis or Congressman Montgomery. The trip to the Mississippi State Capitol gives students their first glimpse at the political realm. The group has the opportunity to ask questions and hear from many state legislators,

officers, MSU alumni, and other relevant speakers. However, the trip to Jackson was canceled and removed from this year's requirements due to COVID-19 restrictions.

As for the research paper, students are selected based on the quality of their research and writing. Papers are reviewed by a committee of MSU staff who will then select the student with the best paper on Senator Stennis as well as the student with the best paper on Congressman Montgomery. The two selected students are each awarded a \$1,000.00 cash prize. The purpose of asking students to specifically write about Senator Stennis or Congressman Montgomery is so students can learn about the individuals that our organization is named after.

Those that are selected to attend the trip to Washington D.C. travel as a group during spring break. The organization partners with the John C. Stennis Institute of Government to help cover the cost of the trips for the students that are selected to attend to ensure that every student has an equal opportunity to participate. Once in D.C., students see the sights of the city, meet our Mississippi Congressmen and Senators, and get the opportunity to sit in on panels with MSU alumni and other professionals in D.C. This personalized experience helps many students determine if a career in D.C. or in politics is truly the right fit for them.

During the Spring 2021 semester, SMA students had high hopes they would be preparing for trips to Jackson, MS, and Washington D.C., but unfortunately, the COVID-19 case numbers did not allow for this. However, students were still given the opportunity to participate in the Fourteenth Annual Dean Frances N. Coleman SMA Research and Writing competition. Participants must utilize the archives from the MSU Congressional and Political Research Center to research Senator John C. Stennis or Congressman G. V. "Sonny" Montgomery and write a formal research paper on their findings. The award for the best paper written on Senator Stennis was presented to Breana Norton and her paper titled "Senator John C. Stennis and the Senate Select Committee on Standards." Additionally, the award for the best paper written on Congressman Montgomery was presented to Christian Fulcher and his paper titled "An Analysis of the Fall of the Soviet Union and the Beginnings of Democracy in Russia through Congressman G. V. "Sonny" Montgomery's Weekly Radio Show." Both of these individuals were awarded a \$1,000.00 cash prize for their great work. SMA also hosted a voter registration drive with the MSU College Democrats and College Republicans. Members were joined by staff from the MS Secretary of State's office to help answer questions and ensure that students were properly registered to vote. Our final event of the semester was a virtual meeting where we first heard from Senator Wicker, who was then followed by Congressman Michael Guest.

As for the Fall 2021 semester, SMA organized meetings with a variety of guest speakers. The first meeting of the semester was a general body meeting where new SMA members were welcomed on board and all expectations of members for the semester were explained. The following meetings included guest speakers from the MSU Career Center to learn



2021 Dean Frances N. Coleman SMA Research and Writing Competition winners (Left-to-Right: Reagan Conner, Christian Fulcher, Breana Norton, and Dr. Dallas Breen)

how to seek out internships and design a résumé, in addition to recent SMA alumni, Heston Lollar, Georgina Swan, and Emily Allegrezza, who discussed topics such as graduate school, their current policy research, non-profit work, and life in D.C. Then, for National Voter Registration Week, SMA hosted one voter registration drive off-campus at a popular local coffee shop, Strange Brew, and one voter registration drive on-campus. The off-



SMA Member, Madeline Brock, pictured at the on-campus Voter Registration Event



SMA Members at the off-campus Voter Registration Drive

(Left to Right: Conner Ivey, Katherine Morris, Reagan Conner, Breana Norton, and Justin Childs)

campus drive was in collaboration with the MSU College Democrats and College Republicans, and the on-campus drive was in collaboration with MSVotes.

Later in the Fall 2021 semester, members heard from Senator Wicker's Chief of Staff, Michelle Barlow-Richardson, who discussed a day in her career and what Senators typically look for in intern applicants, and Hannah Williams from MSVotes who spoke about the mission of MSVotes as well as her experience as a woman of color in the world of politics. In the month of November, SMA members had one of the highlights of guest speakers: Congressman Michael Guest and his District Deputy Director, Kyle Jordan. Congressman Guest spoke on life in D.C. serving Mississippi and Mr. Jordan spoke on the local internship offered through Congressman Guest's office. The internship offers students the opportunity to work in the MSU Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library and organize and digitize papers written by

former Congressional delegates from Mississippi. The final meeting of the semester covered the Congressional Research Papers, how to utilize the Congressional and Political Research Center, and the requirements for the Spring D.C. trip.

The overall summary of SMA events for 2021 included a large number of events and opportunities despite the COVID-19 restrictions at the time. While attempting to maintain a sense of normalcy through a global pandemic, members remained active and involved throughout this past year, while also staying healthy and following Mississippi State University guidelines. The goals for 2021 were to cover professional development topics, local government, national government, and community civic engagement. Given 2021's success, SMA officers intend to maintain these same goals for 2022 while also adding more involvement opportunities to the calendar.



KING-FISHER LOVE BIRDS

By: Annie Price

Two members of the Stennis Institute team who have lived a life of service to rural communities.

The Stennis Institute of Government & Community Development (SIG) at Mississippi State University (MSU) values assorted backgrounds in the team members brought on board. Attracting and utilizing the talents of these individuals, the Stennis Institute has earned the reputation of providing the highest quality technical assistance programs, education, and research to the people and communities of Mississippi. The Institute is now widely referred to as “The Think Tank” across Mississippi and through surrounding states. A prime

example of the talent at the Institute is the couple who has committed their lives to serving not only Mississippi in “retirement,” but in a dedicated career to the state of Alabama, and specifically in the Franklin County community.

Johnny Mack Morrow and Martha Morrow, O.D., are considered pillars of the Red Bay, Alabama, community, even after moving to Starkville in 2020. The Morrows met in 2009 and married in 2011. Martha recalls her first thoughts about him, and the reason for their chosen anniversary.

“He just wasn’t like what I had heard about other politicians,” Martha said, “he was truly in it to help people. Of course, we had to wait for an election cycle before we could get married.”

Johnny Mack represented Franklin County’s District 18 in the Alabama House of Representatives for 28 years, and Martha has practiced optometry for over 48 years. His work in the legislature included positive impacts to a wide range of industries such as the Appalachian Regional Commission Corridor V in order to connect Alabama Highway 24 to U.S. Interstate 22, Franklin County’s constitutional amendment protecting the election of superintendent of education, and legislation which created the Franklin County Water Service Authority.

But even in their personal lives, the Morrows poured into their community. With what started as 46 acres of inherited family land, they built the 250-acre Cypress Cove Farms. While the primary motive behind building this nature preserve was environmental education, the Morrows did so much more than that. Between Camp Courage, a camp for children with disabilities; The Veterans Program, where elementary school students engaged with recent military veterans and explored Cypress Cove Farm; and hosting Envirothon trainings, which are an environmental and natural resource conservation competitions; the Morrows truly provided Cypress Cove Farms as a resource to the community. The best known bird in Cypress Cove Farms is the King Fisher, and these love birds allowed bird-watchers from all over to come and explore the farm.

The Red Bay Museum opened a new exhibit in 2019 named The Johnny Mack Morrow Native American Display. The display includes fossils and other artifacts discovered during archaeological digs conducted on Cypress Cove Farms and donated by the Morrows. A trail on Cypress Cove was added to the North Alabama Birding Trail in 2012, which includes two wooded birding observation areas, three ponds, and a combined 8-mile stretch of trail. All of these aspects are



testament to Johnny Mack and Martha's dedication to environmental preservation and community outreach. In 2019 when Johnny Mack was asked to return to his alma mater to aid in special projects at SIG, he and Martha were excited by the new opportunity. In an article for the Franklin Free Press, Martha noted the opportunity for Johnny Mack to be able to continue his public service with his feet on the ground, rather than in a political position. Moving to Starkville, however, did pose a liability for Cypress Cove Farms. Advised by attorneys, the Morrows sadly opted to close Cypress Cove Farms as he would be unable to maintain safety of the public guests as an absentee landowner. Johnny Mack seized the opportunity to join SIG, claiming this was his version of retirement. In a quote to the Franklin Free Press, Morrow mentions that he was not prepared to sit on the sidelines.

"..I had to decide whether to sit in a rocking chair and watch life go by or help make a difference in the quality of life for people and that's what my parents always taught me to do," Johnny Mack said.

Martha chose to maintain her optometry practice in Russellville, AL, even while making the move. Martha's 48



years of experience has not only been a legacy to her father's practice, but continues on as her 3 children all practice optometry across several states. Martha and Johnny Mack both have hearts for serving people, and they don't plan to stop anytime soon.

As Johnny Mack serves SIG as the Special Projects Coordinator, Martha serves on The Institute's Advisory Board and participates in projects as hands-on as any staff member. Moving to Starkville in the height of a pandemic caused the Morrows to miss out on much of the interpersonal connection building with some of the team. When the 2021 Mississippi Municipal League Annual Conference came along in July, both Morrows jumped at the chance to attend on behalf of SIG. Traveling to Biloxi, MS, the Morrows brought something that sparked joy and brought numerous public officials to The Institute's display table: a cotton-candy machine! The inclusion of this idea brought countless elected officials, visitors, and their guests to learn more about the Institute and Mississippi State University, shining an even brighter light on the opportunities afforded those living in Mississippi and the region. This type of out-of-the-box idea is just one example of the innovation that the Morrows bring to the table.

Currently, Johnny Mack is diving head-first into SIG's economic and community development arm with a focus on tourism.

"Tourism is new money flowing in these communities," Johnny Mack said, "it is clean money, and it builds up the local economy."

