



TEACH FOR AMERICA
**GRADUATE
FELLOWS
PROGRAM**
DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY

TFA Graduate Fellows Program
Graduate and Continuing Studies

DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY

2019-2020 Impact Report





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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 8-12 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 also 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.

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

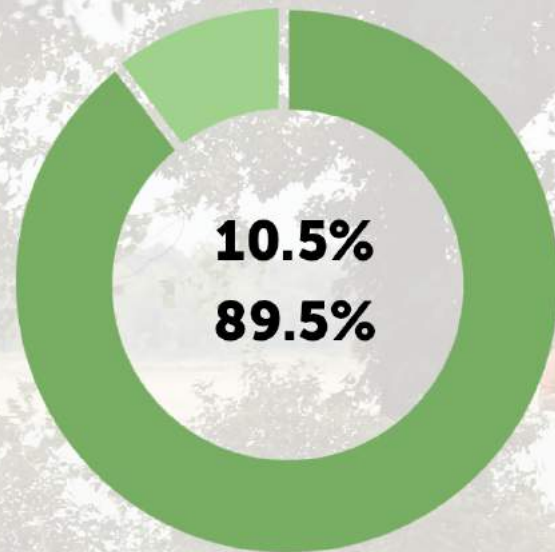
Program success can be measured by the number of TFA alumni who stay in the state of Mississippi, both during and after degree completion. This program has already proved successful in that 93% from cohorts 1-3 are either still living and/or working in Mississippi or continuing to facilitate and support their projects and programs in Mississippi from new locations in Delaware, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Texas. The 8 other fellows (Cohort 4) 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.

*93% from cohorts 1-3 are
either still living and/or
working in Mississippi or
continuing to facilitate and
support their projects*

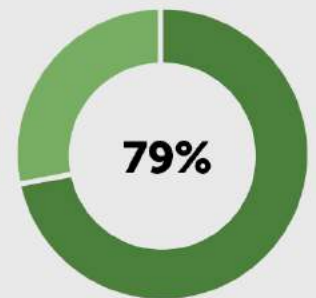
93%



**OUR FELLOWS BY
THE NUMBERS SINCE 2016**



10.5% Originally from Mississippi
89.5% Originally from outside
of Mississippi



79% Still living and/or working in Mississippi



63% Worked Full-Time during the Fellowship
37% Worked Part-Time during the Fellowship



74% Served the Delta during the Fellowship
26% Served the Jackson area during the Fellowship



95,000+
Lives Impacted



\$1,138,450 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.

3.75 AVERAGE GPA FROM FELLOWS SINCE 2016.

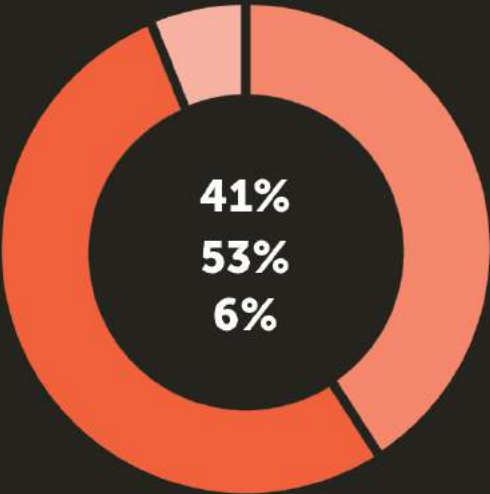


TOP 3 DEGREES PURSUED SINCE 2016:

- Master's & Specialist of Education in Educational Administration & Supervision
- Master's of Science in Community Development
- Master's of Education in Elementary Education

