

SOUTHERN • MISS

Business at Work

FALL 2026 ISSUE

A LEGACY WORTH BUILDING

Alumnus **Jim Rasberry '05** believes the most meaningful investments are the ones you leave behind.



DEAR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF SOUTHERN MISS BUSINESS,

Every year, as we begin putting together this magazine, I find myself asking the same question: *How do we fit an entire year's worth of remarkable stories into just a few pages?* The answer is... we can't. This issue is simply a highlight reel. It's the business equivalent of trying to summarize an entire football season with a few highlights.

Fortunately, we've packed quite a bit into these pages. You'll meet alumni who prove there isn't just one path to success. From financial advising and real estate development to publishing children's books, their stories remind us that a business education prepares students not just for a career, but for a lifetime of opportunities. You'll also see why our accounting program continues to grow, proving that reports of accounting's demise have been greatly exaggerated. Apparently, prospective students didn't get the memo.

You'll read about our Built for Better Business initiative, which reflects a simple belief: true success is measured not only by what we achieve, but by the positive impact we have on others. You'll also discover how business students helped grow one of Southern Miss' fastest-rising student organizations. Who knew pickleball could teach lessons in leadership, teamwork, and entrepreneurship? Then again, business has a way of showing up in unexpected places. And you'll read about how our students continue to learn by doing. From mocktail competitions and wine tastings to field experiences and culinary demonstrations, our hospitality and tourism management students are gaining hands-on experiences no textbook or PowerPoint can replicate.

Finally, you'll read about the remarkable achievements of our faculty and students. Through impactful research, academic excellence, and servant leadership, they continue to demonstrate what makes Southern Miss Business so special.

As I reflect on this past year, I'm reminded that the true strength of Southern Miss Business has never been found in a building, a ranking, or a strategic plan. It's found in people. It's found in faculty who care deeply about their students, alumni who continue to invest in the next generation, donors who believe in our mission, and students who arrive eager to learn and leave prepared to lead. Thank you for being part of that story.

As you read through this issue, I hope it leaves you with the same sense of pride it gave me. And if, by the time you finish reading, you're inspired to reconnect with the college, mentor a student, or simply stop by for a visit, we'd love to see you. After all, the best chapters of Southern Miss Business are still being written.

Warm regards,

J. Bret Becton

J. Bret Becton, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Business and Economic Development

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We are proud to collaborate with these esteemed organizations whose support helps us achieve our goals and enrich the experiences of our business students. If you are interested in becoming a corporate partner, please reach out to business@usm.edu.

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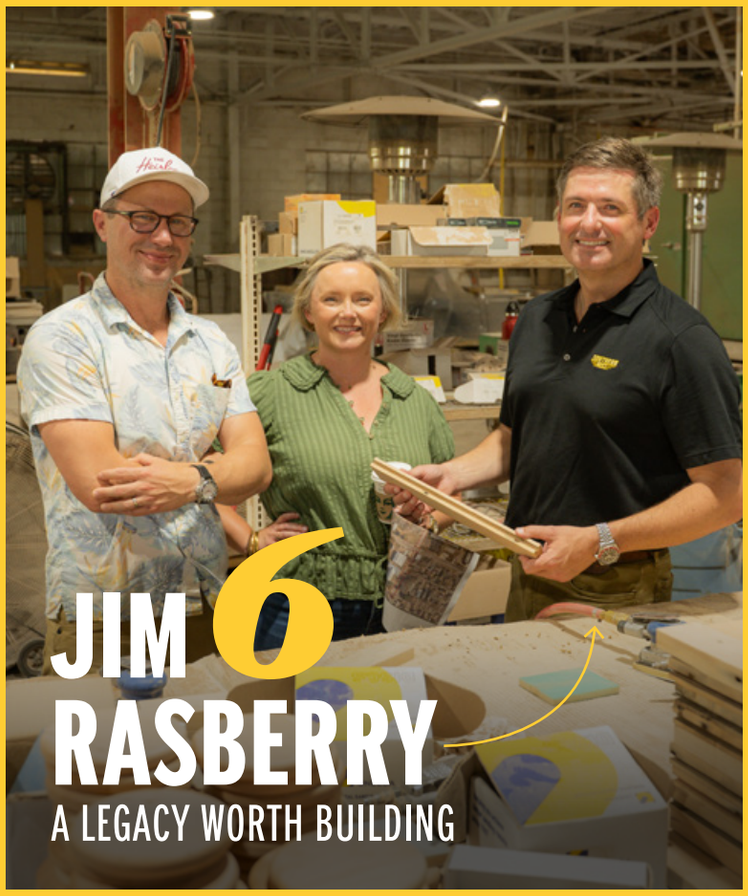
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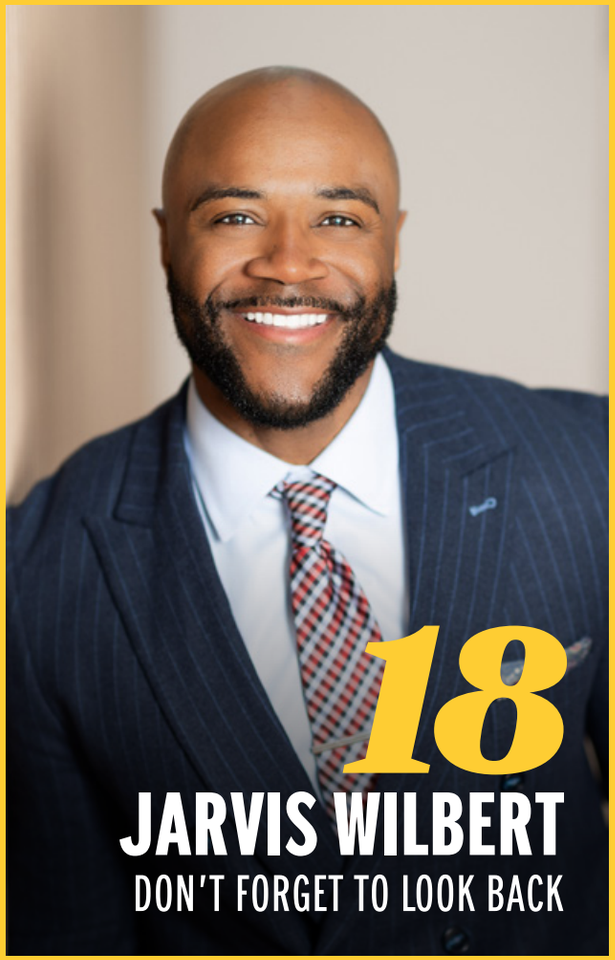
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YEAR IN REVIEW

take a look



























Classes Begin


Meet the Firms

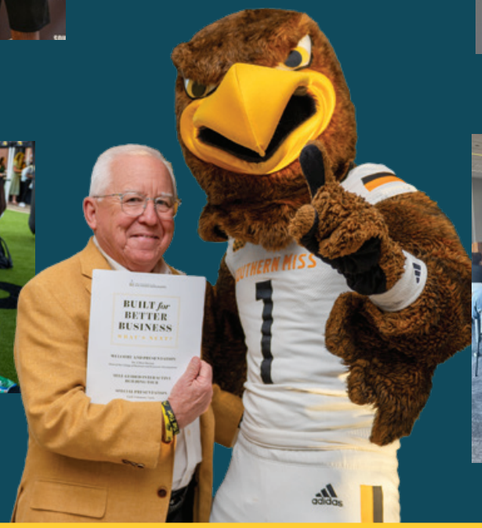

Experience Business Casually


Business Internship Fair



Coffee w/ an Entrepreneur, Ross Arroyo


Welcome Back Cookout




Jones Company Building Tour


Business Excellence Awards




Spring Business Career Fair

AUGUST 2025

Classes Begin

Coffee w/ an Entrepreneur, Fred McCallister

Welcome Back Cookout

Tailgate, Southern Miss v. MSU


Coffee w/ an Entrepreneur, Fred McCallister

SEPTEMBER 2025

Meet the Firms

Tailgate, Southern Miss v. JSU

Built for Better Business: What's Next?

Tailgate, Southern Miss v. Appalachian State

Coffee w/ an Entrepreneur, Rahul Gopal

Experience Business Casually

Black and Gold Day

Tailgate, Southern Miss v. Jacksonville State



Fall Business Career Fair

OCTOBER 2025

Southern Miss Cruisin' the Coast at Gulf Park Campus

Business Career Fair

Jones Company Building Tour

Homecoming Tailgate, Southern Miss v. ULM

Business Internship Fair

Coffee w/ an Entrepreneur, Doug and Susan (Fasano) Williams

TEDxSouthern Miss



NOVEMBER 2025

Business Excellence Awards

Etiquette Dinner

Delta Sigma Pi 75th Anniversary Celebration

Black and Gold Day

Tailgate, Southern Miss v. Texas State

Coffee w/ an Entrepreneur, Ross Arroyo

Hatchathon Finale

Tailgate, Southern Miss v. Troy


Homecoming Tailgate, Southern Miss v. ULM

DECEMBER 2025

Fall Commencement Ceremonies

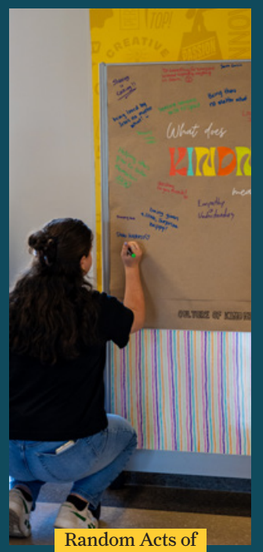

Coffee w/ an Entrepreneur, Brady Raanes


Hatchathon Finale

JANUARY 2026

Classes Begin

Coffee w/ an Entrepreneur, Brady Raanes


Random Acts of Kindness Week



Sport Management Symposium



Professional Sales Week



Spring Commencement Ceremonies



British Studies



Inspired Leader Series, John Sonnier



University Founders' Day



Golden Idea Pitch Competition



FEBRUARY 2026

Random Acts of Kindness Week

Experience Business Casually, Gulf Park

Business Career Fair

Coffee w/ an Entrepreneur, Annah Johnson

MARCH 2026

Inspired Leader Series, John Sonnier

Leadership Bootcamp

Coffee w/ an Entrepreneur, Martha Allen Price

University Founders' Day

APRIL 2026

Etiquette Dinner

Sport Management Symposium

Student Research Showcase

Professional Sales Week

Coffee w/ an Entrepreneur, Gary Stanton

Scianna Business Leaders Study Away in Orlando

The Golden Quills

MAY 2026

Golden Idea Pitch Competition

Spring Commencement Ceremonies

JUNE 2026

Business and Culture in Italy

Business and Culture in Tokyo

Dublin International Internship

JULY 2026

British Studies



Student Research Showcase





The Golden Quills



Scianna Business Leaders Study Away in Orlando



Business and Culture in Italy

A LEGACY WORTH BUILDING

ALUMNUS **JIM RASBERRY** ’05 BELIEVES THE MOST MEANINGFUL INVESTMENTS ARE THE ONES YOU LEAVE BEHIND.

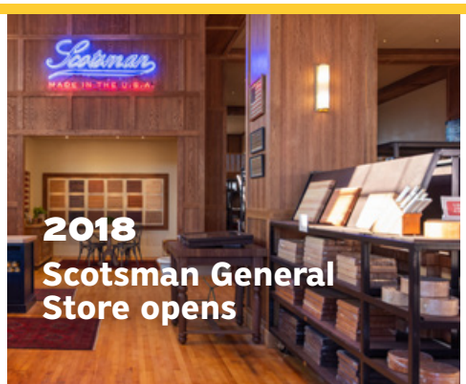
By Bailey Harris Shoemake



Many know Jim Rasberry as the “money guy” on HGTV’s *Home Town: Inn This Together*. Viewers across the nation watched him and his partners transform a historic downtown building into The Heirloom, a boutique hotel outfitted with the Scotsman Co. flagship store and a cooking school. On the show, Rasberry is often the practical one tasked with answering the question everyone else would rather avoid: ***How are we going to pay for this?***

2002
Founded Rasberry Financial Services

2016
Laurel Mercantile opens



2018
Scotsman General Store opens



2021
Scotsman Manufacturing opens

2022
The Scent Library opens



On the floor at Scotsman Manufacturing

"What was great about the business school at Southern Miss was the quality of people," said Rasberry. "Every professor genuinely cared about what was going on in our lives. Not just what we were learning in class, but what was really capturing our interest and how to build on that. Dr. [Bill] Smith and Dr. [Alvin] Williams were amazing."

> *"I like how numbers can turn into dreams."*
>
> **– Jim Rasberry**

Others may recognize him from another one of the network's shows, *Home Town*, popping in to accompany Ben Napier on his escapades while he and his wife, Erin, revitalize their hometown.

But in Laurel, Mississippi, his neighbors know him as a fourth-generation Jones Countian, an entrepreneur, a financial advisor, and one of the many people helping to write the city's next chapter.

Long before cameras were following the restoration of downtown Laurel, Rasberry spent many of his summers as a teenager cleaning out the old buildings his father was renovating. The work wasn't glamorous. More than once, he questioned why his dad was so determined to save buildings that most people seemed ready to forget.

"At the time, I didn't appreciate it, and I sure didn't want to be doing it," Rasberry said with a laugh.

What he didn't realize then was that his father wasn't just restoring vacant buildings. He was teaching his son about legacy. Years later, that lesson would shape nearly every part of Rasberry's life.