Johnny Mack has recently consulted on behalf of SIG with a number of Mississippi communities such as Fulton, Eupora, and Maben, as these municipalities are attempting to recover and move forward from a global pandemic. Martha has continued to support and aid in these efforts with arranging presentations and events. The Morrows value a Winston Churchill quote in the way they have navigated life together.

"We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give."

In late 2021, Stennis Institute Executive Director, Dallas Breen, Ph.D., began making plans for an in-person staff retreat to reconnect with team members, some of which haven't been in-person with each other since before March 2020. Breen mentioned this to the Morrows and before any details were discussed, the Morrows offered their property, "Bully's Barn" in Maben, MS, as the location for the retreat. Not only providing the venue, but Johnny Mack and Martha also cooked and provided the meal. While they might call this location a "pole-barn," the building on their land is the ideal set up for a casual retreat from the corporate-style normalcy many of the staff are used to.

The Morrows' generosity shines through every project, action, or event they take part in. These are two people whose love for their community and dedication to serving others has continued throughout years, across states, and has impacted more individuals than could ever be measured. The Stennis Institute is proud to have them on the team and encourages anyone with ideas, projects, or questions to contact our office so team members such as the Morrows can help you achieve your goals.



Stennis Institute's Consulting Project with Mississippi Secretary of State, Michael Watson

By: Heston Lollar



The John C. Stennis Institute of Government has a long history of providing nonpartisan research and data analysis for political entities and elected officials in Mississippi. When the Secretary of State, Michael Watson, reached out to the Institute about his 29 by 29 initiative, we were excited at the prospect of continuing our research in a field that directly impacts Mississippians.

“Tackle the Tape” is Mississippi’s Secretary of State Michael Watson’s initiative to reform regulations in the state’s occupational licensing boards. Watson’s mission is to “cut regulations that are anticompetitive and do not substantially further the safety and well being of our citizens,” according to his website. Originally starting in July 2020, the Secretary of State’s office used COVID-19 as a launchpad, as reviewing regulations while looking to rejuvenate small businesses, retain healthcare workers, and respond to unemployment issues in Mississippi.

According to the Secretary of State’s website, the 118,000 regulations in the Mississippi Administrative Code would take someone 518 hours to read in 13 weeks. As the most regulated state in the South, per capita, Mississippi’s jobs requiring occupational licenses has increased from 4% to 20%. The Secretary of State’s office has launched a strategic plan to examine the 29 occupational licensing boards and commissions by 2029. Three or four boards will be evaluated each year. The boards under review for 2022 are the Mississippi State Board of Cosmetology, Mississippi State Board of Barber Examiners, and the Mississippi State Board of Architecture.

Using existing Mississippi state policy, Tackle the Tape’s purpose is to ensure that regulations adhere to state law and remain competitive after the effects of COVID-19. Many regulations were suspended during the pandemic, and Watson’s stance on his website states, “if a regulation can be suspended or amended when public health is of utmost importance, it likely does not comply with state policy to begin with.”

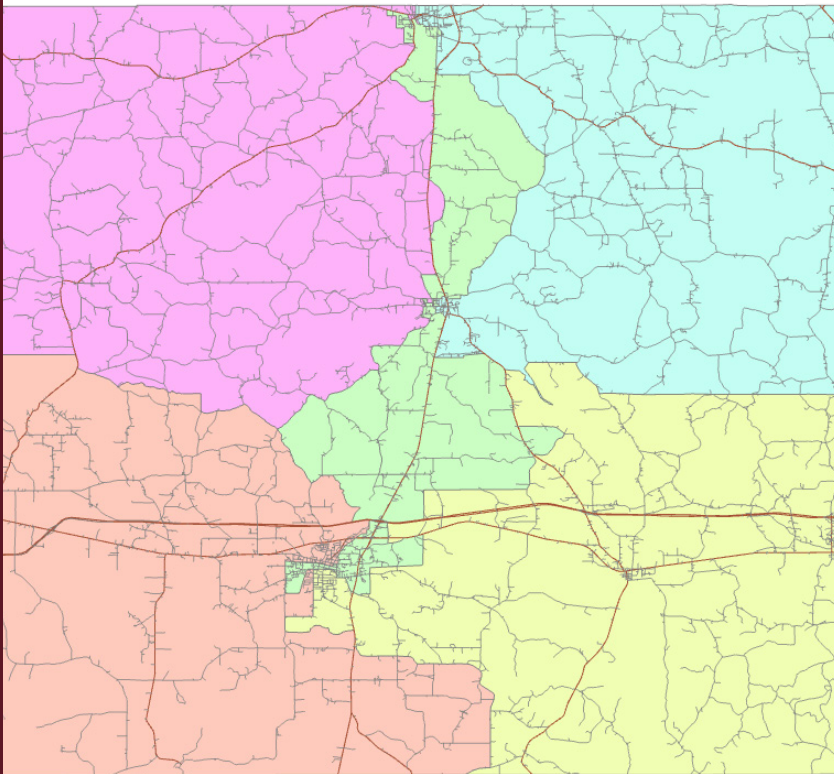
Along with the Occupational Board Compliance Act of 2017, Universal Recognition of Occupational Licenses Act, Fresh Start Act of 2019, and Military Family Freedom Act, Watson has fought for several other pieces of legislation looking to review regulations. This initiative process will be reviewed by eight organizations in Mississippi and across the country. Tackle the Tape will be a seven-year endeavor and SIG will work to collect data on research findings from each of the state regulatory boards.

REDISTRICTING

By Breana Norton

The 2020 Census results are in, and many Mississippi cities and counties are turning to the Stennis Institute to help them redistrict.

Census results track population changes, and these changes determine how many people represent a city, county, or state. As population grows or declines, the number of representatives can increase, stay the same, or decrease. These changes are sorted out and lines are redrawn through redistricting.



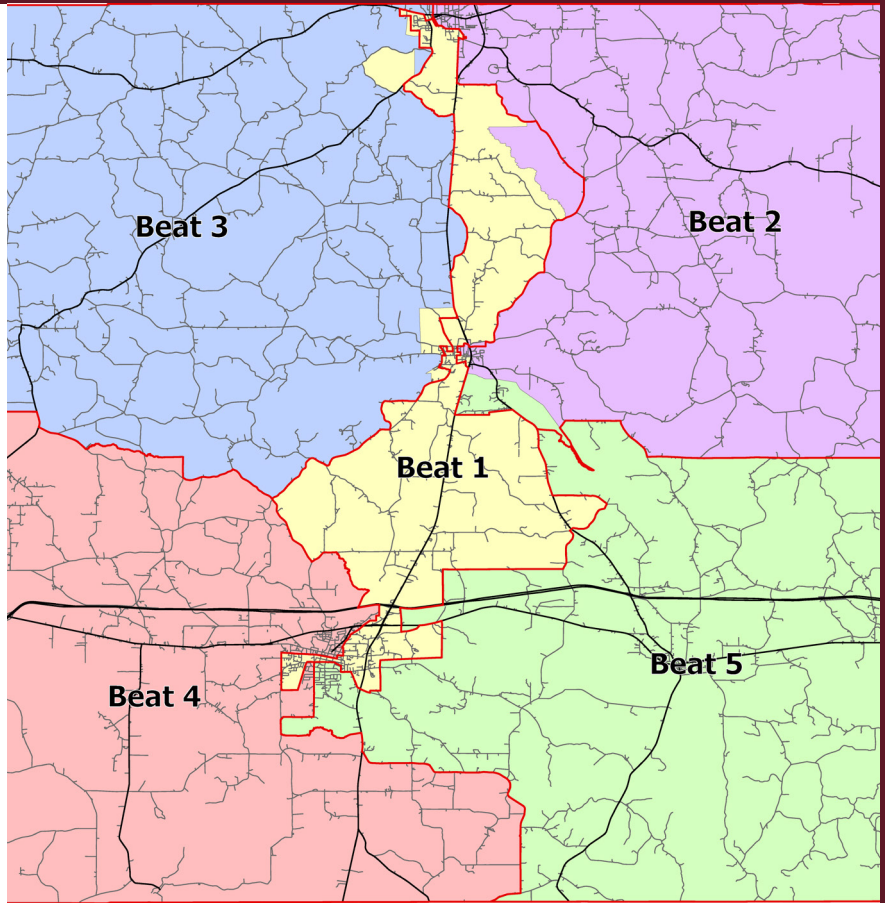
After 1900, some states chose to not redistrict, and were in violation of the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution, one that calls for equal protection. Because of this, redistricting as we know it was revolutionized in the 1960s under the Warren Court of the Supreme Court of the United States. Numerous cases were brought to the court, and under *Reynolds v. Sims*, the Court ruled that all districts must have roughly equal populations. Under *Gary v. Sanders*, the “one person, one vote” rule was established. These cases mandated districts to reevaluate their populations after each census.

During the redistricting process, the Stennis Institute makes it a priority not to pack or crack districts. Packing occurs when the population is intentionally concentrated to a single district, and cracking occurs when people are intentionally split across multiple districts. Both practices result in gerrymandering, an illegal practice in the United States. Gerrymandering exists when lines are drawn to benefit a particular political party or candidate. The Supreme Court decisions in the 1960s combined with the Voting Rights Act of 1965 stalled the practice of gerrymandering. This allowed for minority candidates to have a fairer path to representation. The goal of redistricting is to keep population numbers proportionate across all districts. The Stennis Institute works diligently to protect your district from any

form of gerrymandering and strives for equal representative.