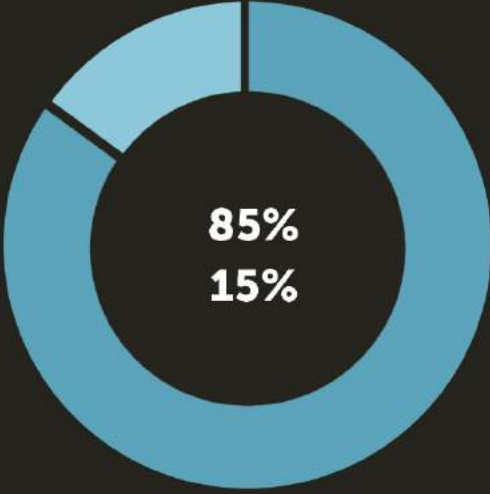
34 graduate degrees completed by 29 Fellows since 2016.

This included Cohorts 1-3, who have completed the two-year Fellowship.



Percentages of Completed Degrees by College:

- 41% College of Arts & Science
- 53% College of Education
- 6% College of Business

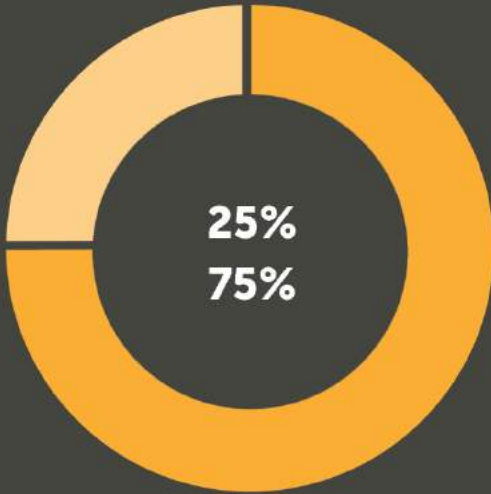


Percentages of Completed Degrees by Type:

- 85% Master Degree
- 15% Specialists Degree
- 0% EdD

Degrees in Progress: Percentage by College.

As of Fall 2020, we have 8 Fellows from Cohort 4 continuing their degree into the 20-21 academic year.



Percentages of Degrees in Progress by College:

- 25% College of Arts & Sciences
- 75% College of Education
- 0% College of Business

87% of Fellows are using their completed degree in their current profession.





Social Entrepreneurship Project

Each Fellow pursues a graduate degree at Delta State, while also working to develop their own individualized 'Social Entrepreneurship Project' addressing barriers in their community.

The projects are designed to address obstacles that are keeping Mississippi from progressing forward. Many projects are conceptualized during the scholar's time as a TFA teacher as they experience the pain points in their community first-hand; from lack of recreational activities after school to inadequate grading systems used within their school districts. The TFA Graduate Fellows Program assists the scholars in thinking more entrepreneurially in the way they might be able to bring their project to life.

We accomplish this through teaching 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.



SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROJECT DATA:

87%

Projects Still
Operating/In
Existence

55%

School-based
Projects

34%

Community/City
Projects

11%

State
Projects

95K+

Estimated
Amount of
People Impacted

\$1,138,450

Funding Raised
Towards Projects
Since 2016

Project Spotlight

Project: Data Snaps Project Narrative

Colleen Zamm



"One of the biggest difficulties for Mississippi Delta families is finding quality, affordable education for their children. As a mother, teacher, and Delta resident, this issue is close to my heart. My project, Data Snaps, works to address this problem by creating accessible data snapshots for students, teachers and families. By facilitating meaningful conversations about student progress between schools and families, Data Snaps empowers families to partner with schools in student success.

The urgency behind my project was driven by two things. First, my town became the site for Mississippi's first rural charter school, Clarksdale Collegiate Public Charter School. Second, my own children were rapidly approaching kindergarten. I wanted to contribute to making Clarksdale Collegiate a school where I was proud to teach and proud to send my own children. I knew from my experience as a classroom teacher that individually administered reading assessments are a powerful tool in guiding instruction, but very time-consuming. I also knew from my experience as a founding teacher at another charter school that in early years, before every grade level is filled, founding schools benefit from additional support. It quickly became clear that I could have the biggest impact supporting Clarksdale Collegiate by administering individualized reading assessments and creating family-friendly data snapshots for each student.

