

THE TROY STATEMENT

2024-2025 EDITION

Feature: Alumnus
Chad Fife, From
the Battlefield to
the Boardroom



SORRELL
College of Business
TROY UNIVERSITY



THE OPENING BELL



WELCOME TO THE LATEST ISSUE OF THE TROY STATEMENT!

It's a privilege to welcome you to the latest edition of The TROY Statement, the official publication of the Sorrell College of Business at Troy University. Each issue gives us the opportunity to recognize the amazing work of our staff and students, share the success of our distinguished alumni, and offer insight into new initiatives in support of our mission and vision—and this one is no exception.

First and foremost, I am so incredibly proud of our faculty, staff, and administration who consistently go above and beyond every day in support of this college and university. Their dedication to high-quality teaching, caring mentorship, impactful research, and community-focused service is not only transforming the lives of our students but also strengthening the economic and social fabric of the region.

As you read The TROY Statement, I believe you will share my pride in what has been accomplished both by the Sorrell College and our alumni. Since our last issue, we've celebrated major milestones such as the reaffirmation of AACSB Accreditation, the opening of the Center for Artificial Intelligence Research and Education, the opening of the first-ever brick-and-mortar Student-Made Store, and so much more. Additionally, it has been my honor to get to know business alum Chad Pigg-Fife and his wife, Sharlene, and his son, Beckam. I am certain you will enjoy his story and learn how the education he received supported his professional success and personal development. Without question, these collective efforts reflect our deep commitment to preparing students who are both job and life ready.

Looking ahead to the upcoming academic year, we are closing out our current strategic plan and initiating the development of a bold new five-year plan. This new plan will be built around the

urgent reality that artificial intelligence and other innovations are fundamentally altering the world of business—and by extension, the future of business education. Higher education must evolve at a pace never seen before, and we intend to lead that change by embracing both the uncertainty and opportunity that comes with it. This upcoming year will also mark the end of the Sorrell College GEEKS! As the creator of our GEEKS program 10 years ago, I want to personally share that we are officially retiring it! While many of its core principles will live on in our culture, the time has come for a new direction. I believe GEEKS served us well in bringing focus to our mission and supporting our initial AACSB accreditation efforts -its legacy will always be part of who we are- but its chapter has closed.

To meet these major challenges and seize the opportunities ahead, we need you—our alumni, friends, and partners—more than ever. Whether it's mentoring students, financially supporting current and new initiatives, serving on one of our many advisory committees, or speaking to business classes as a "Professor for the Day," your involvement is vital so we can best prepare our students for success. As Dean, please know that I always welcome the chance to visit with you personally and discuss how you can become more involved in the life of the Sorrell College.

In closing, thank you for being part of our journey and taking great pride in being part of the "Business Trojans" family! Please enjoy The TROY Statement!

Warm regards,

Dr. Judson Edwards
Dean, Sorrell College of Business
Troy University

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TROY UNIVERSITY
TROY, AL
334.670.3989

DEAN
DR. JUDSON EDWARDS

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
MAUREE ALICE MCCALL

EDITOR
CLIF LUSK

DESIGNERS
STUDIO 207

PHOTOGRAPHERS
JOEY MEREDITH
CLIF LUSK
STUDIO 207

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SORRELL COLLEGE ELITE STATUS REAFFIRMED BY AACSB

Troy University's Sorrell College of Business's elite status has been reaffirmed by the highly competitive specialized business accreditation agency AACSB.

Accreditation for both the Sorrell College and its William H. Carr School of Accountancy was validated by the organization's board of directors.

"The reaffirmation of business and supplemental accounting accreditation by AACSB validates both the high-quality of our academic programming, inside and outside the classroom, and steadfast commitment to continuous improvement in advancing the mission and impact of the Sorrell College," said Dean Dr. Judson Edwards.

Founded in 1916, AACSB is the longest-servicing global accrediting body for business schools and is recognized as the "gold standard" of specialized business school accreditation. Its accreditation places the Sorrell business programs among 1,026 colleges in 65 countries and territories worldwide and places the accountancy program in the elite category as just one of 194 to be recognized with accreditation. Less than 200 colleges of business worldwide hold both accreditations.

"I could not be prouder of the excellent work that our faculty, staff, and administration do each and every day to educate, mentor, and prepare our students for successful business careers and rewarding lives," Edwards said. "I also greatly appreciate all the support we receive from our central administration, advisory boards, and alumni who are dedicated to the success of the Sorrell College."

Along with reaffirmation, the College has been singled out by Fortune Recommends as being among the top 10 nationally for affordability of its online Master of Business Administration degree. The college recommendation arm of

Fortune magazine, the group also named the degree one of the top online programs in the South and ranked it 80th nationally.

U.S. News and World Report named the online MBA program the 84th best nationally for veterans and 142nd overall. The organization also ranked the online master's in business (non-MBA) as 112th nationally while the online bachelor's degrees in undergraduate business programs ranked 117th.

In addition, Collegerank.net has ranked TROY 4th best in its 15 Best Online Master's in Artificial Intelligence and "Masters in AI" have ranked it the 7th most affordable Online Master's in AI Programs.

"We work diligently to ensure that our students receive the very best value for their educational dollar while receiving an outstanding education," Edwards said. "This reaffirmation keeps the Sorrell College in the elite company of business schools worldwide who hold dual AACSB accreditation. There is no better way to demonstrate our commitment to increasing the value of a Troy University business degree."



AACSB
ACCREDITED



SORRELL COLLEGE REPRESENTED AT 2025 SULLIVAN AWARDS

The Sorrell College was well represented in the University's 2025 Algernon Sydney Sullivan Awards.

Derrick Nobles, an Accounting graduate from Mobile, and Juliana Bolivar, Director of the Small Business Development Center at TROY, received the Sullivan Awards during a luncheon in their honor at the Troy Campus. The recipients were also honored during the University's annual Honors Convocation.

The Sullivan Award, which is presented at select colleges and universities throughout the United States, recognizes recipients for their excellence of character, humanitarian service and spiritual qualities. The award has been presented annually to a male student, a female student and one non-student at TROY since 1981. Students, faculty and staff nominate candidates for the award. Social Work major Maggie Chapman was the female student winner.

"We believe that it is appropriate that we present the Sullivan Awards at Troy University," said Dr. Jack Hawkins, Jr., Chancellor. "Our mission is to develop students into leaders with well-defined values who will go out into the world and make a huge difference. We believe that these values are more important today than ever in our history."

Nobles was president of the Dean's Student Advisory Council in the Sorrell College and past president of the University Activities Council and the 101 Elite Men. He was a Trojan Ambassador and a member of the National Panhellenic Council, the Student Government Association, the Welcome Week Committee, the Accounting Society and Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. He was the 2023 winner of Mr. Trojan Pride and is the University's 2024-2025 Homecoming King. Nobles is also the recipient of the Lamar P. Higgins Leadership Award and a member of Beta Alpha Psi Accounting Honor Society, The '87, Mortar Board, Omicron Delta Kappa National Honor Society and the National Society of Leadership and Success.

Bolivar has served as director of the Small Business Development Center at TROY since 2021 and earned her Master of Public Administration Degree from TROY in 2024. She was named to the 2024 class of the Alabama Leadership Initiative and was recognized at the Wiregrass Region's 2024 Remarkable Woman of the Year by Dothan's WTVY Television and Nexstar Media. She also was named a Prelude of the Tri-State by the Tri-State Expo Juneteenth Affairs organization, based in Dothan. In 2023, Bolivar was named to the national Top 40 Under 40 list by America's Small Business Development Center and was selected as Alabama's 2023 State Star, the highest recognition for individual achievement, acknowledging exemplary performance that has a significant and positive impact on advancing small business efforts. Bolivar was raised by small business owners and started her own business at the age of 16.



Derek Nobles & Juliana Bolivar



TROY UNIVERSITY AI CENTER TAKES BUSINESS-FIRST APPROACH

Troy University is taking a business-first approach to artificial intelligence with the opening of the Sorrell College of Business Center for Artificial Intelligence Research and Education.

