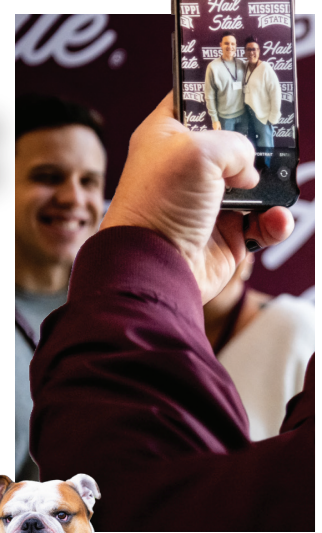
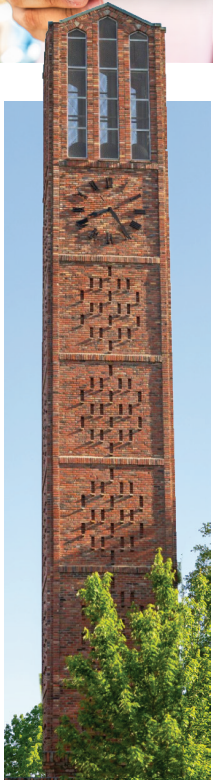




MAROON TRADITIONS

MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY®
STUDENT AFFAIRS MAGAZINE
2024-2025



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SPIRIT OF STATE

By Camille Bullock

Mississippi State University annually recognizes exemplary students of all classifications, majors and backgrounds who serve the community, lead campus and impact the university. These students embody the Spirit of State.

In 2024-25, Spirit of State celebrated its 20th anniversary. From a record 165 nominees, 27 students were selected as the 20th class of recipients. These students represented 18 different majors, nine states and three countries.

The Division of Student Affairs hosted a ceremony at the Old Main Academic Center for these exemplary 27 students, their families and friends.

Previous Spirit of State winners Dee Stegall, Alina Nigmatullina, Hayden Cherry and Roderick Davis welcomed attendees and recognized past recipients in attendance.

To commemorate Spirit of State's 20th anniversary, Cherry and Davis presented MSU President Mark E. Keenum with a watch—the award given to recipients—as a token of appreciation for his leadership and priority to the student experience.

Spirit of State selection committee members Robert Banik, president of the Robert Holland Faculty Senate, and Danté Hill, director of housing facilities and maintenance, presented the awards along with Keenum and MSU Vice President for Student Affairs Regina Hyatt.

For two decades, MSU has recognized outstanding students who are driven to lead, learn and serve their campus and community. Now the university looks forward to a new decade of honoring Bulldogs who take care of what matters and exemplify the Spirit of State.



Former Spirit of State recipients Hayden Cherry, left, and Roderick Davis, right, present MSU President Mark E. Keenum with an honorary Spirit of State award in recognition of Spirit of State's 20th anniversary.



Front row (l-r): Van Truong, Morgan Nelson, MSU Vice President for Student Affairs Regina Hyatt, MSU President Mark E. Keenum, Lucy Mellen, Lana Evans; Second row (l-r): Jessica Zajac, Sneha Cherukuri, Anamica Khadgi, Essence Baker; Third row (l-r): Hayden Anderson, Kaitlyn Bee, Casey Lavender, Lewis Creekmore; Fourth row (l-r): Darien Hardy and Jack Edwards; Fifth row (l-r): Dominic Chavez, Christopher Jolivet, Christopher Walker; Sixth row (l-r): Kelan Traylor, Iuliia Kizner, Caitlyn Guthrie, Christian Armour; Seventh row (l-r): Carson McFatridge, Mansour Bettayeb, Kalyn Chemin; Back row (l-r): August Jones, Grant Richey, Cole Sellers.

2024-2025 Recipients

Hayden Anderson
Biochemistry

Christian Armour
Business Administration

Essence Baker
Biological Sciences

Kaitlyn Bee
Marketing and Management

Mansour Bettayeb
Higher Educational Leadership

Dominic Chavez
Biochemistry

Kalyn Chemin
Physician Assistant Studies

Sneha Cherukuri
Biological Sciences

Lewis Creekmore
Landscape Architecture

Jack Edwards
Business Administration

Lana Evans
Biological Sciences

Caitlyn Guthrie
Biological Sciences

Darien Hardy
Cyber Security and Operations

Christopher Jolivet
Psychology & English

August Jones
Biochemistry

Anamica Khadgi
Biomedical Engineering

Iuliia Kizner
Kinesiology

Casey Lavender
Veterinary Medicine

Carson McFatridge
Wildlife, Fisheries and Aquaculture

Lucy Mellen
Environmental Geoscience & Political Science

Morgan Nelson
Biological Sciences

Grant Richey
Marketing

Cole Sellers
Forestry

Kelan Traylor
Communication

Van Truong
Wildlife, Fisheries and Aquaculture

Christopher Walker
Biomedical Engineering

Jessica Zajac
Accounting and Management

AZALEA HALL

By Graycen Vail

Azalea Hall, Mississippi State University's newest residence hall, blossomed this fall and offers its first residents a redefined on-campus living experience.

Featuring 412 beds and a design that balances privacy with community, Azalea Hall offers more than just a place to sleep. It provides a "home away from home" where students can grow and connect with others.

