



TEACH FOR AMERICA  
GRADUATE  
FELLOWS  
PROGRAM  
DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE AND CONTINUING STUDIES

# 2020-2021 IMPACT REPORT

DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY

# Social Entrepreneurs Meet the Moment

TFA GRADUATE FELLOWS PROGRAM

2020-2021 IMPACT REPORT

GRADUATE AND CONTINUING STUDIES  
DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY

**Funded by the Hearin Foundation**

**Harrison Wood** Coordinator, TFA Graduate Fellows Program  
**Dr. Beverly Moon** Dean of Graduate and Continuing Studies and Research

The TFA Graduate Fellows Program acknowledges the support of the following Delta State University and Teach For America administrators:

Ron Nurnberg  
Deputy Executive Director, Teach For America – Greater Delta

William N. LaForge  
President, Delta State University

Dr. Charles McAdams  
Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, Delta State University

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## Program Overview

Once Teach For America (TFA) corps members successfully complete their two-year commitment, they become alumni of the organization, giving them the ability to relocate to other regions. This program is designed for TFA alumni who have completed their two-year teaching commitment and are interested in extending their time in Mississippi.

*The TFA Graduate Fellow Program is a 2-year fellowship, funded by the Hearin Foundation, with the goal of retaining TFA alumni in Mississippi, while also furthering their education and impact.*

Each year since 2016, Delta State has identified a select group of 5-12 TFA alumni who desire to extend their time in Mississippi. During the 2-year fellowship, selected TFA Fellows receive a full-tuition graduate school scholarship to Delta State University. Fellows are invited to pursue a master's, specialist, or doctoral degree during the program.



Fellows simultaneously work to design and develop a 'Social Entrepreneurship Project.' Through the Social Entrepreneurship Project (SE Project), TFA Fellows work to find solutions to some of the toughest challenges facing Mississippi, many projects focused on addressing education.



The Fellowship is designed to train and equip emerging leaders to further their positive impact in Mississippi by providing 4 key elements for growth:



Education



Social  
Entrepreneurship  
Projects



Mentorship



Community



## Our Impact

Program success can be measured by the number of TFA alumni who stay in the state of Mississippi, both during and after degree completion.

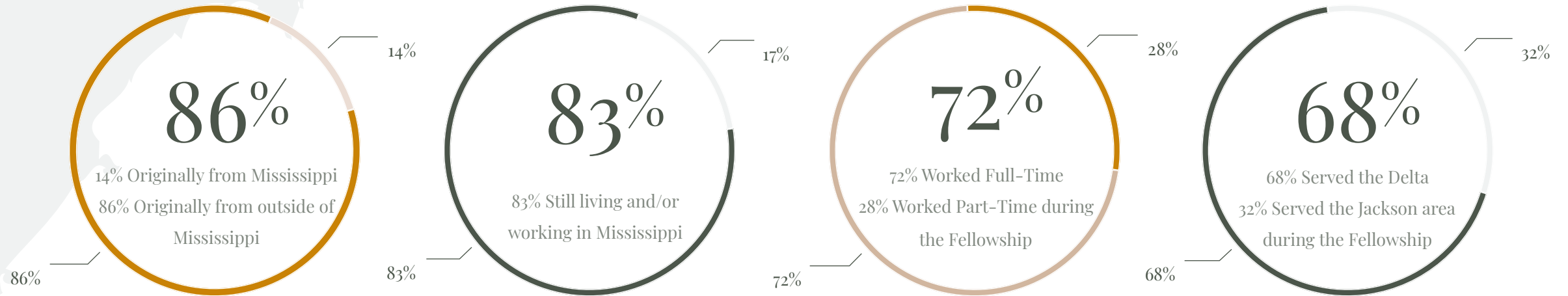
This program has already proved successful in that 95% of cohorts 1-4 are either still living and/or working in Mississippi or continuing to facilitate and support their projects in Mississippi from new locations (Louisiana and Wisconsin). The 5 other fellows (Cohort 5) remain engaged in the program and have not indicated any desire to leave the state; indeed, the current students' projects demonstrate a renewed commitment to their Mississippi communities.



# 95%

*95% of cohorts 1-4 are either still living and/or working in Mississippi or continuing to facilitate and support their projects*

# Our Fellows by the Numbers Since 2016



150,000+ Lives Impacted



\$1,216,750 Funds Raised Towards  
Social Entrepreneurship Projects  
(Economic Development)

# Education

Our program provides Fellows with a full-time scholarship to obtain a graduate degree of their choosing at Delta State University. Fellows have the opportunity to pursue a Master's degree, Specialist degree, or even a Doctorate in Education degree.