The Center is located on the University's Montgomery Campus and seeks to equip business professionals, executives and organizations with the knowledge to evaluate AI opportunities, implement machine learning models and manage AI-driven transformation.

Research-based programs – including academic programs -- will be available to Alabama business, industry and government organizations to meet the growing demand for AI expertise in executive leadership, workforce development and organizational management.

"AI is no longer just a tool for data scientists. Business leaders must understand how to leverage AI strategically, manage risk, and ensure ethical deployment," said Sorrell College Dean Dr. Judson Edwards. "The AI Center will provide that foundational support for business, industry, military and educational needs, and brings together experts who are committed to educating not only our students but the greater community in this emerging field."

By focusing on leadership and AI management, the Center provides students with hands-on experience in AI applications, case studies from real-world business challenges and insights into the regulatory and ethical considerations of AI deployment. "Our programs empower professionals to navigate AI's complexities and maximize its value," said Center Executive Director Dr. Jim Locke.

"The launch of the Center also aligns with Alabama's growing reputation as a hub for technology and innovation. Montgomery's strategic location, combined with Troy University's strong business programs, makes it an ideal setting for AI research and workforce development," he said. The Center will foster collaborations with regional businesses, government agencies and industry partners to ensure AI adoption drives economic growth and operational excellence.

"TROY's leadership in forming the Center for AI will have a positive impact on the state of Alabama and beyond" said Mike Shaw, State Legislator and member of the Governor's GenAI Task Force. "It's great to see TROY and the Sorrell College so ahead of the curve with artificial intelligence. It shows their research and education efforts are in absolute sync with the changing needs of our people and workforce."

Shaw's sentiments were echoed Amanda Senn, Director of the Alabama Securities Exchange Commission.

"We are building relationships with small businesses, entrepreneurs, investors, and financial professionals, and offering strategic guidance on the evolving policy landscape," she said. "TROY's initiative is closely aligned with our work, and we look forward to partnering with the University to position Alabama as a leader in AI education and innovation."

While certificate programs and consulting services are already available, Edwards expects masters-level educational programs in AI, such as an AI-focused Master of Business Administration degree, to be ready for deployment in



Dr. Jim Locke

the coming months, and the Center has teamed with the University-wide AI Forward Committee to implement new technology for educational implementation.

“As companies increasingly look to AI to enhance efficiency, improve customer experiences and unlock new revenue streams, the Center is positioned to become a national leader in AI management education,” Locke said.



Dr. Bill DeMarco



Dr. Judson Edwards



Retired A.F. Maj. Gen. Bowen Ballard



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SORRELL
COLLEGE
SCHOOL OF
HSTM PARTNERS
WITH TROY
ATHLETICS



A new partnership between TROY Athletics and the Sorrell College of Business' School of Hospitality, Sport and Tourism Management will create a new master's level curriculum to give students hands-on work experience inside an NCAA Division I athletics department.

"We are excited to partner with our colleagues in the School of Hospitality, Sport and Tourism Management to provide meaningful 'hands-on' opportunities for our sport management graduate students as we look to grow together," said TROY Director of Athletics Brent Jones. "As an athletics department, this collaborative partnership is a huge win-win for both our graduate students but also our student-athletes. This partnership will provide our athletics department staff members and coaches with additional resources for them so their sports can be more successful. This partnership is an outstanding example of what the 'One TROY' identity means."

The partnership will uniquely place TROY sport management graduate students ahead of most of their peers in practical skill application upon graduation.

"The School of Hospitality, Sport and Tourism Management is excited to again formally partner with the Troy University Athletics Department," Associate Director and Professor Robert Mathner said. "The mission of our school and the master's program is to prepare students to become future leaders in the industry and this partnership does just that.

"In addition, it allows the Troy University Athletics Department to utilize valuable resources to serve our stakeholders so that our student-athletes can have a quality experience at Troy University. This partnership is truly mutually beneficial, and I am confident that the benefits will be realized for years to come," he said.

The new Collegiate Sport Management Concentration is designed to provide graduate students with a more tailored

academic curriculum in NCAA Division I athletics while also providing them a path to getting experience beginning with their first semester in the graduate program.

"This partnership allows us to tap into the quality graduate students that the School of HSTM brings in by providing valuable resources to our coaching staff and administrative staff members," Jones said. "These students will be an incredible resource and benefit to our athletics department and we look forward to providing them with these experiences to assist them in their career endeavors in college athletics."

Graduate course credit will be offered to these students in the form of practicum and internship hours. In addition, and just as meaningful to the students, the Department of Athletics will offer paid graduate assistantships to those students who excel in their practicums and internships.

"One of the strengths of our sport management program is the emphasis on experiential opportunities in sport," Troy University Faculty Athletic Representative and Graduate Program Coordinator Dr. Fred Green said. "This new partnership formalizes this process and provides prospective sport management graduate students with excellent opportunities to position themselves for professional growth in the collegiate athletics industry. We look forward to working closely with Troy University Athletics in providing real world experiences for our students."

Sport management graduate students who choose this concentration will play active roles in the TROY Athletics Department by providing support in a variety of areas including, operations roles for all of TROY's sports teams, assisting in Athletics Communications, Compliance, Development, Licensing and Trademarks, Marketing and Fan Engagement, Operations/ Technology, Student-Athlete Services, and the Ticket Office.



FACULTY

SORRELL PROFESSOR TESTIFIES TO TEXAS LEGISLATURE



Dr. Noah Trudeau

A Sorrell College of Business professor's research into state licensing regulations has led him to the Texas Legislature.

Dr. Noah Trudeau, an Assistant Professor of Economics, was called on to provide expert testimony on several licensure measures – most notably one sponsored by former Speaker of the House of Representatives Dade Phelan.

His testimony is an outcropping of research in and the development of the State Occupational Licensing Index – SOLI, for short – under the Archbridge Institute. The SOLI is a tool that assesses extent and impact of occupational licensing requirements in each state and ranks the states according to occupational licensing burden. In 2024, 284 occupations were examined. Across the United States, occupational licensing affects more than 20 percent of all workers.

"It's Texas. You would think there are very free markets in Texas compared to the perceived highly regulated states such as New York or California," he said. "In reality, Texas has the highest barriers and licensing burdens of any state in the nation."

Texas is joined by Arkansas, Tennessee, Oregon and Alabama in the Top 5 for 2024, while Kansas had the lowest burden.

Traditionally, Trudeau said that burden had been looked at only in terms of impact to low-income occupations. SOLI considers occupations across all incomes and attempts to provide the most comprehensive picture of occupational licensing in the United States.

Last August, the Coalition for Regulatory Efficiency and Reform, a Texas-based group concerned about economic prosperity issues, asked Trudeau to explain the SOLI findings. That discussion led to the call to testify before legislative leaders, specifically on Phelan's HB 11 dealing with reciprocity of licensing.

Dr. Trudeau's background includes a PhD in Economics from West Virginia University and a Master of Arts in Economics from Troy University. Before serving as an Assistant Professor of Economics in the Sorrell College of Business, Dr. Trudeau previously served as an Assistant Professor at Saint Francis University in Pennsylvania.



