

**2023 - 2024**

# **FINAL REPORT**

Presented by:

*Alabama Student Retention Council*



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# Meet the Student Retention Council



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# About the SRC

Alabama's leaders are dedicated to investing in the State's future. As we look towards the next century it is more important than ever that we recruit and retain our college graduates. At the Higher Education Partnership, we believe this is critically important as we propel Alabama into the knowledge-based economy of tomorrow.

As lawmakers pondered ways to encourage the best and brightest college graduates to consider Alabama as a career destination, early surveys from the state's Retain Alabama initiative showed opportunities for growth in categories across the spectrum. While the data was compelling, it became apparent that students needed to be more than just numbers in a report – they needed to have a voice at the table.

External market research showed that traditional students in the Generation-Z category are digital media natives, who are less responsive to traditional advertising. Instead, the students are persuaded by a perception of authenticity and connection.

Recognizing that the strongest voice to reach students is their peers, the Student Retention Council aims to bridge the gap between community leaders hoping to recruit young professionals and the future young professionals themselves.

The Higher Education Partnership was honored to receive legislative support to host the Student Retention Council, beginning in Fall 2022. The Partnership serves as the advocacy voice for Alabama's 14 public universities and is uniquely positioned for this project to build onto existing grassroots networks of students, administrators, faculty and advocates across the state.

Student Retention Council members were appointed by the University Presidents for their work ethic, leadership quality, and ability to represent the student voice. The SRC members come from a diverse cross section of student voices – representing a wide variety of majors, hometowns and campus interests.

Throughout the course of the 2023 – 2024 school year, SRC members participated in a fast-paced, hands-on instructional course. They researched and designed a project they felt was best suited to encourage their peers to consider Alabama.

The Higher Education Partnership would like to thank the following groups for sharing their time to support the students throughout this project: the University Presidents' Council, the League of Municipalities, Main Street Alabama, the AL Association of Colleges & Employers (AAACE), the Alabama Commission on Higher Education, the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama, the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, and The Department of Commerce, TROY Montgomery, AIDT, Dr. Holly Cost, and Mayor Lawrence Haygood.



# Executive Summary

The Student Retention Council, founded by the Higher Education Partnership in 2022, seeks to give Alabama's college students a platform to voice their perspectives in relation to remaining in-state following their college graduation. The President or Chancellor of each of the fourteen public universities in Alabama appointed students to serve on this year's Student Retention Council. With students from each of our public universities, voices from all over Alabama are adequately heard in discussions shaping college students' futures here in our state.

The Student Retention Council has set out to be both a platform for college students to voice concerns and share opinions, and also to serve as an initiative to educate young professionals about the plethora of career and life-style opportunities in Alabama.

While one-third of out-of-state college students and 75 percent of in-state students do stay in Alabama after completing their four-year degree, the Student Retention Council recognizes there is still room for improvement in the rates of those who choose to seek opportunities elsewhere. What many of these students do not realize is that Alabama is ripe with opportunities for their picking. With the second lowest cost of living in the nation, phenomenal employers, and 21 state parks, Alabama is the place to be!

Throughout the course of the past year, students from Alabama's universities have collaborated to address and educate their peers. The second cohort of SRC students has built upon the foundation laid for them the previous year, by reaching even more of Alabama's college students and by going beyond that to build deeper connections with communities all over the state. The following report will detail the collaborative efforts of the second SRC cohort.



# Reaching Gen -Z

The Student Retention Council is uniquely positioned for success, because its primary objective is to provide Alabama's college students a platform to illustrate and motivate the changes that will encourage others to remain in-state following their college graduations.