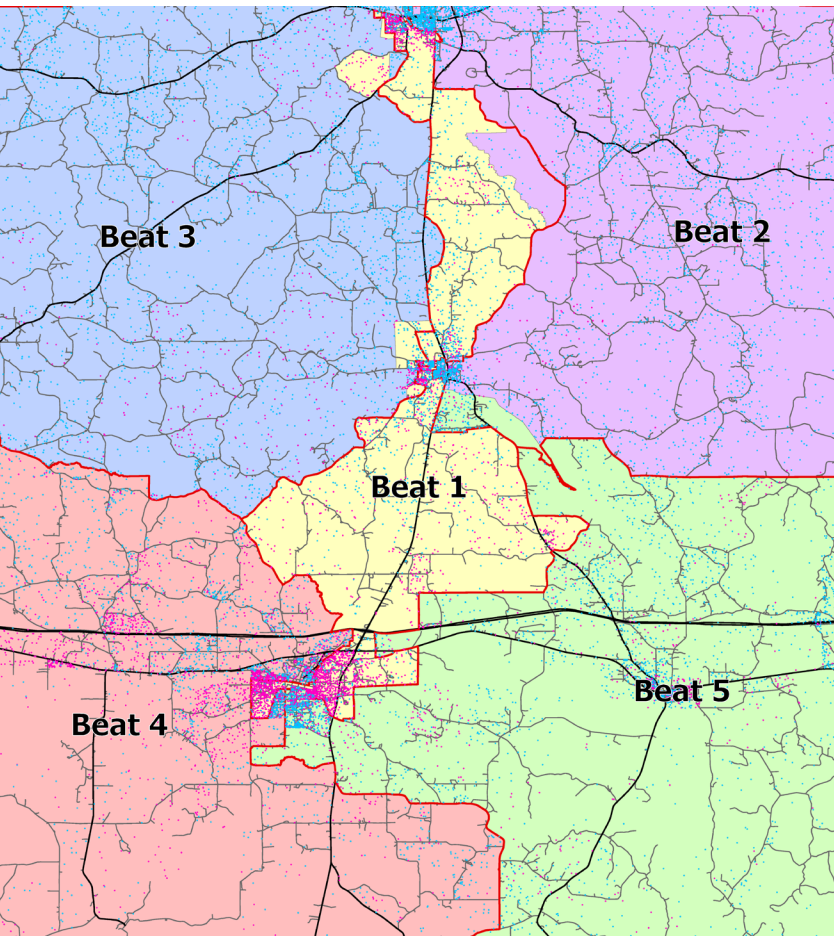
The redistricting process begins with a current map and comparing it to the new population data from the 2020 Census. Looking through these new numbers with Census blocks, new lines are drawn, carefully considering population, geographical features, and demographics. A new proposal map is drawn and taken to the Board of Aldermen or the Board of Supervisors of the city or county, respectively. After discussions with the Board, a vote is cast on the entity's new lines.

Examples shown here showcase a redistricting project done by SIG. This is only one example of the 11 contracts and inquires SIG has taken on thus far.



Redistricting is mandated by the United State Constitution, and can affect many aspects of local

life in a city or county, including supervisors, school boards, judges, and polling places. The Stennis Institute is actively working on various cities and counties with the recently published 2020 United Census data.



If you are interested in redistricting, contact the Stennis Institute at 662-325-3328.

STENNIS STUDENTS DIRECTED INDIVIDUAL STUDIES

By Breana Norton

The John C. Stennis Institute of Government and Community Development (SIG) at Mississippi State University (MSU) offers numerous opportunities for students with research opportunities, employment, and a behind the scenes look at local and state government. However, a hidden gem of student opportunities is course credit through a Directed Individual Study (DIS).

SIG Executive Director, Dallas Breen, Ph. D., serves as a professor and supervisor for DIS courses to students seeking to take a more personalized and independent course. Many majors have a specific class schedule, and a DIS offers an opportunity for students to take courses that are narrowed down to their special interests or potential career interests.

“I teach DIS courses to provide flexibility for students whose schedules may not allow them the opportunity to be introduced to different types of topics,” Breen said.

He has been teaching DIS courses since 2015, and they are offered to students of all classifications: undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral. Directed Individual Studies are offered by most majors and departments on MSU’s campus. If students are looking to take a DIS, they usually talk with one of their professors who actively participates in research or data

collection. Oftentimes, students will already have a job or internship doing similar work, and DIS’s allow them the ability to receive class credit while working. The professor will make a syllabus outlining the class’ objectives and requirements and submit this to the department office with their signature.

Afterwards, the department and academic registrar create a personalized class that only the specific student can put on their schedule. Towards the end of the class, the student is usually assigned a formal research paper on their findings or experience.

The most recent DIS offered at SIG was titled, “Advanced



Statistical Techniques in Social Science Research.” Breen and three undergraduate students focused on introducing the statistical data program R to run models and data sets for public policy research. Learning statistical programs allows students to easily model data as well as develop informed theories on that data. Learning these programs are very helpful to students who are pursuing graduate degrees, as it is a common requirement for students to model and show data in a thesis or dissertation.



Reagan Conner is an undergraduate student who participated in the fall 2021 DIS. Conner is set to graduate in May 2022 with her bachelor’s in Biochemistry, as well as serving as the President for the Stennis-Montgomery Association (SMA). SMA is the student organization sponsored by SIG. “This class will be extremely useful for me during my future endeavors in graduate school and my career,” Conner noted.

Another perk of DIS courses is the individual aspect. DIS courses consist of two to three students but can even consist of one student. The small class size allows professors and students to dive deeper in the subject material, as well as ask more questions and make more verbal connections than they would in a traditional classroom setting.

“The course gave me the freedom to learn at my own pace and to thoroughly understand the material being covered,” Conner said.

Breen has taught a wide range of subject material, from statistics to diversity in human resources. He says that if he knows about the topic, he will be glad to offer a DIS course on it.

His favorite course was Advanced Statistical Methods in Public Administration Research, but he has tweaked his syllabus to incorporate different statistical programs. Being able to teach different statistical programs further tailors each class to specific students’ goals.

Heston Lollar, Project Coordinator at SIG and a current student in the Public Policy and Administration doctorate program, enrolled in a DIS course while he was pursuing his master’s degree. His DIS focused on Stata, another statistical analysis program.

During the spring 2022 semester, Breen is teaching two DIS courses, one titled Quantitative

“A big part of my job is taking data and presenting it in a way that is easily digestible. Dr. Breen’s DIS gave me the tools and training I needed to quickly and easily visualize data,” Lollar said.



Methodology and Statistical Analysis in Public Policy Research. This will be a continuation of the statistical techniques class from the fall semester with two students, one undergraduate and one graduate student. The second is Political Boundaries and Governance, which will focus on the history and practice of redistricting

on the federal, state, and local levels of district boundaries with one doctoral student.

Breana Norton, a graduate student in the Public Policy and Administration program, took a DIS as an undergraduate student. Through this class, she learned the foundation of inserting data and creating models for visualization. She is taking a continuation of this course this spring.

“One of the most important aspects of SIG is that whatever your interest is, SIG will find a way to merge it with research and policy,” Norton said. “I hope to model data that speaks to equity in collegiate athletics.”

The John C. Stennis Institute of Government and Community Development is recognized on both the state and national level. Through its opportunities to invest, many students get their introductions to political administration and public policy. In addition to day-to-day operations, SIG wants to provide as many opportunities to students to get a jump start on their preparedness to succeed in higher education endeavors as well as the workplace.





MISSISSIPPI'S EDUCATIONAL FUNDING

**A Review of School District
Assessments and Tax Levies
and Revenue by Source by
District**

By: Judith Phillips



A Peek into the Study

The data summarized in Table A and B from the Mississippi Department of Education is very useful; however, to use the data to make longitudinal comparisons and to map these comparisons in a valid and accurate format, it required making minor changes to the original data. To provide transparency and clarity, this review provides a complete discussion with supporting examples of modifications or transformations that were made by the Stennis Institute Research Team to the original data that is contained in the Mississippi Department of Education’s Superintendent’s Annual Reports for the 2008-2009 School Year and the 2019-2020 School Year. An exact copy (with no data transformations) of the District Assessment and Tax Levies and the Revenue by Source by District spreadsheet data from the MDE is provided for

reference in Appendix B on page 81. Changes to the original data were limited and were only made when necessary to allow for the accurate longitudinal comparison of the data or to format the data to be accurately mapped and compared across school districts.