WELCOMING FACULTY & STAFF SINCE LAST EDITION



Dr. Md Nabid Alam
Business Analytics
Ph.D., University of North Carolina at Greensboro



Chris Atwater
Sport Management
Ph.D., Virginia Commonwealth University



Dr. Mette Baran
Management
Ed.D., DePaul University



Dr. Janice Chretien
Human Resource Management
Ph.D., University of Texas at Tyler



Dr. Ying Gao
Management
D.B.A., Cleveland State University



Mr. Clayton Lee Graham
College Advisor
M.S., Troy University



Dr. Brandon Griffin
Management
Ph.D., Southern Illinois
University Carbondale



Dr. John Haymore
Human Resource Management
Ph.D., University of Texas at Tyler



Ms. Mauree Alice McCall
Communications
M.S., Troy University



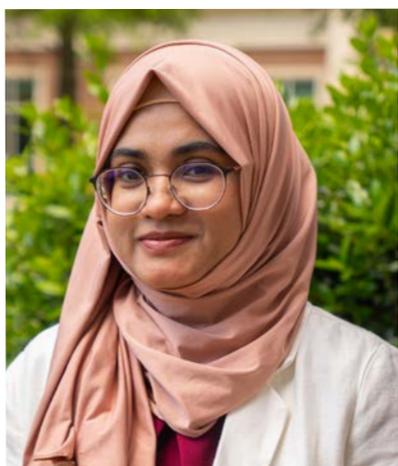
Dr. Junnatun Naym
Finance
Ph.D., Mississippi State
University



Dr. Gordon Miller
Entrepreneurship
Ph.D., Baylor University



Dr. Ventsislav Stamenov
Accounting
Ph.D., University of Southern
California



Dr. Tahmina Sultana
Business Analytics
Ph.D., University of North
Carolina at Greensboro



Dr. Noah Trudeau
Economics
Ph.D., West Virginia University

Not Pictured

Ms. Gabby Coates
Program Coordinator

Dr. Ryan Dunn
Accounting
Ph.D., University of Missouri

Mr. Ed Noriega
Entrepreneurship
B.F.A., Cooper Union School of Art

Ms. Katy Gordon
Program Coordinator

Ms. Natascha Muniz
Program Coordinator

Dr. Ilhwan Na
Management
Ph.D., University of Kansas

Mr. Buddy Starling
Management
M.B.A., Troy University

Dr. Jamie Teterin
Accounting
Ph.D., University of Alabama



MEET THE CHAIRS

Dr. Gi-Yong Koo Director, School of Hospitality, Sport, and Tourism Management

Our vision is to position the School of Hospitality, Sport, and Tourism Management as a leader in experiential education, industry partnerships, and innovative research. Over the next few years, we aim to expand our global engagement, enhance hands-on learning opportunities for students, and strengthen our relationships with key industry stakeholders. With the hospitality, sport, and tourism industries continuously evolving, leading this department enables me to contribute to the future of these fields while supporting the growth and success of both students and faculty.



Dr. Josh McGowan
Director, William H. Carr
School of Accountancy

As Director, one of my key priorities is to enhance the already strong relationships we have with employers to provide even more opportunities for our students. By deepening these partnerships, we can expand internships, job placements, and professional development initiatives, ensuring our students are fully equipped for the workforce. In the past 12 months we raised more than \$250,000 in scholarship funds and endowments. We also have experienced continued success on the CPA exam and a 100 percent job placement rate for our accounting students.



Dr. Shelley Davis
Chair, Department of Management,
Human Resources, and Law

My vision for our Department is that we strive to put our students first and have their knowledge, skill and professional development in mind in all decisions we make in terms of the courses and the opportunities we offer. We have been working hard to create a new stand-alone management major and make major revisions to our MSM, MSHRM, and MBA programs. I am also proud that we have recently launched a Troy University chapter of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). One of the things I enjoy most is seeing the impact our faculty are making on our students lives—whether that is through the courses they teach, the mentoring they provide, or the revising of curriculum and development of new courses and programs.



Dr. Phillip Mixon
Chair, Economics, Finance, Risk
Management and Insurance, Marketing,
& Entrepreneurship

This past year has been interesting, as we have launched a new major in Risk Management and Insurance, revamped the curriculum in Entrepreneurship, sent students London and Korea, hired new faculty, added another discipline the department, had faculty present at international conferences, and lastly, got new department chair. What I enjoy most about serving as department chair is the opportunity to support both students and faculty in achieving their full potential. Whether it is helping students gain the skills they need for successful careers or enabling faculty to engage in meaningful research, my leadership role allows me to contribute to both personal and professional growth. I also take great pride in having the opportunity to influence the direction of the department, ensuring that we continuously adapt and innovate in response to the evolving needs of our students, faculty, and the community.



MOURNING DR. WILLIAM HEISLER'S PASSING





The Sorrell College of Business and Troy University is mourning the passing of professor Dr. William Heisler, who directed the Master of Science in Human Resource Management.

Dr. Heisler joined TROY faculty in 2003. He died on March 7, 2025.

“Bill was a great professor, mentor and friend to all of us for so many years,” said Sorrell College Dean Dr. Judson Edwards.

Prior to joining the TROY faculty, he was an HR executive for Newport News Shipbuilding (NNS), the sole supplier of U.S. Navy aircraft carriers and one of two builders of U.S. Navy submarines. NNS is the largest industrial employer in Virginia. He was also the former director of the Executive MBA program at Wake Forest University and his research interests included executive compensation, incentive programs and performance management.

“Dr. Heisler touched the lives of countless students and faculty during his tenure at Troy University. He loved teaching and sharing his wealth of human resource management knowledge with his students and helping to develop current and future HR professionals,” said Dr. Shelley Davis, chair of Human Resource Management and Law.

“His contributions to this Department, College, and University are countless, and this is a great loss for us all. We are grateful for him and the positive impact he made which will continue to be felt on into the future,” she said.

He earned his Bachelor of Business Administration at University of Arkansas at Little Rock, completed a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering at Union College, and earned both the MBA and, later, the Ph.D. from Syracuse University’s Martin J. Whitman School of Management.

Currently, he served TROY as the Chancellor’s Appointee to the Troy University Personnel Advisory Committee and was a member of the Graduate Academic Council. He was also serving as journal editor of the Journal of Human Resources Education.

“Dr. Heisler was an outstanding educator and mentor whose dedication and professional background inspired many,” said Dr. John Haymore, an assistant professor in the department. “His passing is a significant loss for the university, MSHRM program, and students. He will be deeply missed.”

TROY UNIVERSITY ALUMNI SHAPING THE FUTURE OF ACCOUNTING

"The experiences at TROY grew us as a family and grew me as a future professional. The professors and administrators at TROY assisted us in so many ways and wanted to see us succeed."

- Boyd Busby, CPA





Troy University
1983

Troy University alumni make an impact on the world around them, many times shaping the very future of their professions.

The field of accounting is one area where Trojans are leaving their mark, not only in Alabama, but across the nation.

Jeannine Birmingham, CPA and Boyd Busby, CPA sit at the head of their respective organizations, often seen as pitted against one another, but, in reality, working closely behind the scenes to strengthen the field and those CPAs who work in it.

Birmingham is the CEO of the Alabama Society of CPAs, a hat she's worn for the past quarter century.

Busby is the Executive Director of the Alabama State Board of Public Accounting.

"Boyd wears the hat as the regulator. The Alabama State Board of Public Accountancy has the laws and rules around being a CPA in the state of Alabama; the Alabama Society of CPAs is the membership association," Birmingham explained. "My organization is the professional group, and we have three main areas of focus: we are advocates for CPAs in governmental affairs and in student pipeline efforts, we provide professional education programs, we connect members through leadership, young CPAs, and community programs."

In essence, Birmingham is accounting's biggest cheerleader. Accounting, however, wasn't her first pursuit, it was math, which tended to come naturally being the daughter of a TROY math professor. In fact, both her parents – Dr. Curt and Dr. Diane Porter – encouraged her to find her calling.

"I had declared math as my major and finished my sophomore year with a 4.0 GPA in this major, but I didn't think I wanted to be an educator," she said.



Jeannine Birmingham, CPA



A Kappa Delta sorority sister suggested she try accounting, that it would be "easy." A new accounting professor was coming to campus. She "never batted an eye" in her two intro classes and then took Intermediate Accounting with that new professor – Dr. Tom Ratcliffe.

"Dr. Ratcliffe had a unique way of connecting with students – it wasn't just learning and testing the material – he helped you to see the big picture of what accounting is: the language of business," she said. "Dr. Ratcliffe took a lot of time with students, he really wanted us to understand what we were learning and to be successful in an accounting career."

Busby was similarly drawn into the field by Ratcliffe.

"He was the best accounting major salesperson and convinced me not even to entertain any other major," he said.

Busby's experience was a little different than Birmingham's, though. He was a non-traditional student, married to wife Tami with their three-year old daughter Kalen in tow arriving in Troy. While at TROY the Busbys added son Kaleb and, after graduation, daughter Karis came along and was equally impacted by the TROY experience.