## Top 3 Degrees Pursued Since 2016

1

Master's & Specialist of  
Education in Educational  
Administration & Supervision

2

Master's of Science in  
Community Development

3

Master's of Education in  
Elementary Education



41

*41 Graduate Degrees  
Completed by 37  
Fellows Since 2016*

3.78

*Average GPA  
From Fellows  
Since 2016*

This includes Cohorts 1-4, who have completed the two-year Fellowship.



# Social Entrepreneurship Project

During the 2020-2021 academic year, the COVID-19 pandemic devastated families and communities all over the world. Early on, our Fellows recognized that the crisis would exacerbate pre-existing inequities, particularly within the classroom. In response, our Fellows designed (and oftentimes redesigned), their own individualized 'Social Entrepreneurship Project' (SE Project) addressing barriers in their community while considering COVID-19's challenges.

Each Fellow pursues a graduate degree at Delta State, while also working to launch their SE Project. The TFA Graduate Fellows Program assists scholars in thinking more entrepreneurially in the way they might be able to bring their projects to life. We accomplish this through teaching the Design Thinking methodology.

We believe it is crucial to give Fellows permission to prototype early in their SE Project journey. A prototype is an experiment that is designed to give Fellows an idea of how a concept might work in reality and within a particular community. Prototypes are designed to be implemented for a short time, adjusted through a variety of iterations, and ultimately improved upon. Regardless of the prototype's success or failures, the Fellows are able to gain key insights about their community and project, giving them the ability to pivot it moving forward in their project journey.



Projects Still Operating/In Existence 79%

School-Based Projects 51%

Community/City Projects 40%

State Projects 9%

**150K+** Estimated Amount of  
People Impacted

**\$1,216,750** Funds Raised Towards  
Projects 2016



Estimated Amount of People Impacted

150K+



\$1,216,750

Funds Raised Towards Projects 2016

## PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

# Mississippi Delta Nature and Learning Center

Jon & Amanda Delperdang | Greenville, MS

The mission of Mississippi Delta Nature and Learning Center (MDNLC) is to create a place that cares for the earth and the people that inhabit it by focusing on sharing the bounty nature provides. They envision a future where people are cared for as they care for the earth and each other. The Delperdang's believe in the Mississippi Delta and want to create a place that celebrates the land and people here, by creating family-friendly recreational activities, productive community agriculture, and educational opportunities for all.

MDNLC is located on 30 acres in the center of Greenville, MS just a few miles from the main shopping center and right in the middle of many medical clinics on Colorado Ave. The land has been vacant for 30 years and they plan to begin development with a children's garden, walking path, and indoor learning and event center. With these areas, we will open to the public for a small admission fee or yearly membership options. We will also offer field trips to local schools and the space will be available to rent for events of all types.

They hope to raise additional funds to be able to complete the children's garden by the end of June 2022. For us to open to the public, we also need the learning center and walking trail to have a complete, accessible space to offer high-quality programming and family recreational opportunities. Interested persons can follow them on Facebook and/or Instagram for updates on progress and volunteer events.





## PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

# Molding a Generation of Global Thinkers (MGGT)

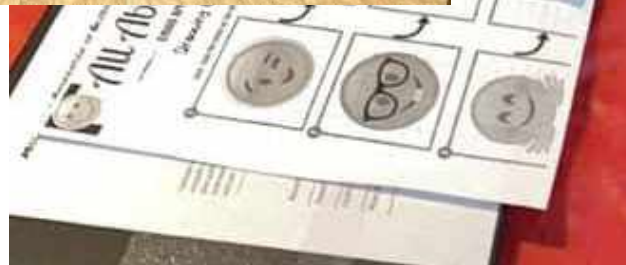
Maya May | Jackson, MS

Molding a Generation of Global Thinkers (MGGT) mission is to reach 8th-10th grade students in Jackson Public Schools who are already leaders in need of extra support as it relates to academics and career goals. The program is 6-weeks and consists of workshops focusing on career aspirations, team building, understanding diversity and culture in school/workplace, managing mental health, and lastly, tutoring for STEM.

MGGT has implemented the program twice from 2020-to 2021, impacting 9 students that have shown interest in learning more about business and entrepreneurship; focusing on turning passion into a profit.

The entire program is cost-free to scholars, thus MGGT is currently focused on fundraising for supplies to provide them with a kickstart fund and assistance with a template for their business venture.

In 2022, MGGT's goal is to offer the workshop for a long-term period, in order to better understand the impact of their workshops. If you are interested in staying plugged into MGGT's work, check them out on Facebook at Upgrade Academy.





## PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

# Student Ambassador Program

Paola Samaniego | Jackson, MS

Paola Samaniego founded the Ambassador Program with the Reimagine Prep/Republic Schools community. The Ambassador Program is a school-wide organization with the core mission to create student leaders within their schools who also work as community advocates. Ambassadors not only look to improve student culture within their schools but work to take ownership in creating solutions to problems they see within their community.