This review used the 9-month average daily student attendance (ADA) as reported by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) to calculate all revenue per student. Average Daily Attendance in Mississippi school districts provides a measure of actual student attendance; the term “enrollment” measures cumulative enrollment disregarding the actual

PERCENT CHANGE FROM 2008-2009 TO 2019-2020

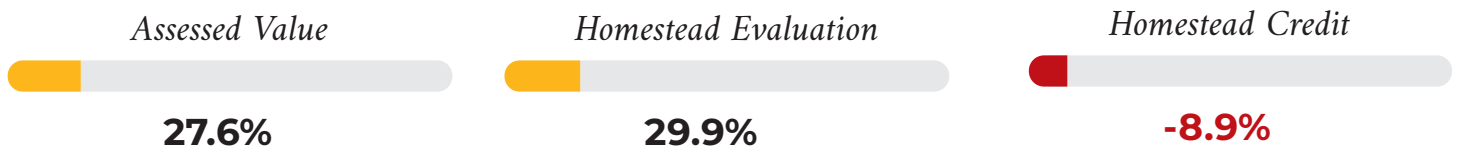


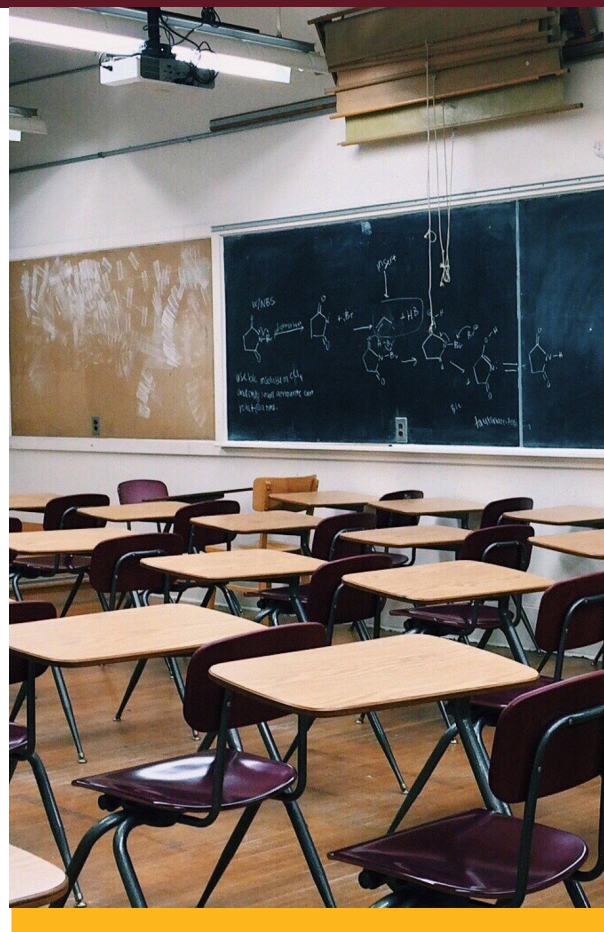
TABLE A: SUMMARY OF SCHOOL DISTRICT ASSESSMENTS AND TAX LEVIES

| School District Ad Valorem Levy | 2008-2009 School Year | 2019-2020 School Year | Dollar Change from 2009-2019 | Percent Change from 2009-2019 |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Assessed Value | \$23,600,567,849 | \$30,109,722,370 | \$6,509,154,521 | 27.6% |
| Homestead Evaluation | \$1,408,057,355 | \$1,828,839,450 | \$420,782,095 | 29.9% |
| Homestead Credit | \$51,996,613 | \$47,394,703 | -\$4,601,910 | -8.9% |
| Homestead Evaluation as percent of Assessed Value | 6.0% | 6.1% | N/A | N/A |

* MDE report does not provide an ad valorem data for Coahoma Agriculture High School for the 2008-2009 school year or for the 2019-2020 school year
 * MD reports assessed value of \$541,305 367 for Forrest Agricultural High School during the 2008-2009 school year and \$685,785,194 during the 2019-2020 school year; no data for homestead evaluation or homestead credits are reported for either year
 * MDE reports assessed value of \$1,669,871 for Hinds Agricultural High School during the 2008-2009 school year; Hinds AS had been closed by the 2019-2020 School year; no data for homestead evaluation or homestead credits is reported for the 2008-2009 school year
 * "Totals above do not include assessed values for Forrest Agricultural High School and Hinds Agricultural High School and Hinds AHS"

TABLE B: SUMMARY OF REVENUE BY SOURCE BY DISTRICT

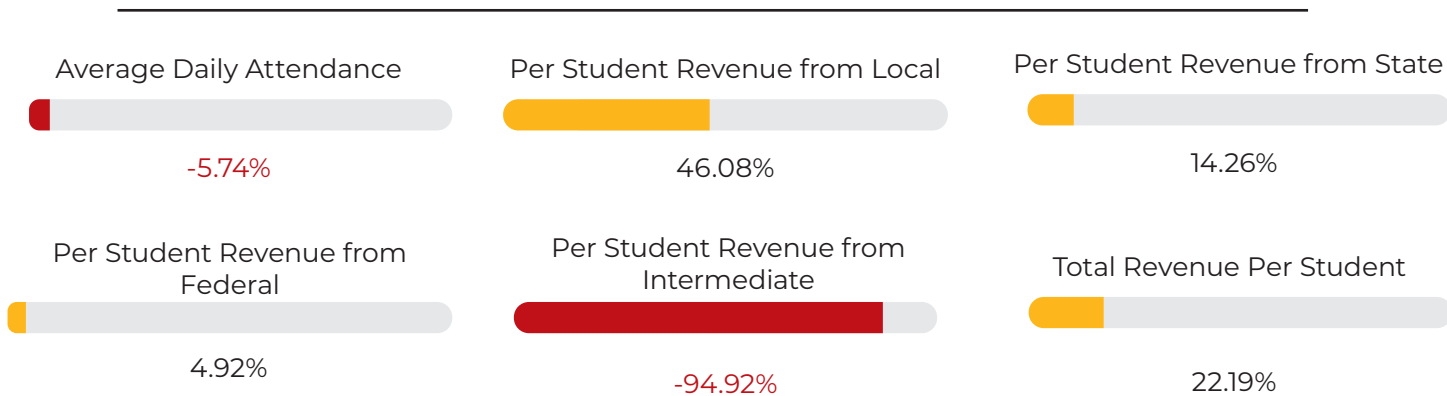
| Source of Revenue | 2008-2009 School Year | 2019-2020 School Year | Change from 2008-2009 to 2019-2020 | Percent Dollar Change |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Revenue from Local Sources | \$ 1,282,334,847.12 | \$1,765,797,030.08 | \$483,462,182.96 | 37.70% |
| Percent of Total | 29.84% | 35.69% | 5.85% | N/A |
| Revenue from State Sources | \$2,334,355,424.21 | \$2,514,226,950.73 | \$179,871,526.52 | 7.71% |
| Percent of Total | 54.33% | 50.81% | -3.52% | N/A |
| Revenue from Federal Sources | \$675,971,960.07 | \$668,513,592.58 | -\$7,458,367.49 | -1.10% |
| Percent of Total | 15.73% | 13.51% | -2.22% | N/A |
| Revenue from Intermediate Sources | \$4,108,845.63 | \$196,909.17 | -\$3,911,936.46 | -95.21% |
| Percent of Total | 0.10% | 0.004% | -0.097% | N/A |
| Total Revenue from All sources | \$4,296,771,077.03 | \$4,948,734,482.56 | \$651,963,405.53 | 15.17% |



physical presence of the student(s); as a result, ADA is generally a lower number than “enrollment.” MDE may utilize an average of month 2 (October) and month 3 (November) or, if higher daily attendance is attained, an average of month 1 (August/September) and month 9 (May) of the previous school year to calculate ADA. Although there are technical differences in regulatory definition and methods for calculating ADA versus student enrollment, the Stennis Team uses the terms “student enrollment” or “enrolled students” interchangeably with the 9-month average daily student attendance (ADA).

When examining average daily student attendance, the Stennis Research Team found a decrease of 26,435 students in ADA when the 2008-2009 school year was compared to the 2019-2020 school year. The team’s first consideration was to question the impact COVID-19 might have had on attendance during the 2019-2020 school year. The first known case of COVID-19 in the United States was reported on January 21st, 2020; the Mississippi

Percentage Change in Per Student Revenue based on Average Daily Attendance (ADA)

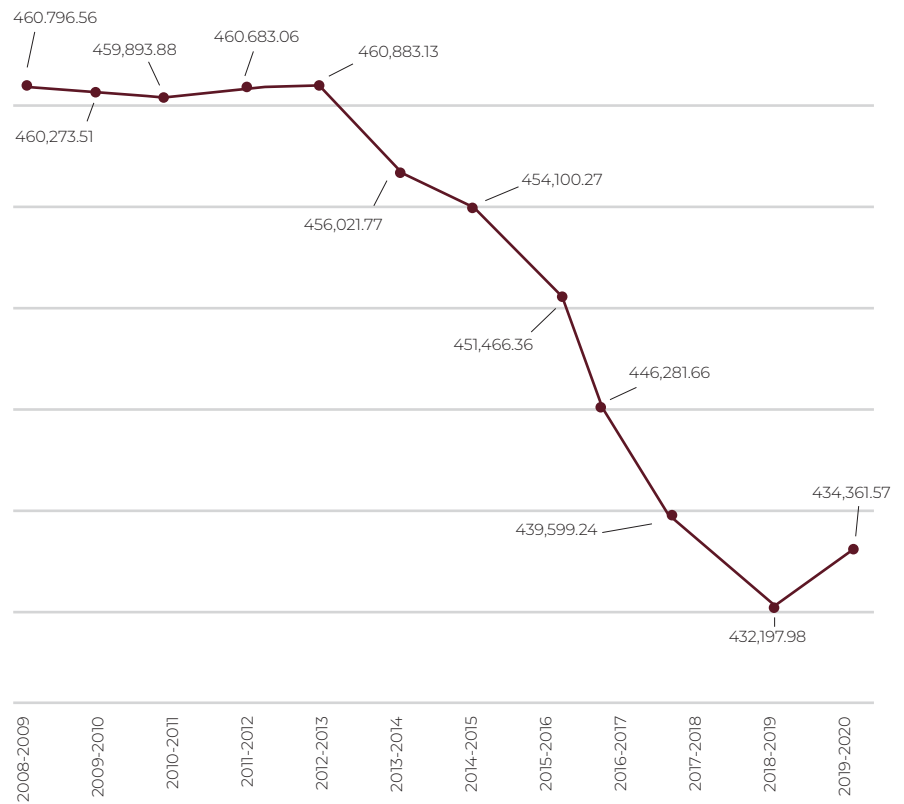


Student Average Daily Attendance Months 01-09 Historically

Department of Health confirmed the first case of COVID on March 12, 2020. The impact of COVID-19 began on March 14, 2020, when Governor Reeves called on Mississippi schools to extend spring break; subsequently, the Governor announced on April 14, 2020, that schools would remain closed for the remaining academic year.