"It was stressful trying to be a good husband and father while working full time and being a full-time student. Although it was stressful, my wife and I would not trade the experience for any other pathway.

"The experiences at TROY grew us as a family and grew me as a future professional. The professors and administrators at TROY assisted us in so many ways and wanted to see us succeed," he said.

Among those "great professors" were Dr. Lorraine Magrath, Dr. Kaye Sheridan, Dr. Earl Ingram and the late Dr. Jean Lalilberte.

They instilled in him the mantra to work hard and do the right thing.

"The accounting professors at TROY constantly emphasized the CPA profession as the most trusted profession," he said. "The emphasis instilled in me the focus to do the right thing to live up to the ethical goals set by my professors and my predecessors."

That's where the real goals of the two organizations really mesh. "What's nice and unique is that Boyd and I have such a great

“TROY has been my complete network. All my business contacts have derived in some way based on my time as a student or continued involvement with the accounting program or business school. School ties continue to run deep,” -Boyd Busby



relationship with TROY and with the faculty. When we have issues, . . . we can talk to TROY faculty and hear not only their perspectives, but we can also learn from students about the resources they need,” Birmingham said.

“It’s a crazy, unique, and wonderful relationship that no other state university has. We are a team. We glean ideas from Troy University and take back to our organizations, and then on to the national level,” she said.



Boyd Busby, CPA

Both wear significant national hats. Birmingham is president of the collective group of state society CEOs and sits on the National Pipeline Advisory Group, an independent panel convened by the American Institute of CPAs. Busby sits on the board of directors of the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy.

Birmingham’s 22-member NPAG recently commissioned two studies, one directed at CPAs nationally, the other at students. TROY was heavily represented in the student survey because of the faculty relationships Birmingham and others, such as alumni Josh McGowan and Amanda Paul, have with the William H. Carr School of Accountancy in the Sorrell College of Business.

“My perspective is ‘out of the mouth of babes’ that it is the students, not those teaching nor those in practice or CFOs (professionals cannot predict what we need to do to have a positive impact or grow our pipeline), who are working through the academic and the interview process, they can tell us what deters them from joining accounting and becoming a CPA,” she said. “I know that of the thousands of students who took the survey, Alabama students had 100s and TROY students were a part of the valuable feedback provided.”



Last year, Busby made 22 university visits making presentations on a range of topics from State Board rules, ethics cases and disciplinary cases brought by the State Board.

"My focus is to prepare the next generation of CPAs to continue the work in an ethical manner. TROY is a major 'CPA school' in Alabama with its Master of Accountancy program students achieving some the highest scores in the country," he said.

His advice to students: "Study hard and do not take your studies lightly. You will be competing the rest of your life, so it is important to lay the groundwork for your future success. Develop those relationships that will last a lifetime, and for accounting students, focus on studying for and passing the CPA exam as soon as possible."

Busby knows firsthand the importance of those relationships.

"TROY has been my complete network. All my business contacts have derived in some way based on my time as a student or continued involvement with the accounting program or business school. School ties continue to run deep," he said.

"TROY remains a constant. From personal relationships to business events and meetings at the University, I do not go more than a few days without interacting with someone who I met through TROY," he added. "The great reputation of TROY's

accounting program has given me a step ahead in the esteem of colleagues throughout my professional life."

For Birmingham, finding mentors for students is a major focus for the student to professional transition.

"When you're talking about the 'Big Picture' of your career, students should find a mentor and connect with professionals. That's one of my top pieces of advice I give. ASCPA does this a lot with students. Make sure you have a mentor, someone you can talk through some of the major decisions and challenges you encounter," she said.

"Throughout your life and career, you do hard things. Hard things take more time and investment of energy, more hours studying, and often more dollars to get to the finish line: becoming a CPA and realizing your earning potential. You must realize that you might have to do some hard things to get there, but most employers make sure that the students don't walk through the process alone. They want you to be a CPA and will equip students and young professionals with tools to be successful," Birmingham added.

"The perception that accounting is hard and boring are myths – those are the stories that professionals must debunk. Accounting can be challenging but also rewarding," she said, "it is a fabulous career and so many doors open with the degree."



NEW ACCOUNTING SCHOLARSHIP HELPS RURAL STUDENTS



Scott Sport, CPA

The new Scott and Colleen Sport Endowed Accounting Scholarship will help rural students become successful.

Applicants must have passed Principals of Accounting I to be eligible and have a 2.5 grade point average, and preference will be given first to students from Crenshaw County, then to applicants from Barbour, Butler, Coffee, Covington, Dale or Pike counties. If no applicants are from those areas, then preference will be given to a first-generation college student from any county.

Scott Sport is a 1986 graduate of the Sorrell College of Business, having completed his undergraduate degree in accounting. He went on to earn an MBA from Auburn University. He is a partner in accounting firm Ernst & Young's Strategy and Transactions practice with more than 35 years of public accounting, corporate development and private manufacturing and distribution experience.

A native of Luverne, Sport's father, Joe Rex, was a TROY alumnus and long-time educator in Crenshaw County, eventually serving as superintendent there. His two sisters became teachers as well.

"As I became successful, I set up the Joe Rex and Barbara Sport Scholarship at TROY to both honor my parents for all they did for me and to help others from Crenshaw and surrounding rural communities pursue their own education at TROY," Sport said. "I am very pleased that we have been able to support a number of students in their educational pursuit."

Similar to his initial scholarship, he hopes to provide the same help specifically to Accounting students at TROY, in turn empowering those students to "pay it forward" to future generations of TROY students.

"While at TROY, I majored in Accounting. In doing so, I found that it provided a solid foundation for business acumen and underlying financial skills that enabled my career progression . . . When I look back at the key ingredients to my success and advice I would pass on to others in Accounting, I would say: (i) always be learning, (ii) take some chances and (iii) reinvent yourself as new opportunities arise," Sport said. "These, coupled with hard work and some good fortune, have allowed me to have a rewarding career."

Carr School Director Dr. Josh McGowan said such support is invaluable to the continued growth of the School and the success of its students.

"The scholarship will be instrumental in recruiting accounting students, especially from TROY's home region, and will be impactful for many years to come," he said. "We cannot thank Scott and his family enough for their dedication in making an accounting degree more affordable for TROY students. Their dedication and commitment to the University sets a high standard."

In the end, Sport said he'd found a deeper appreciation for the University and the Sorrell College.

"As I look back to my time at TROY, I most fondly remember the teachers (Mr. [Gene] Sherman, specifically) who took interest in my education, and the friends I have made at TROY," he said. "Over the years, I have also come to appreciate just how much TROY means not only to me, but to many others from rural communities with backgrounds similar to my own, and who are seeking education as a vehicle for success in their careers and lives."



NICK ABRAHAM NAMED CEO OF AMWINS GLOBAL RISK



Sorrell College of Business alumnus Nick Abraham has been named chief executive officer of Amwins Global Risk, the firm’s London-based specialty distributor.

Abraham, originally an accounting major, switched majors his senior year to enter the Risk Management and Insurance program. Today that decision has landed him in London after having been the executive vice president and branch leader of Amwins Insurance Brokerage in Atlanta.

“For the past 3 years, Nick has made a substantial impact across the Brokerage Division and truly embodies the Amwins servant leadership culture,” said Scott Purviance, Chief Executive Officer of Amwins Group, Inc. “His experience on the carrier side, combined with his wholesale broking knowledge, make him an ideal choice to lead the continued expansion of our London operation.”

That “servant leadership culture” isn’t anything new to Abraham, who had previously worked in various leadership positions at insurance giant Markel for 18 years.

“TROY presented so many leadership opportunities while I was on campus. Those opportunities helped me prepare for my career,” he said. “There are a lot of leadership fundamentals that I learned at TROY. I was exposed to servant leadership by people such as (Chancellor) Dr. (Jack) Hawkins, Col. (Dr. John) Schmidt, Ms. (Barbara) Patterson,

Dean Herb Reeves and others, and I was able to see how embracing that mindset can produce results.”