Over my two-year project, I created schoolwide systems for data collection. My goal was twofold: 1) support teachers who already have additional work related to founding a school, 2) bridge the gap between the founding of the school and the hiring of a curriculum or data specialist who could take over my role. During the school year, we were able to test all 250 students on an every 6-week cycle. Although school wide testing is currently on hold because we are still virtual, a culture of data-driven literacy instruction continues. This upcoming fall, we will be able to provide teachers with pre-quarantine data on each of their students to guide instruction. Our scholar support team, which serves students with the highest need, has been able to continue testing their students virtually. For teachers trying to maximize every moment with their students, the ability to access individualized data is invaluable.

The second focus of my two-year project was family-friendly data snapshots. I created data snapshots for each of our three yearly report card nights. I was able to both participate in and observe these snapshots in use. By providing families with clear communication about their student's strengths, weaknesses, areas of growth, and areas for improvement, teachers were able to have

meaningful conversations about student progress. Conversations might be as granular as what letter sounds a student was working on or as far-reaching as what a student's percentile was on a nationally administered test. Because teachers and families could review a one-page snapshot and a binder of documentation, each conversation was meaningful and focused on the specific skills of each student. The snapshots also had the unintended benefit of familiarizing teachers with each student in their new class every Fall.

Over the course of two years, my project impacted 250 scholars, their families, and the teachers and staff of the school. The intended impact of providing a tool for teachers and families to have meaningful conversations about students has had ripple effects. Students requiring additional support can receive it more quickly because their needs are documented. Teachers, who typically have to spend the majority of their time collecting data, were able to spend their time planning implementation. Instructional assistants who were part of our data collection team have become full-time teachers and the literacy experts of the school. A school-wide culture of using data to drive individualized literacy instruction was fostered and nurtured early on at that school.

Going forward, data continues to drive instruction and our conversations with families. We have been able to think of smart proxies for the data that we are unable to collect virtually. We have also been able to look ahead and think about ways to build community within the student population surrounding data. For example, we were able to use some of our piloting funds to fill the unexpected need for schoolwide celebration instruments, like a large school bell that students will be able to ring to celebrate growth. In coming years, the school will likely hire a full-time person to focus on student data and the project will continue in their hands.

My biggest takeaway from this project was the ability to work in the school where I now send my children. The ability to contribute to the growth and success of a local school is a crucial part of my own family's work and life in the Mississippi Delta."

Project Spotlight

Project: EPIC Mississippi

Hillary Sapanski



"EPIC Mississippi seeks to address parental engagement in education, notably literacy. As teaching standards and best practices in instruction continue to change, oftentimes, parents may not know how to best help their children at home. And, in school districts where there are high levels of poverty, a common statement often thrown around is that there is not enough parental involvement, or the reason why a student struggles is because parents are not helping out at home. Often, the root of academic achievement has become a blame game: who's fault is it: the teachers or the parents? Blaming one another will not help us move forward in the right direction, because it takes all of us, working together. We also know that the issue of academic achievement is multi-faceted and is one of equity. So, how can we address increasing parental involvement in an empowering, supportive way, and eliminate the blame game?"

EPIC Mississippi stands for Empowering Parents, Igniting Conversation. The project's initial prototype in October 2018, involved a 10-day text message trial, with about 20 parents, to see if the information being presented was something that parents actually wanted. During the trial, not only did I discover that parents did indeed, want the information, but they actually liked how it was given to them—in the form of a text message. This was something I was not initially expecting, as I had first envisioned in-person workshops and sessions. However, upon reflection, I realized that a text message would expand access, because most people today have a cell phone, and text messages are meant to be brief. Text messages did not require transportation or interfere with work schedules. By sending information in a form of a text message, parents could read it, reflect, and then if interested, act on it and engage with their child, or apply the tip in another way, at a time that worked for them.

