

Dr. Mark E. Keenum

Biography



Dr. Mark Everett Keenum became Mississippi State's 19th president Jan. 5, 2009, following a distinguished public service career.

Now in his 10th year of tenure, Dr. Keenum has guided Mississippi State to unprecedented heights. The university has experienced record enrollment growth to nearly 22,000 students, including a record 2,062 new transfer students for Fall 2017. The freshman class this year achieved a record average first-time ACT score of 25.13. Mississippi State has awarded more than 4,000 degrees at all levels for seven straight years. The Chronicle of Higher Education designated Mississippi State as a 2017 "Great College To Work For" after receiving top ratings from employees on workforce practices and policies.

The campus has expanded and improved on Dr. Keenum's watch. Mississippi State has completed or initiated capital improvements totaling more than \$1 billion since 2009. Chief among those projects has been The Mill at MSU – a \$40-million, state-of-the-art conference and meeting complex. The Old Main Academic Center, a new \$41-million classroom building and multi-level parking garage, opened at the start of the Fall 2017 semester. A \$60-million project featuring two new residence halls and Nusz Hall, which houses the G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery Center for America's Veterans, opened the previous fall. A \$10-million, fourth-floor expansion of Mitchell Memorial Library to house the Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library and the Frank and Virginia Williams Collection of Lincolnia celebrated its official opening in late Fall 2017. In March 2018, the university and its partner, Memphis-based EdR Collegiate Housing, broke ground on the innovative \$67-million College View development. The first-of-its-kind project for any Mississippi university combines student housing with a mix of retail, commercial, and restaurant space.

A \$55-million expansion and renovation of Dudy Noble Field/Polk-Dement Stadium – home to one of the most storied college baseball programs in America – is also underway. The first phase of the project added the largest video board in the nation to the "Carnegie Hall of College Baseball." The second phase commenced at the conclusion of the 2017 season and is on track for completion for the 2019 season. This major investment will significantly enhance the Dudy Noble fan experience – already described by many as one of the most unique in college sports today. New construction projects launching over the next two years include a new Science and Engineering Complex, Music Building, and the completion of an Animal and Dairy Science/Poultry Science Complex for the Division of Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Medicine. Additionally, the university is developing a comprehensive plan to build additional teaching and research lab space to meet growing demand.

Fundraising has reached all-time record levels. MSU's current Infinite Impact capital campaign reached its initial goal three years ahead of schedule. Due to that unprecedented success, the university announced a new goal – \$1 billion by 2020 – the largest campaign goal ever for an educational institution in Mississippi. During his tenure, Dr. Keenum has been instrumental in expanding the MSU Promise Program, which provides need-based scholarship assistance to Mississippi students whose families have limited financial means.

Mississippi State is ranked by the National Science Foundation as a “Top 100” research institution. The most recent research success has been MSU’s designation as the Federal Aviation Administration’s National Center of Excellence for Unmanned Aircraft Systems and Boeing’s decision to locate a composite research center at MSU’s Raspet Flight Research Laboratory. In 2016, the state of Mississippi became a member of the Pan-Pacific UAS Test Range Complex, one of the FAA’s seven national test sites, and Mississippi State researchers are leading this Gulf Coast R&D hub for unmanned aircraft.

Dr. Keenum is immediate past president of the Southeastern Conference. During his two-year term, he led the SEC Executive Committee, and he continues to serve on the SEC’s Content Committee Board of Directors that oversees the highly successful ESPN-SEC Network. He also represents the SEC as a member of the College Football Playoff’s (CFP) Board of Managers.

In 2018, he was elected to serve a six-year term on the Board of Trustees of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, which is the second-oldest state department of archives and history in the country. A comprehensive historical agency founded in 1902, MDAH collects, preserves, and provides access to the archival resources of the state; administers museums and historic sites, including the new Museum of Mississippi History and the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum; and oversees statewide programs for historic preservation, government records management, and publications.

Dr. Keenum travels frequently to Washington, D.C., meeting with Congressional leaders and federal agency heads to pursue research opportunities and broaden the university’s influence on the national level. He has also worked closely with state leaders in Jackson in support of higher education in Mississippi.

Mississippi State plays an integral role in economic development locally, statewide, and regionally. Its impact is further felt nationally and internationally through unique collaborative partnerships with peer institutions, business and industry, government agencies, and leading non-governmental organizations. Dr. Keenum leads these efforts because he understands the positive impact the nation’s major research universities can have in the diverse communities they serve.

A graduate of Mississippi State with degrees in agricultural economics, Keenum’s interest in international food security has strengthened the university’s contributions to global economic sustainability. In 2014, he was appointed to the Board of Directors of the Foundation for Food and Agricultural Research by U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Thomas J. Vilsack and now serves as chairman. That same year along with other university presidents, he signed the Presidents’ Commitment to Food and Nutrition Security at the United Nations in New York City. This marks the first time universities around the world began to share a collective focus on ending food insecurity.

Dr. Keenum’s passion for international engagement and transformative research and service has positioned Mississippi State as a leader in addressing global food security and poverty, among other critical issues. In 2014 and again in 2016, he was invited to address the United Nations in New York about the crucial roles public research universities play as the global community works to address critical challenges for a growing population.

In 2018, President Donald J. Trump appointed Dr. Keenum chairman of the Board for International Food and Agricultural Development (BIFAD). BIFAD was created in 1975 under

Title XII (Famine Prevention and Freedom from Hunger) of the Foreign Assistance Act. Its mission is to draw on higher education's scientific knowledge and expertise in global food security and world hunger to advise U.S. international assistance efforts.

Dr. Keenum began his career at MSU as a faculty member with the Extension Service and the Department of Agricultural Economics. He went on to serve as chief of staff to U.S. Senator Thad Cochran in Washington, D.C. and was Under Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture prior to returning home to Mississippi State.

A graduate of Corinth High School, Dr. Keenum earned an associate in arts degree from Northeast Mississippi Community College in Booneville and was a member of the Northeast Tigers football team. He is married to the former Rhonda Newman of Booneville, also an MSU graduate. They have four children: Rett, Mary Phillips, Katie and Torie.

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