As SGA President, Abraham said he was able to learn and practice servant leadership.

“That has been important as my responsibilities have grown,” he said.

Learning leadership skills weren’t the only takeaways from his time on campus, however. One of his most important: he married wife Melissa, proposing to her on the then-newly finished Quad. A brick near the fountain commemorates “The Question.”

“So much of my life story is tied to TROY,” he said.

“I first met Melissa as a tour guide when I was a Trojan Ambassador,” Abraham said. “It was my fifth year on campus due to a change in major.”

That change was prompted by a good friend and fraternity brother, Scott Smith, who was in risk management and gave him an overview of the industry. That sealed the deal for Abraham.

“I have a lot of fond memories of the professors at TROY. Carol Jordan, who was the head of the RMI program, was particularly influential in my career. She advocated for a special niche of the insurance industry, Excess & Surplus





Lines, and ensured that her students had networking and learning opportunities in the specialty.”

Those opportunities included a trip to Lloyds of London, the birthplace of the formalized risk transfer mechanism.

“I’ll always remember her last piece of advice to me: ‘This is a small industry and the only thing you have is your name. Always make sure to do the right thing’,” he said.

That permeates Abraham’s professional culture today.

“I chose TROY over larger universities because it seemed that the university valued me more as a student than a number. Culture is such an important driver of results in our business and valuing every one of our team member’s contributions helps us succeed,” he said.

Now, Abraham can share his own advice to TROY students easily.

“Get involved. TROY gives its students so many opportunities to engage. No matter what your aspirations are, learning and experiencing the many things TROY has to offer will benefit you for the rest of your life,” he said.



Nick Abraham & Melissa Abraham



STACY FAISON NAMED AREA PRESIDENT OF SMARTBANK



Sorrell College alumnus Stacy Faison has been named Area President for SmartBank for its operations in central and east Alabama.

Faison, who holds both a BSBA in Accounting and an MBA in Business Management from TROY, is a Distinguished National Alumni of the Year, selected in 2007. His 27-year banking career has been spent in commercial and private banking leadership roles at Columbus State Bank, now Synovus, Troy Bank and Trust, and Bank of America.

Faison has a passion for giving back to the community, which he intends to continue in his new role. He currently serves on the Sorrell College of Business Executive Advisory Council at Troy University and has served in this role over 15 years. His past involvement as Chairman for Piedmont Columbus Regional Healthcare Foundation and as a Board Member for Alabama Trust Fund, Auburn Chamber of Commerce, and Troy University Athletic Hall of Fame are just a few examples of his passion for the community.

“Stacy is a key and vital addition to the bank’s senior leadership as he has the experience to build strong & motivated teams to be able to go above our clients’ expectations and rapidly grow in the bank’s key markets from Montgomery to West Georgia,” said Jeff Williams, SmartBank Regional President.



LINETTE CASEY RECOGNIZED BY U.S. DEPT. OF ENERGY

“These exceptional women are deepening our understanding of the clean energy transition and sparking innovative breakthroughs we need to build a thriving clean energy future that benefits every community.” -Jennifer M. Granholm



Sorrell College of Business alumna Linette Casey (MSM '01) was one of nine leaders recognized by the U.S. Dept. of Energy for their outstanding achievements in the field of clean energy.

The 2024 Clean Energy Education and Empowerment (C3E) Awards initiative aims to close the gender gap and increase the participation, leadership and success of women in clean energy fields. It is led by DOE in collaboration with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford University's Precourt Institute for Energy and the Julia Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory at Arizona State University.

“DOE is honored to celebrate this year’s C3E Awardees, a remarkable group of leaders introducing groundbreaking ideas and diverse viewpoints to advance a fair and sustainable clean energy economy in America and across the world,” said U.S. Secretary of Energy Jennifer M. Granholm. “These exceptional women are deepening our understanding of the clean energy transition and sparking innovative breakthroughs we need to build a thriving clean energy future that benefits every community.”

The awards were presented Nov. 13 at the C3E Symposium at Stanford University and Casey’s award comes from the Business Sector.

Casey has established herself as an expert in driving the renewable energy transition and finding sustainable solutions for energy-intensive industries. She has worked in numerous business roles in the energy field, including logistics, procurement, and sales. She collaborates with customers

across the energy industry—including industrial, utility, and renewable sectors—on both local and global scales.

In her current role as a Sales Account Manager for Siemens Energy, Casey works across the renewable energy field—from onshore and offshore wind to solar and storage—supporting a range of clients that include engineering, procurement and construction companies; developers; startups; utilities; and regulating bodies.

Casey is dedicated to mentoring and developing strong women and girls. She is a founding member of the Boston Chapter of the Women’s Energy Network and served as its president in 2022. Under her leadership, the Boston Chapter instituted a college scholarship for young women entering energy careers.

She is featured as a Trailblazer in the children’s book *Everyday Superheroes: Women in Energy Careers*. Casey was also honored with the Distinguished Alumna Award from Maine Maritime Academy, received the Excellence in Character Award (formerly the Woman of the Year Award) from PowerGen International, and was named one of the Top 10 Global Women in Sustainability by TE100.

Casey’s educational background includes an MS in Management from Troy University, a BS in International Business and Logistics from Maine Maritime Academy (Casey was the first female graduate in the major), and a graduate certificate in Corporate Sustainability and Innovation from Harvard University.

DEREK YOUNG NAMED GLOBAL HEAD OF ASSET MANAGEMENT AT FIDELITY



Sorrell College of Business alumnus Derek Young was recently named Global Head of Asset Management Distribution by Fidelity Investment.

As Global Head of Asset Management Distribution, the 1986 graduate leads the European and APAC ex Japan distribution teams. Additionally, since March 2024, he is responsible for the Client Propositions team comprised of product, solutions and investment directing teams that ensure client needs globally are well connected with the full range of Fidelity's investment capabilities. He is also a member of Fidelity International's Global Operating Committee.

In his previous role as President Japan, Young was responsible for managing Fidelity's Japan business covering multiple business channels; Wholesale, distributing Fidelity branded funds through financial institutions; Institutional, providing Fidelity investment solutions and services to institutional investors, asset managers and Defined Contribution pension plans; Personal Investing, which offers Fidelity and third-party mutual funds and stock trading services to retail investors.

Fidelity is one of the world's largest privately held financial services corporation with some \$4.4 trillion in total discretionary assets and more than \$11.5 trillion assets under administration. Some 43 million individuals and 24,000 businesses do business with the company, based in Boston, Mass.

"Fidelity is a family-owned business, and its values are very similar to mine," Young said, from his Tokyo office. "If people are not capable, not willing or don't have the time to manage their investments, Fidelity is there to help. Our two guiding principles are 'the client is always right' and 'what's in the best interest of our customers.'

"Those values – family values – are Fidelity Values and Southern Values, and I get to see how they interact in this country to earn the respect of those people around me," the Milledgeville, GA native said.