These announcements would only have impacted month 7 (March), month 8 (April), and month 9 (May) of the 9-month average daily student attendance (ADA) for the 2019-2020 school year; because MDE generally uses month 2 and month 3 (October and November 2019) of the school year to calculate ADA, the Stennis Research Team concluded that COVID-19 was unlikely to have impacted the findings presented in this data review.

Additionally, a review of student ADA for every school year from 2008-2009 through 2019-2020 found that student ADA has been declining consistently since the 2012-2013 school year, except for a slight increase of approximately 2,164 students in average daily attendance from the 2018-2019 school year to the 2019-2020 school year (Figure I above).



This study does not adjust the dollar amount of revenue for inflation. There are multiple categories of spending that drive price changes and inflation rates; these categories of spending vary between industries and there are multiple alternative methods for measuring and adjusting for inflation. The method selected to measure inflation related to school revenues may result in significant differences and may change the frame of a policy discussion, for example:

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for Education

was 127.393 in 2009 and 137.790 in 2019; based upon this data, \$4,647,433,827 in 2019 would have the same purchasing power as \$4,296,771,077 in 2009

The historical CPI in the U.S. was 214.5337 in 2009 and 255.6575 in 2019; based upon this data \$5,120,337,058 in 2019 would have the same purchasing power as \$4,296,771,077 in 2009

Chained CPI integrates consumer adjusted spending due to product substitution; between 2009 and 2019, Chained inflation averaged 1.51 percent per year; based upon this measure, \$4,992,490,599 in 2019 would have the same buying power as \$4,296,771,077 in 2009

The research team reviewed and examined data for the 2008-2009 school year and the 2019-2020 school year; this review provides metrics of changes that have occurred over that period.

This review of School District Assessments and Tax Levies and Revenue by Source by School District compared data for the 2019-2020 school year with the 2008-2009 school year found:

The dollar amount of the assessed value of property within Mississippi School Districts averaged an increase of 27.6 percent; over the same period, the dollar amount of revenue to school districts from local sources increased by 37.1 percent. This indicates that the increasing share of local revenue as a source of funding for public elementary and secondary education may be outpacing the growth in the assessed value of property in some Mississippi school districts.

The dollar amount of Homestead Exemption tax credits issued to residential homeowners decreased by approximately \$4.6 million or 8.9 percent; declines in Homestead Exemption tax credits were widespread across approximately 90 percent of Mississippi's school districts. These decreases are primarily a function of slow population growth or population

declines, aging populations, and/or long-term trends in household formation and related declines in residential homeownership.

To provide local revenue to fund elementary and secondary public education, the average millage rate levied on property within Mississippi's school districts was 53.9 mills during the 2019-2020 school year; the operating millage rate levied to support local public education averaged 48.7 mills. Millage rates to provide local funding for public elementary and secondary education vary significantly from a low of 31.60 mills in the Amite County School District to a high of 86.86 mills in the Jackson Public School District.

Assuming the budget needs of elementary and secondary public education continue to increase, school districts with stagnant growth



(or declines) in the assessed value of property will need to increase millage rates to maintain local revenue or increasingly rely upon state sources of revenue to fund public education.

The dollar amount of revenue to Mississippi school districts from all sources (local, state, federal, and intermediate) increased by \$651.96 million or 15.2 percent from the 2008-2009 school year until the 2019-2020 school year. Revenue from local sources as a percent of total revenue to school districts increased from 29.8 percent of total during the 2008-2009 school year as compared to 35.7 percent of total during the 2019-2020 school year. Revenue from state sources as a percent of total revenue to school district decreased from 54.3 percent of total during the 2008-2009 school year as compared to 50.8 percent of total during the 2019-2020 school year. Revenue from Federal sources declined by 2.2 percent over the period.

When the 2008-2009 school year is compared to the 2019-2020 school year, total revenue to Mississippi school districts from all sources increased by \$651,963,406; approximately 75 percent of the total revenue increase came from local sources which exhibited an increase of \$483,462,183 between the two periods.

During the 2008-2009 school year, total revenue from all sources averaged \$9,324.65 per student in average daily attendance (ADA); in the 2019-2020 school year, revenue from all sources averaged \$11,393.11 per student (ADA) representing an increase of \$2,068.46 per student (a 22.2 percent increase in total revenue per student). Total revenue per student was found to exhibit significant variability between school districts ranging from a low of \$8,970 per student in the Lincoln County School District to a high of \$18,313 in the Choctaw County School District (this excludes Ambition Preparatory Charter School which had revenue per student of \$19,913 during the 2019-2020 school year).

The examination and a discussion of the relationship between student academic outcomes and school district revenue was beyond the scope of this review. Table D below provides a brief synopsis of average revenue per student by source disaggregated based upon school district accountability grades as reported in the 2020 Statewide Accountability Performance Rating published by the Mississippi Department of Education

| School District Accountability Grade | Number of School Districts | Average Revenue per Student | Average Revenue per Student from Local | Average Revenue per Student from State |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|--|--|
| A | 31 | \$10,983 | 37.4% | 51.8% |
| | 34 | \$11,139 | 37.4% | 51.8% |
| | 32 | \$11,765 | 37.4% | 51.8% |
| B | 22 | \$12,615 | 37.4% | 51.8% |
| | 18 | \$12,623 | 37.4% | 51.8% |

Read the full report by Judith Phillips [here](#).

If you have a topic to explore with The Stennis Institute, reach out to our office at 662-325-3328 or email an inquiry to comms@sig.msstate.edu

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While The Stennis Institute Annual Report continues to grow and showcase some of the great talent employed here, it is difficult to include every single person.

Here is a special thanks to our staff, students, and surveyors that keep SIG at the top of the game!

Dallas Breen, Ph.D.

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Joe Fratesi

Assistant Dir. for Community Dev.

David Parrish

Assistant Director for Operations

LeeAnn Funderburg

Business Manager

Chance McDavid

Project Director

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Johnny Mack & Martha Morrow

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Bonnie Hays

Administrative Assistant

Breana Norton

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Annie Price

Graduate Research Assistant

Erin Bailey

Undergraduate Research Assistant

Regan Conner

Undergraduate Research Assistant

Lily Elliott

Undergraduate Research Assistant

Gracie Kelley

Undergraduate Research Assistant

Harris Mason

Undergraduate Research Assistant

Grace Troutman

Undergraduate Research Assistant

Mary Martha Willson

Undergraduate Research Assistant

Charlotte Allen

Surveyor

Gary Andrews

Surveyor

Mary Andrews

Surveyor

Perry Brown

Surveyor

Benjamin Carver

Surveyor

James Carver

Surveyor

Gail Dixon

Surveyor

Geoff Jakins

Surveyor

Kathy Jones

Surveyor

Harley Meadows

Surveyor

Douglas Stewart

Surveyor

Anthony Varaksa

Surveyor

LEADERSHIP TRAINING

By: Mary Martha Willson

MISSISSIPPI COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

While The Stennis Institute (SIG) offers a number of programs and services to the political and community development landscape of Mississippi, one core principle has a large-scale impact on the state as a whole: education. As a unit of the Mississippi State University Office of Research and Economic Development with ties to agencies across the state, collaboration and partnership are a key component of the value SIG brings to the table.

The Mississippi Community College Foundation (MCCF) and the John C. Stennis Institute of Government and Community Development (SIG) established a partnership in 2009 to deliver educational training on leadership and leadership development within the community college setting. The Mississippi Community College Leadership Academy (MCCLA) program was created by both organizations to try and create these developments. MCCLA is a year-long leadership training program that runs from June to May.

“The structure and communication from the [Mississippi Community College] Foundation and the [Stennis] Institute allowed for efficient transitions from one session to the next,” Said Jonathan Townes, Dean of Technology-Career and Technical Education at Hinds Community College.

The program’s purpose is to provide community college leaders with the knowledge,

skills, and ability to better serve their audience as well as to advance administrators’ opportunities for advancement in their career paths. The MCCLA provides leadership development training to individuals at the mid and upper levels of community college organizational charts. A main goal of the Leadership Academy is to provide an avenue for networking and discussions among surrounding 2-year institutions, so that administration can be connected and supported in their efforts to build community and foster student development. To participate in MCCLA, an employee must be nominated for consideration to the academy by filling out a nomination form and then is selected by the Assistant Executive Director of Human Resources of the MCCF board. The nominee can nominate themselves or be nominated by another faculty member. Typically, participants are nominated by the President of their college. The program promotes innovation and potential restructuring to the 2-year colleges in order to support new generations of students. This





increased knowledge is taken back to each campus for implementation and promotes their local community through growth and education.

In addition to the logistical support from Stennis staff members, SIG also financially supports the MCCLA through a yearly contract to provide scholarship funding for participants to promote participation. Among the 35 participants from the 2021 cohort, 14 of Mississippi's 15 community colleges were represented. Townes reflects on the positive ways MCCLA has impacted him.

"The Mississippi Community College Leadership Academy (MCCLA) has truly been a great experience and has increased my understanding of leadership, created partnerships with other community college faculty and staff, and brought forth a new initiative at Hinds with our establishment of an office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. This leadership academy created a space to understand the positives and challenges associated with all departments within an institution of higher education as well as noting how all stakeholders are important for the success of a college or university," Townes said.