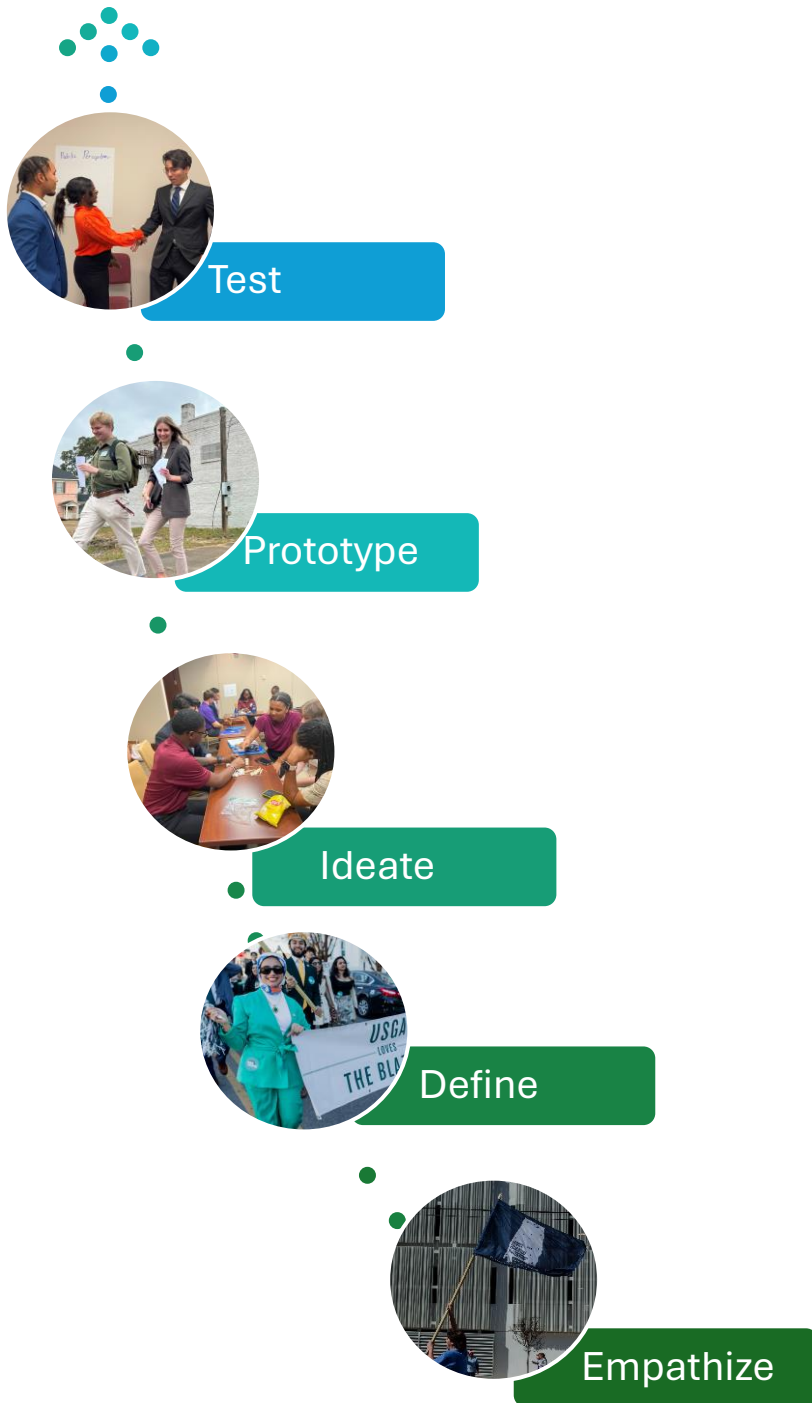
Generation Z supplements traditional news sources and celebrities with social media and often looks up to their peers from their own campuses more than they do traditionally prominent public figures. In line with this, the SRC is composed of student leaders from each of Alabama's public universities. The SRC was structured with the knowledge that today's college students are much more likely to collaborate with their peers than with those who they find less relatable.

Moreover, enlisting the help of student leaders all over the state allows a deeper connection to be formed between the mission of the SRC and Alabama's college students, who we're working tirelessly to retain. In charging student leaders from each campus to engage in conversations, collect feedback, and connect with communities, a deeper sense of buy-in is created. In this way, the design of the SRC ensures every college student in Alabama knows they have a platform to utilize their voice.





# Process



In the 2023 – 2024 school year, the Student Retention Council worked to build on the platform developed by the first cohort. The inaugural cohort of the SRC met throughout the year. Using the Stanford Design Method, they developed and executed presentations on campus that would encourage their peers to consider Alabama as a career destination.

In Cohort 2, the Student Retention Council continued to utilize this methodology as they entered Fall 2023. The University President or Chancellor appointed students to the SRC prior to August. At their August orientation, students reflected on the work of previous years. They considered their own experiences on campus and designed focus group questions that could help to expand on the data examined previously. This was the “Empathize” phase of the Stanford Design Method.

The SRC reconvened in Montgomery in October to Define and Ideate on ways to address the problems they understood from the campus focus groups. They began to develop campus presentations addressing student perceptions and to explore ideas related to creating Quality of Life in communities.

Through the winter holidays, members from across the state worked to develop their prototypes of community projects and campus presentations. Throughout the spring semester, they worked to execute campus presentations and continue to share the messaging with peers. They also had the opportunity to “test” their community projects through in depth community conversations. The conversations explored the dynamics of what it would look like to implement some of the proposed projects in Alabama’s municipalities.

# Understanding Student Perceptions

After reviewing the research from the first Student Retention Council cohort, as well as previous Retain Alabama reports, SRC members further developed ideas surrounding the data points on the survey through relating the data to student experiences on their campuses. It was key to host authentic conversations to find qualitative details that painted a full picture of current student perceptions of the state.

