

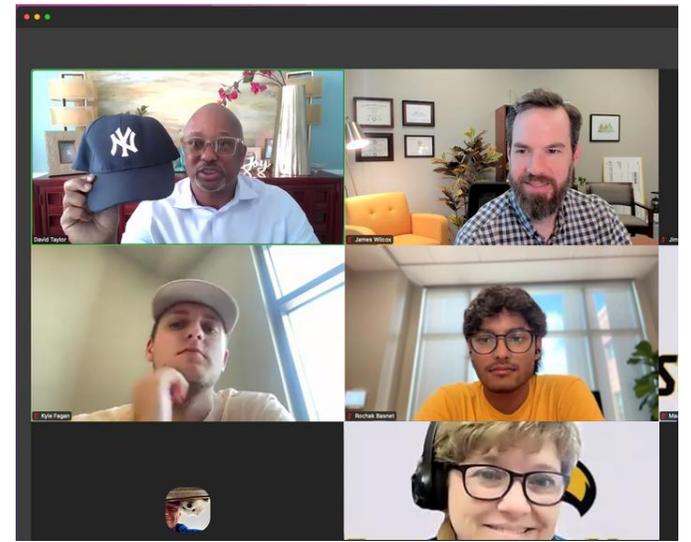
2025

ANNUAL REPORT

CENTER FOR
ENTREPRENEURSHIP

SOUTHERN MISS
HATCHERY

YEAR IN PHOTOS



2025 BY THE NUMBERS



777

UP
28%

STUDENTS
ENGAGED



179

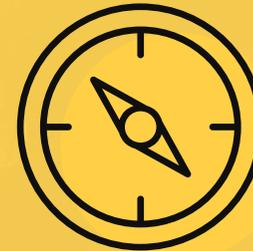
UP
30%

STARTUPS SERVED



\$20K

AWARDED



181

UP
50%

STARTUP
CONSULTATIONS



61

UP
33%

ALUMNI/MENTORS
ENGAGED



28

EVENTS HOSTED

ABOUT THE CENTER

The **Center for Entrepreneurship** (CfE) is the engine of student innovation at Southern Miss—a place where curiosity turns into action and ideas grow into impact. What began as a small initiative has evolved into a dynamic ecosystem engaging hundreds of students each year through programs like the Golden Idea Pitch Competition, Hatchathon, Founders Society, CheckPoint, Coffee w/ an Entrepreneur, and the statewide Southern Entrepreneurship Program (SEP).

Through hands-on learning and partnerships with industry leaders, the Center equips students with the mindset, skills, and support to become problem-solvers, innovators, and value creators for Mississippi and beyond.



Mission

Driven by the potential in every student, the Center for Entrepreneurship fosters a culture of **innovation for all** through a dynamic ecosystem of resources, mentorship, and experiential learning.



Vision

To elevate the spirit of entrepreneurship within the Southern Miss community, empowering all students to create enduring economic and social value.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

All students at The University of Southern Mississippi are invited to participate in the Center for Entrepreneurship's menu of programs and activities, including competitions, workshops, and mentoring.



Key'Shawn Kennedy

Classification: PhD Candidate
Major: Educational Research

"The Center for Entrepreneurship has provided the resources that I needed to turn my business into what it is today. Before I joined the Center for Entrepreneurship, I was struggling to create a business model that allowed my business to partner with school districts. Currently, I am receiving proposal requests from school districts across two states."



OM Nepal

Classification: Junior
Major: Computer Science

"The Center for Entrepreneurship promotes creativity and an entrepreneurial mindset among all students, regardless of their major. So, even as a Computer Science student, I get to learn and practice entrepreneurial skills while collaborating with other amazing students and being advised by great mentors, including the Center's director himself, Professor Wilcox."

Campuswide Participation

ALL

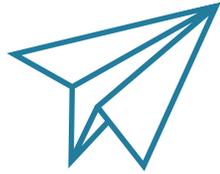
Colleges Represented

50+

Majors & Disciplines



Taking Flight at the CfE



“Taking Flight” is a new spotlight series where innovation takes flight and soars to new heights. We celebrate the bold student entrepreneurs across Southern Miss' campus who are transforming ideas into impact. From startups solving real-world problems to creative ventures reshaping industries, we're showcasing the students who aren't just dreaming about the future —they're building it. Whether you're launching your first business, developing the next breakthrough app, or bringing a passion project to life, “Taking Flight” is here to inspire, connect, and prove the entrepreneurial spirit is alive and thriving at Southern Miss.