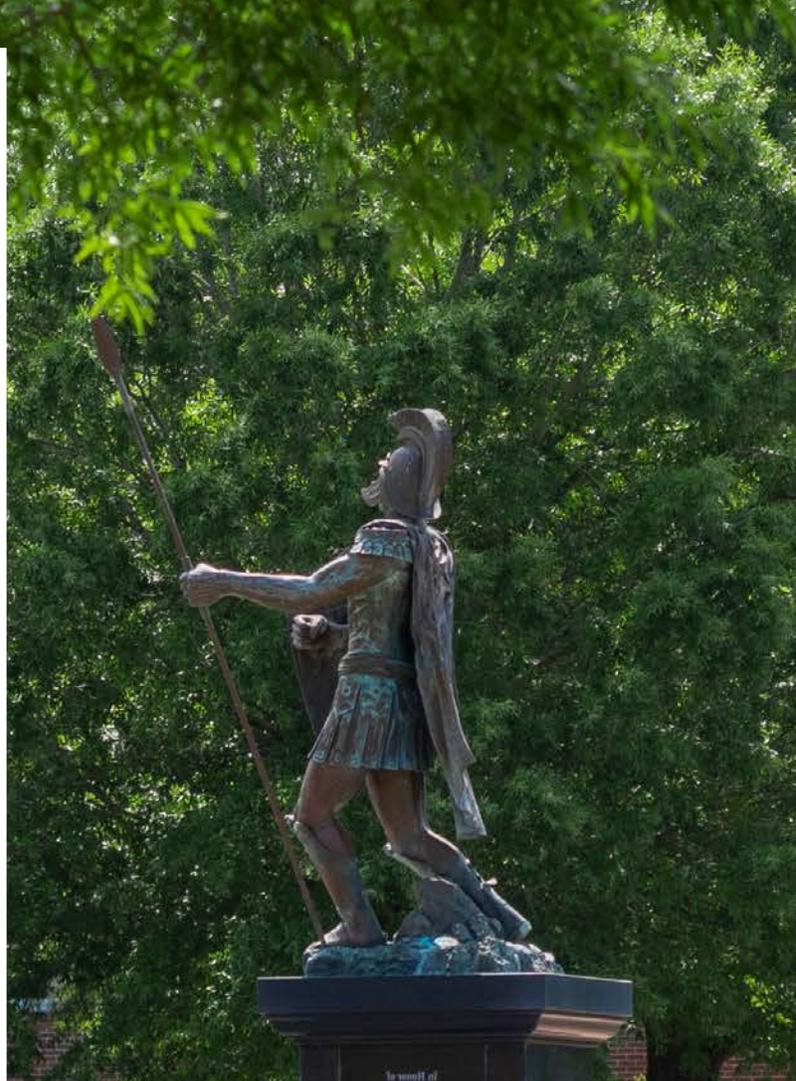
Those values, first learned at home, were honed at TROY in the Sorrell College, where Young said the combination of professors taking an interest in him, leadership development, work on campus and social activities is what has carried him to success in business.

A Sullivan Award winner, Young was a George C. Wallace Leadership Scholar, through which he expanded his leadership capabilities greatly.

"I had the privilege of being involved in leadership activities and those helped to development my values of caring about other people, respecting other people, of making sure you did the right thing for other people," he said.



Derek Young with parents, Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Young at the 1986 Sullivan Awards luncheon



people to follow, who want to win and want to do it the right way. I'm a leader with a carrot, not a stick," said Young.

"I have built amazing teams of amazingly talented people who have wanted to be a part of the winning culture and team. I learned that at TROY," he added.

Young points to three professors in particular who mentored and pushed him to succeed academically.

"Robert Earl Stewart was so great – he was the 'Z' of the balance sheet. He taught me to think about things in a different way and was very supportive of me as a finance major. His classes were incalculable in understanding finance; he was easy to follow and had a natural gift as a teacher," he said. "When you were dealing with him, he was giving you the tools to go about and be successful."

The real difference for him was seeing that TROY professors took an interest in developing a total package, not just a competent practitioner in a given field.

"They really cared about me as an individual and cared about my being successful. Having that background has been really important in my life," he said.

It was Ira Pyron, who taught Finance alongside Stewart, that pushed Young to take his education to the next level.



Fidelity
INVESTMENTS

He was a resident advisor in Alumni Hall and then moved up to be manager of Dill Hall – both experiences proved invaluable learning labs for Young.

"The work ethic skills that came from having to work with people across the university were important and I learned so much about different people from different walks of life and I got to be the person to understand where they were coming from," he said.

"I had real learning experiences (at TROY) as I moved through on how you fit in, how to bring the TROY values into the workplace and be the kind of leader who motivates

“The work ethic skills that came from having to work with people across the university were important and I learned so much about different people from different walks of life and I got to be the person to understand where they were coming from,” -Derek Young

“He had gone to Harvard, and he pushed me to Vandy. I had a full scholarship at Georgia and only a partial to Vanderbilt, but he convinced me it would be a good opportunity to grow and do things in a big way,” he said.

Young went on to complete an MBA in accounting and finance at Vanderbilt and later earned his Chartered Financial Analyst certification.

“Eugene Sherman in accounting really challenged me,” he said. “The professors really challenged me on a personal basis and made sure I was doing everything I could to excel and leverage my skill sets. They were really great, and I learned from them. They were true mentors.”

Joining Fidelity in 1996 as director of Risk Management for Fidelity Management Trust, Young has held a litany of jobs within the company, with an ever-expanding global footprint.

After spending five-plus years based in Tokyo and now home-ported in London, Young said the lessons he learned at TROY are part of his every-day strategy in business.

“One of the biggest challenges facing us in Japan is the standard of living – the life expectancy is increasing as people live longer and I want to make sure they have enough money to live on,” he said. “I want to push the idea of trying to help people invest in the ways it takes to maintain their quality of life. These issues mean a lot to me and to Fidelity, so I want to help other people to understand it.”

Omicron Delta Kappa

Omicron Delta Kappa, a national leadership society, recognizes meritorious attainments in all-around leadership with a strong secondary requirement of scholarship. The society recognizes outstanding students, faculty and administration based on achievements in all areas of leadership at Honors Day held in Sorrell Chapel.

ODK officers are: Brock Davis, vice president-elect; Derek Young, vice president; Tasha Spottiek, president; and Jim Wyatt, president-elect.

Omicron Delta Kappa members are Mary Blaydes, Leslie Carroll, Ann Johnson, Tami McCray, Lori Birtford, Angie Overstreet, Taina Spottiek, Dr. Joseph Mitchell, Susellen Snoekstra, Jim Wyatt, Sharyn Nunn, Brock Davis, Judy Barretto, Dr. Judy Lewis, Dr. Jan Errod, Dr. Manuel Johnson, Chancellor Ralph Adams, Robbie Davis, Cliff Alfred, Annette Jones, Mrs. Helen Leverette, Mr. Don Gibson, Dr. Rhoe Swisher, Derek Young, Ron Pierce, Lucas Cade, Bert Kelly, Ms. Jean Mary, Brian Weekly, Ms. Jacqueline Smith, Charlie Finch, Mrs. Carolyn Gibson, and Mr. Leroy Walton.



JON HEATH OF CARR, RIGGS & INGRAM PAYS IT FORWARD



Jon Heath's goal in establishing an endowed scholarship in the William H. Carr School of Accountancy in TROY's Sorrell College of Business is simple: "pay it forward."

"I was blessed to attend then-Troy State University via academic and athletic scholarships that together funded both my undergraduate degree and MBA," he said. "Someone paved the way for me via similar grants. I simply want to pay it forward – hopefully helping many future students reach their dreams and goals."

Heath, who played football for the Trojans from 1989-1993, is President of Operations and a partner in Carr, Riggs & Ingram and CRI Advisors. He was a member of the regular season undefeated 1993 National semi-finals team, playing his last three years for Coach Larry Blakeney.

"I encourage and challenge others to join me in paying it forward," he said.

Prior to CRI, Heath spent over 11 years with PricewaterhouseCoopers where he specialized in utilities and telecommunications, serving large multi-nationals and start-ups. As CRI's President of Operations, he is responsible for the firm's quality control, marketing and information technology initiatives.

Heath said it was the personal touch that gave him great affinity for TROY.

"I made wonderful friends via athletics and earning my accounting degree," he said. "I'm also a Sigma Chi, which has afforded me many lifelong friendships."

"One of my favorite parts of being at TROY was that, even as a young student, I got to know Dr. & Mrs. Hawkins. I would often see Mrs. Hawkins walking along campus. I received several handwritten notes from Dr. Hawkins both prior to and after graduating. Those personal touches are treasured," Heath said.

It wasn't just the personal touches from the First Couple, but from several other mentors on campus, both in athletics and academics.

"I mention athletics because that's where it all started. Had I not visited on an athletic visit, then I wouldn't have obtained the academic scholarship either," he said, noting the impact Coach Blakeney, (head trainer) Chuck Ash, Johnny Williams and (former athletics director) Robert Earl Stewart had on his life.

"Academically, Dr. Thomas Ratcliffe, Mr. Eugene Sherman and Ms. Sue Beasley made big investments in me," he said. "I am so grateful for them and their love and counsel."