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*"Factors that would influence me to stay in Alabama (include) my family and to serve the huge amount of underserved populations."*  
-UAB Student

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*"I just love the small town charm."*  
- UNA Student

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*"As far as outdoors... (Alabama) is one of the most beautiful states."*  
-AUM Student

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The 2023-2024 SRC cohort executed small focus groups and conversations on campuses in the Fall of 2023. Many broad conclusions echoed ideas that were shared in the previous studies, but they also provided surprising examples of areas in Alabama that did appeal to them. Each student had unique experiences and exposures that shaped their perception. Many of the results were thematically unique to each campus, as a result of student perceptions being largely centered around proximity to their campus (Unique Campus Reports, Appendix A).

While some students reflected on comparisons to large metros where they had visited or lived, a surprising number shared positive perceptions of the suburban and rural environments in Alabama. This was surprising and contrasted with previous data that suggested the primary focus should be on urban centers.

Overall, four key themes that were incredibly important to the majority of to students when they were choosing whether or not they would stay in Alabama were: Quality of Life, A Sense of Belonging, Access to Career Pathways, and Affordability. Student Retention Council members considered these factors when developing presentations and

community projects designed to appeal to young professionals.

## Key Decision Factors:



Quality Of Life

Community  
Connections  
(Belonging)



Access To  
Career  
Pathways

Affordability



# Reaching Campus

Cohort 1 reached campus through in-person presentations. In Cohort 2, the Student Retention Council worked to refine this approach to highlighting the strengths and opportunities to put them in line with students' key decision factors.

SRC members built on last year's campus presentations by summarizing them into a one-page flyer that was customized to the unique needs and interests of each campus (Appendix B).

Then, the SRC took the one-pagers to each campus, presenting to multiple groups to distribute the one-pagers and raise awareness about relevant assets and opportunities available in Alabama.

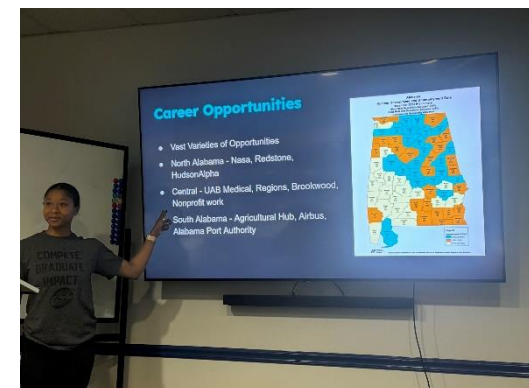
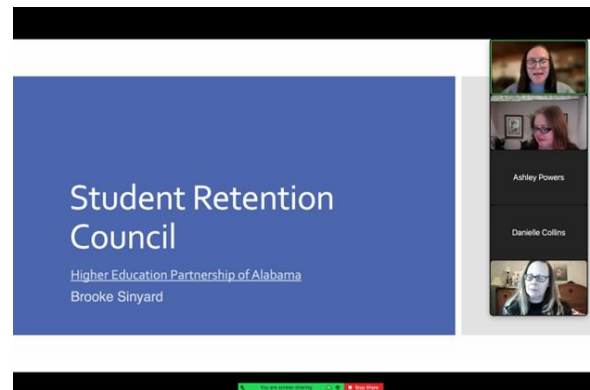
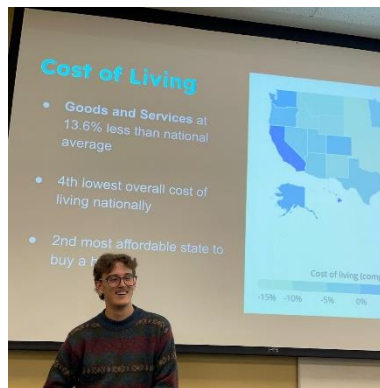
Presentations reached a range of participants across a variety of age groups, majors, and influence circles, so this direct message was just the beginning of a larger conversation that could be echoed across campus. In all, SRC members reached approximately 3,000 people directly this year.

The SRC also recognized the value of reaching college students through social media and, as a result, launched a new Instagram platform with plans to grow digital engagement in future years.

## *Key Insights:*

**Most Impactful Thing Learned – Cost of Living Statistics**

**Most Interested in Learning More – Career Opportunities & Internships**



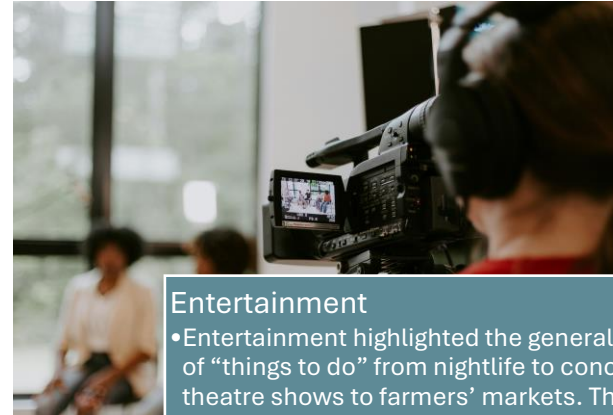
# Understanding “Quality of Life”

The Student Retention Council also endeavored to focus on solutions for barriers to staying in Alabama. Considering the value focus on quality of life, the SRC broke quality of life into four key features that were important to young professionals. Then, were organized into groups to take a deep dive into each of these areas and develop projects that could be implemented to impact each of the areas.