Sugam Panthi & Dr. Fan Zhang
MagnoliaEd



MagnoliaEd is a student-faculty venture developing an AI-powered learning platform that delivers real-time academic support and dynamic instructional content. By integrating text, presentations, images, and other digital materials into personalized learning experiences, the platform supports diverse learning styles and elevates student success. MagnoliaEd reflects Southern Miss's commitment to collaborative innovation and technology-enhanced education.

“James, Michael, and the entire CfE team have been instrumental to our success and that of other USM startups. Universities should invest more in centers like this—they produce diverse graduates prepared for various career paths, from medicine to entrepreneurship. Even students who don't launch startups gain invaluable business knowledge and entrepreneurial thinking that benefits any career. The Center demonstrates USM's commitment to comprehensive student development and innovation.” — Dr. Zhang

World Without Sin is redefining faith-based fashion with modern, premium streetwear designed to help people express their beliefs with confidence and style. Each collection blends contemporary design with meaningful messages, giving customers a way to represent their faith in their daily lives.

“

"The Center for Entrepreneurship has been instrumental in my growth as a student founder. Through events like Coffee w/ an Entrepreneur and Golden Idea, I've gained practical insights and inspiration that have pushed me to take my business more seriously. The support from Professor Wilcox and being surrounded by other driven students at the Center has given me the encouragement and space to pursue excellence with World Without Sin."

”



Elmer Hernandez
World Without Sin

WWS
WORLD WITHOUT SIN



Gunjan Sah
exium



Exium is an AI-enabled proctoring platform designed to strengthen academic integrity while also supporting students through a smoother assessment experience. Building on this foundation, co-founder Gunjan is expanding AI capabilities into new sectors—including defense—where he has worked to develop tools that process military communications and GPS data to streamline after-action reporting and improve operational effectiveness.

“

"The Center for Entrepreneurship has been transformative since my freshman year. Professor Wilcox, Michael, and Shelby bring invaluable expertise that has shaped my development. Though I began with limited business knowledge, engaging with peers across majors and participating in Center programs has provided essential insights into real-world operations. The Center creates an exceptional environment for interdisciplinary learning, fostering the diverse skills necessary for entrepreneurial success."

”

Born Elite is a performance apparel venture creating custom athletic wear that helps student-athletes look, feel, and compete at their best. Each jersey is tailored with the athlete's name, number, and team design, giving players gear they're proud to wear and a meaningful keepsake long after the season ends.



Julien Smith
Born Elite



“

“The Center for Entrepreneurship has helped me gain exposure for my business through videos and social media posts. I also appreciate the advisement I’ve received from Professors James Wilcox and Dustin Odom. Their guidance and the skills they’ve taught me in their entrepreneurship classes have been incredibly helpful in my journey!”

”



GOLDEN IDEA PITCH COMPETITION

Golden Idea represents an annual opportunity for Southern Miss students, providing support, mentorship, and funding to help launch big ideas!

Current Southern Miss students from all majors and all disciplines are eligible and encouraged to participate.