Rasberry was a driven student at Southern Miss, transferring from Jones College to pursue a business degree. Unlike most students, he wasn't waiting until graduation to begin his career. He founded Rasberry Financial Services in 2002 while still in college, recalling a memory of sketching his company logo out in the margins of his notebook.

At Southern Miss, he found professors who truly cared about where his ambition might lead, and he was able to apply what he was learning in real time.

More than two decades later, Rasberry Financial Services manages approximately $150 million in assets and serves upwards of 300 households across the Southeast. The firm intentionally remains small, making the impact more personal. While helping clients build wealth remains at the core of his work, Rasberry has found that the most rewarding part is helping clients transform years of financial discipline into the legacies they've spent a lifetime building.

"Everyone wants to be comfortable once they retire and pass on a big inheritance. But that's not really what matters in life," Rasberry shares. "It's the stories and memories that are passed down that matter the most."

For his clients, he has found that money is rarely the dream itself, but the tool to make the dreams come to life. And that realization has inspired one of the most ambitious projects of his career: **The Heirloom.**





April 2024
The Heirloom remodel begins



Aug. 26, 2025
The Heirloom catches on fire

Oct. 1, 2025
The Heirloom was slated to open

May 10, 2026
Home Town: Inn This Together premieres







Rasberry shared with admiration that every space inside the hotel was meticulously and thoughtfully curated by his wife, **Mallorie**. Visitors would encounter pieces of not only Laurel's history throughout the building, but pieces of Rasberry's own family history.

His grandmother, known affectionately as "Snoozy," once worked in the same building, running the candy counter when it operated as the Kress department store. As a tribute to her, a children's play kitchen sat in the heart of the first floor with ***Snoozy's Kitchen*** written in script above the miniature countertops.



Framed and hung on the walls of the cooking school were generations of family recipes and kitchen aprons, shared by close family and friends. The entire project was built around a simple belief that the whole team shares: *places matter because people matter.*

The same philosophy guides Rasberry's approach to community development.

When Hurricane Katrina devastated so many communities in 2005, downtown Laurel was already struggling. Empty storefronts lined many of the streets, and investment was scarce. Like many others, Rasberry was faced with the decision to leave his hometown or stay and help build something better. Rasberry chose to stay.

That choice ultimately led to a partnership with his lifelong friends Josh and Emily Nowell and Ben and Erin Napier. Together, they co-founded, own, and operate the Laurel Mercantile, Scotsman General Store, Scotsman Manufacturing, and The Scent Library. They have restored countless historic properties in Laurel, created nearly 100 jobs, and helped fuel a resurgence that has drawn national attention.

Their various talents, philosophy, and values are aligned in a way that make them the perfect team. One of those shared values includes their commitment to American-made products. While many companies focus solely on finding the most economical option available, Rasberry sees purchasing decisions through a different lens.

For Rasberry, choosing American-made products is not a marketing strategy or about nostalgia. It is about investing in the people and places that still make things, create jobs, and keep local economies moving forward.

"It's not even about American-made. It's about American support."

That philosophy can be found throughout every one of their businesses, but perhaps nowhere more clearly than at The Heirloom.

While their commitment to American-made products shaped the furnishings and goods found throughout the property, the larger inspiration came from their appreciation for Americana itself. The hotel celebrated the craftsmanship, hospitality, and character that have long defined small-town America.

With a color palette of red, white, and blue woven throughout the design and vintage flags displayed in numerous spaces around the hotel, every detail was intentionally selected to honor the building's history. This was something the team worked tirelessly to preserve.



Front and center in the hotel lobby hung a handmade welcome flag, resembling a soldier's homecoming sign used during World War II. Little did they know, this would become one of the few items to survive what came next.

After two years of restoration work and only weeks before its scheduled completion, The Heirloom suffered a devastating fire that irreparably damaged all four stories of the building. Years of dedication seemed to disappear overnight with very little left to salvage. The welcome flag remained intact among the destruction, becoming an unexpected symbol of the resilience that would define the months ahead.

While grieving the devastating loss, Rasberry's sense of humor remained intact.

"We always said we wanted to build a second hotel," Rasberry told Nowell in the days after the fire. ***"I just didn't think it would be in the same spot."***



For Rasberry, the fire has fundamentally changed the way he thinks about failure. "The only time it's a failure is when you experience a difficult situation, and you take nothing from it," he said.

That perspective eventually gave rise to another phrase that has become somewhat of a rally cry for the group: *Keep Building*.

The empowering message is about continuing to serve your community and move forward even when circumstances don't unfold quite the way you planned.

Rasberry isn't sure what the future has in store, but when he reflects on what matters most, his thoughts inevitably return to his family.

He speaks with obvious pride about his two daughters, Lucy and Lottie, who are growing up watching their parents and friends work together to build something meaningful. One day, he and Mallorie hope their daughters will understand that restoring buildings was never really the point. The point was always about creating something worth passing on to the next generation.

Because long after the projects are finished and the spotlight has faded, it is the ***stories, memories,*** and ***values*** we leave behind that ***become our true legacy.***

THE HEIRLOOM PODCAST

Months before the fire, Rasberry and Nowell launched *The Heirloom Podcast,* which focuses on the theme of why legacy matters. Many of the early episodes were recorded inside the construction zone that would eventually become the hotel. Following the fire, the podcast took a pause, but returned in May 2026 to follow along with the show's weekly episodes, sharing behind-the-scenes stories that weren't captured on television.

Tune in!





BUILT FOR BETTER BUSINESS

A DECADE AFTER SCIANNA HALL OPENED ITS DOORS, SOUTHERN MISS BUSINESS IS BUILDING TOWARD AN EVEN BOLDER FUTURE.





Ten years ago, Scianna Hall was built to be a place where business students could discover their potential, develop their talents, and prepare to make an impact.

Today, that vision is alive in every corner of the building.

In Scianna Hall, students learn alongside faculty, collaborate with classmates, explore career opportunities, and build lasting connections. You can find them pitching startup ideas in The Hatchery, managing real investment portfolios in the Renasant Financial Services Center, and developing confidence in the Professional Sales Lab.

Each space reflects the same commitment that inspired Scianna Hall from the very beginning: a commitment to preparing graduates to be ready for life.

ALUMNI, DONORS, STUDENTS, AND FRIENDS GATHERED TO CELEBRATE THAT FIRST DECADE DURING *Built for Better Business: What's Next?*

Guests explored the building through an interactive tour, experiencing firsthand how philanthropy has shaped the student experience over the past decade. Stops throughout the building

highlighted the innovative spaces that prepare students for careers in finance, entrepreneurship, technology, sales, leadership, and beyond, reinforcing that the college's greatest investment has always been its students.

WHILE THE EVENING HONORED THE VISION THAT MADE SCIANNA HALL POSSIBLE, ITS FOCUS WAS FIRMLY ON THE FUTURE. DURING THE CELEBRATION, DEAN BECTON INTRODUCED VISION 2035, AN AMBITIOUS PLAN TO POSITION SOUTHERN MISS BUSINESS FOR EVEN GREATER IMPACT IN THE YEARS AHEAD.





TEN YEARS AGO, THIS BUSINESS BUILDING WAS JUST AN IDEA. TODAY, SCIANNA HALL STANDS AS A TESTAMENT TO WHAT CAN HAPPEN WHEN VISION AND GENEROSITY COME TOGETHER.

The evening concluded with a special presentation from the USM Foundation Board to the Scianna family, honoring the life and legacy of the late Chuck Scianna.





VISION 2035

BUILDING ON A DECADE OF MOMENTUM

NAME THE COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Secure a transformational naming gift that elevates the college to new levels of national recognition, academic excellence, and student opportunity

NAME THE CENTER FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Build on the success of The Hatchery by growing entrepreneurship education, mentorship, startup support, and innovation programming for more students

LAUNCH THE INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

Expand the Student Managed Investment Fund into a premier institute that provides immersive investing experiences, trading software, and industry partnerships

ESTABLISH THE INSTITUTE FOR SALES EXCELLENCE

Elevate the nationally recognized Professional Sales Program through enhanced technology, experiential learning, faculty support, and expanded student opportunities

STRENGTHEN SIGNATURE STUDENT PROGRAMS

Increase scholarships and leadership programming for more students to participate in the college's signature student programs

The generosity that created Scianna Hall has transformed the lives of thousands of Golden Eagles. Now, Southern Miss Business is poised to expand that impact by strengthening nationally recognized programs, creating new opportunities for experiential learning, and ensuring future generations of students have the tools to thrive.

Join us as we seek visionary partners who want to shape the future of business education and leave a lasting impact at Southern Miss.

Learn more about VISION 2035

SOUTHERN MISS BUSINESS EXCELLENCE AWARDS



The Southern Miss Business Excellence Awards honor leaders who have created meaningful change in their communities and whose careers reflect purpose, creativity, and dedication. Three awards are presented during the annual luncheon: Entrepreneur of the Year, Alumni of the Year, and Young Alumni of the Year.

ENTREPRENEURS OF THE YEAR

KEITH AND MELISSA SAUCIER

The Boardman Distinguished Entrepreneur of the Year award was created to highlight the incredible stories of visionary leaders who have turned their ideas into successful ventures. This year, the college proudly recognized **Keith** and **Melissa Saucier**.

The Sauciers are the owners of Keith's Superstores, Keithco Petroleum, BRJ Oil Co., Saucier Enterprises, and Shop Local Mississippi. At an early age, Keith began working for his uncle and father at Big K Oil Company. Over the years, he has worked in every area of the business, from pumping gas and changing truck tires to dispatch and fuel hauling, as well as scouting and constructing new store locations. As the daughter of two entrepreneurs, Melissa also began working at a very early age in her parents' businesses, gaining early experience that shaped her own entrepreneurial path.

Together, Keith and Melissa have transformed their entrepreneurial experiences into a thriving family of businesses. The first Keith's Superstore opened in 1996. Today, the chain operates 43 stores and counting. Their fuel transport business spans the southern United States. Keith and Melissa remain deeply involved in their companies, working full-time while also managing their 5B Ranch for horses and Saucier Farm, home to a variety of show animals. Their children and nephews actively compete in livestock shows and rodeos, and Keith and Melissa can always be found cheering them on.

Faith and family are at the heart of the Sauciers' values, which they share with their six children. They prioritize giving back, especially to causes supporting children, education, and their community. Their philanthropic efforts include funding five suites in the new Children's of Mississippi Hospital NICU Tower, membership in the Southern Miss Circle of Champions, support for William Carey University's School of Nursing, and multiple scholarship programs throughout Mississippi.



ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR

RETIRED MAJOR GENERAL STEVE AINSWORTH



Retired Maj. Gen. Steve Ainsworth was recognized as the 2025 Southern Miss Business Alumnus of the Year. A two-time Southern Miss graduate, he earned both his Bachelor of Science (1983, Honors) and MBA (1985, Honors) before building distinguished careers in banking and military service.

Major General (Ret.) Ainsworth began his banking career with Deposit Guaranty Bank in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1985. Over the next four decades, he held leadership positions with several major financial institutions, including Truist Bank and Fifth Third Bank, before establishing the Corporate Banking Group for Cadence Bank. He retired from Cadence in 2024 as executive vice president and managing director.

At the same time, Major General (Ret.) Ainsworth dedicated more than 42 years to military service. After beginning as an enlisted soldier in the Mississippi National Guard and earning his commission through the Southern Miss ROTC program, he rose through the ranks to serve in leadership positions across the United States and overseas. He retired in 2020 as Commander of the 84th Training Command at Fort Knox, Kentucky, following service as Commander of the 377th Theater Sustainment Command, the largest two-star command in the Department of Defense.

His military honors include the Distinguished Service Medal, Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, National Defense Service Medal, and Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, among numerous other awards and recognitions.

Beyond his professional accomplishments, he has served on the boards of numerous service and community organizations and has held advisory roles supporting the U.S. Army. He and his wife, Susanne, reside in Nashville.

YOUNG ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR

ASHTON WILLIAMS, CPA

Ashton Williams, CPA is the vice president of finance at Codaray Construction. After earning his associate degree at Jones College, Williams transferred to The University of Southern Mississippi in 2013. During his undergraduate years, he was an active member of Beta Alpha Psi and studied abroad in Japan through the Business and Culture in Asia program. In 2015, he graduated with a bachelor's degree in accounting and immediately began pursuit of a master's degree in professional accountancy. While in graduate school, Williams worked as a graduate assistant in the Dean's Office and passed two sections of the Certified Public Accountant (CPA) exam before completing the program in 2016.

That same year, he married his wife, Hayley, and the couple moved to Jackson, Mississippi, where he began his career in public accounting and successfully completed the remaining sections of the CPA exam. Since then, Williams has steadily advanced in his profession, moving from assurance associate to his current role as vice president of finance at Codaray Construction in Hattiesburg, a position he has held since 2024.



Since joining the company in 2020, Codaray has seen remarkable growth, expanding its team from 28 to 68 employees and increasing annual revenues by 249% over five years, all while completing commercial construction projects across the state of Mississippi.

Beyond his professional achievements, Williams is deeply committed to service and leadership. He is a recipient of the Jones College Rising Star Award, a graduate of both the Jones Leadership Academy and Leadership Pinebelt Class of 2022, and he continues to serve on the Southern Miss School of Accountancy Advisory Board and the Southern Miss Alumni Association Finance Committee.