In addition to a total of three 3-day meetings in June, October, and February participants have a series of books to read, class assignments to complete, and a group project that they must complete. Each participant must create an action plan by identifying a need or service within their college that can be improved, then get approval from the necessary channels in their institution. This year's action plan topics ranged from creating a comprehensive student support plan post-COVID, developing and implementing a strategic enrollment marketing plan, to establishing an office of diversity, equity, and inclusion. While each topic is different, they are equally necessary and unique to each specific institution. The goal of this aspect of the program is to develop the ability of participants to design, create, and implement a plan that could work for a targeted audience.

"This academy has provided an opportunity for me to sharpen my supervisory, management, and leadership skills. I would recommend this institute to other individuals who are seeking to grow within higher education," Townes said

The Stennis Institute continues to provide the highest quality education, technical assistance programs, and research to the people and communities of Mississippi, and MCCLA is a prime example of this effort.




If you are interested in getting involved with MCCLA or any other SIG project, reach out to us or come by our office. We offer everything you need, from the courthouse to the classroom.

Graduation for the current MCCLA Cohort will be held in May on MSU's Starkville Campus. Watch for the announcement on the Stennis Institute social media!

2021 STATE EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

By: Grace Troutman



Since its establishment in 1976, the John C. Stennis Institute of Government & Community Development has been committed to improving the lives of Mississippians through governmental avenues. Working to address current economic and social issues, the Stennis Institute believes that well-informed, highly

trained public servants are key to a more prosperous Magnolia State; this need has been greatly heightened by the widespread impact of COVID-19 on the health, safety, and well-being of Mississippians and Americans as a whole. Fueled by applied research, governmental services, leadership training, and economic/community development,

the Stennis Institute's staff works to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of Mississippi state and local governments through basic and applied research, training, technical assistance, and service. As a means of upholding this pillar of its threefold mission, the Stennis Institute hosts a yearly conference known as the State Executive Department Institute (SEDI).

SEDI is an immersive, educational program designed to prepare mid to upper-level executives to be effective leaders. To be considered for that year's cohort, each applicant is asked to submit a nomination and résumé. The nominations are open to all, but the selection committee only



chooses a maximum of 25 participants and 2 alternates. For decades, SEDI has shaped the career journeys of executives from an array of educational and professional backgrounds. In its thirty-one-year stint as part of the Institute, SEDI has trained dozens of talented leaders that take the knowledge learned in these courses and implement them into their fields throughout the state's government sector. Thus, SEDI's reach in the state is expansive and better the lives of countless residents.

The six-day intensive course allows participants to not only garner a richer understanding of public administration and adjacent principles, but also the opportunity to network and establish coalitions with fellow heads of agencies, counties, cities, and state positions. The participants are divided into teams, making for a more connected group of individuals who can benefit from each other's perspectives during workshops, panels, and seminar-style discussions. With Mississippi public officials sitting at round tables, meals function as a channel for networking opportunities and innovative conversation among capable minds. SEDI, in essence, creates a greater sense of community among those leading the state.

The SEDI program is led by one of Stennis' own, Frank Riley. In his career, Riley has acquired assorted, relevant knowledge that makes him an incredibly qualified leader; he has years of experience with professional development-related events, bolstering a strong background in budgeting, public speaking, management, economic development, and financial services. In addition to his work as program coordinator for SEDI, Frank Riley works as a Research Associate at the Stennis Institute, organizes the Stennis-Capitol Press Forums, and directs the Family Impact Seminars. Family Impact Seminars are a consortium of universities throughout the nation working on legislative training opportunities on topics related to families. He has worked tirelessly for the last two years to ensure that the SEDI program can deliver maximum results for its participants, especially in the face of an unrelenting global pandemic. Despite these obstacles, Riley has transformed experiences from the pandemic into opportunities for growth and discussion for SEDI participants.

After the challenging year that was 2020, the Stennis Institute was thrilled for SEDI's return to its traditional format.



On May 2nd, the 2021 State Executive Development Institute commenced. Throughout that week, graduate-level participants sharpened their leadership skills and expanded their professional knowledge. The members held roles ranging from nurse practitioner, occupational therapist, engineer to human resources director, county board Supervisor, to Director of Public Relations. The event took place in three

SEDI

STATE EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE



locations: Mississippi State University, Holmes Community College: Ridgeland Campus, and the Mississippi Craft Center. It consisted of workshops led by Stennis Institute experts and faculty from the MSU College of Business, as well as faculty from renowned universities such as the University of Southern California and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Outside the academic sector, sessions were also held by state and local officials in order to diversify the scope of knowledge that was accessible to participants.

The curriculum included discussions about topics such as management, organizational theory, conflict resolution, strategic negotiation, cybersecurity issues, and collaboration with the Legislature. Scholars presented on areas that are vital to government affairs and organizations. For example, Jennifer L. Philips, Ph.D., gave a detailed presentation on

policy development and implementation that included a detailed plan of action with steps, measurement tools, and goals. Whit Waide, a former attorney and professor in the Political Science department at MSU, gave a talk about the legal principles that underlie the administration and regulation of government agencies, also known as administrative law. Each day was filled with speeches such as these in conjunction with discussions and group breakouts. Similarly, the five teams were assigned a case study to examine and present on, so each day one of the teams presented their findings and received feedback from conference colleagues and leaders.





On May 5th, the participants strayed from the program's conventional structure and met in the Jackson metropolitan area, allowing them improved access to additional guests, including this year's keynote speaker, State Insurance Commissioner, Mike Chaney. Riley commented on the positive effect of the day's events.

“Speakers on this day included a panel of leaders who spoke about leadership in a time when their organizations were deeply divided. Other sessions included a discussion of the state budget, ad valorem taxation, economic development, and a panel of registered lobbyists,” Riley said

In a time of political polarization and strife, these speakers guided participants and equipped them with the necessary tools to effectively lead their respective organizations. On May 7th, the attendees gathered for a luncheon at the Mississippi Craft Center followed by their graduation ceremony. The Stennis Institute is proud of the work done by Frank Riley and all other individuals who collaborated to make this conference a success. The Stennis Institute congratulates the 25 graduates and hope that they will carry their knowledge from SEDI into their careers in service to the state of Mississippi.

Nominations for SEDI 2022 are open until March 18.

Visit www.sig.msstate.edu/sedi for more information.

A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE OF WORKFORCE

Northeast Community College Strategic Workforce Summit





















By: Erin Bailey

“Imagine a workforce system in northeast Mississippi that tightly connects with the school system, expands learning choices for people, and provides existing business and industries with continual access to workers equipped with the skills and entrepreneurial spirit to power a growing region. What could we do to begin creating this future?”

This significant question was asked at the Northeast Mississippi Workforce Council Summit on Nov. 3, 2021. What makes this summit so unique is the very last sentence of the posing question, “What could we do to begin creating this future?” Many work summits spark important conversations and big picture ideas, but the new innovations get left on the back burner where no action is initiated after the summit ends. Well, on Nov. 3, 2021, members of the Northeast Mississippi Workforce Council Summit took action. Hosted by Northeast Mississippi Community College (NEMCC), The Stennis Institute of Government (SIG) at Mississippi State University (MSU) helped facilitate the summit that bridged the gap between leaders from industry, education, local government, and economic development by creating discussion on how to enhance the workforce in northeast Mississippi. Facilitated by SIG Assistant Director, Joe Fratesi, Ph.D., the NEMCC Strategic Workforce Training Summit included



COMPARISON BETWEEN TRADITIONAL STRATEGIC PLANNING AND STRATEGIC DOING

| | STRATEGIC PLANNING | VS | STRATEGIC DOING |
|--|---|----|--|
| Designed for... | Hierarchies  | | Networks  |
| Developed through... | Top-down approach  | | Collaborative approach  |
| Result in... | A plan  | | Collaborative action  |
| Best environment... | Stable & slow moving  | | Complex, fast-paced  |
| Best used for challenges with... | Clear problem / Technical solutions  | | Multiple causes / No single solution  |
| Who is in charge? | Single entity or group  | | No single person or group  |
| Focus on... | Problems (fixing old systems)  | | Opportunities (designing what is next)  |
| Critical thinking and action are... | Separate  | | Combined  |
| Result in initiatives/projects that are... | Long-term / Big picture  | | Short-term / Achievable  |
| Based on... | Wishes & dreams  | | Current assets & resources  |

guest speakers, AccelerateMS Director, Ryan Miller, Ph.D., and President and CEO of the Mississippi Manufacturers Association, Mr. John McKay. The Summit provided a unique networking opportunity for the 130 attendees from different areas of the workforce system in northeast Mississippi. It isn't often that professionals with different backgrounds and expertise are able to exchange such powerful ideas. Leaders such as superintendents, industry leaders, and workforce professionals of northeast Mississippi were strategically mixed together to not only form collaborative ideas, but to create elaborate plans of action to take the next step toward their ideal future for the workforce system.

Dr. Joe Fratesi explained each step and process of the summit after the attendees were presented with the posing question. He then facilitated a broader group discussion at each table of the summit.



Conversations discussing available assets and resources within the groups arose, leading to a formation of strategic opportunities that would begin to strengthen the workforce pipeline in northeast Mississippi. Strategic opportunities such as improving communication between K-12 school systems and community colleges, creating more internships within regional businesses, and building a pipeline to broaden opportunities for students were identified and written on asset cards. This hard work did not stop at the summit.