This new hall features private, single-room living areas grouped into pod-like communities that balance individual space with shared connection. The innovative design supports both quiet study and social interaction, giving students the flexibility to make the space their own.

Azalea Hall houses the Luckyday Scholars Program, named for Aberdeen native and former Trustmark CEO Frank Rodgers Day. The building features residential, office and classroom space, creating an all-in-one environment where scholars can live, learn and build community.

One of the hall's most significant features is a FEMA-rated storm shelter, the first of its kind on campus. The shelter can hold up to 400 people and includes bathrooms and a generator to ensure safety and comfort during severe weather.

Outside of emergencies, this secure and spacious area also functions as a multipurpose event space, further integrating Azalea Hall into the broader campus community.

Dining options in Azalea Hall bring exciting variety and convenience to students. The newly launched Azalea Dining houses

three unique concepts: State Slice, serving hand-tossed, brick-oven pizzas; Mezza, providing a Mediterranean-inspired menu with made-to-order pastas and more; and The Lock Box, a new ghost kitchen concept that dishes out a rotating lineup of cuisine choices for students to order in advance and pick up from food lockers designed to keep items warm.

For added convenience, Azalea Dining also features a mini market where students can purchase everyday essentials, such as batteries, laundry detergent, frozen foods and snacks, without having to leave the building.

MSU also prioritized student well-being in the planning of Azalea Hall with on-site gyms, meditation and wellness rooms, and large and small study rooms that residents can use to take care of their minds and bodies.

"Azalea Hall is a place where students can thrive academically, socially and personally, MSU Executive Director of Housing and Residence Life Dei Allard said. "It features a beautiful new dining environment that serves not only our students, but also our faculty, staff and campus guests. And this milestone would not have been possible without the dedication of many incredible partners."

With its emphasis on safety, comfort and community, Azalea Hall sets a new standard for student living at MSU and offers students not just a place to stay, but a place to belong.



PERRY FOOD HALL

By Halle Bray

Perry Cafeteria at Mississippi State University reopened this fall following a year-long renovation with a fresh, modern concept that expands student dining, enhances gathering spaces and preserves the historic heart of campus.

For more than 100 years, Perry has been a central hub for students to share meals and memories. The updated facility, now known as Perry Food Hall, reimagines this legacy, creating a vibrant, multifunctional space that serves not only as a dining destination, but also as a welcoming environment for studying, relaxing and connecting.

“As the university has grown, our places for students to meet and gather—basically their living room, if you will—have become inadequate,” Cheryl Bowen, executive director of budget and planning in MSU’s Division of Student Affairs, said of the idea behind the new space. “Perry is a giant building that you had to pay at the door to get into, so the hope is that students, by not paying at the door and having different concepts in there, will come and use it for studying, small meetings, gathering and relaxing.”

For those students wanting to dine, Perry Food Hall introduces three new concepts that replace the all-you-care-to-eat model.

The 1921 Café pays tribute to the year Perry opened and offers traditional Southern comfort food, including student favorites Fried Chicken Wednesday and Catfish Friday.

The Beet Drop provides customizable salads and plant-based dishes, and Bark delivers a handcrafted smokehouse experience with bold flavors and delicious sides.

“We can provide a lot of different options and really focus on quality products, full meals and things that drive our culinary program to be a showcase for the university,” James Jankowski, Aramark resident district manager, said.

In addition to new food options, Perry Food Hall now features expanded lounge areas accessible without payment—offering students a place to gather whether they’re grabbing a bite or not.

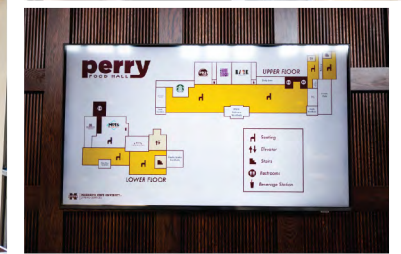
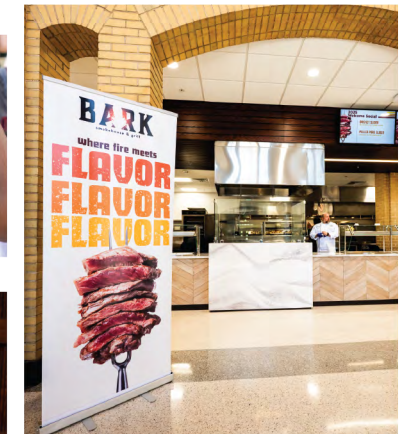
Starbucks anchors the south end after relocating from the Colvard Student Union, enhancing the social experience with coffee, pastries and open seating to encourage community use.

A revitalized north end brings back an expanded Moe’s Southwest Grill and reintroduces the beloved State Fountain Bakery to its original location, delighting students and the community with an expanded menu that includes staples such as MSU ice cream, donuts and the famous dog bone cookies.

“We just really wanted to honor the building, honor the tradition, and that’s why we wanted to bring State Fountain Bakery back to its original location,” Jankowski said.

For Bowen, the impact is clear: “It brings more of a family feeling to it and makes the building a space that serves our students better than before.”

As MSU continues to grow, Perry Food Hall exemplifies MSU’s dedication to enhancing the student experience.