Every 9 weeks, ambassadors will complete one small service project. Since the program's founding, Ambassadors have hosted food drives, community clean-ups, and organizing community gardens. Ambassadors also have a larger service project they work toward every year. This year the ambassadors at Reimagine are working on fundraising for the implementation of solar panels within our school. Paola hopes that creating community leaders that take ownership at an early age, will translate to the work they do in Mississippi as adults.



COHORT 4 | JUNE 2019 – MAY 2021

# Active Fellows

*Fellows are currently half-way through the 2-year fellowship*



**Calvin Steinhauer**

Clarksdale, MS

*International Micro-Finance Clubs*



**Meaghan Fuller**

Jackson, MS

*Book Buddies*



**Kacie Neville**

Cleveland, MS

*Wellness School*

COHORT 4 | JUNE 2019 – MAY 2021



**Jessica Martinson**

Cleveland, MS  
*Wellness School*



**Paola C. Samaniego**

Jackson, MS  
*Ambassador Program*



**Amanda Delperdang**

Greenville, MS  
*Mississippi Delta Nature and Learning Center*





**Jon Delperdang**

Greenville, MS

*Mississippi Delta Nature and Learning Center*



**Emily Goodwin**

Clarksdale, MS

*Clarksdale Courts*

*To learn more about our alumni, Cohort 1, 2, and 3, and each Fellow's SE Project, visit our website at [tfafellows.com](https://tfafellows.com)*

COHORT 5 | JUNE 2020 – MAY 2022

# Active Fellows

*Fellows are currently half-way through the 2-year fellowship*



**Amanda Bowman**

Cleveland, MS

*Better Together: Teacher Mentorship*



**Alexandria Brumfield**

Jackson, MS

*Teacher Retention Study*



**Abigail Corder**

Clarksdale, MS

*Literacy Project*



**Maya May**

Jackson, MS

*Molding a Generation of Global Thinkers*



**Kelsey Smith**

Cleveland, MS

*Reading Works Early Reading Skills*





# Mentorship

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A core component of the fellowship is pairing scholars with mentors who have direct experience launching similar ventures. As the scholars further articulate their vision and purpose behind their project, they are matched with mentors who can offer insight into taking quick and lean steps on their project.

Each month, mentors host a 60-minute call with their Fellow. Topics discussed include:

- Organizational branding and marketing
- Business strategy and design
- Disruptive innovation techniques
- Creative networking and movement building
- Collaborative leadership and community engagement
- Bootstrapping and lean methodology



Since 2017, our fellowship has built a strong network of mentors including:



Matthew Abrams  
Consultant  
[matthew-abrams.com](http://matthew-abrams.com)

Matthew supports entrepreneurs and leadership teams to clarify what it is they want and activate a plan to achieve it. He has given keynote talks at Sustainable Brands, The Innovation Exchange, and TEDx conferences.



Erin Boyd Krampetz  
Culdesac, Business Operations  
& Co-Founder of Ashoka U  
[ashokau.org](http://ashokau.org)

Expertise in building social impact initiatives across academia and with both the public and private sectors. Currently working to build the first car-free neighborhood built from scratch in the U.S. in Tempe, Arizona.

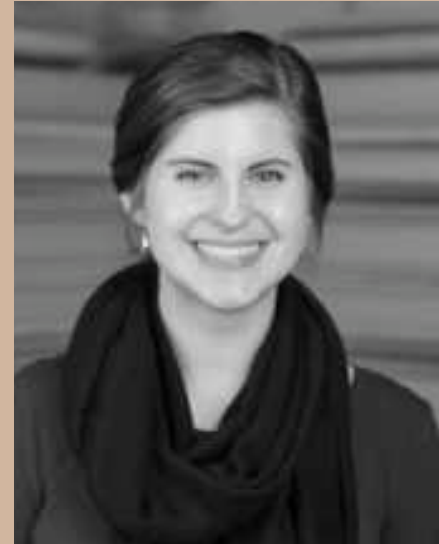


Spud Marshall  
Chief Catalyst  
[iamspud.com](http://iamspud.com)

Spud is dedicated to cultivating changemaker communities and innovation ecosystems. He has co-founded multiple ventures, including New Leaf (a co-working office), the co.space (a 20-person residential home), and 3 Dots (an arts & innovation event center). He also consults organizations worldwide to develop similar programs and initiatives through Barefoot Consulting.

Reagan Pugh  
Founding Partner – Assemble  
[howweassemble.com](http://howweassemble.com)

Reagan Pugh speaks to college campuses throughout the country about finding the right intersection between who you are and what you're made to do by identifying the story you want to tell with your life. He's worked with thousands of students as a speaker, workshop facilitator, and guest professor teaching a leadership course he designed at Texas State University, Trinity University, and Angelo State University.