The goal of the Northeast Mississippi Workforce Council Summit was to not only have the participants collaborate and form these innovations, but also to



help them take initiative after the summit. Following the summit, the Stennis Institute analyzed the members' responses and categorized them into "focus areas." These focus areas allowed the strategic opportunities to be organized so the ideal future of the workforce system in northeast Mississippi could be visualized. There were four main focus areas identified: Hands-

On Training Opportunities, School-Industry Relationships, Soft Skills/Education, and Marketing, Outreach, and Communication. The Hands-On Training Opportunities focus area included specifics such as internships, apprenticeships, and mentorships. The education-to-industry relationship focus area consisted of ideas like enhancing the relationship between parents of students and the community. Additionally, the Soft Skills/Education focus area was made up of innovations such as providing training that would ultimately connect students to careers. Finally, the Marketing, Outreach, and Communication focus area organized ideas like creating recruitment videos, hosting an industry career fair, and educating counselors on how to inform their students of community college and trade opportunities.

Attendees of the summit who were willing to continue taking initiative after the summit signed up to put the ideas that made up the focus areas into action. Since the Summit, the attendees have been organized into action teams where they will take the innovations created at the summit and turn them into spark plug projects. Spark plug projects are short-term, usually around six-month, action plans that will allow the teams to see if they are on the right track to fulfilling their goals. The posing question that sparked these incredible ideas and projects may appear short, but behind it lies a long-lasting impact on the future of northeast Mississippi's workforce. The Northeast Mississippi Workforce Council Summit brought a unique group of leaders together and took the first step toward a better workforce in northeast Mississippi.

Interested in Strategic Doing or leadership trainings offered by The Stennis Institute? Contact our office and let us help you reach your goals.

Call us at 662-325-3328 or email us comms@sig.msstate.edu

First IMPRESSIONS

JOHN C. STENNIS INSTITUTE

By: Gracie Kelley

The John C. Stennis Institute of Government and Community Development (SIG) operates on the continued effort of recruiting talent that aides our publics in Governmental Services, Applied Research, Leadership Training, and Economic and Community Development. Community Development and Economic Development typically go hand-in-hand on certain projects, with tourism being one high note that adds to both of these efforts. Tourism projects work to bring new people, new money, and fresh eyes to your community. This is where a long-standing service SIG offers comes into play.

First Impressions is a project that has been put together and brought forth by the Stennis Institute that allows you to get a birds-eye-view of your community through the eyes of a first-time visitor. Communities all over Mississippi can invite Stennis faculty to come in and observe their community to better understand how their town is portrayed to people who are seeing it for the first time. At its core, the goal of the project is to revitalize, help, and encourage communities as well as work together to serve each other so that our State can reach its potential a town at a time. After 10+ years in the making, First Impressions is succeeding in accomplishing the goal it was created to meet.

In order that this goal is met, there is a specific, strategy that is used. At its most basic form, this strategy splits the project into two main stages: the visitation and the presentation. Before the process starts, a need must be recognized. Once the need is recognized by your internal community officials, you must contact SIG's Community Development team. You will then receive an application form that will need to be filled out in order to have the town analysis completed. The application process will help the Community Development team get an idea of your town and its needs. Additionally,





the application serves as a request and verification that the visitation team has been invited to complete their survey. Seeing a group of obvious visitors taking pictures and browsing your town has the tendency to raise questions and raise eyebrows of locals, so having proof that the team has been asked to come in eases the minds and answers the questions of locals.

The application also has a portion where you are asked

if there are individuals in your town that would be willing to visit another town. Ideally, this would open an opportunity to do something called a “community swap”. The idea behind this is that while your town is being evaluated, you have the chance to spur on another community by being part of a first impression team in their town. There is great importance in having everyday people such as stay-at-home parents, teachers, and businesspeople as part of these visitation teams. Bringing in untrained eyes helps to create a realistic, unbiased outlook on a town.

While having everyday citizens is vital to ensure the integrity and diversity of the visitation team, there are other individuals that are necessary for these teams to function properly. In addition to everyday people, teams are often made up of university personnel, community and economic developers, chamber of commerce and local officials, as well as Mississippi Main Street Association personnel. These individuals are brought in as external visitors to guarantee transparency and authenticity. Once again, remaining unbiased is of the utmost importance. Every individual on these visitation teams is willing to volunteer their time and effort to pour into the betterment of surrounding Mississippi communities in order that we may see our state thrive. Once the dedicated team has been formed, it is time for the visitation.

When the First Impressions team arrives, your community representatives take time to show the team around so that they can experience what a day in the life looks like. While visiting, there is so much to see and learn, but the visitors are paying careful attention to a few criteria-housing, infrastructure, schools, places of worship, retail areas and even people in your town. Brittney Perkins, one of the Community Development researchers at SIG, says that their interactions with community members are genuine and often happen organically. She goes on to say that this tells a lot about the town’s personality. Eagerness to ask questions and approach visitors shows that they are welcoming and that they care about their town.

After tying up the last ends of the visitation process, Stennis’ Community Development team returns to home base to begin the second stage-the presentation. They will begin by discussing their findings and sorting through the information and pictures that have been collected along the way. A written presentation and visual presentation are then curated to showcase their experience. After the presentation is prepared, the visitation team reports back to your community to share the experience your town offers based on their First Impression visit. The presentation is set up as if it were a town hall meeting and anyone in your town who is interested is not only welcome but encouraged to attend. The presentation is known among the team as “your town in pictures” because they have found that simply showing you your town from their perspective has been widely effective. Beyond this, the team seeks to encourage you to keep doing the things you do well as a community while also presenting suggestions to help your community

begin to flourish and continue to grow. This process, while tedious and time consuming, has proven successful in towns across our state.

Throughout the years, there have been countless success stories that have come about. Joe Fratesi, Ph.D., Stennis Institute Assistant Director for Community Development, has many accounts of successful visits and towns that made huge improvements for the sake and creating a more valuable community. One of his favorite success stories is from the town of Water Valley, MS. Here, visitors noticed that as shoppers leave the grocery store, they are viewing the backside of the buildings on Mainstreet. A comment was made while visiting that improving the back of the buildings could be beneficial as they are visible to anyone leaving the grocery store—every person in town. In response to this, the back of the buildings on Mainstreet were improved with a little paint and attention. The improvement did not stop here, though. This sparked a project called Better Backyard—a project centered around the idea that improving the back of buildings would attract people to the front of the buildings. In this instance, one of First Impressions’ many valuable traits is evident—it helps to expose the unseen.

Water Valley is not the only example of this; there are many testimonies where a town has seen an issue for so long that they simply do not see it anymore—fresh eyes of visitors are vital for seeing the unseen. Another valuable trait seen in this example is that Water Valley did not stop at painting the back of their buildings—they went even further to improve the integrity and appearance of their town.



Many successful town turnarounds are not solely a result of First

Impressions, but First Impressions acts as a launch pad to put pep in the steps of Mississippi communities. The goal of First Impressions is to spark a fire and give hope for a better future by helping a town to realize its potential. The truest success stories are of the towns that take what they are given and multiply it for years to come in order that they may continue a good work in their town. Long after the visitation teams are gone and SIG has moved to the next project, towns are left with an excitement to continue building a better community. At the end of it all, First Impressions, and the passionate Community Development team at Stennis, seek to showcase these towns and showcase how loveable the state of Mississippi is.

Interested in the First Impressions team visiting your community? Contact our office!

Call us at 662-325-3328 or email us comms@sig.msstate.edu

NEW TALENT ADDED TO MISSISSIPPI'S THINK TANK

2022 has already brought new faces for The Stennis Institute. Many of these “new faces” are familiar faces with a new title. They come to SIG with different passions, experiences, and skills, which all adds to SIG’s nickname: Mississippi’s Think Tank. We look forward to the year ahead!

Brittney Perkins, a bubbly personality and native of Columbus, MS, is an integral part of the staff at the Stennis Institute of Government. She is a research associate whose passion brings a new excitement to the community and economic development branch of the team at Stennis. She has strong interpersonal skills, and she is comfortable and confident bringing a new perspective to the table.

As a research associate in community development, her main priority right now is a project called First Impressions. Her role involves her going into communities across Mississippi with her colleagues to get a first impression of the town. She then works to sort information and pictures from the town to then compose a presentation for the town that improves their community. Her hope with this project is to develop and encourage surrounding communities to grow and thrive. This job is exceptionally rewarding for her because she loves to help towns become more inviting by giving them her fresh outlook on their town. It is obvious that Brittney truly believes in the State of Mississippi and is passionate about making this state loveable, while also bringing attention to the state’s hidden gems.

While the work that she is very rewarding, she says that the biggest accomplishment of it all is being able to be on the team as a full-time employee of Stennis. Brittney received her Bachelor of Art in Communications with a concentration in Communication Studies at Mississippi State University, then moved on to gain her master’s degree in Public Policy and Administration. She is now working on her Ph.D. in Public Policy and Administration. She began to work with Stennis as a Graduate Assistant while receiving her master’s degree, but this has now rolled over into a full-time position for her. She has excelled as a student and employee; while balancing the two, she received an outstanding graduate award.

Brittney works very hard in so many areas of her life and is a passionate about so many things. When she is not working to create a comfortable and flourishing environment for surrounding communities or doing research, she enjoys watching horror movies. She is also a proud dog-mom of her dog, Maslow. When asked what her favorite Mississippi State tradition is, she says that she loves to celebrate the University’s birthday. She is also a big fan of Maroon Friday because she loves to show off her school spirit. Overall, though, her favorite part of being a member of the Mississippi State family is the community. Connection and community are very important for her, and this campus has fostered her passions and created many opportunities for her. In her experience, this University has been so good for her and has been great place for her to network. Along the way, she has been able to make life-long friends.