HOUSING NEIGHBORHOODS

By Graycen Vail



Students in Mississippi State's residence halls build strong communities with the people on their floors and in their buildings. A newly launched housing neighborhood model expands that experience by actively connecting students across multiple halls, creating broader support systems and a stronger sense of belonging that extends beyond a single residence hall.

In fall 2024, MSU started five neighborhoods that group residence halls by location. Neighborhoods on the north end of campus include Victory Park, comprised of Dogwood Hall and Deavenport Hall; Zacharias Village, made up of Griffis Hall, Nunnelee Hall, Hurst Hall and Ruby Hall; and Azalea Hall, MSU's newest residence hall that opened this fall and serves as its own neighborhood.

The Historic District, a combination of Sessums Hall, Critz Hall, Hull Hall, McKee Hall and Herbert Hall, adorns central campus, and the southern end of campus features South Point, home to Oak Hall, Magnolia Hall, Moseley Hall, Cresswell Hall and Hathorn Hall.

MSU's Office of Housing and Residence Life, or HRL, started the neighborhood concept to create a home base for students no matter their involvement across campus. Whether participating in student organizations, working a campus

job or exploring new interests, students can always return to their neighborhood and know they belong to a consistent and supportive community.

Throughout the year, residence life staff host bigger events across all neighborhoods and smaller programs within each neighborhood to help students form friendships and support systems beyond their immediate roommates and floormates.

HRL started a new programming model known as Belonging, Experience, Learning, and Lead, or B.E.L.L., to support the neighborhood concept. Each B.E.L.L. component reflects a core part of the on-campus experience, and the programming model focuses on welcoming students, introducing campus resources, encouraging community service and promoting understanding across different values and perspectives. Together, the B.E.L.L. framework and neighborhood structure aim to create a more cohesive, inclusive residential experience.

By building stronger connections among students and creating a consistent sense of community across campus, the housing neighborhood model supports student growth and well-being in meaningful and lasting ways.



STUDENT EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR



Anna Leslie Potts 2024-2025

Dean of Students' Office

Major: Psychology

The 2024-25 Outstanding Student Employee of the Year for the Mississippi State University Division of Student Affairs was Anna Leslie Potts, a senior psychology major who works in the Dean of Students' Office.

Thomas Bourgeois, MSU's dean of students, said the following when asked about Potts' contributions to the office:

"Anna Leslie shows incredible maturity in an office that deals with high-stress situations with parents, students and faculty. Her professionalism and empathy are a winning combination. Our office is a better place with her as a student worker."

STUDENT LEADER SPOTLIGHTS

JAMES WALKER

By Amiyah McCall



For Florence, Alabama, native James Walker, the community he found living in Mississippi State's Hurst Hall as a freshman helped him find a "home away from home."

"Living in Hurst Hall was such an amazing experience for me," Walker said. "By getting involved, I went from being the out-of-state student who knew no one to becoming fast friends with the people in my hall."

Now a junior agricultural science major, Walker remains focused on creating a positive residential experience for fellow Bulldogs. As a freshman, he joined Hurst's Council of

Residential Experiences, or C.O.R.E., giving students a voice in shaping their housing experience.

Walker then became active in the Residence Hall Association, serving as president for the 2024-25 academic year and currently as the director of programming.

In his role as a student leader, Walker believes true impact comes from helping students feel seen, supported and involved—a mindset rooted in the very welcome that first made MSU feel like home.

JEFFERY JOHNSON JR.

By Amiyah McCall



Jeffery Johnson Jr., a rising senior from Jackson, has emerged as a dynamic leader at Mississippi State.

As 2024-25 National Pan-Hellenic Council, or NPHC, president, Johnson guided significant growth and achievements within the organization while honing his own leadership skills.

His dedication and impact contributed to MSU receiving several honors at the 2025 Southeast Greek Leadership Association Conference in Atlanta, including the Lamar Bryant NPHC of the Year Award, the Community Cultivation Award and the Council Impact Award.

A member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Johnson has also shared his passion for MSU through serving in various roles, such as a New Maroon Camp counselor, Roadrunner, Orientation Leader and College of Business Ambassador.

Johnson approaches all his involvement with the mindset: "Focus on what you can control, and be the best you can be at everything you can."

It's a philosophy that has fueled his considerable success and continues to inspire those around him.

STUDENT LEADER SPOTLIGHTS

CAMERON CUMMINGS

By Mallory Morrow



Cameron Cummings has served Mississippi State's Student Association throughout his time on campus. For 2025-26, he was elected president and offers a leading voice for students.

The senior from Madison, Alabama, got started in the Student Association, or SA, his freshman year in the Policy Pod of Freshman Reach, a program that helps first-year students get involved in the SA.

A software engineering major, Cummings represented the National Society of Black Engineers, or NSBE, on the SA Senate the last two years be-

fore being elected president in the spring.

"I want students to be able to come to me with questions, concerns or ideas," Cummings said. "Even if I don't have the answers, I'm committed to finding them and making sure everyone feels like they're heard and valued on campus."

Outside of SA and NSBE, Cummings works for the Center for Entrepreneurship and Outreach and serves on the executive board for the Eta Upsilon Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.

KARIME ALONSO IXTEPAN

By Amiyah McCall



Karime Alonso Ixtepan's journey at Mississippi State University is one marked by a commitment to serving others.