Williams lives in Petal, Mississippi, with his wife and their two children, Jack and Sophie. While proud of his professional accomplishments, he considers his greatest role, responsibility, and blessing to be that of husband and father.

IN THE BUSINESS OF CULTIVATING RELATIONSHIPS

HOW J.T. TISDALE SPENT HIS CAREER HELPING OTHERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE AT SOUTHERN MISS

For nearly three decades, J.T. Tisdale has helped others leave their mark on our beloved Southern Miss. Along the way, he has built relationships with just about everyone he has crossed paths with.

Now, as he enters retirement, the impact of those relationships is coming full circle.

Mrs. Rita Scianna and the Scianna family have established the **Dr. J.T. Tisdale Business Scholarship Endowment** in his honor. Fittingly, after years spent helping others create lasting impact through philanthropy, Tisdale is now the namesake of one himself.

"When J.T. told me he was going to retire, I knew I wanted to do something," said Mrs. Scianna. "His dedication, integrity, and humor were the things that Chuck liked about him. The scholarship is a way to honor him and continue to inspire and support future business majors in their pursuit of a great education at Southern Miss."



Tisdale's Southern Miss journey began in 1994 in the Office of Public Relations, where he managed media and travel for philanthropist Oseola McCarty. The experience helped shape his deep appreciation for generosity and offered an early glimpse into the profound difference a single gift can make.

His career continued as he moved into roles across the Hattiesburg campus and even to The University of Mississippi before ultimately finding his place in the College of Business and Economic Development at Southern Miss.

Tisdale was a driving force behind many of the college's most transformational initiatives. Notably, he helped cultivate support for the construction of Scianna Hall, which now stands as a centerpiece for Southern Miss Business.







Through his ability to build meaningful, lasting relationships, he connected with thousands of donors and raised millions of dollars to support scholarships, student programs, and faculty and staff excellence. He worked alongside donors to establish the EAGLE Scholars Program, which has grown far beyond its original fundraising goals.

"When we initially started fundraising for the EAGLE Scholars endowment, we set a goal to raise enough money for 10 scholarships," said Tisdale. "Now, we have more than 25 scholarships committed, including planned giving."



Additionally, his longtime collaboration with benefactors Chuck and Rita Scianna led to the creation of the Scianna Business Leadership Program and support for the Student Managed Investment Fund, further strengthening opportunities for future business leaders.

Since the early 2000s, Tisdale has secured thousands of philanthropic gifts, including numerous six-figure and multiple seven-figure commitments. Altogether, he helped generate millions of dollars in private support, impacting students, faculty and staff across programs and colleges throughout the University.

Tisdale's passion for student success also extended beyond fundraising. He created a study-abroad program to Japan, which he led for five years, broadening students' perspectives and experiences.

Those who know him best understand that his success was never measured solely in dollars raised. His ability to connect with people from all walks of life transformed donors into close friends. Whether he was meeting with a CEO, an alumnus, a farmer, or a donor making their very first gift, he treated everyone with the same genuine interest, respect, and kindness.

Tisdale was just as likely to talk about scuba diving, gardening, music, or his latest hobby as he was to talk about fundraising. He brought curiosity, humor, and enthusiasm wherever he went, making every conversation memorable.

As he begins retirement, the opportunities he helped create will continue shaping lives for years to come. Yet perhaps his greatest gift is found in the relationships he built along the way.

After all, buildings, programs, and endowments may stand as visible reminders of philanthropy, but people are the ones who leave the most lasting impression.

Join us in celebrating J.T. Tisdale's legacy with a gift to the DR. J.T. TISDALE BUSINESS SCHOLARSHIP ENDOWMENT (Fund No. 2627).

Scan the QR code or visit go.usm.edu/TisdaleScholarship

INSPIRED LEADERS SERIES

JOHN SONNIER

SHARES LESSONS ON BUILDING A CAREER WITH PURPOSE





This year's Inspired Leaders Series welcomed Southern Miss alumnus John Sonnier, managing director and investment banking partner at William Blair. The series invites industry leaders to share their stories with the campus community and answer the question, ***"What inspires you?"***

More than 140 students attended the town hall-style conversation, where Sonnier reflected on a career that has spanned pharmaceutical sales, biotechnology, equity research, and investment banking. Based in Chicago, he advises biotechnology companies across the United States and Europe on mergers and acquisitions, strategic transactions, and capital-raising initiatives.

After graduating from Southern Miss in 1987, Sonnier began his career in sales before joining Johnson & Johnson and later Baxter Healthcare, where he developed a passion for the emerging biotechnology industry. That interest eventually led him to Wall Street, where he built a career helping innovative companies navigate some of their most important business decisions.

Sonnier emphasized the importance of building meaningful relationships, pursuing opportunities with intention, and remaining resilient when navigating competitive industries.

In addition to the keynote discussion, Sonnier met with members of the EAGLE Scholars Program over lunch. This gave the students an opportunity to engage with him in a smaller setting and ask more in-depth questions. By sharing both the challenges and opportunities that shaped his career, Sonnier offered students a look at the many paths available to business graduates and the value of approaching each step with purpose.

"Follow your interests, leverage your network, and don't be afraid to take calculated risks."

– John Sonnier

Although alumnus **Jarvis Wilbert** ’15, ‘20 has only just recently published his first children’s book, the message it holds has been years in the making.



DON’T FORGET TO LOOK BACK

By Bailey Harris Shoemake

Jarvis Wilbert has built an impressive career in the pharmaceutical industry, earning recognition as a ***Mississippi Business Journal* Top 40 Under 40 honoree,** an **Eli Lilly Territory Manager of the Year**, and the **Young Alumnus of the Year Award** from both Copiah-Lincoln Community College and Southern Miss Business.



Yet when asked about those accomplishments, the conversation quickly shifts away from himself. He'd rather spend more time acknowledging the people who helped him and the goals he has helped others reach.

"My biggest accomplishment has been helping other people get to where they wanted to be," Wilbert says. "All the accolades aside, that is what is important to me."

That idea sits at the heart of his children's book, *Don't Forget to Look Back,* which encourages its young readers to remember the people who invest in them and to look for opportunities to invest in others.



Growing up in Brookhaven, Mississippi, Wilbert fondly recounts examples of his **grandmother's** generosity, kindness, and service. Whether caring for family members or opening her home to those in need, she demonstrated the type of quiet leadership that left a lasting impression on her grandson. Years later, those memories inspired both the main character and the message behind his book.

While becoming an author may seem like an unexpected addition to his résumé, the themes throughout the book are remarkably consistent with the life Wilbert continues to build.

Wilbert serves as a senior cardiometabolic care specialist with Novo Nordisk. Before joining the company, he spent nine years with Eli Lilly and Company, steadily advancing through the organization while earning distinctions, such as the Platinum Performer Award and the Pinnacle Award.

Throughout his career, he has worked alongside physicians to improve outcomes for patients living with obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and other chronic conditions while building a reputation for his passion for patient advocacy.

His journey to pharmaceuticals began at Southern Miss.

After community college, Wilbert transferred to Southern Miss to earn a bachelor's degree in healthcare marketing. During that time, he found several mentors who encouraged him to pursue opportunities he may not have considered for himself and helped him develop the confidence to take advantage of them.



A pivotal moment came when **Dr. Kelli King,** associate teaching professor and program director of healthcare marketing, encouraged him to apply for an open position with Eli Lilly.

"All things led to black and gold. It instantly felt like home."

*- **Jarvis Wilbert** on choosing Southern Miss*



"As a student, Jarvis displayed the natural characteristics needed to succeed in a pharmaceutical sales career," said Dr. King. "He was focused, hardworking, intellectually curious, and consistently welcomed and applied feedback. What stood out most with Jarvis, though, was his genuine passion for healthcare. He approached the role as an opportunity to educate providers, advocate for patients, and contribute to better health outcomes. When the sales position with Lilly became available, I knew Jarvis would be a great fit and encouraged him to apply."

When he started with the company in 2016, reality hit quickly. Wilbert vividly remembers the shock of opening the box of training materials his first week. He looked through the overwhelming amount of information and complex topics, wondering how he could possibly learn enough to sit across from a doctor and add value to their work.

Still, he studied, growing from a new representative learning the industry to one of the company's top performers. Wilbert's early career success paved a partnership between Southern Miss and Eli Lilly's Internship Program, and he found himself in a position to do for others what so many had done for him.

Over the years, he has helped connect many Southern Miss students and recent graduates with opportunities in the competitive industry. Several alumni have followed in his footsteps after receiving guidance and encouragement from Wilbert, something he considers among his proudest accomplishments.

"I would not be where I am today without Jarvis," said Madison Calkins, a 2024 Southern Miss Business alumna who currently serves as a cardiometabolic health territory manager with Eli Lilly. "He was my first interaction with the pharmaceutical industry and the one who so selflessly guided and encouraged me through my internship."

Calkins participated in the Eli Lilly Sales Internship in 2023 and was offered a full-time position to manage the Auburn territory after graduation. Throughout the entire experience, Wilbert was always there to lean on.

Calkins went on to say, "What Jarvis has accomplished is not only a reflection of his hard work and grit, but the result of someone who genuinely cares for others and wants to help them chase their dreams."



HIS COMMITMENT TO SOUTHERN MISS EXTENDS FAR BEYOND CAREER MENTORSHIP.

Wilbert regularly returns to campus as a guest speaker in classes and to participate in programming, such as **Experience Business Casually**, sharing advice with business students preparing to enter the workforce. He has served on the Southern Miss Alumni Association Board of Directors and was selected to serve on the Search Advisory Constituency Committee that helped identify the university's 11th president, Dr. Joe Paul. His loyalty to the university continued as he returned to earn his MBA in 2020.





Wilbert visiting Brookhaven Elementary School



JARVIS' PERSONAL MOTTO:
"I love you all, regardless of _____."

Since publishing *Don't Forget to Look Back,* Wilbert has taken its message to elementary schools across Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi, including Brookhaven Elementary School, where he once sat as a student himself.

"It meant so much to me to see familiar faces in a familiar place," he said while sharing the experience of returning to his hometown.

Today, Wilbert and his fiancée, Carly, are building their life together in New Orleans, Louisiana, where he continues his work in healthcare while remaining actively involved with Southern Miss.

Whether supporting colleagues, advocating for patients, mentoring students, or reading to a classroom full of children, his motivations remain much the same.

"Be the best person you can be," Wilbert says. "And whatever you do... Don't Forget to Look Back."



After publishing *Don't Forget to Look Back,* Wilbert returned to Southern Miss at the invitation of Dr. Kelli King to share the inspiration behind the book with **current healthcare marketing students**. Dr. King ensured every student received a copy, and Wilbert personally signed each one with a handwritten note of encouragement.











A SEAT AT THE TABLE

WHERE STUDENTS LEARN TO CREATE EXPERIENCES WORTH SAVORING

Food and beverage operations is a subject that naturally engages the senses.

What guests see, smell, and taste all work together to create unforgettable memories.

That reality shaped the experience for several students enrolled in the HTM 388: Food and Beverage Operations course taught by **Dr. Wendi McLain,** the newest assistant teaching professor in the Hospitality and Tourism Management program.

Dr. McLain spent her class periods challenging her students to explore the industry from multiple angles. Supported by a Teaching Innovation Mini-Grant from the Southern Miss Center for Faculty Development, the course included food demonstrations, tasting experiences, and hands-on projects designed to bring innovative student hospitality concepts to life.

One of the most unique lessons came from someone sitting just a few seats away.

Luis Carvajal is the co-owner of his family's two Don Chuy's Mexican Grill & Bar restaurants and is simultaneously pursuing degrees in both hospitality and tourism management and accounting. Carvajal pulled back the curtain on restaurant operations during a demonstration for his classmates in Scianna Hall. During the presentation, he discussed food costs, catering logistics, and business strategy.

His transparency and firsthand perspective gave his peers a look at the challenges and opportunities that hospitality professionals navigate every day. He brought several menu items from his restaurants for sampling and even demonstrated how they make their fresh guacamole.

"I've always learned best through experience, so being part of a class like this has been incredibly valuable," said Carvajal. "I grew up in the restaurant industry, and getting to share my own experiences with my classmates during the demonstration was really meaningful! I have learned so much in my hospitality courses, and I have already taken some of these lessons back to our restaurants and implemented them."

Students also expanded their understanding of beverage operations through educational tastings at The Little Wine Shoppe in Hattiesburg. The visits introduced concepts related to sensory evaluation and the role beverages play in shaping the overall guest experience. It didn't hurt that Dr. McLain is a Level 1 sommelier and shared her own expertise while preparing the students for the tastings. Rather than simply discussing these topics in class, students were able to taste the difference for themselves.

By the end of the semester, the students shifted from observers to creators.

Each student was tasked with developing their own original mocktail concept. Five beverages advanced to the final competition, where they showcased their creations to a panel of judges and guests. The project challenged the students' originality and creativity in beverage development, as well as branding, logistics, and event coordination. The top honor went to *The Scarlett Horse,* a sparkling blend of apple and pear juice, honey, and lime created by **Kinsey Brewer** and inspired by the 2026 Year of the Fire Horse.

Each experience offered students a different perspective on the hospitality industry. Together, they created a semester-long lesson in what hospitality truly means: creating memorable experiences that leave you wanting more.

Word has traveled fast about the unique class format, and students from a variety of majors have signed up for a highly sought-after seat at the table.