The "Jon Heath Pay It Forward Endowed Scholarship" is one way Heath can ensure other students have the opportunity to achieve success in Accounting, and in life.

Recipients must be undergraduate students with a declared major in Accounting or enrolled in the Master of Accountancy Program, with first preference given to masters students or students enrolled in Intermediate Accounting I who have and maintain a 3.0 GPA.

"I would tell (today's) students to first, include God in your planning. Proverbs 16:3 informs us to 'commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.' Then, believe in yourself and commit wholeheartedly to that plan, realizing you will make mistakes, enjoy successes, and have to adapt to change," he said.

"So, surround yourself with wise, God-fearing counsel. Ask a lot of questions, then choose to be humble and listen," said Heath. "Proverbs 19:20 says, 'Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise.' After all, isn't gaining wisdom one of the reasons that you came to TROY?"



CHAD FIFE: FROM THE BATTLEFIELD TO THE BOARDROOM

"As a first-generation college student that had just completed a six-year active-duty commitment in the Army, TROY not only provided me with a phenomenal experience, but was instrumental with serving as a bridge as I transitioned from military life to corporate America,"

- Chad Pigg Fife





Chad Fife and GCIAS Team

As a senior partner with Bank of America Merrill Lynch's Global Corporate & Institutional Advisory Services Group (GCIAS) and as a managing partner, Wealth Management Advisor, he leads the GCIAS Defined Contribution, Defined Benefit, and Philanthropic (Endowment, Foundations, Non-Profit) institutional investment consulting practice. Fife is a six-year veteran of the United States Army where he served on active duty. He is also the recipient of numerous military awards, including the Meritorious Service Medal. Upon completion of his military service, he joined LPMG as an auditor.

A two-time Sorrell College graduate based in Atlanta, he holds both B.S. and MBA degrees in Accounting, and nine

certifications in investing, financial planning, retirement and wealth management areas. In 2023 and 2024, his GCIAS team was awarded #1 spot on Barron's "Top 100 Consulting Teams" list. His team was also recognized on the "Top 100 Institutional Consultants" list in 2021 and 2022.

He said TROY was the bridge that transformed him from military service to the world of business and finance.

"As a first-generation college student that had just completed a six-year active-duty commitment in the Army, TROY not only provided me with a phenomenal experience, but was instrumental with serving as a bridge as I transitioned from military life to corporate America," Fife said.

"All of the professors were very professional and passionate about delivering a first-class education to the students. Not only was TROY a fantastic experience, but their passion for serving helped me feel right at home from the start," he added.

Fife's college trail wasn't direct. Being from a small town in Indiana presented a challenge when it came to funding a college education, so he turned to the U.S. Army, enlisting as a 17 year-old high school graduate in order to earn that college money through the GI Bill.



“It’s important to approach life as an ongoing education to not only stay apprised of your respective industry, but to always keep yourself in a position of marketability...” -Chad Pigg Fife

That enlistment took him from Fort Benning, GA to Vicenza, Italy, to Fort Campbell, KY, where he met Sharlene, a Blackhawk helicopter pilot who would become his wife. He ended his six-year active-duty service as a staff sergeant.

“It made it difficult for both of us to continue on active duty due to the inevitable separation. Sharlene and I knew it was important for one of us to retire from the Army, so I decided to be the ‘risk taker’ and pursue corporate America dreams,” he said.

At the time, Sharlene’s command was at Fort Rucker, AL, conveniently located so that TROY was the obvious choice.

“I was clueless when it came to the college life, so feeling welcomed from the beginning with smaller classroom settings was very appreciated. I also joined Delta Chi fraternity, which helped me quickly acclimate to the social life,” he said.

At TROY, he knew he wasn’t just a number, but someone who would be supported along his academic journey by caring professors.

“Two professors distinctly stand out as playing a pivotal role during my accounting education: Dr. Steve Grice and Ray Moody. From Day one, Dr. Grice was able to succinctly describe the accounting curriculum and commitment to me, so that

the expectation was crystal clear and all I had to do was work hard each and every day. Ray Moody was a retiree from KPMG after a 30-year illustrious career. Ray and I would continuously meet to discuss the curriculum and how it directly or indirectly correlated to serving as a public accountant,” he said.

A very succinct comment played a pivotal role in his decision to make TROY his after-Army move.

“As Dr. Grice brilliantly stated early on, ‘There is only one way to learn accounting!’ After working in the audit profession for a couple of years, I decided to pursue a career as a financial advisor at Merrill Lynch. I have been a financial advisor for 20 years now and can continuously tie back to my education at TROY throughout my conversations,” he said.

When it came time for a job after completing an MBA in Accounting, it was Moody who facilitated an interview and provided the recommendation that KPMG hire Fife – even before he had started the graduate program. Once completed, he was able to step into an auditor’s position in KMPG’s Atlanta office.

For Fife, his first day in corporate America taught him that it doesn’t matter where you attend college, everyone starts out the same.

“...Not only was TROY a fantastic experience, but their passion for serving a large military population across all of their campuses helped me feel right at home on day one.” -Chad Pigg Fife

“The personable college experience and the simple understanding of completing the college process was just the entry point to a career. In my experience, I felt that I was better prepared for my profession than many of my friends that attended other universities,” he said. “I feel this occurred as a direct result of the passion each professor that I learned from had for each and every student; we weren’t just a number!”

Beyond his contributions as a member of the Sorrell College Dean’s Executive Advisory Council, Fife readily shares his experiences with high school and college students exploring the different paths in accounting, and often encounters people whose degrees are not part of their profession.

“It’s important to approach life as an ongoing education to not only stay apprised of your respective industry, but to always keep yourself in a position of marketability,” he said. “From an accountancy perspective, every time I mention to someone that I have an accounting degree from TROY, the immediate recognition and praise is refreshing and is always a direct, positive reflection of everyone’s role at TROY.”

A large part of that is due to the program’s long-standing commitment to excellence, where student hard work returns great dividends. Fife said there were two primary ways for students to achieve success.

“Trust your professors, as they have your best interest at heart. You have to do your part each and every day,” he said. “I never approached studying to pass an exam; rather, I approached studying as what is essential to fully understand the content, which led to success in the workforce.”





IDEA BANK MARKETING COMPETITION ENDS WITH A FLASH



Gabby Jent, recent TROY graduate and owner of Gabby J Photography from Jasper, AL, has won the IDEA Bank's annual Marketing Competition. While Jent has been behind the camera perfecting her craft since high school, she officially started her business in 2023.

Since then, Jent has grown her clientele and services, offering photo shoots of all kinds including portrait, lifestyle, graduation, couples, wedding shoots, and more. Jent offers a unique experience through Gabby J Photography, offering a relaxed, enjoyable, and low-pressure environment to capture her client's in "every step of life."

Her clients specifically praise their experience working with Jent, noting that she is "a vibrant and joyful soul" and "so fun to work with... open to any and all ideas."

Participants of the competition were asked to set up a business display, include information documents, and post a reel to Instagram. The purpose was to showcase the consistent branding of their business, their uniqueness, their strong audience recognition and engagement, and more.

As the Best Overall winning display, Gabby J Photography's display impressed judges with its interactive Polaroid feature, professional materials, and clear presentation of services. Judges praised its creativity, strategy, and authenticity.

As the winner of the IDEA Bank's 2025 Marketing Competition, Gabby J Photography received a personalized marketing package valued at \$2,000 to assist in the promotion and growth of her business. Gabby J Photography continues to grow, planning to stay in Troy and seek photography opportunities as they arise.



IF THERE IS A
PROBLEM WITH A
TABLET, PLEASE
PLACE A STICKY
NOTE WITH THE
PROB

SBDC GIVES “NEW START” TO PIKE COUNTY INMATES



Juliana Bolivar Addresses Class

A group of women at the Pike County Jail are gaining new tools to rebuild their futures through a unique entrepreneurship series launched by Troy University's Small Business Development Center (SBDC).