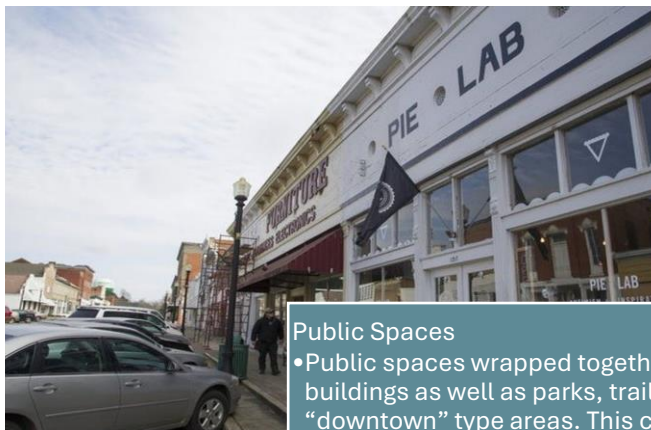
## Community Connections

- Community connections focused on the feeling of belonging in a community. In campus focus groups, many students enjoyed participating in service or giving back, and also opportunities to connect intergenerationally whether through religious communities or social groups. This committee worked to identify ways that communities in Alabama can share the message that all are welcome!



## Entertainment

- Entertainment highlighted the general category of “things to do” from nightlife to concerts or theatre shows to farmers’ markets. This committee explored different perspectives of what entertainment might look like on any day of the week.



## Public Spaces

- Public spaces wrapped together physical buildings as well as parks, trails, and “downtown” type areas. This committee explored ways to maximize public spaces to appeal to young professionals.



## Public Perception

- Public perception addressed the idea that how individuals feel about where we live is influenced by how others talk and think about it. This committee explored how municipalities and the state can “brand” their community to appeal to young professionals.

# Connecting With Communities

Through those four categories, each group developed three sample project plans of ideas that they thought could be implemented to appeal to young professionals. Initially, these ideas were conceived with influence and inspiration from the places they grew up, visited and attended school. They used a simple formula: something a town could do on their own, something they could partner with a university to do, and something that the state could do collectively.

In full, SRC members developed a template of 12 ideas (Appendix C). Members also met with city leaders in Hartselle and Loxley to discuss things they are doing in their communities to build a strong quality of life strategy. The SRC considered strengths and opportunities in each partner community and determined which if any of their projects may be a good fit for the towns to implement.

Next year, the SRC cohort will look to expand the reach to include more partner communities and to work to begin an execution phase of some of the proposed projects in communities.

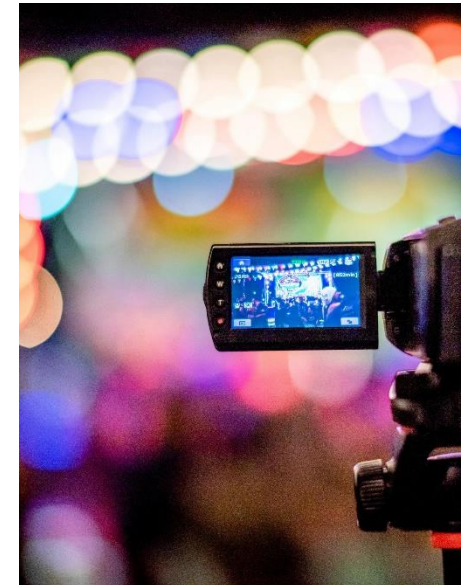


## Quality of Life Projects Include the Following Ideas:

- You Can Do – Small projects municipalities could implement
- We Can Do – Projects that municipalities can partner with a university group to execute
- Alabama Can Do – Statewide projects that could capitalize on opportunities

*(Project Proposals, Appendix C)*

# Opportunities for Alabama



Some key opportunities we identified for Alabama included the following:

1. Emphasizing and raising awareness of natural parks and the beautiful resources existing in Alabama. The state could invest in programs like the National Park Passport program or create other collectible items that students would seek out, ultimately seeing different communities across the state. We believe this would increase retention because studies have shown that Gen-Z loves opportunities in the outdoors and our research shows there is currently low levels of awareness of the opportunities among college students.
2. Facilitate inclusive recreation programs and cross-cultural community connections. This can be done at the local level and supported by state leaders through narrative!
3. Create and promote statewide “Emerging Artists” programs. We featured a possible emerging filmmaker contest that could include resources from universities with film programs, thus building on existing film festivals, and highlight Alabama’s 25% tax credit program for filming in Alabama.
4. Finally, they focused on emphasizing careers in the knowledge-based economy. By including a wider variety of career and internship options in platforms like the talent triad, students will have the opportunity to seem themselves finding a competitive job in Alabama.