Meet Dr. Wendi McLain

Dr. Wendi McLain is an assistant teaching professor specializing in hospitality and tourism in the School of Marketing at The University of Southern Mississippi. She joined the Southern Miss faculty in fall 2025. She brings 15 years of experience in private clubs, catering, and special event operations, along with a special interest in the wine and beverage industries.

This spring, McLain successfully defended her dissertation at Auburn University, earning a Ph.D. in hospitality management. Her research focused on the Taylor Swift Eras Tour experience economy and reflects her broader interest in fan engagement and live events.

McLain's mission is to engage students in the hospitality and tourism industries and increase exposure to the many opportunities available within this exciting field.

> "Hospitality and teaching are my passions. To be able to do both in such a supportive environment, alongside amazing students and faculty, makes it a joy to come to work every day."
>
> **– Dr. Wendi McLain**



MORE THAN A GAME

HOW A SMALL GROUP OF FRIENDS CREATED A STUDENT ORGANIZATION THAT HAS HELPED OTHERS FIND COMMUNITY AND BELONGING.

By Joella Kelly



Starting college often comes with more questions than answers. Many students ask themselves, "Will I find my people?" "Will I discover something I'm passionate about?" "Will campus ever start to feel like home?"

For a particular group of students, the answer came in one of the most unlikely places: the GOLDEN EAGLE PICKLEBALL CLUB.

The club began in the most ordinary of ways, with a group message between students looking for more people to join them on the pickleball court. Haiden Lowery, an accounting major, and his friend Julia Garrett would frequently invite others to play, but the group remained small.

That changed when Lowery overheard Ashlyn Le, a marketing major, talking about her love of pickleball. He told her about his vision for growing their casual meetups into a more formal group. Immediately interested, Le encouraged him to go through the university's approval process and make it an official student organization.

To do so, the group needed five officers. Lowery became president, Le vice president, and Garrett secretary. Alongside them, finance major Ngan Trat stepped into the role of treasurer, while Clay Tardiff became the event coordinator. With a full executive board in place, the group officially became the Golden Eagle Pickleball Club.

The club quickly gained popularity due to its welcoming atmosphere. Le explained, "This is a place for anyone and everyone, regardless of how good you are at pickleball or your age."

But fostering an inclusive community was only one piece of the puzzle.













Part of the club's success lies in the classroom. Several members of the executive board were business students who found themselves putting their coursework into practice. Le shared that her marketing classes directly influenced her approach to the club's social media strategy, while Coursera certifications prepared her to utilize tools like Google Analytics.

While those skills helped the club grow, its welcoming culture is what kept people coming back. As Lowery puts it, "25% of what we do is teach people how to play pickleball, and the other 75% is helping them make new friends." Experienced members regularly volunteer to spend an entire evening teaching newcomers the game, helping them feel comfortable from the moment they arrive.

The feeling of belonging has become one of the club's defining qualities. Students from every stage of their college journey, from freshmen to seniors, transfers to international students, have found lasting friendships through the club. One of those students is accounting major Gunnar Bolton, whose experience reflects exactly what the club set out to create.

As a transfer student, Bolton arrived at Southern Miss hoping to gain not only a degree, but also a community. After recognizing his classmate Lowery in an Instagram post by the Golden Eagle Pickleball Club, Bolton reached out to learn more. He joined the club's group message and was immediately struck by the excitement surrounding an upcoming pickleball play.

"The executive team had sent out a reminder about the meeting, and everyone was responding with so much excitement," he said. "It made me feel like it was something I wanted to be a part of."

Now, he is looking forward to becoming the next treasurer of the club, a role where he'll help shape the same friendly environment that first drew him in.

From the very beginning, the founders envisioned an organization that would make a difference both on campus and throughout Hattiesburg.

Each year, the club hosts two signature events. In the fall, Halloween Bash transforms Lamar County Sportsplex into a family-friendly celebration complete with trunk-or-treating. In the spring, the club partners with the Wesley Foundation to host Dinkin for Gold, raising funds for Delta Grace, an organization that provides safe and secure housing for elderly, disabled, and low-income individuals.

In just a couple of years, the tournament has seen significant growth, raising nearly $900 for Delta Grace in 2025.

"What makes me most proud isn't just the success of the tournament," said Dr. Joanne Tran, who serves as the club's faculty advisor and an associate professor of marketing. "It's seeing our students grow into confident leaders."

The organization has also worked to build a foundation beyond its founders' time at Southern Miss. To ensure a smooth transition between officers, the club created an internship program for students interested in future leadership roles. Applicants spend a semester learning how the organization operates before being considered for executive positions.

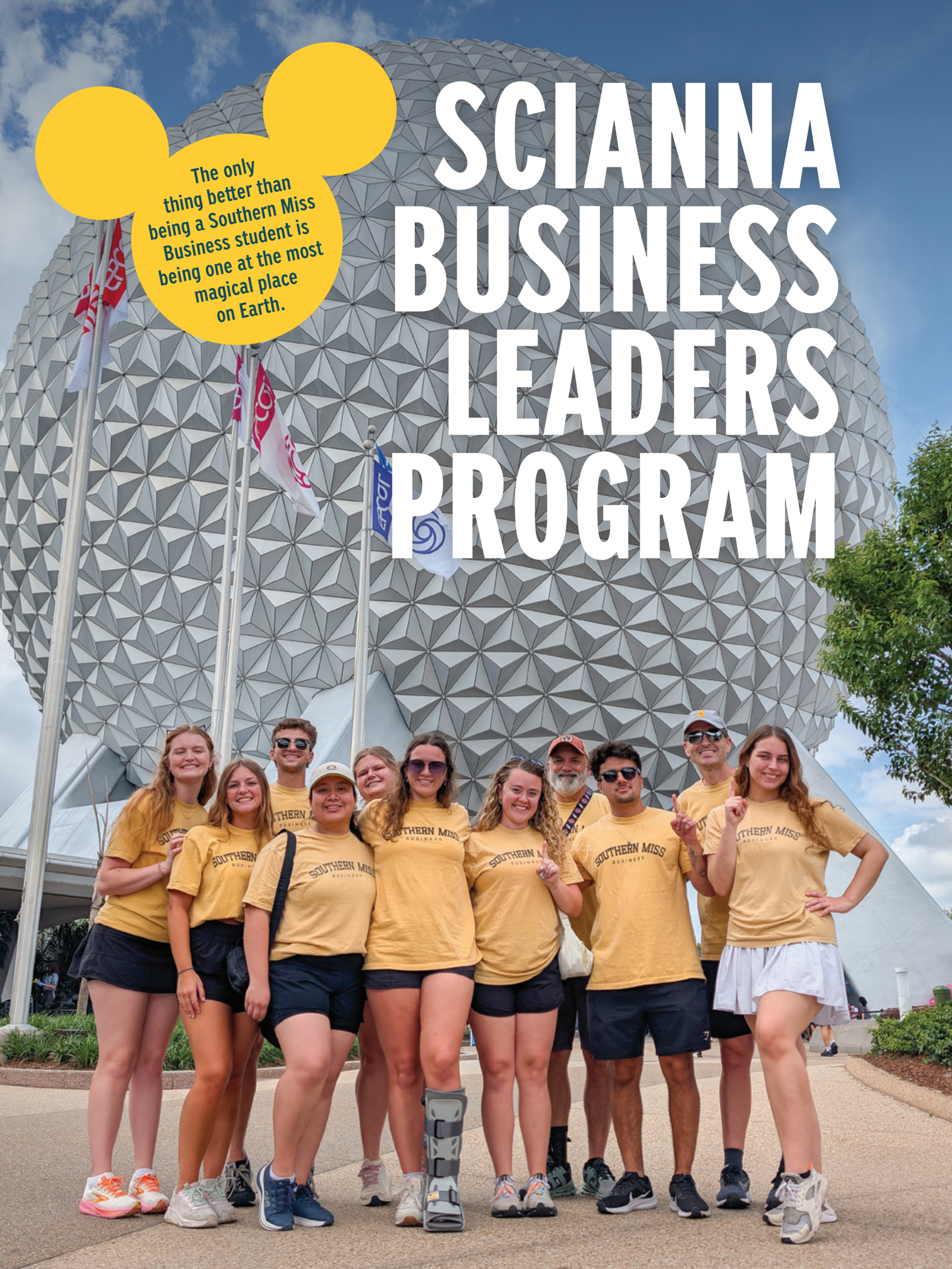
That commitment to leadership has already paid off. The Golden Eagle Pickleball Club was named the 2025 New Student Organization of the Year and continues to welcome around 40 to 50 active players each semester.

When asked what memories stand out most, neither Lowery nor Le mentioned tournaments or awards. Lowery immediately thought back to the late nights the original officers spent gathered around whiteboards in Scianna Hall, throwing around ideas late into the night.

Le's favorite memories were all encompassing. "Every pickleball play, there are always people laughing and having fun and teasing each other." That sense of belonging is exactly what the club's founders hoped to create.

What started as a small group chat has become something much bigger than pickleball. For dozens of students, it has become a place to find friends, grow as leaders, and discover that sometimes the best part of college is the community you never expected to find.

*"Get involved, introduce yourself to people, and take advantage of every opportunity to build relationships." – **Gunnar Bolton's** advice to fellow transfer students*


The only thing better than being a Southern Miss Business student is being one at the most magical place on Earth.
SCIANNA BUSINESS LEADERS PROGRAM
SOUTHERN MISS
BUSINESS







Most visitors walk through the gates of Walt Disney World focused on the fastest route to their favorite ride. But for members of the Scianna Business Leaders Program, a recent study away trip to the iconic theme park offered much more than rollercoasters.

The students were tasked with examining how one of the world's most recognizable organizations intentionally designs its culture and systems to create an experience that feels seamless to millions of guests each year.

“The students had an opportunity to take a look behind the curtain,” said Dr. Bradley Winton, program director and assistant professor of management. “They took a peek at the magic behind the Disney theme parks, which isn’t really magic at all; it’s strategic use of both time-tested and innovative leadership techniques.”

The first day took students through Disney's Magic Kingdom, where they explored topics, such as transformational leadership, organizational identity, employee empowerment, and innovation management. Rather than only discussing these concepts in their workshops, the students saw them come to life through conversations with Disney cast members.

A merchandising manager in Adventureland shared her career journey and discussed the role leadership support played in her development. A guest relations manager offered examples of how Disney empowers cast members through a process of directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating, allowing them to navigate complex guest situations in real time.

Of course, no trip to Disney World would be complete without a little fun. Between leadership discussions, students found time to enjoy attractions throughout the park, experiencing the park not only as future business leaders but also as guests.

The day concluded in the shadow of Cinderella Castle, where students reflected on a question that had surfaced repeatedly throughout their observations: ***What does Disney intentionally design that many organizations leave to chance?***

The search for that answer continued into the next day at EPCOT.

There, students shifted their attention to topics, such as strategic leadership, corporate social responsibility, sustainability, global branding, and cross-cultural leadership. One particularly memorable discussion took place in the Japan Pavilion, where international cast members shared how Disney uses empathy and perspective-taking to help employees feel welcomed and supported while living and working far from home.

For entrepreneurship student Kali Plunket, the conversation reinforced the idea that strong organizations are built by investing in people first. “This experience has taught me that if I prioritize people over profits, my organization will thrive,” she said. As students continued their journey through the World Showcase, conversations expanded to the balance Disney must maintain between authenticity and entertainment, profit and people, efficiency and relevance.

That idea ultimately became the defining theme of the trip.

The experience gave students a firsthand look at how leadership principles are integrated throughout an organization and reinforced through everyday decisions. For graduating senior Jordan Sullivan, the trip offered a new appreciation for the intentionality behind Disney's success.

“Walt Disney World’s parks are so successful because their leadership model creates a consistent customer experience by upholding transformational leadership, empowering employees, and maintaining a deep organizational culture,” she said.

The entire group echoed this sentiment, finding that the internationally recognized brand gave them a closer look at what can happen when leadership, culture, and strategy are designed intentionally rather than left to chance.

BUILDING A SALES CULTURE AT SOUTHERN MISS



Through national competitions, service-learning, student leadership, and corporate partnerships, the Southern Miss Professional Sales Program continues to shape career-ready graduates.

A RISING PROGRAM. A LASTING IMPACT.

Sales culture is more than trophies and competitions; it is how students build resilience through trial, confidence through repetition, and opportunity through persistence. The Southern Miss Sales program has created cornerstone events to foster these opportunities for students.

From the International Collegiate Sales Competition (ICSC) to the Fastenal National Sales Invitational, and from the classroom to the community, our students learn to listen, lead, solve problems, and create value.



"Representing Southern Miss on a national stage was surreal. Competing against major, well-established sales programs as part of a program only a few years old reminded me how far we've come. More than anything, I learned to trust my preparation, lean on my teammates, and believe that Southern Miss Sales belongs in those rooms."

— **Marcus Kirkland** **ICSC Finalist**
MBA Candidate, 2026-27 Graduate Sales Coach

PROGRAM EVENTS

Proven, Recognized Results

TOP 10 at International Collegiate Sales Competition

1ST PLACE Fastenal National Sales Invitational

$16,800 RAISED for nonprofit organization

Over **$3,500 AWARDED** through program competitions

National Collegiate Sales Competition **QUARTERFINALISTS**

STUDENT AND ALUMNI HIGHLIGHTS



Mary Morgan Wert and **Marcus Kirkland**
3RD RUNNER UP IN SALES MANAGEMENT CASE AT ICSC



Sierra Greene
Zoetis Account Manager
2025-26 GRADUATE SALES COACH



So'Niya Thompson
MBA Candidate
2025 FASTENAL NATIONAL CHAMPION

PROGRAM EVENTS

Connecting Skills.
Serving Communities.
Creating Lasting Impact.