Alexis Taylor  
ESG Strategy Lead for  
Indeed.com

Alexis Taylor focuses on driving environmental, social, and governance strategy for Indeed, advocating for climate equity and economic justice as a City Commissioner, and advising on the development of the Global Shapers Community.



# Community

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We work to foster a strong community, both inside and out of the TFA Graduate Fellows Program. The COVID-19 pandemic forced us to be creative and pivot with how we built and nourished our community. During 2020-21, 100% of our meetings and events were hosted virtually.

We work to build an external community through a variety of events that engage stakeholders, mentors, collaborators, friends, family, & students.





## Immersion Retreat

In order to establish a strong group culture within the Fellowship, each cohort begins their experience with an Immersion Retreat. Our first *Virtual Immersion Retreat* took place from Friday, September 11th to Sunday, September 13th, 2020. During the retreat we intentionally disconnected from work and daily stresses, to focus on building collaborative relationships and developing Social Entrepreneurship Projects.



## Community Meet-Ups

Additionally, TFA Fellows regularly convene to share experiences in a collaborative, think tank-like environment, allowing Fellows to develop goals and accountability partnerships. We achieve this through bi-weekly virtual meetings and through 'Hub Meet-ups.' 'Hub Meet-ups' allow Fellows to connect in-person or virtually based on their geographic location in Mississippi. We have 4 Hubs: Jackson-based, Clarkdale-based, Cleveland/Greenwood-based, and Greenville-based.





# Pitch Competition, also known as “Ballot & Brunch”

We hosted our 4th annual “Ballot & Brunch” on Saturday, November 14, 2020, on the virtual platform Remo. Guests were invited to become active participants in re-imagining Mississippi with the TFA Fellows. Each fellow invited individuals to the pitch competition who they consider to be mentors, collaborators, or stakeholders in their SE project. TFA staff, DSU coordinators, and potential future TFA fellows were also in attendance. The event was a huge success, with over 80 guests in attendance!

Each Fellow presented a powerful one-minute pitch about their SE Project. Following the pitches, Fellows hosted their own breakout room and guests were able to independently move from room to room to continue the conversation regarding projects.

Once guests were able to network with the Fellows, all guests cast their vote on the SE Project they would support and like to see come to fruition.

*The top-three presenters received a scholarship stipend to bring their projects to reality. Our winners include 1st Place (\$500), Paola Samaniego; 2nd Place (\$400), Jessica Martinson + Kacie Neville; and 3rd Place (\$300), Nicole Bishop.*





## Celebrate & Connect

We hosted our 4th annual “Connect & Celebrate” on Saturday, May 1, 2021, from 10-11:15 AM on the Zoom platform. The event’s purpose is to honor and celebrate the graduating cohort from the two-year fellowship. The graduating group, Cohort 4, consisted of 8 Fellows who shared stories from their two-year journey, along with their SE Project progress. Additionally, Cohort 5 was able to garner feedback, advice, and new ideas from other Fellows and community members to improve their venture in the coming academic year.

## Saturday Meet-Ups

On a Saturday each semester, we hosted virtual workshops to develop the fellow’s SE Projects. Our goal during these meet-ups is to build community, generate energy, and collaborate. We offer workshops on human-centered design, business strategy, and leadership — tailored to meet fellow’s needs and desires.





# Gratitude

Thank you so much to all of our incredible stakeholders, entrepreneurs, mentors, partners, and friends. Creating impact is a team sport; any impact reported here is only possible because of you! We're humbled to work alongside you and learn together how we can more effectively change the way Mississippi tackles problems.

Looking ahead to the 2021-22 academic year, we are excited to be welcoming a cohort of 7 Fellows who will begin graduate school in the Fall of 2021. Additionally, in 2021 we are striving to continue to be agile and adaptable as we navigate the challenges of COVID-19. Although our Fellows are spread out around the state of Mississippi, the virtual connections will allow our community to continue our work during a pandemic.

The current program has been successful in helping TFA alumni assimilate into the region, opening educational and entrepreneurial paths for these service-oriented, high-achieving teachers, developing community and university partnerships, and directly impacting 150,000+ Mississippians to date. Through the Hearin Foundation, Delta State has fostered a community of ambitious and persistent changemakers – tackling major issues and offering new ideas for systems-level change.

Delta State University would like to thank the Robert M. Hearin Foundation for its generous support of the Teach For America Graduate Fellows Program. The Hearin Foundation, a nonprofit organization based in Jackson, Mississippi, has provided numerous grants to Delta State University over the years. The organization supports Mississippi's higher education and economic development.