Born in Mexico and raised in Diamondhead, Mississippi, the senior civil and environmental engineering major has built meaningful connections and helped fellow students thrive academically and personally in her role as a resident advisor, or RA, in MSU's residence halls.

"One of my favorite parts of being an RA is mentoring students and engaging with them as they navigate life at MSU," Alonso Ixtepan, who most recently served as an RA in Oak Hall, said.

That spirit of mentorship also extends outside her RA role, whether it's supporting future engineers in MSU's Society of Women Engineers, where she serves as president, and the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, or prospective students as a Bagley College of Engineering Ambassador and a Roadrunner.

For the 2024 Spirit of State Award recipient, her dedication exemplifies the spirit of MSU—one committed to leadership, service and community.

HANNAH CASTEEL

By Mallory Morrow



The moment Hannah Casteel stepped on Mississippi State University's campus, she knew she was home.

The kinesiology graduate student from St. Louis has found her place in University Recreation, or URec, where she has been a student employee since her freshman year.

She worked in various roles before becoming a graduate assistant in facilities, where she oversees the Joe Frank Sanderson Center's front desk operations and student staff, helps with facility reservations and collaborates with other departments on campus.

While at MSU, Casteel has also participated in the Office for Student Well-Being's Healthy Dawgs, a peer-to-peer program dedicated to encouraging overall health and well-being among students. She values sharing what she's learned through her experiences with the student workers she now mentors.

"I'm just grateful for the opportunities that I've been given, and I hope I get to continue to give those opportunities to the other people who are already here or will be in the future," Casteel said.

TYLER POWE

By Mallory Morrow



As a transfer student, Tyler Powe recognized how getting involved could make Mississippi State University feel like home. Since arriving on campus, the Jackson native has immersed himself in opportunities that have shaped his leadership journey and helped him leave a lasting impact at MSU.

Powe has served his peers through the Student Association and the Black Student Association. He's also been on staff for New Maroon Camp, a student-led retreat that helps first-year students transition to MSU, and S.P.A.R.K., a program that introduces high school students to college opportunities.

Involvement in organizations such as Men of Excellence and the Montgomery Leadership Program has boosted his confidence and developed skills that he plans to carry into his future career.

"These experiences challenge me to be the leader I want to be and to make an impact on the generations that come after me," Powe said.

Through his campus involvement, Powe is committed to building connections, growing as an individual and paving the way for Bulldogs who will follow in his footsteps.



HARDY AT THE DUDE

By Julia Weeden

Last September, Mississippi State University partnered with Live Nation to bring the first standalone concert to Dudy Noble Field, Polk-DeMent Stadium, and Mississippi-born country music artist HARDY served as the headliner.

Michael Hardy, known professionally as HARDY, is a Philadelphia, Mississippi, native who first gained attention as a songwriter for artists such as Florida Georgia Line, Chris Lane and Morgan Wallen before embarking on his own career as an artist.

MSU envisioned hosting larger-scale musical artists and wanted Bulldog fan HARDY to headline the history-making first full-scale concert at “The Dude.” Eighteen months of intensive planning and collaboration with Live Nation, the world’s largest producer of live entertainment and the touring agency that represented HARDY, and HARDY’s management team went into the preparation with MSU’s team, which was led by Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs Jackie Mullen and Deputy Athletic Director for External Affairs Tom Greene.

Working around the clock was crucial because Hurricane Francine moved through the state, forcing MSU and Live Nation to postpone the concert an extra day. Patrons unable to attend the rescheduled show could request a full refund or donate their tickets to the Columbus Air Force Base.

Francine cleared through and, on his birthday, HARDY and openers Randy Houser and Travis Denning transformed the Carnegie Hall of College Baseball into the Carnegie Hall of Country Music.

HOLOBOX

By Maggie Heath

Last fall, technology once reserved for science fiction shows like *Star Trek* came to life inside Mississippi State University's Colvard Student Union.

In the busy heart of campus, students gathered around a device called the Holobox, which projected real-life 3D holograms of student leaders sharing personal stories about how becoming involved at MSU shaped their Bulldog journeys. Thanks to a partnership between MSU's Center for Cyber Education and Division of Student Affairs, the Holobox became more than just a tech novelty. It became a powerful new tool for connecting students to campus life in ways that are as innovative as they are personal.

The Holobox displays crisp images, dynamic videos and realistic holographic visuals while creating an interactive experience for users. Students could choose the student organization experience they want to explore and, with a simple tap, summon a holographic "navigator"—a digital projection of a real MSU student leader. These student leaders recorded their experience in front of a backdrop at MSU's Office of Research and Economic Development, and the videos were uploaded to the Holobox.

These navigators spoke directly to viewers about how campus involvement has enriched their lives and how their organizations contribute to the university community.

Sophomore marketing major Nyiah Landfair, who is involved in groups like Freshman Reach, Fashion Board and Essence Fashion Coalition, served as one of these navigators. She believes the Holobox has the power to break down barriers for students seeking connection.

"Many people hear about clubs on campus, but they usually do not want to join a club unless they personally know someone within the organization," Landfair said. "Instead of just reading a poster, the Holobox provides an interactive way for students to receive a personal invitation that reduces nerves that could be present at an organization fair."

As the technology is adopted by more and more companies around the world, these interactive holograms could pave the way for a new era of student engagement at Mississippi State—an era where technology and personal stories combine to inspire, inform and connect students to a vibrant campus community.