Sales Week and Selling Seymour

100 BUSINESS STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

Each semester, over 100 business students team up and compete in the Selling Seymour challenge with one central prompt: "What moment sold you on Southern Miss?" Their stories showcase our brand, their voice, and their pride.



Senior Sales Challenge

$2,500 IN PRIZES AWARDED

Our Senior Sales Challenge is helping pilot and shape the future Gulf Region Intercollegiate Team-Sell Competition, preparing students to lead in high-stakes team sales scenarios.





Kids Hub Child Advocacy Center Project

$16,800 RAISED

During Child Abuse Prevention Month in April, students in the MKT 400: Advanced Professional Selling course used Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tools and live team quotas while raising critical funds for Kids Hub Child Advocacy Center (CAC).



"This project has been so rewarding because I have been able to put new sales skills into practice to fundraise for an amazing cause that directly pours back into helping our community that has been so influential in shaping me into who I am as a person!"

— **Jordan Sullivan** **Raised $4,400 for Kids Hub CAC**
Business Development Representative at VOXO
2026 Outstanding Student in Sales, The Golden Quills

WHAT'S NEXT

CENTER FOR SALES EXCELLENCE

Create a hub for sales education, research, and corporate engagement that drives impact and innovation.

GULF REGION INTERCOLLEGIATE TEAM-SELL COMPETITION

Host a regional Gulf Region Intercollegiate Team-Sell Competition to elevate our program and showcase student talent.

CORPORATE PARTNERSHIPS

Deepen relationships that create real-world experiences and career opportunities.

M TRANSPORT

FASTENAL INDUSTRIAL & CONSTRUCTION SUPPLIES

CINTAS READY FOR THE WORKDAY™

United Rentals

HOWARD TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

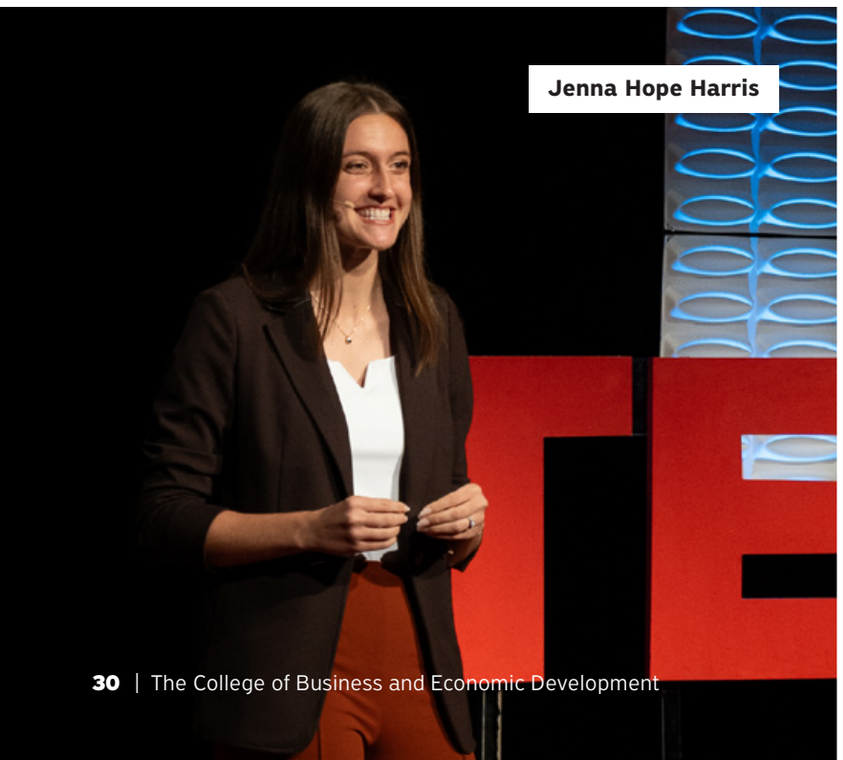
Enterprise Mobility™

For program details or investment opportunities, contact Kevin.Buckley@usm.edu.

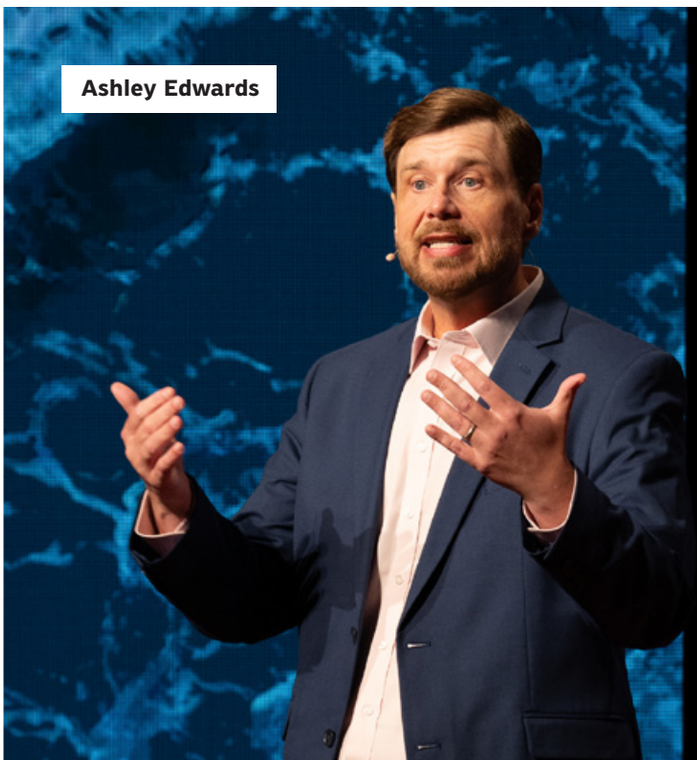
TEDxSOUTHERN MISS HIGHLIGHTS INNOVATION AND LEADERSHIP IN THE BLUE ECONOMY

By Dr. Joyce Powell





Jenna Hope Harris



Ashley Edwards

The inaugural TEDxSouthern Miss took place at Southern Miss Gulf Park campus in Long Beach, Mississippi, bringing together thought leaders, innovators, and community members to explore the theme *Blue Economy.* Organized by the School of Leadership within the College of Business and Economic Development, the event featured a dynamic lineup of speakers whose ideas reflected the region's growing focus on sustainability, innovation, and leadership along the Coast.


Dr. Joe Paul

Ashley Edwards, nationally recognized coastal resilience expert, opened with "The Blue Economy: A Blueprint for Our Future," highlighting how coastal Mississippi can harness innovation, resilience, and collaboration to shape long-term prosperity. Pappu Jha, a USM undergraduate student, followed with "AI for Ocean Health," exploring how artificial intelligence can be used to protect marine environments.



Dr. Courtney Taylor

Geoff Douglass, co-founder and CEO of Mythos AI, presented "Everything Depends on Ships: How Autonomy at Sea Will Secure Our Future," revealing how autonomous technology is revolutionizing the maritime industry. Jenna Hope Harris inspired the audience with "Mindset Matters: Taking Your Thoughts Captive," encouraging personal growth through intentional reflection.

Dr. Jennifer Lemacks, professor and associate dean for research and innovation at Southern Miss, delivered "If My Neighbor Is Unwell, Then So Am I," which emphasized community health and equity across the Gulf South. Jessica Rankin, founder of The Safe Food Culture LLC, shared "Food Safety in the Blue Economy: A Three-Part Strategy for Success," focusing on cultivating safer and more effective workplace cultures.


Sarah Myers and **Dr. Jennifer Lemacks**

Sarah Myers, director of The Children's Center for Communication and Development at Southern Miss, gave "Anchored Beginnings: How Early Intervention Shapes a Region's Future," illustrating how supporting children and families strengthens communities. Dr. Courtney Taylor, executive director of Accelerate MS, connected education and opportunity in "Where Workforce Meets Water."

The program concluded with "Infinite Blue," an original poem written and performed by Dr. Leila Hamdan, professor and associate vice president for research at Southern Miss, who reflected on the depth, mystery, and promise of the ocean.

The event drew a diverse audience of campus and community members, along with virtual viewers across the region, all eager to engage with the exchange of ideas and inspiration. TEDxSouthern Miss reflected months of planning and collaboration among Southern Miss employees and community partners, demonstrating the impact of leadership in action and the power of ideas worth spreading.

For more information about TEDxSouthern Miss and to watch the recorded talks, visit ***usm.edu/tedx*** *or scan the QR code.*

CENTER FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP

BUILDING MOMENTUM. EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY.

The Center for Entrepreneurship (CfE) entered a new stage of growth as expanded programming, strategic partnerships, and student engagement strengthened its role as a catalyst for innovation at Southern Miss. From launching new founder pathways and student organizations to increasing regional visibility and deepening collaborations across campus, the CfE continued building an entrepreneurial ecosystem that serves students at every stage of their journey.



A YEAR OF IMPACT

This year's momentum has translated into measurable impact, including more students engaged, more ventures supported, more funding deployed, and more opportunities created for students to transform ideas into action.

1,371 STUDENTS ENGAGED

$26K TOTAL AWARDED

170 STARTUPS SERVED

PROGRAM GROWTH

DISCOVER

Spark curiosity and build entrepreneurial awareness.

STUDENT PARTICIPANTS FY2026 **312** » **864** TOTAL TO DATE



COFFEE w/ an Entrepreneur

VALIDATE

Test ideas, solve problems, and reduce uncertainty.

STUDENT COMPETITORS FY2026 **141** UP 70% » **276** TOTAL TO DATE



HATCHATHON

NEW AND GROWING

E-Society: More than 100 students joined the Entrepreneurship Society during its first year, creating a vibrant interdisciplinary community of founders, innovators, and future entrepreneurs. Launched in fall 2025 through a partnership with the university's Office of Innovation Management and supported by a National Science Foundation ART grant, the organization provides students with networking opportunities, professional development, founder meetups, and connections to the Center's venture development ecosystem.

Agile Fund: Designed to help student ventures capitalize on time-sensitive opportunities, the Agile Fund provides flexible support for rapid prototyping, customer discovery, specialized equipment, and travel to external competitions.

FlightPath—Tier2 Rise: As the next tier in FlightPath beyond CheckPoint, Rise provides second-stage funding and mentorship to help promising student ventures refine their business models, validate markets, and prepare for growth.

VentureWorks: Focused on entrepreneurial skill development, VentureWorks offers hands-on workshops and expert-led programming that help students transform ideas into action.

The Happenings: The Happenings is a student-produced video series connecting students with opportunities, events, and founder stories from across the CfE's entrepreneurial ecosystem

FEATURED STUDENT STARTUP



Sixer: Building a Home for Cricket in North America

When Southern Miss student Muhammad Shamir Siddiqui looked at the North American sports landscape, he saw an underserved community. Despite cricket being the world's second most-watched sport, millions of fans across the United States and Canada still lack a dedicated platform to watch matches, engage with fellow fans, and connect with local leagues.

To change that, Shamir co-founded Sixer, an integrated platform combining free live streaming, interactive fan engagement, fantasy gaming, and league management into a single experience built specifically for North American cricket. Throughout the past year, Sixer reached several major milestones, including acceptance into Y Combinator Startup School, participation in the PEAK SportsTech Conference, the launch of its public waitlist, and its first official league partnership—streaming international league cricket legally and free in North America for the first time.

The Center for Entrepreneurship at Southern Miss played a key role in Sixer's journey, providing $6,500 in combined funding through FlightPath (CheckPoint and Rise) and the Golden Idea Pitch Competition, along with mentorship, strategic guidance, and opportunities to connect with investors and industry leaders.

Today, Sixer continues to expand its technology, partnerships, and audience as it works toward becoming the home for millions of cricket fans across North America.

LAUNCH

Provide resources to move promising ventures forward.

STUDENT COMPETITORS FY2026 **77** » **379** TOTAL TO DATE

GOLDEN IDEA PITCH COMPETITION







GROW

Continue building ventures, networks, and long-term impact.

9 STARTUP VENTURE PITCHES FY2026

57 TOTAL TO DATE

FLIGHTPATH



ACCOUNTING

A PROGRAM ON THE RISE

THE SCHOOL OF ACCOUNTANCY CONTINUES TO ATTRACT MORE STUDENTS INTO ONE OF THE NATION'S MOST IN-DEMAND CAREERS.



The undergraduate Accounting program at Southern Miss has experienced remarkable enrollment growth over the last four years. Between fall 2023 and fall 2026, the School of Accountancy's undergraduate program *enrollment increased 60%,* contributing to the program's highest overall enrollment in the past decade.

A key contributor to that growth has been the introduction of the fully online undergraduate accounting program. Designed to provide greater flexibility, the program allows students to earn their degree in accounting while continuing to work, care for their families, or live outside commuting distance of campus.

For Anna Courtney, that flexibility made returning to college possible. After stepping away from higher education for more than 20 years and building a career as a chef, Courtney returned to Southern Miss as a transfer student in the online accounting program with a career change in mind.

"I chose to return to school to pursue a second career in accounting, with a particular interest in governmental or not-for-profit sectors," said Courtney. "The flexibility of Southern Miss' online Accounting program has allowed me to avoid choosing between my future dreams and the present gift of being with my family during these crucial early years. I have earned my degree while simultaneously raising my daughter, working, and living outside the Hattiesburg area."