# Future Directions

Moving forward, the Student Retention Council is excited to welcome the next cohort of the SRC. With the continued support of the Alabama legislature, the SRC will continue to host a Presidential Appointee from each public university campus who will work to raise awareness of the Retain Alabama message amongst their peers. Additionally, the Higher Education Partnership is proud to have received an Innovative Entity Designation for the work of the Student Retention Council. As a result of this additional support, we are excited to expand the program to include even more leadership roles for individuals to engage directly with communities. The Retention Council aims to deepen our reach to include more students on campus and continue to develop a strong digital presence, highlighting Alabama's strengths. As the SRC expands, we look forward to sharing the message that opportunities has opportunities for every college grad to thrive and to working in line with community leaders to build increased opportunities to fall in love with the great State of Alabama.



# Appendix



# Sample Campus Profiles – Interview Results

## **The University of South Alabama**

### *Interview Subjects*

Interview 1: Bennett Booth, selected due to involvement in numerous organizations such as Southerners, Student Government Association, and greek life.

Interview 2: Natalie Waters, selected because she is an out of state student with a healthcare background.

Interview 3: Emory Robinson, selected due to lack of involvement on campus, nursing student.

Interview 4: Gracie Tanner, selected because she is a student athlete and shows a lot of community involvement.

Interview 5: Julia Nelson, selected due to her involvement in Jaguar Marching Band and Mechanical Engineering.

Interview 6: Nick Flynn, selected due to out-of-state origin and heavy involvement in USA Southerners, USA Cyberscholars Program, the Catholic Student Association, and Undergraduate Research.

Interview 7: Pedro Infante, selected due to being an international student with intent to stay in Alabama. High-achieving Mechanical Engineering student.

### *Student Perceptions of Alabama*

Most of the students saw Alabama as a place where they could maintain a successful lifestyle and career. They felt Alabama was a good place to stay in post-graduation and were aware of the job opportunities within the state. A few mentioned they would stay in Alabama for a few years after graduation then decide their next plans which would include the decision of moving out of state. We would say we were surprised with how many said they wanted to stay in state. We would have guessed it would have been torn half and half with staying in state or moving away. The reasoning behind this is because many are not aware of the opportunities within Alabama. This data does not directly align with prior Retain Alabama Research and the SRC research due to most students being aware of job opportunities and commitment to stay in state.

### *Factors Influencing Post-Grad Decisions*

Major influences for choosing post-grad destinations heavily relied on the major cities within the states. It seemed most students wanted to move to a larger city whether it was in Alabama or other states. Another common factor for some students was well rounded areas. This includes areas that have good education systems, local shops, and lots of job opportunities. We feel as if social media is starting to heavily influence perception of an ideal location. Students also listen and take into consideration their peers' thoughts as well. One key factor that would persuade most students to stay in Alabama would be higher pay. The lack of high salaries compared to other states is off putting when considering where to live. In addition, the students that came from outside of Alabama were inclined to stay in the state due to its cheap cost of living, convenient job opportunities (Airbus, specifically), and less densely populated living conditions.

For the students that were interviewed that wanted to leave Alabama, the students felt as though they wanted to feel a big city experience with a high concentration of young individuals fresh out of college. In addition, the students looked for places that had a high concentration of diversity within its population, something they felt Alabama lacked.

### *Major Themes*

Most of the people interviewed wanted to stay in Alabama post-graduation. Many said they wanted to go to major cities such as Huntsville, Birmingham, and Mobile. A lot of the students could not identify careers lacking in Alabama. Many also said they felt they could grow in their career in Alabama. Different majors differed when it came to seeing themselves growing in their career. For example a nursing student felt as if they had lots of room for growth whereas an athletic trainer did not. Another big theme was that Alabama had an abundance of job opportunities within the major cities of Alabama that they saw as attractive. For those that wanted to leave Alabama post graduation, these individuals desire to work for smaller, start up companies a typical from the big companies we have within the state. They would point to cities such as San Jose, California or New York City, New York and other large cities as ones with more opportunity.

### *Identified Opportunities*

Students need to be more informed about the job opportunities in Alabama. Alabama can easily be brushed off when it comes to thinking about career choices, but the more informed people are the more they will see the opportunities. Many are not informed of other cities that are not major cities and the jobs offered in smaller cities. The students' minds immediately go to these big cities and the smaller ones are overlooked. Each city has job needs regardless of the size. A large opportunity is to inform students on programs that are available to them as college students. For example, one of the students we interviewed is involved in a cyber scholars program that requires him to stay in the state for several years after graduation. Through his involvement in this program, he's been able to see an abundance of opportunity within the state of Alabama and has been more inclined to stay.