Since that initial prototype, EPIC Mississippi slowly grew. Three more trials were done during the 2018-2019 school year, where I tested out categories by age groups and topics, as well as frequency and times of the day. By June 2019, EPIC had a few hundred subscribers. In September 2019, EPIC began text messages that lasted the entire 2019-2020 academic school year. During the COVID-19 pandemic, EPIC adjusted the program to include daily text messages for many categories, so that parents were able to help maintain learning at home. During the pandemic alone, almost 200 people subscribed. Today, the program currently has just shy of 900 subscribers and has 12 categories for parents to choose from. The categories primarily support literacy for early childhood and elementary-aged students, but there is also a vocabulary category for middle school-

aged students, as well as categories regarding social-emotional learning, conversation starters, anti-racism, and general parenting tips. There is now a category for teachers, that promotes self-care, as well as support for teaching during the pandemic.

EPIC Mississippi is not just a "one-man" show. EPIC Mississippi has "ambassadors," which are teachers who help promote the text messages and get the parents of their students to sign up. EPIC Mississippi Ambassadors have T-shirts and get incentives throughout the year for promotion. Ambassadors also have the opportunity to help with writing text messages. EPIC Mississippi has also recently partnered with the Mississippi Department of Education and is featured as a partner on the Strong Readers Mississippi Campaign website, which is dedicated to supporting parents with literacy at home.

The TFA Graduate Fellows Program was instrumental in EPIC Mississippi becoming a reality. The fellowship provided the space for me to be able to both dream and even create this project. It also gave me the resources, the network, and the connections to do so. One of the most important lessons that I learned is that you can have big ideas, but big ideas will not get you anywhere if you do not narrow your focus and actually do something about it! I had to stop "thinking" and just dive in with prototypes. Prototyping is extremely important when creating a social entrepreneurship project because you have to see if the idea that you want to put out in the world, whether it is needed or not, is something that is wanted by your targeted audience. You have to constantly ask questions, test things out, and ask for feedback. Throughout the fellowship, I sent out surveys to EPIC Mississippi subscribers to get data about the project, and I continue to encourage feedback. This is what helped EPIC Mississippi become what it is today. And, because I kept getting more subscribers, it encouraged me to continue because the demand was there—I had built in accountability.

The fellowship granted me the opportunity to create something for Mississippi parents. I am grateful for the experience, the knowledge that I learned, and the network I was in. EPIC Mississippi has no plans to stop anytime soon. I look forward to seeing how it continues to grow and develop as time goes on.

If you are interested in subscribing to EPIC Mississippi or spreading the word, you can visit EPIC Mississippi on Facebook (www.facebook.com/epicms), Instagram (@epicmississippi), or our website (www.epicmississippi.org). You can also contact me at epicmississippi@gmail.com.

Active Fellows

Cohort 3
June 2018 - May 2020



Nicole Bishop
Indianola, MS
*Lefflore County Academic
Advising for Student Athletes*



Whitney Christenson
Greenwood, MS
*SIPP: Job-Skills
Training Program*



Dylan Jones
Indianola, MS
Equity Analytics, LLC



Katisha Limehouse
Indianola, MS
The Village



Valencia Lloyd
Jackson, MS
Empowered ACTS



Samantha Macy
Jackson, MS
Reimagine Prep Garden



William Murphy
Greenville, MS
Sunflower Photosynthesis



Hillary Sapanski
Jackson, MS
EPIC Mississippi



Katie Steinour
Clarksdale, MS
Project Talanoa



Alissa Rashid
Clarksdale, MS
*Clarksdale Collegiate -
Technology*



Colleen Zamm
Clarksdale, MS
Data Snapshots and Binder

Active Fellows

Cohort 4

June 2019 - May 2021

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



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 and 2, and each Fellow's
SE Project, visit our website at
tfafellows.com*



Mentorship

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

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
Social Impact Strategist & Builder
& Co-Founder of Ashoka U
ashokau.org

Expertise in building social impact initiatives across academia and with both the public and private sectors. Fellow of US-Japan Leadership Program (USJLP) elected by the United States-Japan Foundation.