Another example is Dr. Kevin Meyers, who previously earned a Ph.D. in polymer science, but returned to Southern Miss to earn a degree in accounting while preparing to assume leadership of his family's CPA firm.

"I liked the convenience and flexibility of the online program," said Dr. Meyers. "I plan to take over my family business in the future, so I wanted to start working toward earning my CPA license. By taking the classes online, I was able to continue learning the ins and outs of the business and earn my degree at the same time."

The online format has also created new opportunities for professionals who already hold bachelor's degrees in business to return and complete the accounting coursework required to pursue the CPA license.

The success of the fully online option has complemented, rather than replaced, the traditional undergraduate experience. Enrollment in the Hattiesburg in-person undergraduate Accounting program increased 28% between fall 2024 and fall 2026, demonstrating continued demand among students seeking the traditional college experience.

Together, the two pathways have expanded the school's reach well beyond Mississippi. Current students have joined the program from across the Southeast, including Texas, Kentucky, Ohio, North Carolina, and South Carolina, as well as internationally from Nepal and the Philippines.

The school is also strengthening the future of the profession through initiatives, such as High School Accounting Days, which introduces high school students to career opportunities within the profession while building relationships with educators and career coaches across the region. These efforts help students better understand the vast opportunities available in accounting and encourage them to consider the profession earlier in their academic journeys.

"We have been thrilled to see our program grow over the past few years," shared Dr. Blaise Sonnier, director of the School of Accountancy. "Our faculty have made a commitment to deliver the same high-quality accounting education online that we provide on campus. Our goal is to provide a home at Southern Miss for anyone interested in pursuing an accounting degree from an AACSB-accredited program, in a format that fits their busy lives."

The school's continued growth comes at a time when employers nationwide are seeking more accounting professionals. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of accountants and auditors is projected to grow 5% from 2024 to 2034, creating approximately 124,200 job openings each year. Much of that demand is expected to result from retirements, economic growth, and increasingly complex financial reporting, tax regulations, and business operations.

By expanding access while maintaining a strong traditional undergraduate experience, the School of Accountancy is preparing more students to meet that demand and ensuring that a Southern Miss accounting education is accessible to students wherever life has taken them.



INNOVATIONS IN SOUTHERN MISS BUSINESS CURRICULUM



Staying competitive requires continuous innovation and adaptability. That is why Southern Miss Business is constantly evolving our curriculum to ensure students are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to stand out among their peers. Emphasizing innovation, accessibility, and personalized learning, we are thrilled to share the following updates.

Master of Science in Economic Development Now Offering New Dual Degree Options

Graduate students pursuing the Master of Science in Economic Development now have even more opportunities to customize their education. The program now offers dual degree options with both the **Master of Business Administration** and the **Master of Science in Sport Management,** allowing students to combine complementary areas of expertise while earning two graduate degrees. These new pathways prepare graduates with a broader skill set for leadership roles across business, economic development, and the growing sports industry.

School of Management Updates Undergraduate Degree Programs

The School of Management has updated its undergraduate degree offerings to give students clearer, more recognizable credentials. Approved by the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL), the former General Business emphasis is now the **Bachelor of Science in Business Administration,** while **Entrepreneurship** has become its own standalone bachelor's degree program. The new Entrepreneurship program is also classified under its own national Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code, allowing Southern Miss to benchmark its program directly against leading entrepreneurship programs across the country. Together, these changes strengthen the visibility of our degrees, make it easier for employers to understand graduates' qualifications, and ensure Southern Miss Business remains competitive in an evolving marketplace.

School of Leadership Introduces New Names and Curriculum Updates for Master's and Doctoral Programs

Effective fall 2026, the School of Leadership introduced new names and curriculum updates for two of its graduate programs, reflecting their continued evolution while building on the strong human capital development foundation that has long shaped the programs. The Master of Science in Human Capital Development became the **Master of Science in Leadership and Talent Development,** while the Doctor of Philosophy in Human Capital Development became the **Doctor of Philosophy in Leadership and Organizational Development.**

The updated names more closely align with contemporary industry and academic terminology and reflect the programs' emphasis on human-centered leadership, workforce development, learning, performance improvement, and organizational success.

The **Master of Science in Leadership and Talent Development** will retain its 30-credit-hour structure while incorporating revised coursework designed to strengthen applied learning, research foundations, consulting-focused experiences, and performance improvement practice. Offered fully online, the program prepares working professionals to lead organizational growth, design workforce development initiatives, implement evidence-based strategies, and support employee and organizational success across a variety of sectors.

The **Doctor of Philosophy in Leadership and Organizational Development** will retain its 54-credit-hour structure and continue to prepare scholar-practitioners through a combination of professional core courses, research core courses, and electives. Curriculum updates strengthen the program's focus on organizational development, performance improvement and evaluation, leadership, learning and talent development, workforce development, qualitative and quantitative research, statistics, and applied organizational practice. Designed for working professionals, the Gulf Coast-based, executive-format program will continue to blend face-to-face sessions with online instruction, creating a collaborative environment where research, practice, and leadership innovation intersect.

Together, the updated programs build on the School of Leadership's human capital development roots while broadening how they prepare professionals to advance people, learning, performance, and organizational development.

Southern Miss Joins Certified Fraud Examiner's Anti-Fraud Education Partnership

The University of Southern Mississippi has joined the **Association of Certified Fraud Examiners' Anti-Fraud Education Partnership,** positioning Southern Miss as one of only two universities in Mississippi to partner with the ACFE. Through this partnership, Southern Miss Business and the School of Accountancy gain access to high-quality classroom resources, including videos, case studies, the *Fraud Examiners Manual*, and opportunities to bring in guest lecturers. Students also benefit from discounted ACFE memberships and training materials. With fraud risks continuing to rise in today's business landscape, this partnership strengthens our commitment to preparing students with real-world skills that help organizations solve complex problems.

Social Media Content and Strategy Minor Prepares Students for Digital Careers

To strengthen career preparation in a rapidly changing field, the School of Marketing revised courses supporting the Social Media Content and Strategy minor, including Social Media Marketing, Digital Marketing, and Digital Marketing and Analytics. The updated curriculum emphasizes current competencies in content development, digital campaign planning, audience engagement, analytics and performance measurement.

These revisions better align classroom learning with the tools, strategies and decision-making skills used by today's marketing professionals. Students completing the minor will be prepared to contribute across social media management, content strategy, digital marketing, brand communication and related career fields. By connecting academic preparation with evolving employer expectations, the strengthened minor advances Southern Miss' commitment to ensuring graduates are ready for life!



EAGLE SCHOLARS PROGRAM
PREPARING STUDENTS TO BE READY FOR LIFE

The EAGLE Scholars Program continues to prepare students for success long before they step into their first full-time role. Through a combination of leadership development workshops and hands-on skill building, the 2025-26 class of EAGLE Scholars spent the year strengthening some of the qualities that matter most in today's workplace: adaptability, self-awareness, and trust.

Janea McDonald, owner of Edge Consulting, kickstarted both semesters of programming. In the fall, she helped the students develop confidence in public speaking through hands-on practice. In the spring, she shifted the focus to emotional intelligence, guiding them through self-assessments and workplace scenarios designed to strengthen social awareness.

One of the program's most meaningful sessions was led by Dr. Joe Paul, president of The University of Southern Mississippi and previous director of the EAGLE Scholars Program. During his workshop on active listening and building trust, students examined the role listening plays in effective leadership and relationship-building.





"It was truly meaningful for our EAGLE Scholars to spend time with President Joe Paul," said Russ Willis, program director and associate provost for student success. "University presidents have countless demands on their schedules, yet Dr. Paul chose to engage directly with our students in a hands-on workshop setting. His willingness to invest his time, share his experiences, and interact personally with our students speaks volumes about his commitment to student success."



Throughout the year, the scholars learned from accomplished professionals representing a variety of industries. Haley Ford-Harrison, director of brands for Unify by Bread, challenged students to define and communicate their personal brands. Human resources professional Jean Denton led discussions on navigating difficult workplace conversations, while Dr. Lindsey Lewis, owner of INGAGE Talent Development, guided the students through the DiSC Assessment, helping them better understand their own work styles and how they interact with others.

The year's programming concluded with a workshop led by Kevin Buckley, professor of practice and director of the Professional Sales Program. The experience of crafting and presenting a compelling elevator pitch challenged the group to communicate their value with confidence.

This year also marked the introduction of a new requirement designed to help the scholars strengthen their professional credentials. Each student completed at least two Coursera modules, encouraging them to develop specialized skills while working toward industry-recognized microcredentials that enhance their career readiness.

More than a scholarship, the EAGLE Scholars Program serves as a launching pad for future business leaders. By combining professional development, meaningful mentorship, and real-world learning experiences, the program equips students with the confidence and skills needed to thrive in their careers and make a lasting impact in their communities.



Wish You Were Here!

CARTOLINA POSTALE

Apr 16 6AM 1999
ITALY
ROME

This summer, several business students took advantage of study-abroad opportunities to London, Italy, and Japan, discovering that perspective is one of the most valuable things you can bring home.






















SOUTHERN MISS BUSINESS
SOUTHERN MISS BUSINESS
DIOR
DIOR
PRADA

NOT ONE EXPECTED ROUTE

THE STORY OF DEAMY ALVARADO

By Joella Kelly



At Southern Miss, thousands of students return to campus each semester with stories shaped by hard work, resilience, and ambition. During the spring 2026 semester, one of those stories took center stage.

Deamy Alvarado, a senior accounting major from Hattiesburg, Mississippi, received the Judge R.J. Bishop Mississippian Award after being nominated by one of her professors, Amber B. Hatten, professor of practice. She was honored by the USM Foundation at the Founders' Day Student Awards Ceremony.

The Judge R.J. Bishop Mississippian Award is an esteemed, $8,500 scholarship recognizing undergraduate seniors who demonstrate determination and resilience in overcoming significant physical, personal, or financial challenges in pursuit of their education. In her nomination letter, Hatten shared, "Upon review of the Bishop Award's eligibility criteria, there is no student in the School of Accountancy more deserving than Deamy. She is an exemplary student who consistently strives for excellence in every aspect of her life." Hatten went on to describe Alvarado as kind, humble, composed, respectful, and driven.

Southern Miss has always been on the periphery of Alvarado's life, but one memory made it feel personal long before she ever stepped into a classroom. As a baby, her parents brought her to the front of campus, where they took family photos by the flower beds. Growing up, her mom would point them out each time they passed the spot, saying, ***"Look, that's where we took those pictures!"*** What once felt like a simple moment became something more meaningful over time. Now, as a student walking the same campus, those photos feel less like a memory and more like the beginning of a story she was always meant to step into.

As a first-generation college student, Alvarado has always had a strong sense of responsibility to pursue a degree, not just for herself, but also for her family. She often draws on the lessons she learned from her parents to propel herself forward, never forgetting the sacrifices they've made to help her pursue her education. She describes her father as the biggest inspiration for her strong work ethic, and her mother as her greatest source of support, leaning on them through every endeavor as she moved closer to achieving her dreams.

However, the road to reaching her goals was not without hurdles. During her senior year of high school, she experienced a medical emergency that affected her physical and emotional well-being. While navigating this difficult period, she missed key deadlines that would have supported her plans to attend Southern Miss.

After wrestling with the uncertainty of whether her dreams were still within reach, she shifted her focus toward new opportunities and ultimately began her academic journey at Pearl River Community College (PRCC). Because of her outstanding academic performance, Alvarado earned a full scholarship to attend PRCC. Once there, she joined the Honors Institute, where she explored a variety of potential career paths before ultimately finding her place in accounting.

A few days before starting as a transfer student at Southern Miss, Alvarado and her mother decided to visit campus. Together, they approached Scianna Hall with awe and excitement. While exploring the building, they ran into Hatten and learned that she was one of the accounting professors who would be teaching Alvarado. Following that chance encounter, Alvarado reflected on the meaningful conversation she had with Hatten, saying she felt reassured that she would be taken care of by the faculty at Southern Miss.

Since officially becoming a Golden Eagle, Alvarado has made the most of every opportunity at Southern Miss. She is an active member of Beta Alpha Psi and serves as an officer in Beta Gamma Sigma. In addition, she represents the college as a Cintas Business Student Ambassador while maintaining an impressive GPA. Her dedication to academic excellence and campus involvement reflects her strong commitment to both her personal and professional growth.

This semester, when Alvarado received the news that she was to be nominated for the Bishop Award, her first thought was that she was undeserving. "While I have faced and overcome significant obstacles, I often focused more on what I still needed to accomplish rather than how far I had already come," she explained. After the initial shock of the nomination, she slowed down and thoughtfully reflected on her journey and the perseverance it took to get to where she is today. She describes receiving the award as an honor that motivates her to continue striving for excellence. It has been an experience that reassures her that, in her own words, "progress does not always have to follow one expected route to be meaningful."

Alvarado was accepted to the Master of Professional Accountancy program at Southern Miss and began in fall 2026. While considering her future, she is interested in a service-led career in governmental or nonprofit accounting. She has also given serious thought to law school one day, with dreams of practicing immigration law or even estate planning after seeing how well her accounting degree could intersect with the field.

With the world before her and a future that is undeniably bright, Alvarado is wrapping up her senior year at the special place where she and her family took photos so many years ago. As she continues to pave her own path, one thing remains certain—***she will always have the support of her parents and her Golden Eagle family, all the way to the top.***

"Progress does not always have to follow one expected route to be meaningful."