### *Notable Quotes*

One student mentioned not having adequate housing in Alabama for a student fresh out of college. The pricing for decent housing is either through the roof or if it is cheap it is in an undesirable location. Another memorable quote, "there isn't enough diversity within the state of Alabama," highlighted a large factor that deters people from staying within the state. Another memorable quote, "Mobile, Alabama just feels like a safe New Orleans," highlights the family friendly living conditions that the state has to offer. Another memorable quote, "Airbus has a program that allows me to pursue a graduate degree while working and is one of the major

reasons I wanna stay in Alabama.” highlights the niche opportunities that are available to students that can encourage them to stay.

## University Student Profile

**Overview:** SRC Cohort 1 identified broad trends related to students' impressions of Alabama using previous research and informal observations. Your role is to build on their understanding by building a profile of your university. You will act as a qualitative researcher, gathering quotes, themes, and observations from your peers.

**Target Interviewees:** Each SRC member should interview 4 peers. Together, seek to represent a wide variety of view points and experiences. Consider in-state and out of state students, racial and socioeconomic variety, differing majors and levels of campus involvement, a variety of student-group affiliations. Please gather the contact information for your interviews and create a database.

### **Final Profile Template:**

#### **University of North Alabama**

##### **Interview Subjects (List Name, Title if Relevant, Brief Reason for Interviewing):**

###### Ben Starkey

Interview 1: Taylor Trout, Marketing major. I interviewed Taylor because she was a UNA athlete her first year at UNA, and is highly involved in school organizations as well as greeklife.

Interview 2: Ethan Hacker, Nursing major. I interviewed Ethan because he has one of the more challenging majors at UNA, and while he isn't involved in school organizations, he is involved in greeklife.

Interview 3: Izzy Terral, Interior Design major. I interviewed Izzy because she is involved in school organizations but not greeklife.

Interview 4: Hayden Blakley, Biology major. I interviewed Hayden because he is involved in greeklife as well as school organizations.

#### **Bella Coddling (sophomore girl not involved in much, from AL)**

##### Major?

- Professional Marketing/Real Estate

##### Do you intend to stay in Alabama after graduation. If not, what are your main reasons for leaving?

- No, because for what I want to do I will not have as many opportunities here as somewhere else.

##### If you were governor for the day, what are some of the first things you would change?

- Better roads, more homeless shelters, bring in bigger companies.

##### Do you see a career potential for your chosen field in Alabama? Where do you see the most career potential? Why?

- Yes, because you can do real estate anywhere, but the market is bigger in other places. California, New York, and Texas (bigger cities) have more career potential. They have bigger companies and areas.

What is your desirable living residence?

- Coastal states

What scenario would cause you to choose Alabama over anywhere else? How could we create that for you? In other words what would it take for you to stay in Alabama? Pay?

- Not having a stable job or nice place to live. Offer more opportunities for a bigger career, seems Alabama hires more experienced people rather than people fresh from college. To get my dream job, stable living, good pay.

What could Alabama improve on?

- Technology, better school systems, and more benefits/pay.

What is Alabama not doing for your career/major? What could school do for your major?

- Building more industry places rather than housing. Get me more opportunities/teach me skills.

Has the university made resources and career opportunities available?

- Yes, they offer job/career fairs.

What is one thing you like about where you live in Alabama?

- Family nearby, southern hospitality, and weather

Who do you trust for guidance when making major career decisions?

- Myself, advisor, mom

**Sydney Castillo (junior girl, from TN, STEM major)**

Major?

- Chemical Engineering and Technology

Do you intend to stay in Alabama after graduation. If not, what are your main reasons for leaving?

- If I were to stay in Alabama it would be because of job opportunities offered in Huntsville. If I go back to Tennessee, it would be because it's my hometown and family is close. I have not traveled to Alabama besides coming to school here.

If you were governor for the day, what are some of the first things you would change?

- Transportation and expanding road sizes in bigger cities (Bham). Gambling is illegal in Alabama unlike Tennessee

Do you see a career potential for your chosen field in Alabama? Where do you see the most career potential? Why?

- Yes, in the Huntsville area, bigger STEM based companies are being brought in that area and thrive there.

What is your desirable living residence?

- A rural area outside of a major city

What scenario would cause you to choose Alabama over anywhere else? How could we create that for you? In other words what would it take for you to stay in Alabama? Pay?

- A secure job opportunity that offers benefits that I need. Also offers growth in the job I take. Offer incentives/benefits to undergrad students before they take the job so they can become aware of what Alabama based companies have to offer for them.

What could Alabama improve on?

- Promoting all options and educational benefits for smaller colleges like UNA instead of just big D1/SEC schools. Within state high schools and surrounding state high schools also should be included

What is Alabama not doing for your career/major? What could school do for your major?

- More hands-on opportunities within my field, Alabama officials can promote different opportunities in every major. School could offer more tutors for my major and use non-textbook examples on how to explain/figure out a problems/concepts.

Has the university made resources and career opportunities available?

- Yes, but they seem to be limited in what is available and are targeted for more upper classmen. Could provide more info for underclassmen.