Juliana Bolivar, Director of the Troy University SBDC, said the idea for the program grew out of her experience supporting justice-impacted individuals over the years—some while still incarcerated, including developing business plans through the mail, and others after release when entrepreneurship offered a path forward despite employment barriers.

"This time, these women are getting access to real tools, exposure to emerging technologies, and a chance to see themselves differently," Bolivar said. "Our goal is to show that entrepreneurship is not reserved for people with resources. It can begin with vision and willingness."

Pike County Sheriff Russell Thomas called the program an innovative way to get inmates thinking about their futures.

"Any time we can have a positive impact on their lives – a way to show them that they can still be successful members of the community – we're winning the game," he said. "Studies have proven that when inmates are engaged in meaningful thought, skills building, and hope, recidivism rates drop, and the inmate goes on to live a productive life."

"The Small Business Development Center at TROY is giving hope, support and learning opportunities that will lay the foundation for these ladies' future success," he said.

Participants were introduced to how modern tools can support idea development, strategic thinking, and the practical skills required to launch a business—such as planning, time management, and communication.

The New Start Up series will continue with four additional seminars covering business basics, marketing, small business finances, and professionalism. Sessions are designed to be practical and accessible, focusing on ways participants can use their strengths to build opportunity for themselves and their families.

"If we were able to support justice-impacted individuals in building business plans years ago—before the technology we have today—then I truly believe we can go even further now," Bolivar said. "The energy in the room, the questions, the ideas—it was inspiring to see how ready these women are to learn, to grow, and to take ownership of their futures."

Bolivar expressed deep gratitude for Pike County Sheriff Russell Thomas, whose support made the initiative possible.

"It takes a leader in our correctional system to believe that there is hope and that we can contribute to positive change," she said. "We are so grateful to Sheriff Thomas and his team for welcoming this program and trusting us to bring these resources inside. Their belief in this model made all the difference."

The SBDC at Troy University provides free business consulting and training to entrepreneurs across Southeast Alabama. The New Start Up series is one of several efforts aimed at expanding access to entrepreneurial education in under-served communities.



TROY UNIVERSITY OPENS NATION'S FIRST **STUDENT-MADE** STOREFRONT



Chancellor Jack Hawkins Jr.



Lynne Firmin George



Trustee Karen Carter &
Chancellor Jack Hawkins Jr.

The nation's first brick-and-mortar Student Made Store opened this fall on the Square at Troy University's IDEA Bank and promises to be a new intersection between student entrepreneurs and the community.

The IDEA Bank is located at 63 South Court Street on the corner of Court Street and Three Notch Street. TROY's Student-Made Store is currently comprised of 28 student creators and eight student managers, a number that IDEA Bank Director Lynne George says is growing.

"Patrons can expect to find a wide variety of items showcasing unique student art, jewelry, clothing, custom creations and much more," she said.

A block-party styled grand opening event was sponsored by the Pike County Chamber of Commerce in front of the IDEA Bank and its new Student Made Store entrance.

TROY's store is part of a consortium of 13 other student-made stores at campuses across the nation but is unique in that it is the only one to operate a store front and an online store.

"In addition, not only are the products all student-made, but the store is also completely student run. Six student managers oversee the daily operations of the store, including a fully student-staffed business," George said.

Troy's Student-Made Store is open both online and in-person throughout the academic year. Please note that the store operates cashless. All payments must be made via credit, debit, or ApplePay for convenience and safety.

Follow the journey and share your experience with studentmade_troy on social media. For more information, please contact ideabank@troy.edu or 334-808-6777 or visit the website at studentmadestore.com/student-made-troy.



ALABAMA STUDENT LAUCHPAD FUNDS STUDENT AI STARTUP WITH \$100,000

The student-founded, now alumni-led, Cognera Health, Inc. team has won the Alabama Launchpad competition, securing \$100,000 in non-dilutive funding.

Founded by Master of Computer Science alumnus Vamsi Jupudi, Cognera's CEO, and Jaydeep Patel, a Master of Clinical Mental Health alumnus, the team successfully completed the Launchpad competition in the Life Sciences track after winning the Sorrell College of Business' Regions Foundation Business Idea Competition IDEA Bank.

"Winning has not only validated our efforts but has also sparked conversations that were previously unimaginable," Jupudi said. "We are currently engaged in some truly promising discussions with investors and potential partners."

Established in 2006, Alabama Launchpad is the state's most active early-stage seed fund investor, dedicated to driving innovation and job growth through startup competitions and ongoing mentorship for Alabama entrepreneurs. The program has invested more than \$6.4 million in more than 120 startups, resulting in more than 1,600 jobs created and more than \$1 billion in estimated valuation. It is a program of the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama.

Once the team made it to the finalist stage in the statewide competition, Jupudi said "things got really intense."

"The program paired us with some amazing advisors -- Saksham Narang, Matthew Jaeh, Cecil Bostany, Keith Cromwell, Gayle Rogers, Mary Ila Ward, and Ryan Robinett. These weren't just casual check-ins either. We had these deep

strategy sessions where they really pushed us on everything - our business model, how we were thinking about the technology, our market approach, all of it," he said.

Patel said he never considered himself an entrepreneur.

"It was a truly exhilarating and transformative experience. I had never explored my entrepreneurial side, but the idea of creating a novel solution to help people with mental health challenges, distinct from traditional approaches, shifted my perspective. I was working as a counselor for over a year when Vamsi reached out. We collaborated to develop an innovative platform to support mental health," he said. "After our win at Troy University's IDEA Bank, I knew we had something special to offer the world, and our journey began."

Following their IDEA Bank win, the pair reached out to veteran healthcare technology executive John Budala, who serves as Cognera's president. Together, the three - along with some dedicated interns - have built an Artificial Intelligence-driven platform to address gaps in mental healthcare.

"Vamsi's technical expertise and leadership guided us toward Alabama Launchpad, while John's business acumen shaped our strategy, guiding us through the startup landscape with confidence. We poured our collective ideas into creating Cognera Health, refining our platform for the Alabama Launchpad competition. We secured mentorship through IDEA Bank and other Troy University resources," Patel said. "It was a journey of long hours, tireless discussions and creative problem solving."



Jaydeep Patel, Vamsi Jupudi, John Budala

Jupudi believes the experience was valuable in several ways, including how the state of Alabama benefits.

“What I found most valuable wasn’t just the business advice, though that was crucial. It was how they helped us get really clear about why Alabama specifically needs what we’re building,” he said. “They kept pushing us to articulate how our AI platform solves this fundamental problem where people get therapy but then they’re on their own until the next session. That gap is where so many people struggle, and that’s exactly what we’re addressing.”

Now, with \$100,000 in additional funding, Jupudi said he looks to accelerate the development of their platform, BrightLyf.

“(The prize money) completely transforms what we can do and how fast we can do it. We can now build our HIPAA-compliant MVP in less than six months instead of the longer timeline we were looking at before. This means we’ll be launching pilot programs in multiple locations much sooner than we originally planned,” he said.

Patel agrees: “Our mission has been clear from the start: to help those in need and save lives through accessible mental health care.”

“The Alabama Launchpad win, with its \$100,000 prize and invaluable mentorship, is one of many affirmations of our goals. We’ll keep pushing to make Cognera Health the leading solution in mental health care, transforming lives across Alabama and beyond,” he said.



Vamsi Jupudi



Dean Edwards, Vamsi Jupudi, Lynne George, & Preston Pritchett



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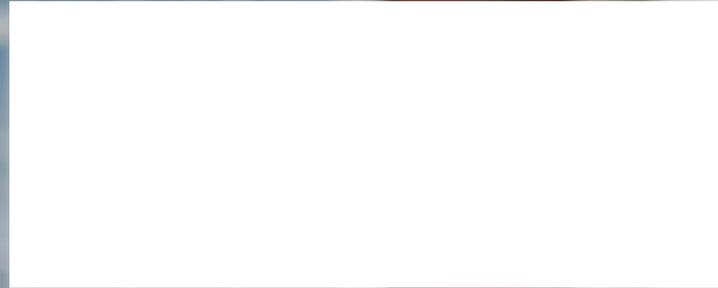
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