Deamy Alvarado and Amber Hatten after the University Student Awards Ceremony

CELEBRATING
BUSINESS STUDENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS



2025-26 PUBLIC COMPANY ACCOUNTING OVERSIGHT BOARD (PCAOB) SCHOLARS

Laura Katherine Stovall and Nila Griffin

Read the full story!



SOUTHERN MISS GRADUATE SCHOOL HALL OF FAME

Pasawee Reansuwong | Siti Norris

2026 CITIZEN SCHOLARS

Gracelyn Barrois
Kathryn Flock
Alexandria Green
Ja-Lea Holmes
Corinda Kelly
Madison Keyes
Kaylee Nguyen
Natalee Parker
Jordan Sullivan



2026 DRAPEAU PRIZE WINNER, UNDERGRADUATE SYMPOSIUM ON RESEARCH AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY

Larissa Lee



CFA SOCIETY OF MISSISSIPPI AWARD

Maksym Chikin



SUMMER RESEARCH GRANT RECIPIENT, DRAPEAU CENTER FOR UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

Ashlyn Le

TEAM RANKED NO. 11 OVERALL

NATIONAL COLLEGIATE SPORT SALES CHAMPIONSHIP



Heath Deloach and Olivia Reid advanced to the round of 32 in the Ticket Sales Presentation Pro bracket.

Heath Deloach, No. 3 national finish in the inaugural Man vs. Machine competition



ALL-SUN BELT FIRST TEAM

Davis Gillespie
Matthew Russo



MEN'S TEAM HIGHEST GPA

2026 TALON AWARDS

Southern Miss Baseball



DID YOU KNOW?

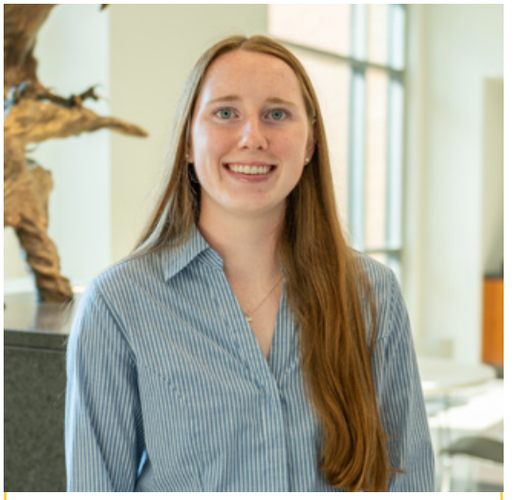
More than 50% of the Southern Miss Baseball team is made up of business students.



CANNON-HEINHORST UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH ENDOWMENT AWARD

HONORS COLLEGE

Reuben McDonald



MSCPA UNDERGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP

Madison Keyes



MSCPA RALPH F. NEELY GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP

Anna Grace Purser



SUSAN A. SILTANEN GRADUATE SCHOOL SYMPOSIUM

Susan Dobson, Human Capital Development Ph.D.

2nd Place Oral Presentation, Social and Education Sciences and Business Category



MISSISSIPPI YOUNG BANKERS ORRIN SWAYZE SCHOLASTIC AWARD FINALIST

J.C. Hosey



UNIVERSITY STUDENT AWARDS CEREMONY

Deamy Alvarado
Judge R. J. Bishop Mississippian Award

Charlie Lanehart
Outstanding Freshman

Dominick Impastato
Outstanding Freshman

Haiden Lowery
Best Citizen Award and Who's Who

Ella King
Who's Who

Marcus Kirkland
Who's Who

Lanie Abney
Who's Who

Lundon Hidalgo
Who's Who

THE GOLDEN QUILLS

MOMENTS THAT MATTER

The Golden Quills has become one of the college's most meaningful traditions, bringing together students, faculty, staff, friends, and loved ones to celebrate the individuals whose leadership, service, scholarship, and character shape Southern Miss Business.















Scan here to learn more about The Golden Quills and view a full list of the award recipients →

CELEBRATING
BUSINESS FACULTY AND STAFF



Dr. Vishal Arghode

Business Advisory Council Research Award
The Golden Quills

Summer Grant for Improvement of Instruction
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Dr. Greg Bradley

Named Executive Director of the Executive Education Program at Southern Miss



Dr. Jacob Breland

One Coast Top 10 Community Leader Award



Kevin Buckley

***Mississippi Business Journal's* 40 Under 40 Honoree**

Coursera Mini-Grant
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Dr. Ali Dogru

Louis K. Brandt Publication Award
The Golden Quills

Business and Economic Development Service Award
The Golden Quills

Excellence in Service Award
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony

AI for Social Good
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony

Coursera Mini-Grant
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Dr. Banu Elmadag

Aubrey K. Lucas and Ella Lucas Endowment for Faculty Excellence Award
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony

Coursera Mini-Grant
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Mac Forsyth

Outstanding Chapter Advisor Award
Sigma Alpha Epsilon Nationals

Read the full story!



Casey Maugh Funderburk

ACUE Distinguished Teaching Scholar
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Dr. Mary Funk

ACUE AI in Higher Education Endorsement
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Dr. Aisha Ghimire

Service-Learning Faculty Fellow
Center for Community Engagement

Advancing Excellence in Teaching Grant
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony

Coursera Mini-Grant
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Dr. Ke Gong

Junior Faculty Outstanding Research Award
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Amber Hatten

Emerging Graduate Mentor Award
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony

Advancing Excellence in Teaching Grant
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Dr. Abubaker Haddud

Butch Oustalet Distinguished Professorship Excellence in Research Award
Southern Miss Gulf Park Awards Ceremony



Dr. Alison Hubbard

Nina Bell Suggs Endowed Professorship
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Dr. Srinidhi Kanuri

Business Advisory Council Research Award
The Golden Quills



Dr. Kelli King

ACUE AI in Higher Education Endorsement
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Dr. Wendi McLain

Summer Grant for Improvement of Instruction
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Dr. Chao Meng

Business Advisory Council Research Award
The Golden Quills

Sabbatical
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Dr. Dustin Odom

Summer Grant for Improvement of Instruction
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Dr. Shinhee Park

Coursera Mini-Grant
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Dr. Joyce Powell

ACUE AI in Higher Education Endorsement
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony

Staff Excellence Award (Professional)
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Dr. Sabrina Reed

Coursera Mini-Grant
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Dr. Christopher Smith

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Fellow
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony

Advancing Excellence in Teaching Grant
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Alexis Stoner

ACUE AI in Higher Education Endorsement
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony

Coursera Mini-Grant
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Brenda Tart

Outstanding Staff Member Award
The Golden Quills



Dr. Joanne Tran

Joseph A. Greene Excellence in Teaching Award
The Golden Quills

Excellence in Teaching Award
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony

Service-Learning Faculty Fellow
Center for Community Engagement



Wei Wang

2025 Champion of Tourism Education
Mississippi Tourism Association and the Louisiana Travel Association

Business Advisory Council Research Award
The Golden Quills

Advancing Excellence in Teaching Grant
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony

Coursera Mini-Grant
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Dr. Bradley Winton

Business Advisory Council Research Award
The Golden Quills

Provost Faculty Fellow
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony

Junior Faculty Outstanding Research Award
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Dr. Gallayanee Yaoyuneyong

Coursera Mini-Grant
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Dr. Zikai Zhou

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Fellow
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony

Coursera Mini-Grant
Faculty and Staff Awards Ceremony



Ready for Life Champion Awards

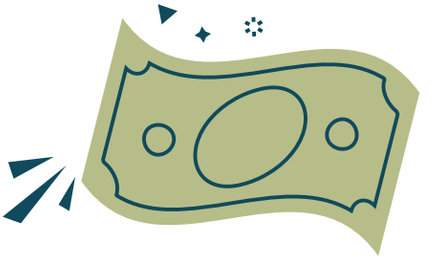
The School of Marketing received a Ready for Life Emerging Champions Award for the Hospitality Passport Program, developed by Drs. Wei Wang and Wendi McLain. The initiative is designed to integrate certifications and hands-on learning into the curriculum to better prepare students for careers in the industry.

Julia Bradley received a Ready for Life Champion Award for her innovative work preparing accounting students for internships and careers through the Accounting 311 course and her leadership of Beta Alpha Psi.





EDUCATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ACCOUNTANTS



LINKING LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND COGNITIVE ABILITY



Based on research by Drs. Matthew Sargent and Bradley Winton

Accounting students need more than the ability to memorize technical rules. To succeed in the workplace, they must be able to think critically, solve problems, evaluate complex situations, and make strong professional judgments. This study explores whether Bloom's taxonomy, a widely used framework for organizing learning objectives, aligns with the cognitive abilities of accounting students. Bloom's taxonomy includes six learning categories: remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create. These categories are often viewed as progressing from lower- to higher-level thinking.

COGNITIVE SKILLS WITHIN THE REVISED BLOOM'S TAXONOMY

Lower Level Cognitive Skills ⟵ ⟶ Higher Level Cognitive Skills

REMEMBER	UNDERSTAND	APPLY	ANALYZE	EVALUATE	CREATE
Recall specific facts	Grasp meaning of materials	Use information in a new situation	Identify schemas or relationships	Use information to make judgment	Create or develop something new

We studied undergraduate accounting students enrolled in two accounting courses at a large university in the southwestern United States. Students completed data analytics and critical thinking assignments, and we analyzed the words students used in these assignments and matched them with Bloom's taxonomy categories. We also asked students to complete the Lectical Reflective Judgment Assessment, which measured their level of cognitive development and reflective judgment. Reflective judgment, an indicator of deeper cognitive ability, is a person's ability to think through uncertainty, consider evidence, understand that multiple answers may exist, and make reasoned decisions. This ability is especially important in accounting because professionals often face complex, uncertain issues that lack a single simple answer.

We found that only one Bloom's category, "understand," was significantly related to students' reflective judgment scores. The other Bloom's categories, remember, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create, did not show a significant relationship with the students' measured cognitive ability. Our research suggests that simply using assignments or learning objectives labeled with higher-level Bloom's categories may not automatically mean students are developing stronger critical thinking skills, and additional focus is needed to make progress.

One possible explanation is that students with stronger reflective judgment may express their thinking through explanation, interpretation, and summarization, which are connected to the "understand" category, which refers to our ability to summarize and explain information. In other words, students may be doing deeper thinking, but their written responses may show that thinking through language associated with understanding rather than words linked to analysis, evaluation, or creation.

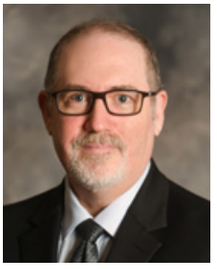
These findings are important for accounting education. While Bloom's taxonomy remains useful for organizing course goals and assignments, educators should be careful not to treat it as a strict, step-by-step hierarchy in which students move cleanly from one category to the next. We suggest that Bloom's taxonomy alone may not be sufficient to measure or develop cognitive ability; instead, educators should combine it with cognitive development models, such as reflective judgment, when designing learning activities for students.

Overall, our research shows that accounting education should continue moving beyond rote memorization and overly focusing on technical knowledge. There should be alignment throughout the curriculum to help students practice professional judgment, deal with uncertainty, and consider multiple viewpoints. By strategically using Bloom's taxonomy and pairing it with tools that directly support cognitive development, like the reflective judgment model, educators can better prepare the next generation of accountants for the increasingly complex demands of the profession.

Our research suggests that simply using assignments or learning objectives labeled with higher-level Bloom's categories may not automatically mean students are developing stronger critical thinking skills, and additional focus is needed to make progress.

TO READ THE FULL RESEARCH ARTICLE, SCAN THE QR CODE OR SEE:

Sargent, M. J., Winton, B. (2026). Educating the next generation of accountants: Linking learning objectives and cognitive ability. *Journal of Accounting, Business and Management,* 33(1), 13-32.



Dr. Matthew Sargent is an assistant professor in the School of Accountancy at The University of Southern Mississippi.



Dr. Bradley Winton is an assistant professor in the School of Leadership at The University of Southern Mississippi.

TOURIST DINING CHOICES UNDER CONFLICTING ONLINE REVIEWS

A SOCIAL MOTIVE PERSPECTIVE

Based on research by Dr. Wei Wang



Online reviews have become one of the most influential sources of information for travelers. Yet tourists often encounter a common dilemma: local residents and fellow travelers do not always agree. A restaurant celebrated on social media by visitors may receive only modest praise from locals, while establishments favored by residents may be overlooked by tourists. When recommendations conflict, whose advice do travelers trust?



This question motivated a recent study co-authored by Dr. Wei Wang with an international team of researchers from China, Japan, and the United Kingdom. Published in the *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, a top-tier ABDC A* ranked journal, the highest category in the Australian Business Deans Council journal ranking system, the study examines how tourists navigate conflicting recommendations from local residents and fellow travelers. Rather than focusing solely on review ratings, the research investigates the social and psychological factors that shape decision-making when consumers encounter competing opinions online.

Drawing on Social Identity Theory, the researchers examined two fundamental social motives: affiliation, the desire to connect with others and reinforce social bonds, and uniqueness, the desire to express individuality and stand apart from the crowd. In today's digital environment, where dining experiences are frequently shared on social media, these motivations can play an important role in shaping consumer choices.