2025 PARTICIPATION

77  **UP 75%**
Student Competitors

29 
Mentors & Evaluators

\$5K 
In Cash Awards

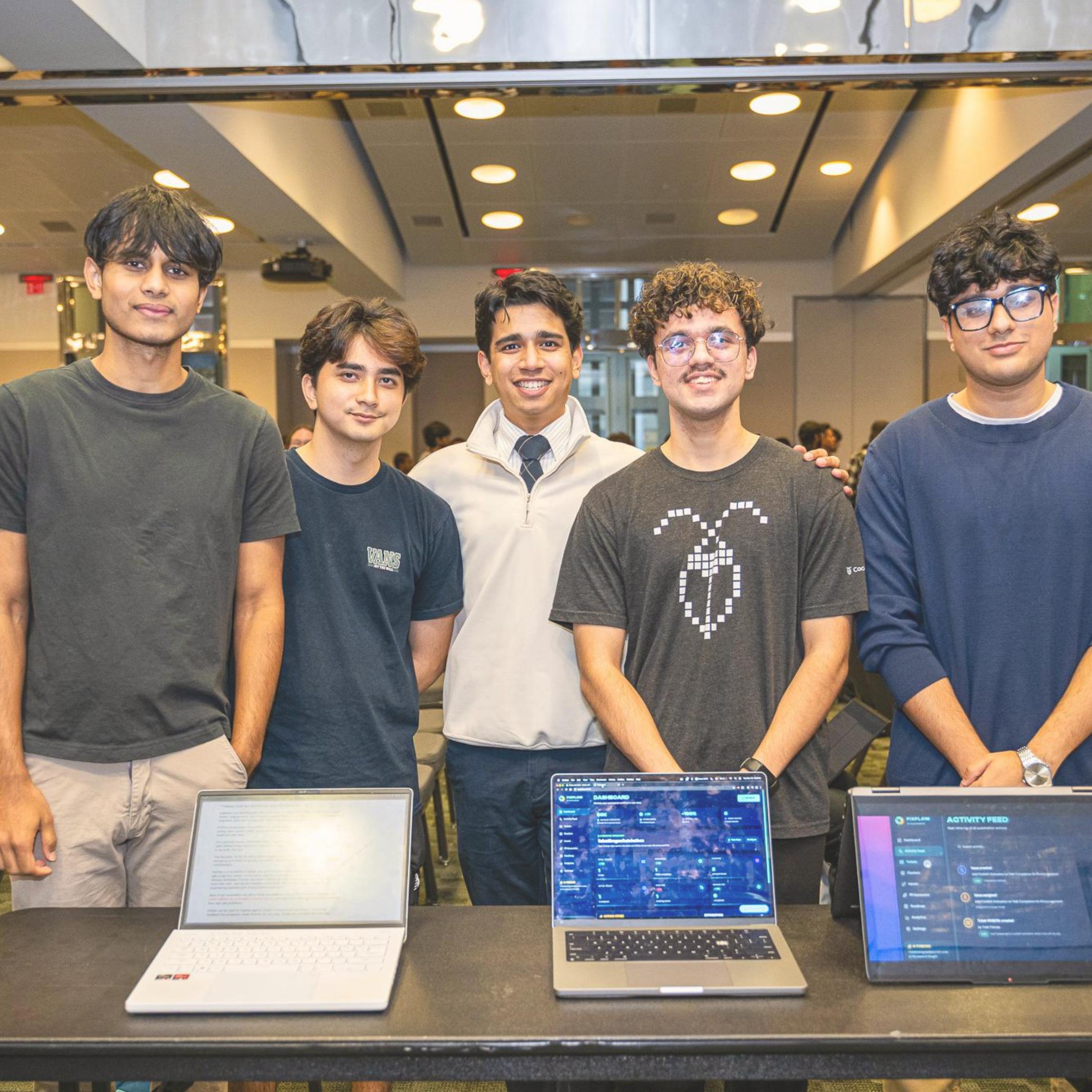




ScubaKey Adventures LLC, led by founder Ka'Lon Duncanson, is an emerging venture dedicated to expanding scuba education and adventure tourism along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Drawing on Ka'Lon's professional experience teaching scuba in The Bahamas, the company provides personalized training, certification preparation, and recreational dive experiences for students, locals, and visitors. As ScubaKey Adventures grows, it aims to make high-quality dive instruction more accessible while introducing the community to the excitement of underwater exploration.