Students watch a video of Diamond Sims, president of MSU's United Greek Council, speak about her experience on the Holobox.

LONGEST STUDENT HEALTH CENTER NEW ONLINE SCHEDULING

By Madelyn Blackburn

Scheduling an appointment at Mississippi State's Longest Student Health Center is now just a click away.

Recognizing the need for more convenient scheduling options, the Longest Student Health Center, or LSHC, launched an online scheduling platform in partnership with Phreesia, a national leader in healthcare automation tools.

The LSHC's full-service clinic and pharmacy serve MSU students, faculty and staff, and residents in the surrounding community, so the addition of online scheduling has benefited both patients and clinic staff.

Previously, patients would schedule appointments in person or by phone, which required significant time from the scheduling staff.

New patients and those with multiple medical concerns must first contact the LSHC to book an appointment. Once in the system, returning visitors can use the new platform to quickly schedule a specific visit type along with a provider, date and time.

"Online scheduling has been a game-changer for us," said Daniel Hale, the LSHC's director of fiscal operations. "It gives students greater control of their healthcare, letting them book appointments anytime without having to call or wait on hold. That kind of access matters, especially when students are

managing tight schedules or dealing with time-sensitive health concerns."

The reduced number of incoming calls has allowed scheduling staff to focus on other tasks and provide more personalized assistance when calls do come in. Because the online scheduling system is also used for online check-in, more demographic information and paperwork can be collected before the patient arrives, further streamlining the process for scheduling staff.

Hale said online scheduling has also helped ease operations by reducing no-shows. Automatic appointment reminders have lowered the number of patients who miss or cancel appointments, allowing LSHC providers to care for more Bulldogs each day.

In a place where patient care is the utmost priority, Hale noted how healthcare workers are benefiting from a more streamlined process to provide life-changing aid.

"We've seen firsthand how much students appreciate being able to schedule their appointments online," Hale said. "It gives them flexibility, improves access to care and helps us run the clinic more efficiently. For a university health center, where demand can spike quickly, having a reliable, user-friendly scheduling option makes a huge difference in how we serve our student population."



KATRINA POE-JOHNSON

By Amiyah McCall

“Truly pursue what you’re really interested in.” Those wise words from Katrina Poe-Johnson serve as the foundation of a medical career rooted in service, compassion and commitment.

A proud Mississippi State University alumna, Poe-Johnson has dedicated her life to caring for others, first as the only physician in her rural Mississippi hometown and now in her seventh year as the executive director of University Health Services in MSU’s Longest Student Health Center, or LSHC. She has come full circle, guiding and serving the very campus that once helped shape her own journey.

Born and raised in Kilmichael, a rural community 51 miles from the MSU campus, Poe-Johnson’s passion for medicine was sparked at a young age as she supported her mother through chronic illness.

Glenda Poe-Pointer, Poe-Johnson’s aunt and an MSU alumna, influenced her decision to begin her pursuit of a medical career in Starkville. At MSU, Poe-Johnson was a resident advisor in MSU’s residence halls for three years, a State Strider, a Bulldog Hostess and a member of several honor societies.

She graduated from MSU in 1993 with her Bachelor of Science in biological sciences and completed her doctorate at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson. Poe-Johnson practiced 17 years in her hometown, never thinking she would leave until she learned about an opening at the LSHC while supporting MSU at the 2018 Women’s Final Four in Columbus, Ohio.

The opportunity to care for the students at her alma mater was one she couldn’t pass up.

“I thought it was a great opportunity for students to see me and say, ‘Hey, she went to Mississippi State and was able to (pursue medicine) and come back,’” Poe-Johnson said.



“Those things that are worth having, you have to work hard for, but make sure you enjoy it.”

In 2024, the MSU Alumni Association recognized her as the College of Arts and Sciences Alumni Fellow, a program that highlights notable alumni who have distinguished themselves in their respective careers.

“I couldn’t believe it,” she said of the honor. “It made me feel good that I was doing something good and taking care of people.”

Poe-Johnson’s passion for service and commitment to student well-being have left an indelible mark on her alma mater. She continues to inspire the next generation of Bulldogs—reminding them that success requires effort, but joy must be part of the journey.

MAROON FAMILY ALLIANCE

By Ella Keller

Taking care of what matters is more than just a slogan for Mississippi State University. It's a goal for the Maroon Family Alliance.

Established in 2021 as part of the Office of Parent and Family Services under the Division of Student Affairs, the Maroon Family Alliance, or MFA, aims to support the division and help eliminate barriers for students.

The MFA's structure allows parents to provide insights into issues facing students.

"We want families who are strongly tied in, so being a part of the Maroon Family Alliance gives these families access to leaders on campus for meetings, brainstorming and discussing through things on campus," said Jana Berkery, director of development for the MSU Foundation.

These conversations can help lead campus improvement for current and future students.

The MFA allows families to meet semiannually to discuss avenues for

alleviating student barriers in areas such as campus safety, career services, health and wellness, and student leadership.

The MFA gives families an outlet to express concerns on behalf of their students and students' friends and to directly connect with a group that can make a difference.

Supporting these areas helps students receive assistance through programs like Bully's Pantry, MSU's food pantry.

Families have provided student support through the MFA for four years.