John Harper, Ph.D., has been with the John C. Stennis Institute of Government and Community Development (SIG) since 2011, when he was first employed as a graduate research assistant while getting his master's in Public Policy and Administration. After graduation in 2013, he became a doctoral assistant, and in 2019, upon graduation of his doctoral program in Community College Leadership, became a full-time employee as a Post-Doctoral Research Assistant. Earlier this year, he made the transition to Research Associate II as a Leadership Development Specialist.

Throughout his post-doctoral experience, he worked as the liaison between SIG and the Mississippi Community College Foundation to co-facilitate the Mississippi Community College Leadership Academy (MCCLA). A yearlong leadership development program, MCCLA looks to strengthen supervisory and management skills. During MCCLA, Dr. Harper

teaches a workshop on Embracing Diversity in the Workplace.

Although he has been a full-time employee for three years, he will tack on more responsibilities in his new role. These new responsibilities still fall into the community college realm. A community college student himself, he went to Copiah-Lincoln Community College before coming to Mississippi State University.

"I'm very passionate about community colleges, because they have the capability to change a life," Harper said. "They can change the trajectory of people's lives who may not be prepared for a four-year university. Had it not been for Co-Lin, I don't know if I would have finished. Who knows what I would be doing."

In addition to MCCLA, Harper is looking to revitalize a defunct SIG program, the Community College Fellowship Program, a leadership development program that provides specialized training for community college professionals.

"Think of MCCLA as the undergraduate course, and Community College Fellowship Program as the graduate course," Harper said.

In any position Harper finds himself in, he focuses on making an impact at the community college level. He gives all the credit of where his is today to his time at Copiah-Lincoln and shares that experience and knowledge at the workshops and programs he facilitates.

"Most recently, a person wrote me a letter and told me that the diversity and inclusion workshop totally transformed the way they handled situations in the workplace," Harper said. "That's what it is all about."

Harper and his wife, Shelby, have two children, Levi (3), and Madeline (1). When Dr. Harper is not in the office, and the weather is improved, he enjoys riding motorcycles and racing.



Chance McDavid rejoined SIG staff as Project Director in February 2022. He brings multiple disciplines and various experiences to SIG Operations. A graduate of Mississippi State University, he received his bachelor's degree in Poultry Science, before going to the University of Mississippi for a master's in Public Relations. He joins us from the Mississippi Development Authority, where he was the Director of Community and Rural Development.

Upon graduation from Mississippi State, he worked for Tyson Foods and Sanderson Farms in Manufacturing and Quality Assurance. He returned to Mississippi State through the Extension Service. Here he worked on local, state, and national levels in 4-H Youth Development, Agriculture and Natural Resources, and Community Resource Development. Also at Mississippi State, he worked for the Southern Rural Development Center. Located in the Department of Agricultural Economics, he worked on regional and

national research and outreach programs serving the Land Grant University System. McDavid worked as a Project Manager for the Mississippi State Community Action Team, before the entity merged with SIG.

Serving his community, McDavid was Vice President and Chief Operations Officer with the Greater Starkville Development Starkville Partnership with oversight of the Starkville Area Chamber of Commerce. He has served on both Starkville and Clinton, Mississippi's, community boards and associations.

"The most exciting part of my job as a community development practitioner is the ability to positively impact communities across state by encouraging and teaching others how to be the change in their communities that will generate wealth and improve quality of life for future generations," McDavid said. "Every day brings opportunities to engage with new projects and new people who are passionate about improving communities where they live, work, and raise their families."

Originally from Brookhaven, MS, he and his family have lived in Clinton, MS, for the past ten years. His wife, Kayla, was also involved in local government as the Membership Relations Manager for the Clinton Chamber of Commerce. They have three boys, Brayden (13), Trace (11), Joshua (7). The McDavids are also the proud owners of their dog, Lucy, their cat, Mittens, and two bunnies, hop and hopper.

In his free time, he enjoys spending time with family, especially at the baseball fields. The McDavids enjoy the great outdoors and visit family often in Southwest Mississippi and the Louisiana Delta. On the top of his bucket list, he wants to restore two family vehicles, a 1979 Ford Ranchero GT and a 1991 Ford F100.

GRADUATING STUDENTS

The Stennis Institute of Government (SIG) prides itself on providing opportunities to MSU students to gain experience and specialized skills while completing their studies.

Along with the Stennis-Montgomery Association (SMA) and Directed Individual Studies, SIG also employs a number of Undergraduate Research Assistants (URA) and Graduate Research Assistants (GRA). These students work up to 20 hours per week working on research projects, economic development initiatives, data entry, and more. In 2021, two URAs and one GRA graduated from MSU and moved on to begin their careers.



Marlee Melcher was a GRA and graduated in May 2021 with a Master of Science in Counselor Education with a concentration in Clinical Mental Health. Melcher is now a Children's Therapist at Community Counseling Services in West Point, MS, which is her hometown! Melcher worked on many projects in her years at SIG, including being one of the students who launched Stennis Spotlight, SIG's quarterly newsletter comprised of solely student work. The first issue of Stennis Spotlight was recognized by the local Public Relations Association of Mississippi Chapter's PRism Awards in December 2021, with Melcher included on the entry.

Alexx Lux also graduated in May 2021 with a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Economics & Management. Lux was a member of SMA while working toward her first bachelor's from 2016-2018. She served as Vice President from 2017-2018, and joined other students on trips to Jackson, MS, to the Mississippi Capitol and to Washington, D.C. Lux is currently preparing to start the Masters of Economics program at the University of Maryland.



Khalil Markham finished his Bachelor of Science in Computer Engineering with a minor in Political Science in December 2021. Markham received an offer as a Database Software Engineer at Boeing and moved to California to accept the position. Markham was also a member of SMA and joined other students on trips to the Mississippi Capitol and Washington, D.C. Markham worked on some cybersecurity research projects while working with SIG and notes the professional benefits from working with the staff.

"Everyone I met taught me something that I will use... at Stennis, it is the fellow scholars and learners who pour into one another that make you appreciate the environment and absorb and learn as much knowledge as you can," Markham said.

Gracie Kelley is finishing her Bachelor of Business Administration in May 2022, with plans to attend New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in the fall. Kelley was also a student whose work launched the Stennis Spotlight and received the same recognition. After her post-grad experiences, Kelley aspires to work in women's ministry and provide support to women who hit major obstacles in their lives, and potentially open a business, such as a coffee shop or bakery, to aide in that effort as well as serving the community. Kelley has been involved with the MSU Baptist Student Union and Anazao Worship, traveling for mission trips and ministry work.

"Stennis has allowed me to be excellent, be creative, and be bold. I have been challenged to be all that I am and then more," Kelley said.



Reagan Conner will graduate in May 2022 with a Bachelor of Science in Biochemistry, with a concentration in Forensic Science and a minor in Political Science. Conner served as the SMA Secretary and Vice President and has been SMA President since 2020. Conner also participated in a Directed Individual Study with Breen for two semesters focusing on Advanced Statistical Techniques in Social Science Research and Quantitative Methodology and Statistical Analysis in Public Policy Research. After graduation, Conner plans to attend graduate school at the University of Arizona where she will be studying Environmental Health Sciences and conducting research on toxicological exposures in firefighters. This cause is relevant to Conner in both an academic standpoint and a personal standpoint; Conner has been a volunteer firefighter with Oktibbeha County, MS, since 2020.



Annie Price has been a Graduate Research Assistant at SIG since January 2021, focusing on the communications efforts for the institute. Price completed her undergraduate degree in communications with a concentration in public relations at MSU in December 2019 and will complete her master's degree in educational leadership in May 2022. Her skillset falls under communications with special attention to branding, graphic design, data visualization, and content management for social media, website, and publications. These skills were put to use at SIG for a rebranding campaign in 2021 including a new logo, website, branding colors, and social content. Price plans to stay in north Mississippi for family and to give back to the community.

"Stennis gave me the opportunity to really hone my skills and gain confidence in them. I could never put into words how thankful I am for my time here," Price said.



Erin Bailey will graduate in May 2022 with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and a certificate in Trauma-Informed Child Advocacy. Erin has started applying to graduate programs for Clinical Mental Health Counseling for post-graduation. While working with The Stennis Institute, she has worked with Matt Peterson, Ph.D., on salary/compensation studies, as well as working with Joe Fratesi, Ph.D., on economic and community development services offered by SIG.

“I’ve learned so much just in the short time working here and will miss all the friendly faces!” She said.



The relationships built between the staff and students at SIG continue past graduation. Staff members can be seen interacting with past students at conferences, trainings, and taking phone calls from past students looking for advice, referrals, or insight into their careers. As a research arm of MSU, SIG is not always student-facing in the way other departments on campus are, which makes these relationships and mentorships even more valuable and important to SIG staff.

We wish all the best to these students as they graduate and leave us, and we know they will all go on to do great things!





2021 ANNUAL REPORT

A functioning unit of The Office of Research & Economic Development and the College of Arts & Sciences at Mississippi State University, the John C. Stennis Institute of Government provides meaningful, applied research to both local and state units of Mississippi government, the Institute brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to bear on real-world issues.

Through its executive development programs, training opportunities, and technical assistance programs, the Institute provides support for today's policy-makers from the courthouse to the classroom. By playing an active role in the development of tomorrow's governmental leaders, the Institute is working to ensure that Mississippi's future remains strong.

Projects range in size and scope from specific work with Mississippi's smallest towns to federally-funded grants with multi-state application. Contact The Stennis Intsitude to find out how we can provide support and resources to your community.