Ka'Lon Duncanson

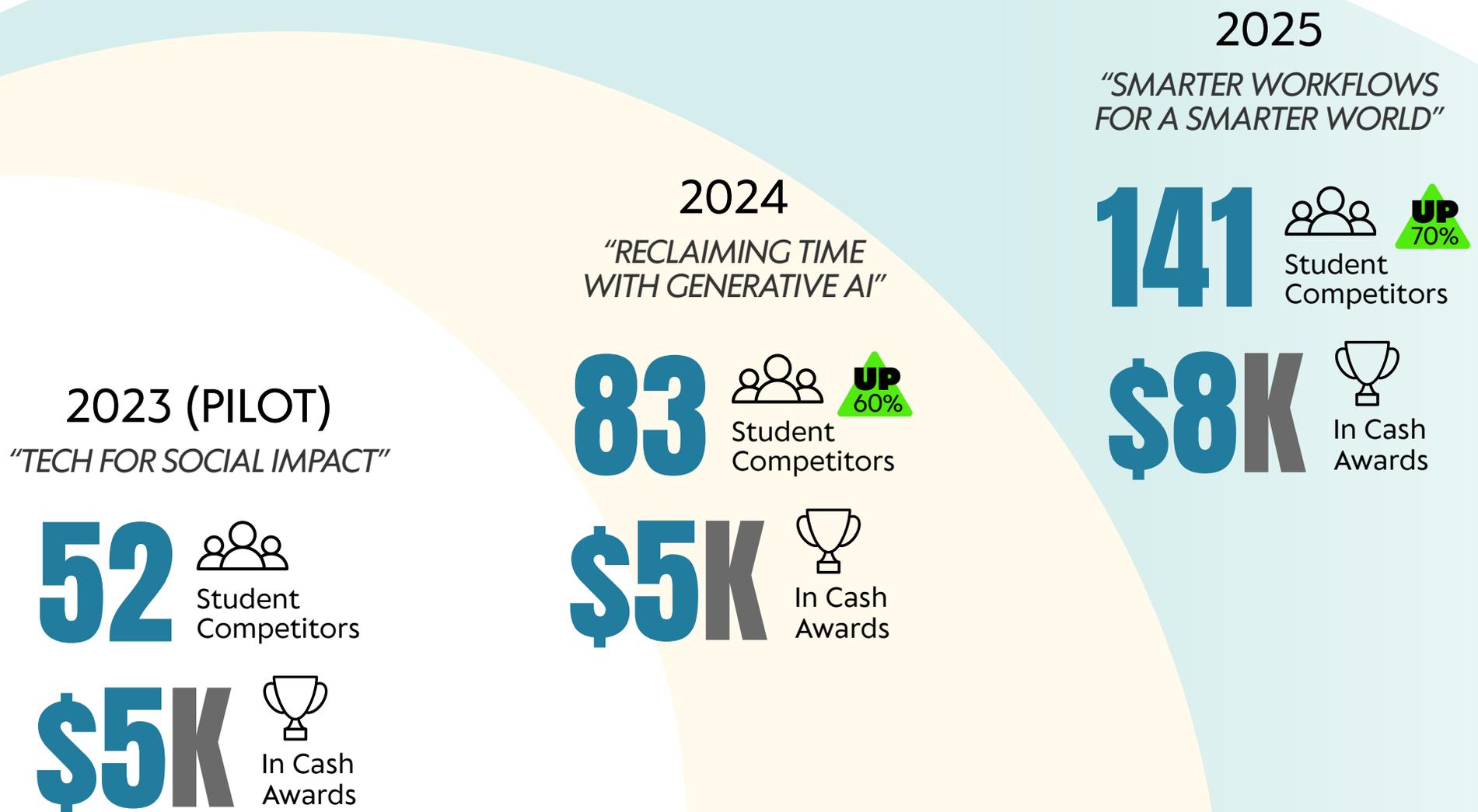
2025 Golden Idea Pitch Competition Finalist



HATCHATHON

Hatchathon is a collaborative, week-long innovation event hosted by the Center for Entrepreneurship, in partnership with VOXO, Inc. and the USM School of Computing Sciences and Computer Engineering.

Bringing together students, mentors, and industry leaders, Hatchathon challenges participants to solve real-world problems through a rigorous team-based process.



"I love that Hatchathon provides not just an opportunity to build a project and win prizes, but also gives us resources, connects us with industry professionals, and builds us as well-rounded professionals who not just know how to code impressive apps but also consider the business side of things. I've done hackathons in some big name universities like Princeton, Georgia Tech, and New York University; I believe that if the students as well as faculty keep leveling up USM's hackathon at the same rate, we will be able to compete with those national level hackathons very soon."

Sushant Aryal

Computer Science Student (Junior)

"Our team looks forward to Hatchathon every year. Working with the Center for Entrepreneurship and Southern Miss has been a great partnership, and the staff continues to run an amazing event. The students have been leveling up each year with more ambitious projects and dynamic team presentations. It is impressive to see how quickly they turn ideas into something real."

Brennen Hodge

VP of Product, VOXO, Inc.

"I was genuinely impressed by the organization, the energy, and the level of innovation on display. The students delivered creative, automation-driven AI solutions with real and immediate business application. Events like this show true thought leadership from Southern Miss and demonstrates how they prepare students for success in an educational landscape that's rapidly evolving."