The MFA is structured into three gift tiers that support student-focused initiatives and promote involvement in the organization. During meetings with campus leaders, donor families decide how the gifts can best support students' needs.

To learn more about the MFA, visit family.msstate.edu/get-involved.

BEEP SHUTTLES

Last fall, Mississippi State ran an electric-autonomous shuttle pilot with Beep Inc., the system's provider. Two shuttles, each equipped with AI-enabled remote human supervision and self-governance, transported riders through the core of campus and to College View apartments.

Student Affairs' marketing and communication team designed the wrap for the shuttles.



BEHAVIORAL HEALTH NAVIGATORS

By Madelyn Blackburn

Mississippi State University has put boots—or rather, feet—on the ground to increase support of student mental health.

Recognizing a growing need for mental health resources among students, Student Counseling Services, or SCS, launched a Behavioral Health Navigator, or BHN, program to help faculty, staff and students better navigate mental health needs and connect with crucial services.

The program stems from a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration grant co-authored by Jeremy Baham, associate vice president for student affairs, and Kim Hall, professor and associate dean at MSU-Meridian. After MSU's Office of Research and Economic Development approached Baham with the grant opportunity, discussions quickly turned to how best to address gaps in mental health outreach and resource awareness on campus.

"There was a clear need for faculty and staff to have someone they could turn to for guidance about student mental health concerns," said Shanice White, SCS

director. "The Behavioral Health Navigators are our liaisons, our resource officers and the feet on the ground making these connections happen."

Seven BHNs received specialized training through SCS before embedding in each college and select departments on campus. Their role is twofold: develop educational materials and training for faculty and staff, and connect personally with students, helping guide them toward campus resources or services that fit their needs.

Baham sees the initiative as a transformative step forward.

"We want to ensure that our campus community knows about resources and understands how to use them," Baham said. "The Behavioral Health Navigators are helping us create a campus culture where mental health support is visible, accessible and part of our everyday conversations."

With these dedicated navigators embedded throughout MSU, the university is taking meaningful strides to support the well-being and success of its Bulldog family.



Laquita Bedford, a behavioral health navigator in the Division of Access, Opportunity and Success, speaks with a student at a tabling event.

GIVING HIGHLIGHTS

MAROON & WHITE COMPLETION GRANTS

Contributions to the Maroon and White Completion Scholarships will provide full-time, Pell-eligible students who have completed 75% or more of their program of study a \$1,000 scholarship, awarded one time in the student's academic career.



CENTER FOR AMERICA'S VETERANS SCHOLARSHIPS

The G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery Center for America's Veterans engages military-connected students through educational benefits, transitional support and activities that promote learning, well-being and success. Scholarships provided by alumni and friends of MSU assist these students with unmet financial needs while attending school.



BULLY'S PANTRY

Bully's Pantry helps meet the basic needs of students who are experiencing food insecurity and other financial needs. Opened in 2020, Bully's Pantry has assisted thousands of students by providing nutritious food and basic personal necessities.



STUDENT AFFAIRS GENERAL FUND

The Division of Student Affairs' central focus is student success and engagement. Gifts to the division's general fund support departmental programs and services that help students achieve academic success, personal growth and career goals.



DR. BRIT KATZ

As a 17-year-old freshman at Mississippi State University, Brit Katz doubted he belonged in college. But through student leadership roles and the encouragement of caring student affairs mentors, he discovered confidence, purpose and a lifelong calling helping students.

At MSU, the Columbus native immersed himself in campus life, joining Sigma Nu fraternity, the Residence Hall Association, the Student Association and numerous other organizations.

Guided by mentors who saw something in him, Katz completed bachelor's and master's degrees from MSU and a doctoral degree from the University of Mississippi and launched a career devoted to transforming students' lives.

Now, Katz is giving back to the profession that shaped him through an endowed fund that annually honors MSU's Student Affairs Director of the Year and New Professional of the Year with awards bearing his name.

"My life was transformed because student affairs professionals took the time to nurture and guide me," Katz said.

Over the next 43 years, he built a distinguished career shaping the student experience at Southwestern University, the University of South Carolina Upstate, Millsaps College, Emory University and the University of Louisiana at Monroe.

Katz, a third-generation Bulldog whose parents both graduated from MSU, hopes his gift will ensure student affairs staff receive the recognition they deserve.

"We need to value the staff in student affairs for their work," he said. "It's not celebrated often enough, and we must do that publicly so they feel essential. That's why I wanted to give back to Mississippi State."

To support the Katz endowed fund, contact Jana Berkery, director of development with the MSU Foundation, at jberkery@foundation.msstate.edu.



MSU Vice President for Student Affairs Regina Hyatt presented the Brit Katz New Professional of the Year award to Suzanne Bowen (top), Office for Student Well-Being health and wellness educator, and the Brit Katz Director of the Year to Associate Dean of Students Cat Walker (bottom). Katz (center) established an endowed fund to honor MSU student affairs professionals.

A NOTE FROM DR. REGINA YOUNG HYATT

VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS

Students First! This simple statement has been the mantra for our Division of Student Affairs. It means that in every program, service and activity we deliver, we put students first. What they need comes first, and we try to deliver what they want, too. Sometimes we don't meet either of these goals, but we try to ensure that in all we do, in every decision we make, our students' well-being comes first. I think you see this mantra in action through this year's Maroon Traditions stories!