What is one thing you like about where you live in Alabama?

- Sense of community, everything I need is within 5-10 minutes, reminds me of home (TN), people are passionate about what they do in the community.

Who do you trust for guidance when making major career decisions?

- Advisor, maybe classmates

**Tripp Hearn (junior boy, in greek life, from TN)**

Major?

- Business management

Do you intend to stay in Alabama after graduation. If not, what are your main reasons for leaving?

- Most likely not. I am not from here, be close to family.

If you were governor for the day, what are some of the first things you would change?

- Major interstates and transportation services

Do you see a career potential for your chosen field in Alabama? Where do you see the most career potential? Why?

- Yes, in the Huntsville area. Growth/potential is a big factor.

What is your desirable living residence?

- Somewhere like Huntsville/Nashville

What scenario would cause you to choose Alabama over anywhere else? How could we create that for you? In other words what would it take for you to stay in Alabama? Pay?

- Job opportunities. Keep job market open and bringing in new and growing companies. Good pay/work environment

What could Alabama improve on?

- Developing more cities like Huntsville



What is Alabama not doing for your career/major? What could school do for your major?

- Alabama is doing a good job for maintaining my major. It could open up more job offers.

Has the university made resources and career opportunities available?

- Yes, because they offer multiple internships and company visits often.

What is one thing you like about where you live in Alabama?

- History of area and growth

Who do you trust for guidance when making major career decisions?

- Dad

**Wyatt Maclin (senior boy, highly involved in multiple other organizations, from AL)**

Major?

- Marketing concentration in sales

Do you intend to stay in Alabama after graduation. If not, what are your main reasons for leaving?

- No, I would like to get a different perspective and find all of my options. I would move back once I'm older.

If you were governor for the day, what are some of the first things you would change?

- Implement lottery in Alabama, put a focus on lower income areas, solidify infrastructure.

Do you see a career potential for your chosen field in Alabama? Where do you see the most career potential? Why?

- Yes, in the Huntsville area. Most prosperous city in Alabama. Bham and Mobile would be good too.

What is your desirable living residence?

- Nashville

What scenario would cause you to choose Alabama over anywhere else? How could we create that for you? In other words what would it take for you to stay in Alabama? Pay?

- Sales in Alabama are mostly in Bham and Huntsville. If there were more solid opportunities in south Alabama, then I would stay.

What could Alabama improve on?

- Bring more professional teams to state. Could bring in more job opportunities. Create more “business” cities like Hville and Bham

What is Alabama not doing for your career/major? What could school do for your major?

- Alabama is doing fine for my career, just lack of interest in staying here. UNA is providing about everything I need for my major

Has the university made resources and career opportunities available?

- Yes. The sales team, and multiple companies talk to us in advanced sales class.

What is one thing you like about where you live in Alabama?

- Close to river

Who do you trust for guidance when making major career decisions?

Outside of immediate family, Brian Morgan (professor)

### **Student’s Perceptions of Alabama:**

Write a short paragraph about general perceptions of Alabama as understood by students. Include interpretation – did this match your expectations? Did anything surprise you? Does this align with data and conclusions from prior Retain Alabama research and SRC work?

General perceptions about Alabama were that it is behind in the business world and the only cities people want to move to would be Huntsville or Birmingham. It also seems they believe Alabama’s transportation system was not very good and it is behind in technology. This matches the expectations I had for how people would perceive Alabama. One thing that surprised me is that none of the people I interviewed wanted to live in Alabama after they graduate. This aligns with data and conclusions from prior Retain Alabama research and SRC work. Something else I picked up was that students from Alabama were much more apt to want to stay in Alabama. I also found those who were not from Alabama generally did not have a strong desire to stay in Alabama. While much of this can likely be explained through the family ties these students might have, it also raises the question “do we need to do a better job promoting what Alabama has to offer?”

### **Factors Influencing Post-Grad Decisions:**

What factors stood out as major influences for choosing a post-grad destination? Who and what is affecting students' perceptions of ideal locations? If all other factors remained constant, is there one key factor that would persuade students to stay in Alabama?

Major factors that stood out were the available job opportunities, living areas, and where they were from. Family was affecting students' perceptions of ideal locations. Some wanted to go back out of state to their families, ones in-state wanted to move away and experience more opportunities. Job opportunities also affected where they would move to. One key factor that would persuade students would be the growth of Huntsville and Birmingham.

### **Major Themes:**

Across all discussions, what themes stood out to you? What did you identify as common experiences for the whole group? Where did different majors or individuals differ strongly?

Themes that stood out for me are moving away from Bama if from here and going back home if they were not from Alabama. Also, Huntsville and Birmingham seemed to be the only cities ideal for any major. Individuals did not differ much aside from where they wanted to live. Common experiences we identified were not enough job opportunities and no ideal place to live in Alabama.

### **Identified Opportunities:**

What do students need to know to consider staying in Alabama? What are challenges that could easily be addressed with more information?