Jason Dunn

SVP of Business Development, FV Recycling

COFFEE W/ AN *Entrepreneur*



The Center's monthly guest speaker series, Coffee w/ an Entrepreneur, provides students with inspiration to dream big, innovate, expand their professional networks, and embark on their own entrepreneurial journeys.

Coffee events are open to the public and often draw crowds from across and off campus.

2025 PARTICIPATION

260+  **UP**
45%
Students & Guests

8 
Featured
Entrepreneurs



NEW PROGRAMS SPOTLIGHT



FlightPath Stage 2 – Rise



VentureWorks



VentureWire



Entrepreneurship Society



CHECKPOINT

Stage 1 Goal: Clarify your business idea, show your commitment, and design a quick experiment to validate your problem or market.

Your Steps to CheckPoint Funding (\$500)

1. Meet with the Center → Schedule a one-on-one consultation to discuss your idea.
2. Build Your Pitch Deck → Create a short slide deck answering:
 - What problem are you solving?
 - What's your solution?
 - Who is your target customer?
 - How will you reach them?
 - Who is the competition, and how are you different?
 - What experiment will you run to test your idea?
3. Review Your Deck → Schedule a follow-up with the Center to refine your slides.
4. Practice Your Pitch → Book a session with the USM Speaking Center. When complete, you'll get a password to apply for an upcoming CheckPoint pitch event.
5. Submit Your Application → Complete the online form.
6. Pitch for \$500 → Present to the CheckPoint board and request funding.

RISE

Stage 2 Goal: Validate your customer, value proposition, and market opportunity to prepare for launch.

Your Steps to Rise Funding (\$2,000)

1. Complete Your Lean Canvas → Map your business model and review it with the Center.
2. Talk with Customers → Interview at least 30 potential customers and share names, dates, and key insights.
3. Summarize What You Learned → Write a one-page takeaway from your interviews.
4. Build a Proof-of-Concept → Show that your solution can work.
5. Run the Numbers → Complete a unit financial analysis using the financial tool (Tabs A-D).
6. Write an Executive Summary → Summarize your business opportunity.
7. Recruit Your Team → Identify and secure a complete team capable of executing the business.
8. Attend a Workshop → Join at least one Center workshop (e.g., Risk Capital, IP) to sharpen your startup skills.
9. Update Your Pitch Deck → Revise your slides to reflect what you've learned and review with the Center.
10. Practice Your Pitch → Work with the USM Speaking Center to refine delivery. You'll get a password to apply for a Rise pitch event.
11. Submit Your Application → Complete the online form.
12. Pitch for \$2,000 → Present to the Rise board and request funding.

VentureWorks

VentureWorks is an innovative educational series designed by the Center to guide aspiring entrepreneurs and startup founders through every critical stage of their venture's journey.

From initial concept to sustainable growth, this program provides practical insights, expert guidance, and actionable strategies that address the real-world challenges entrepreneurs face.

VentureWire

VentureWire is the Center's monthly media series showcasing the people, ideas, and momentum shaping our innovation ecosystem. Each feature highlights inspiring founder stories, real-world startup wins, and behind-the-scenes looks at how bold ideas are becoming thriving ventures. You'll find fresh insights from faculty experts, alumni innovators, and industry leaders on what's next in entrepreneurship – plus practical tips to help you turn your own ideas into impact. From student startups gaining traction to collaborative projects transforming our region, VentureWire keeps you connected to the breakthroughs and opportunities driving the future of entrepreneurship at Southern Miss and beyond.

ARTISAN

ENTREPRENEURSHIP SOCIETY

The Entrepreneurship Society, home to the National Science Foundation's ARTISAN, is where entrepreneurship, innovation, and translational research activities collide. Whether you're curious about turning your research into a product, launching an idea into the world, or collaborating with creative peers, the Entrepreneurship Society is your community.



52  Members

8  Meetings

1  Events



BE A CHAMPION

Your generosity today helps shape Mississippi's tomorrow. Give the gift of opportunity by supporting the next generation of entrepreneurial leaders.

When you give to the Center for Entrepreneurship, your support stays here - building a stronger Mississippi and empowering our students to innovate within our communities.

GIVE TODAY!

WWW.USMFOUNDATION.ORG

Center for Entrepreneurship
Development Fund (2179)

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@usmhatchery



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