In both the renovation of the historic Perry Food Hall and the construction of our newest residence hall, Azalea, student voices were prioritized. Through student focus groups, surveys and in-person meetings with student leaders over several years, we got the feedback needed to renovate and construct spaces students want to spend time in. We built spaces that create opportunities for community building, for quiet reflection and to get great food (something we know our students enjoy).

I love the stories we've shared this year about our students and about the work our departments are doing to support their well-being and sense of belonging on campus. Taken together, well-being and belonging make a huge difference in student success. We know students who are mentally, physically and socially well are more likely to succeed academically. Programs like the Behavioral Health Navigators meet students where they are, literally, and allow for quicker delivery of resources to students who need them. Events like the HARDY concert and others help bring that sense of community to students, and, yes, they are a lot of fun, too.

We are so grateful for the support from our alumni and friends whose gifts help to make our Students First! philosophy come to life in meaningful ways. Dr. Katz is a great example of that. As a long-time student affairs administrator and advocate and a proud Bulldog, Dr. Katz's gift is elevating our work and recognition of team members who are excelling

at living the Students First! philosophy day in and day out. Every single gift, big or small, is appreciated! Programs like Bully's Pantry could not exist without our alumni and friends who provide the needed financial support to keep the pantry operating. So, thank you to all who invest in us and in our students.

Higher education continues to evolve. I have never been more convinced about the transformational power having a college degree has in a person's life. We will continue to do all we can to ensure that students at Mississippi State have access to what they need (and what they want) so they can experience that transformation for themselves.



*Hail State!
Regina*

DEPARTMENTAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS 2024 2025

AIR FORCE ROTC

Air Force ROTC Detachment 425 commissioned 19 officers into the United States Air Force in 2024-25.

Eighty percent of Detachment 425's second-year cadets received selection into MSU's Professional Officer Course as juniors and seniors.

ARMY ROTC

MSU's Army ROTC commissioned 19 Second Lieutenants into the active Army, Army Reserves and Army National Guard in 2024-25.

Two cadets ranked in the Top 100 nationally of more than 5,500 participants at the 2025 Advanced Camp.

BULLY'S PANTRY & FOOD SECURITY NETWORK

Bully's Pantry had 9,440 visits from students in 2024-25, and the pantry vending machine in the Colvard Student Union served 280 students with 1,270 visits.

The Block-by-Block meal program satisfied 643 meal requests and provided 4,890 meals to students. Students donated 384 meals.



CENTER FOR AMERICA'S VETERANS

The Center for America's Veterans supported more than 3,000 military-connected students, including U.S. veterans, service members and dependents.

MSU received recognition as a Top 5 National Military Friendly School by G.I. Jobs.

Collaboration with the Mississippi National Guard broadened and enhanced the Mississippi National Guard General Scholarship program, allowing eligible service members to significantly fund the cost of their tuition.

UNIVERSITY RECREATION

University Recreation's Joe Frank Sanderson Center registered over 250,000 student ID scans in 2024-25.

More than 1,850 students participated in intramural sports in 2024-25, and 882 students competed on Club Sports teams. Ten club sports teams traveled outside of the Southeast and competed nationally.

OFFICE FOR STUDENT WELL-BEING

The Office for Student Well-Being conducted health presentations and programs that reached more than 6,000 MSU students, faculty and staff in 2024-25.

The office provided nutritional counseling to 99 students.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

The Office of Emergency Management hosted the first Prepare-a-thon, a collaboration with campus and community partners to teach emergency preparation to university students and employees.

Emergency Management hosted 32 training opportunities in 2024-25, with more than 415 registered attendees.

CENTER FOR STUDENT ACTIVITIES

The Center for Student Activities registered 33 new student organizations in 2024-25, and more than 14,500 students participated in at least one registered student organization. Student organizations and departments hosted over 5,300 events, with nearly 6,900 students attending at least one event.

To open the 2024-25 academic year, 2,200 students registered for New Maroon Camp, and over 4,100 students participated in Dawg Days, MSU's welcome week of activities and events.

OFFICE OF SURVIVOR SUPPORT

The Office of Survivor Support and MSU's Coordinate Community Response Team were featured in a video project by the National Organization for Victim Advocacy.

The office raised awareness about domestic and dating violence and collected 650 donated items for Bully's Pantry through the CAN Domestic Violence Initiative.



HOUSING & RESIDENCE LIFE

Housing and Residence Life completed construction on Azalea Hall, with the new housing concept opening to students in fall 2025.

More than 4,000 students moved to campus during fall 2024's MVNU2MSU.

Housing and Residence Life developed the Entrepreneur Community, MSU's newest living-learning community, with plans to launch the pilot program in fall 2025.

COLVARD STUDENT UNION & EVENT SERVICES

Colvard Student Union welcomed more than 2.3 million visitors and hosted 4,313 events in 2024-25.

Event Services provided comprehensive support for more than 1,000 campus events, offering a range of logistical solutions, including audio systems, tables, chairs, staging and tents.

LONGEST STUDENT HEALTH CENTER

The Longest Student Health Center recorded 20,879 patient appointments in 2024-25, including 15,545 student appointments, 5,334 private patient appointments and 1,429 appointments with the mental health nurse practitioner.