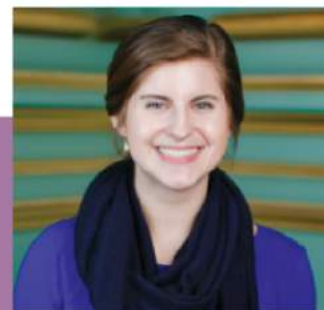
Spud Marshall
Chief Catalyst
iamspud.com

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 world-wide to develop similar programs and initiatives through Barefoot Consulting.



Reagan Pugh
Founding Partner – Assemble
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
CEO – 3 Day Startup
3daystartup.org

As the CEO of 3 Day Startup, Alexis J Taylor partners with universities, governments, and corporations to democratize the entrepreneurial mindset. She has eight years of experience in various entrepreneurial endeavors and knows that in a rapidly changing world, equipping individuals with this way of thinking is key to shaping more inclusive, fair, and prosperous communities.



Community

We work to foster a strong community, both inside and out of the TFA Graduate Fellows Program. In order to establish a strong group culture within the Fellowship, each cohort begins their experience with an Immersion Retreat, where we disconnect from technology and daily stresses, to focus on building collaborative relationships and developing Social Entrepreneurship Projects.

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 based on their geographic location in Mississippi. We have 4 Hubs: Jackson-based, Clarkdale-based, Cleveland/Greenwood-based, and Greenville-based.

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

THESE EVENTS INCLUDE:

Immersion Retreat

Each summer we host an Immersion Retreat to offer the Fellows the opportunity to refine their leadership skills while also being introduced to entrepreneurial perspectives when tackling social problems.

The cohort was hosted at a home near Delta State University's campus. Participants focused on the expansion of their proposed SE Projects through vision setting, customer discovery, probes, and prototypes. They became more than simply a group of TFA alumni, but rather, a group that will continue to intentionally support and collaborate with one another as they take steps towards change in Mississippi over the next two years.

Ballot & Brunch

We hosted our 3rd annual "Ballot & Brunch" on December 7th, 2019, in Ewing Hall on Delta State University's campus. The event was a collaboration between Teach For America - Greater Delta and the TFA Graduate Fellows Program. Guests were invited to become active participants in re-imagining Mississippi with the TFA Fellows. Each fellow invited individuals to the Ballot & Brunch 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 brunch was a brainstorming opportunity for attendees to propose ideas for advancing Mississippi followed by a pitch/networking competition among the Fellows. After brunch, each Fellow presented a powerful one-minute pitch about their SE Project.

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: 1st Place (\$500); 2nd Place (\$400); 3rd Place (\$300)

Saturday Meet-Ups

During a Saturday each semester, we host an on-campus workshop 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.

Celebrate & Connect

We hosted our 3rd annual "Connect & Celebrate" on April 25, 2020. In March of 2020, the U.S. was hit with the COVID-19 pandemic, causing our program to host our last 2019-2020 event via Zoom. The event's purpose is to honor and celebrate the graduating cohort from the two-year fellowship. The graduating group, Cohort 3, consisted of 11 Fellows who shared stories from their two-year journey, along with their SE Project progress. Additionally, Cohort 4 was able to garner feedback, advice, and new ideas from other Fellows and community members to improve their venture in the coming academic year.





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 into the 2020-21 academic year, we are working to recruit a small Cohort 5 who will begin graduate school in Fall of 2020. Additionally, in 2020 we are striving to be agile and adaptable as we navigate the challenges from the COVID-19. Although our Fellows are spread out around the state of Mississippi, virtual connection 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 95,000+ of 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.