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## High School Students Learn Entrepreneurship Skills at Conference

**STRIVE! brings 100 north Mississippi high school students together with area business leaders**

JANUARY 28, 2019 BY EDWIN B. SMITH



Students from Greenville High School compare notes on their group project during the STRIVE! Conference at the UM Jackson Avenue Center. Photo by Megan Wolfe/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

OXFORD, Miss. – For 100 north Mississippi high school students, the path to owning their own businesses got a boost recently at the University of Mississippi.

Those students spent Thursday (Jan. 24) investing in their entrepreneurial journeys at STRIVE!, one of three regional conferences aimed at developing young entrepreneurs across Mississippi. The day's fast-paced experiences challenged students to perform market research, interact with local business resource providers and practice proper soft skills such as communication, networking and dining etiquette.

Held at UM's Jackson Avenue Center, the event was sponsored by the **Southern Entrepreneurship Program** and hosted by the **McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement**. Both SEP and the McLean Institute's **Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development** initiative, or CEED, work to develop an entrepreneurial mindset among Mississippi youth.

"The central focus of STRIVE! is to demonstrate the importance of communication skills within and outside of business settings," said James Wilcox, director of the SEP and the Center for Economic and Entrepreneurship Education within the University of Southern Mississippi's College of Business and Economic Development.

"By practicing these soft skills, students are able to walk away with a greater sense of confidence in themselves and in their ability to pitch innovative new ideas to prospective customers, partners and

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### Campus Briefs

#### Construction Set to Begin on Gertrude Ford Boulevard

OXFORD, Miss. – Closures of the southbound lane on Gertrude Ford Boulevard, near the University Avenue bridge, are expected during construction of a retaining wall on the University of Mississippi campus starting Monday (July 22). The construction will begin at 7 a.m. July 22 and is expected to continue through Aug. 31. During that time,

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### Thank You To Our Donors

#### Family Comes Full Circle with Ford Center Gift

OXFORD, Miss. – Family historian Kay Castellow McKnight is finding out more similarities between herself and cousin Gertrude Castellow Ford following a recent search through the family archives. After reconnecting with her father's side of her family, McKnight is also expanding a legacy begun by her cousin at the University of Mississippi. "Gertrude was the

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fundress. The event also serves as a valuable networking opportunity, allowing students to put faces with the names of local business resource providers they can reach out to for assistance in the future.”

CEED project manager J.R. Love said the partnership between the two universities came about through a series of meetings he and Wilcox attended in Jackson.

“As we talked, we realized that both of our institutions had common goals to better the state of Mississippi and to equip future young business leaders within it,” Love said. “This conference enabled us to fulfill these mutual objectives.

“Whether students use their innovative thinking skills to start a business or tackle community challenges, they can be change agents for their communities.”

Participating high schools included Greenville, Hernando, Itawamba County, New Hope (Columbus), and West Tallahatchie (Webb). Sitting at 16 tables in groups of four to six people each, the students listened attentively as Wilcox and others shared insights.

“How much money would you need to start a business?” asked Wilcox, who facilitated the day’s events. “You may think that it’s too expensive or unrealistic, but the truth is we see students launch businesses every year with as little as \$10.

“Resist buying junk food for a month, and instead use that money to make more money.”

Using several SEP alumni as real-life examples, Wilcox invited students to participate in the program’s annual \$10 challenge “Making Money Now.”

“It’s called bootstrapping,” he said. “Don’t view what you have as being too little. Instead, consider what you can do now with what you do have. Leverage it. Grow it. But start with what you have.”

Following Wilcox’s opening presentation, representatives from the Oxford University Bank, Mechanics Bank, North Mississippi Enterprise, Oxford-Lafayette County Economic Development Foundation and the Mississippi Small Business Development Center participated in a panel discussion. Questions addressed included what high school students can do to grow their networks, how to make their social media accounts more professional, and how to begin saving and investing money.

The students were then issued a marketing challenge to create an MVP – a reduced version of a full-scale business idea – for a coffee shop. Participants at each table got a box with an instruction sheet, a T-shirt and a set of markers. Wilcox instructed them to read and follow the instructions to create a vision, a value and a voice for their MVP.

After lunch, each team submitted their T-shirt design and presented a 30-second pitch showcasing their particular vision. The event judges were three Ole Miss students: Elena Bauer, CEED innovation fellow and law student from Germany; AK Burress, CEED innovation scholar and pharmacy student from Water Valley; and Adam Franco, CEED innovation scholar and public policy student from Birmingham, Alabama.

Winners of the challenge were:

- First place – Hernando High School students Raiven Booze, Dominique Cheeks, Nigeria Hibbler, Raven Payton and Dara Tuggle
- Second place – New Hope High School students Emma Alexander, Emma Blankenship, Micaela Hudgins and Kenzie Deason
- Third place – New Hope High School students Amia Hill, Rotrik Morris, Makayla Williams, Kevon Brown, Shikyra Minor, Aubri Bouldes and Taylor Jackson

Katie Naron, instructor in teacher education at the UM **School of Education**, discussed the importance

## Ole Miss In the News

### TIME: UM Law Professor, Space Expert Featured in Moon’s Historic Site Fight Article

‘We Need That Boot Print.’ Inside the Fight to Save the Moon’s Historic Sites Before It’s Too Late By Currie Engel/TIME Half a century after humankind first walked on the moon, our sole natural satellite is becoming a much busier place. NASA wants to make a return trip, as do private American space companies like

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Panelists Holly Kelly (left), Tyler Hill and Gant Boone share their business expertise with students during the STRIVE! Conference. Photo by Megan Wolfe/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

of etiquette with conference participants.

Several students talked about specific benefits they gained from the conference.

"I really found the information about the importance of good communication skills helpful," said Taylor Jackson, a senior from New Hope. "I'd like to one day own my own photography business. I now realize that I can do it if I start small and work really hard."



Itawamba County High School students Chase Ross (left) and Raina Ratliff discuss the best way to pitch their group's idea for a coffee shop. Photo by Megan Wolfe/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

Itawamba County High senior Raina Ratliff said she profited from the tips on networking.

"I want to own a bakery and realize that I will need to make good business connections in order to achieve my goal," Ratliff said. "I'll begin with selling cookies at bake sales, but the goal is to evolve into a product line with more expensive items, like cakes."

Entrepreneurship class instructors from the participating high schools said they were glad to see principles they've taught their students being echoed by business professionals.

"What I've heard today will definitely reinforce my curriculum," said Glenda Gooden, of West Tallahatchie. "This also gives them an opportunity to present their own business ideas and possibly find ways to obtain seed money for themselves."

Kali Harris, of New Hope High School, agreed.

"It's just great to see all of them so engaged in what is being presented," she said. "There's been a wealth of knowledge provided here today which, if applied, should help them advance toward their own bright futures."

Established in 2007, SEP has served more than 6,000 high school students through its annual series of regional conferences and regional competitions. The final two regional STRIVE! conferences are scheduled for Jan. 30 and Feb. 6 in Jackson and Hattiesburg, respectively.

Up next in this year's SEP series is THRIVE!, described as Mississippi's "Shark Tank" event for high school students. The top 20 winners from these regional qualifiers will advance to the SEP State Competition in May.

The SEP program and the [McLean Entrepreneurial Leadership Program](#) have shared goals of working with Mississippi high school students to develop an entrepreneurial skill set.

The Robert M. Hearin Support Foundation supports the program with a generous financial gift that allows Ole Miss CEED students to promote entrepreneurship and economic development in Mississippi, Love said.

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