A total of 8,069 unique individuals received services from the center.



STUDENT LEADERSHIP & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Students logged 24,978 service and volunteer hours, translating to a financial impact of \$869,016.39, based on an hourly rate of \$34.79, as per the Do Good Institute at the University of Maryland.

Student Leadership and Community Engagement staff facilitated more than 60 contact hours throughout the university and local communities via in-person workshops and presentations.

Forty-five students graduated with the Maroon Volunteer Cord, an honor earned after completing 200 undergraduate service hours or 100 graduate service hours.

UNIVERSITY POLICE

The MSU Police Department earned an accreditation award from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies for the seventh time.

The department added two new K-9 officers following the retirement of three long-serving K-9s.

PLANNING & ASSESSMENT

More than 100 individual staff members attended two professional development series coordinated by the Office of Planning and Assessment, totaling 340 hours of professional development.

The office led an SEC-wide Interfraternity Council data project.



DINING SERVICES

A True Balance allergen-friendly station opened at Fresh Food Company, addressing the nine most common food allergens in a safe and inclusive dining environment.

Dining Services partnered with Starkville's Casserole Kitchen to provide monthly meals to the community, hosted a campus blood drive with Vitalant and secured \$1,500 in grant funds to support the Boys & Girls Club of Starkville.

COMPUTER-BASED TESTING SERVICES

Computer-Based Testing administered 2,920 professional and certification exams to university and community members in 2024-25, a 42% increase from the previous year.

BARNES & NOBLE AT MSU

The MSU Bookstore donated more than \$23,000 to various on-campus and community organizations.

The Bulldog Bundle program saved students \$7.8 million for the 2024-25 academic year.

OFFICE OF FRATERNITY & SORORITY LIFE

MSU's fraternities and sororities raised more than \$1 million in philanthropy dollars and performed more than 65,000 service hours in 2024-25.

The Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life provided an embedded counselor for students in sororities and fraternities, the only model of its kind in the SEC.



DEAN OF STUDENTS' OFFICE

For International Day of Action for Academic Integrity, students engaged with case scenarios, signed an integrity pledge and received guidance on proper citation practices and the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence.

The Honor Code and Student Conduct offices engaged students in problem-solving and critical thinking discussions, encouraging students to commit to integrity and promote responsibility as MSU students.

DISABILITY RESOURCE CENTER

The Disability Resource Center provided students with programming on study skills and executive functioning tasks to address academic preparation. For faculty, it offered training on creating inclusive educational environments for students with disabilities.

The center installed upgraded chairs and tables, partitions to reduce visual distractions, noise-reducing headphones and clocks at each testing station.



PARENT & FAMILY SERVICES

The Office of Parent and Family Services' fall Bulldog Family Weekend welcomed more than 650 guests, representing approximately 207 families of current Mississippi State students.

The office hosted a fall and spring housing fair where students had the opportunity to connect with 13 local off-campus housing partners.

MARKETING & COMMUNICATION

The Division of Student Affairs' text messaging service pushed out more than 312,400 resource-focused text messages to nearly 14,000 student contacts in 2024-25.

The division launched a redesigned website that makes it easier for students to find what they need, with searchable resource listings and department pages.

STUDENT COUNSELING SERVICES

Student Counseling Services, or SCS, served 667 students in 2024-25.

SCS launched a Behavioral Health Navigator Program to provide support in different colleges and divisions on campus.

A peer support program started in 2024-25, with 16 undergraduate students selected to serve as the inaugural class of peer mentors.

A NOTE FROM OUR EDITOR

BROCK TURNIPSEED

Director, Marketing & Communication Division of Student Affairs

Walking across campus, you can feel the energy of growth and progress all around. The reimagined Perry Food Hall is buzzing with students once again, while the opening of Azalea Hall, our newest residence hall, is already helping create a sense of home and community. These spaces are more than just buildings—they are places designed to bring Bulldogs together.

Students are at the heart of these campus changes, and this edition of Maroon Traditions spotlights outstanding student leaders who are shaping the Bulldog experience through their involvement, service and creativity.

We also highlight new opportunities being developed to help more students succeed and

leave their mark on Mississippi State. Students remain at the heart of everything we do. That's why our division recently launched a redesigned website that makes it easier to find resources, along with a new text messaging service that delivers valuable information and resources directly to students' fingertips.

This publication reflects that same spirit. Written and designed by students, Maroon Traditions celebrates the pride, collaboration and determination that define Mississippi State.

I hope you enjoy reading how our division and students are Taking Care of What Matters.

Hail State!



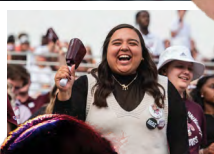
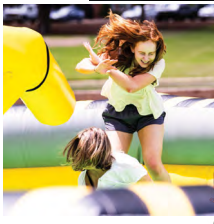
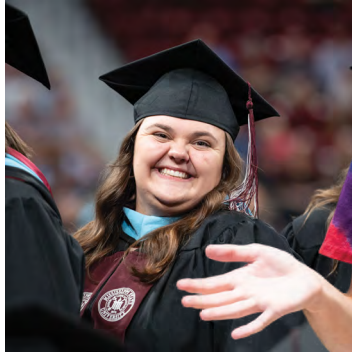
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