To test their ideas, the research team conducted four scenario-based online experiments involving more than 1,000 participants. Across different scenarios, participants were asked to choose between restaurants that received conflicting evaluations from tourists and local residents. The findings revealed a clear pattern. Individuals motivated by affiliation were more likely to favor restaurants recommended by fellow travelers. Choosing the same restaurants as other tourists reinforced a sense of similarity and shared experience. In contrast, individuals motivated by uniqueness were more likely to prefer restaurants recommended by local residents. Local recommendations offered an opportunity to differentiate themselves from mainstream tourist behavior while still benefiting from what many perceive as insider knowledge.

One of the study's most important discoveries involved the role of social media. These effects emerged primarily when participants intended to share their dining experiences online. When travelers anticipated posting photos, reviews, or stories about their meals, social motives became significantly more influential. However, when participants had no intention of sharing their experiences, the differences between affiliation-oriented and uniqueness-oriented individuals largely disappeared.

The researchers explain this pattern through the concept of "social return," defined as the positive feedback individuals expect to receive from sharing experiences online. Travelers often anticipate reactions, such as likes, comments, and social recognition, before making consumption decisions. As the study concludes, conflicting online reviews are not simply an informational challenge; they are also a socially meaningful context in which consumers pursue different identity goals.

The findings offer practical implications for restaurants, tourism destinations, and online review platforms. More broadly, they suggest that consumers do not always choose based solely on expertise or objective quality. The findings suggest that in today's digital marketplace, who delivers a recommendation can meaningfully shape how tourists respond to conflicting online reviews.

TO READ THE FULL RESEARCH ARTICLE, SCAN THE QR CODE OR SEE:

Qiu, S. (Charles), Wu, Y., Ono, A., Wang, W., Chen, M.-H., & Wang, G. (2026). Tourist dining choices under conflicting online reviews: A social motive perspective. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 67, 101467.

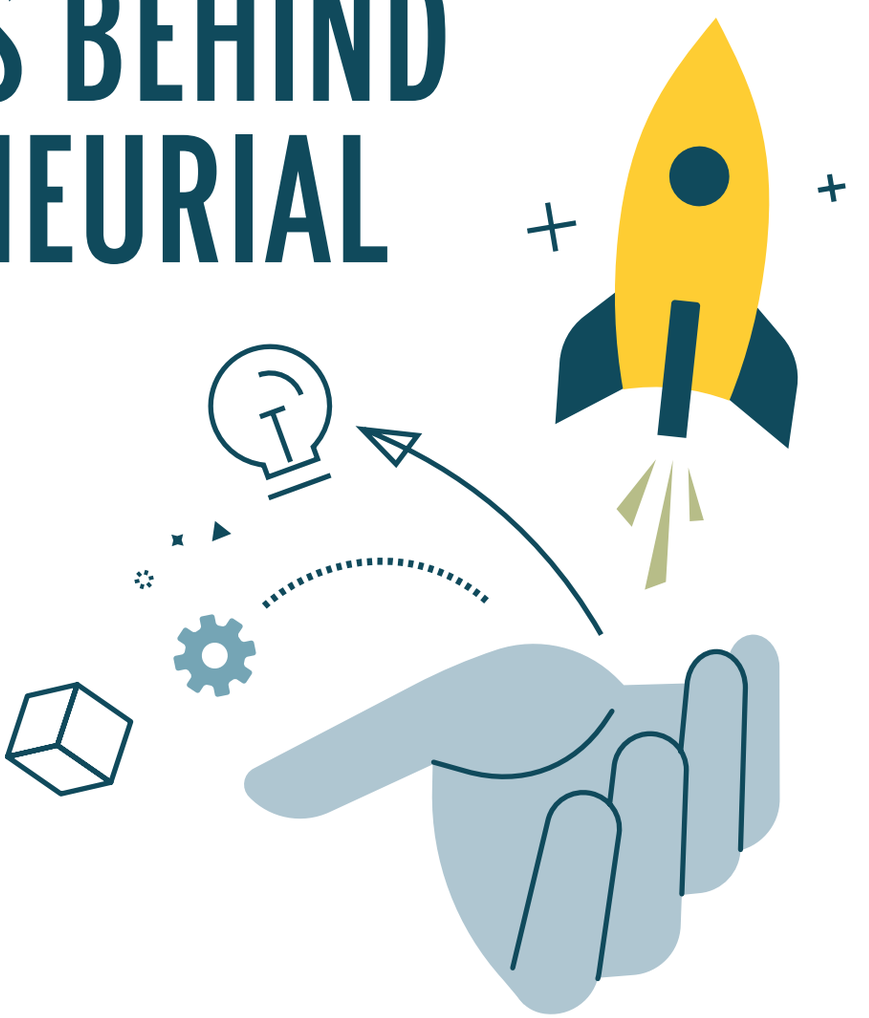


Dr. Wei Wang is a professor in the School of Marketing at The University of Southern Mississippi and holds the Kaetsu Distinguished Professorship.

UNLOCKING ENTREPRENEURIAL WELL-BEING

THE HIDDEN STRENGTHS BEHIND ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS

Based on research by Dr. Vishal Arghode



Entrepreneurs are often seen as bold, confident, and naturally comfortable with risk. They are the people who start ventures, create jobs, introduce new ideas, and bring energy to local and national economies. Yet the entrepreneurial journey is rarely as simple as it looks from the outside. Behind the vision and drive, many entrepreneurs carry a quieter burden: uncertainty, pressure, self-doubt, and the fear that they may not be as capable as others believe.

This study explores that human side of entrepreneurship.

Our research examined the relationship between psychological capital and the impostor phenomenon among entrepreneurs. Psychological capital, often called PsyCap, refers to a set of positive psychological resources that help people move through challenge and uncertainty. It includes hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism. In practical terms, these are the inner resources that help an entrepreneur find a way forward, believe in their ability to act, recover from setbacks, and maintain a constructive view of the future.

The impostor phenomenon, sometimes described as impostor syndrome, is the experience of feeling inadequate despite evidence of competence and achievement. Entrepreneurs who experience impostor feelings may question whether they truly deserve their success. They may attribute progress to luck, timing, or help from others rather than recognizing their own preparation, judgment, and effort. For entrepreneurs, these feelings can be especially powerful because business ownership often involves visibility, risk, comparison, and constant evaluation.

To investigate this issue, we surveyed entrepreneurs in the United States and used established measures of psychological capital and impostor phenomenon. The study found a clear negative relationship between psychological capital and impostor experiences. In other words, entrepreneurs with higher levels of psychological capital tended to report lower levels of impostor feelings. The overall psychological capital score, as well as the specific dimensions of hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism, were all negatively associated with impostor phenomenon.

This finding is important because it shifts attention to something that is both personal and practical. Entrepreneurship is not only about strategy, financing, innovation, or market opportunity. It is also about the psychological resources entrepreneurs draw upon when they face rejection, ambiguity, competition, and setbacks. A strong business idea matters. So does the inner capacity to keep learning, adapting, and believing that progress is possible.

The study also offers useful insight for business incubators, accelerators, entrepreneurship educators, mentors, and coaches. If entrepreneurs struggle with impostor feelings, support should not focus only on business plans, pitch decks, or financial projections. It should also help entrepreneurs strengthen confidence, resilience, hope, and optimism. Supportive mentoring, reflective conversations, peer networks, and psychological capital-building interventions may help entrepreneurs manage self-doubt in healthier and more productive ways.

At its core, this research invites us to see entrepreneurs more fully. They are not only founders, risk-takers, or innovators. They are people building ventures while also building themselves. By understanding how psychological capital relates to impostor feelings, we can better support entrepreneurs in sustaining both their businesses and their well-being. That may be one of the most important investments we can make in the future of entrepreneurship.



TO READ THE FULL RESEARCH ARTICLE, SCAN THE QR CODE OR SEE:

Heminger, S., Arghode, V., & Bhattacharyya, S. (2024). Unlocking entrepreneurial well-being: Exploring the interplay of psychological capital and impostor phenomenon. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*. 33. 10.1108/IJOA-07-2023-3846.



Dr. Vishal Arghode is an associate professor in the School of Leadership at The University of Southern Mississippi.

IN MEMORIAM

MS. NELL MURRAY
1946-2025

Nell Murray was a devoted friend, generous benefactor, and proud two-time graduate of Southern Miss Business. Following a distinguished career at The University of Southern Mississippi and Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, she spent more than two decades as a consultant, helping educational institutions, government agencies, healthcare organizations, and economic development entities strengthen their leadership and effectiveness.

Together with her husband, Murray established the Hilton and Nell Murray Endowed Research Fund, ensuring that faculty scholarship and research will continue to flourish for years to come. As a longtime member of the College's Business Advisory Council, including several years as its president, she provided thoughtful guidance, steadfast encouragement, and strategic insight that helped shape the college's direction. She was a trusted mentor, an enthusiastic advocate, and a valued partner who consistently sought ways to help our students, faculty, and programs succeed. For her dedication to our college, she was recognized as the 2023 Alumna of the Year.

We are profoundly grateful for Murray's friendship, leadership, and generosity. She will be deeply missed and forever remembered.

DR. HUGH JAMES PARKER
1949–2026

Dr. Hugh Parker was an accomplished educator and business leader whose life was defined by servant leadership, mentorship, and an unwavering commitment to developing others.

A proud graduate of The University of Southern Mississippi, Dr. Parker earned both his bachelor's degree and master's degree before completing a Ph.D. in accounting at Oklahoma State University. His distinguished career spanned academia and professional practice, including service as a professor of accounting at Southern Miss, professor and dean of the Else School of Management at Millsaps College, partner and later managing partner of HORNE LLP, and one of the nation's most respected experts in accounting, valuation, and business litigation.

Despite his many professional accomplishments, Dr. Parker never forgot the university that helped launch his career. He remained an enthusiastic supporter of Southern Miss and the College of Business and Economic Development for decades. As a valued member of the Business Advisory Council, he generously shared his expertise, strategic counsel, and encouragement with college leadership, faculty, and students.

Whether in the classroom, the boardroom, or around a dinner table, Dr. Parker was a gifted teacher whose greatest satisfaction came from helping others grow as professionals, leaders, and individuals. His example will continue to inspire future generations of Golden Eagles, and his absence will be deeply felt by all who had the privilege of knowing him.

MR. MARK KILLINGSWORTH
1951-2025

Mark Killingsworth was a committed alumnus, respected business leader, and cherished friend of Southern Miss Business. Throughout his life, Killingsworth exemplified the values of servant leadership, humility, and generosity, leaving a lasting impact on our students, alumni, and college community. A Southern Miss graduate, he built an extraordinary 42-year career with Dillard's Inc., rising through the organization to become a vice president. While his professional accomplishments were significant, his greatest legacy at Southern Miss was his unwavering commitment to helping others succeed.

As a member of the College's Business Advisory Council and an Executive in Residence, he generously shared his time, expertise, and extensive professional network with our students. Whether speaking in classrooms, mentoring aspiring business professionals, or opening doors to internships and career opportunities, Killingsworth believed deeply in investing in the next generation of leaders. The College of Business and Economic Development is profoundly grateful for his friendship, leadership, and faithful service. His influence extends far beyond board meetings and guest lectures. It lives on in the countless students he encouraged, the careers he helped launch, and the example he set of a life defined not simply by professional success, but by service to others.

SOUTHERN MISS BUSINESS

VISION, MISSION, VALUES

VISION

We will be a recognized leader in providing business educational experiences that inspire and empower business scholars and students to fearlessly lead on the national and international stage.

MISSION

Our purpose is to develop leaders who leverage an entrepreneurial mindset to create value and innovative business solutions. We ensure that all students have applied experiences that build the knowledge and develop the skills needed to succeed and lead in the global marketplace. We support economic development by advancing knowledge through influential scholarship and collaboration with our communities.

VALUES

Passion

We nurture passion and inspire boldness.

Authenticity

We stay true to who we are and always act with integrity.

Unity

We respect others' perspectives and work together to strengthen our community.

Resiliency

We persevere by being relevant, tenacious, and adaptable.

Resourcefulness

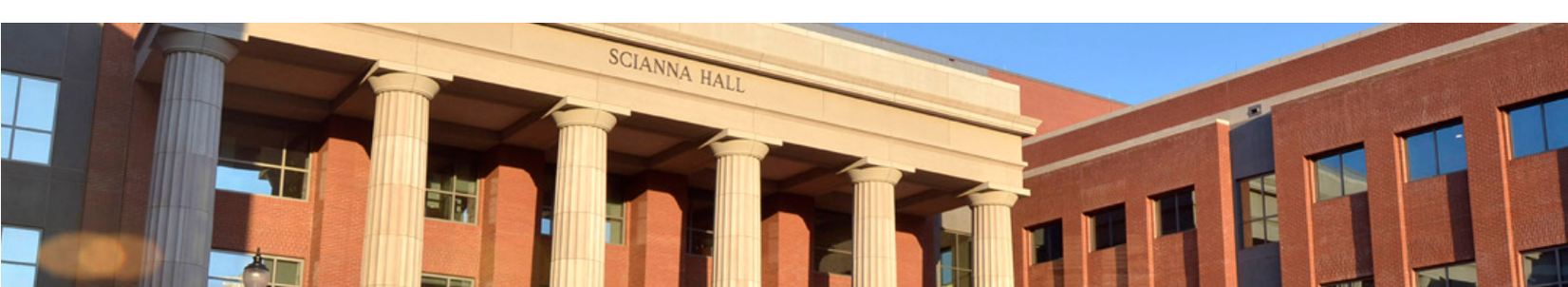
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