Students need to know that Alabama is a growing state and is quickly becoming a business hub. Students should also know the cost of living in Alabama is much less than many other states making it an ideal place to start a career. Alabama has ample career opportunities, many of which are with major companies or tied to them. Alabama has a broad mixture of offerings from beaches, mountains, big cities, rural areas. One challenge that may be easily addressed is the job market and networking within job markets. Making jobs more readily available and allowing for more networking will use Alabama's resources to promote jobs to recent grads. This will make it more feasible for graduating students to consider Alabama for a future career destination.

### **Notable Quotes:**

What if any quotes stood out to you?

"I would move back to Alabama in my mid to late 30s." -Wyatt Maclin

"I just love the small town charm."- Hayden Blakely

## **The University of Alabama**

Ke'ara Lacy, Criminal Justice Student

- Selected because has no Panhellenic involvement, involved with the Center for Service and Leadership and other student organizations.

Ragan Hope Wilson, Social Work Student in The Blackburn Institute

- Selected because of involvement within the School of Social Work and The Blackburn Institute.

Destini Jones, Kinesiology Student

- No Panhellenic involvement; but involved in a couple multi-cultural organizations.

Tori Samples

- Selected because of involvement with student engagement; National Pan-Hellenic Council member.

Mike Egan

- Selected because he has lived in downtown Chicago his whole life. He has no campus involvement but purposefully moved to the Alabama because of its politics and low cost.

Colby Lewis

- Selected because he grew up in the suburbs of Alabama but plans to leave for med school. He has broad involvement across campus including homecoming and SGA, but no fraternal affiliation.

Cassidy Matwiyoff

- Selected because she is from California and does not plan to stay in Alabama after graduation, but also does not plan to go back home. Is in a sorority, SGA, and is involved in the medical groups on campus.

Walt Shelton

- Selected because he is an instate student who plans to remain in state after graduation and hopefully work here for the remainder of his life but is open to leaving if need be for career or family. He is the head of the Blackburn Institute and is interested in corporate investment.

## **Student's Perceptions of Alabama:**

The first major perception we noticed with the students we interviewed was that race relations often was the most significant perception they held about the state. This perception was very unsurprising to us, although the students also noted many other perceptions such as the state being more conservative, rural, impoverished, and lacking good education. Those secondary perceptions, while perhaps often discussed, were still

interesting to hear students talk about, especially how many perceived the good of things such as our conservative politics or the states rural-ness differently.

### **Factors Influencing Post-Grad Decisions:**

When evaluating their post-grad options students across the board seemed to generally agree that one major aspect influencing their decision was the opportunity to live near a growing and prosperous city. Reasons for this desire included, but are not limited to, job opportunities in their relevant fields, young social interest, major sports teams, and walkability. But other factors such as political alignment, cost of living, educational quality (primarily K-12) and access to healthcare (primarily rural) also were frequently mentioned by our interviewees. Those things which students specifically mentioned they wanted to stay in state because of were lost cost of living as well as a call to action to stay here and better our state.

### **Major Themes:**

Perhaps the strongest and most prevalent common experience amongst the group was that race relations played a strong role in their perceptions about our state, but it was not always negative; one student even specifically mentioned that a positive about Alabama was its diversity and broad spectrum of people. Another common theme was the lost cost of living. From houses, to food, to care, students seem to really emphasize their desire to stay in state due to its broad affordability.

As for the difference in students across majors, every medicine/healthcare major we interviewed felt there were not enough quality options for them to study or work in the state and so they all planned to leave upon graduation. As for majors who primarily focus on social services (such as a social work major) they often felt called to remain in state and do their part in making it better. Majors such as business students were divided on if they wanted to stay or leave; they often spoke about the growing opportunities in Huntsville and Birmingham, but also mentioned how they could go out of state to more established cities such as Atlanta, New York, or Chicago and work at more established firms/companies/etc.

### **Identified Opportunities:**

The first reason most students brought up as to why they wanted to stay in state following graduation was the low cost of living. As a matter of fact, every student we interviewed specifically mentioned the low cost of living as one of their primary factors in wanting to stay rather than leave. Similarly, some students mentioned the opportunity to live in rural areas, just outside of major cities such as Huntsville or Birmingham and enjoy the duality of a city as well as the benefits of living in a rural area such as community, low costs, and safety. Another frequent reason for staying was continued growth in north Alabama and a desire to be a part of that growth. New opportunities in the northern region of our state seem very compelling to many young students who want the experience of a lively growing city but do not want to have to pay the cost of cities such as New York or L.A. Some

students also mentioned that they wanted to stay due to their family who remain in state and are not willing, able, or want to leave at this time.

**Notable Quotes:**

“Compared to other places, it is semi-affordable.”

“A lot of people from my high school are moving back to Alabama because of a low cost of living.”

“I need a good, young social group.”

“There is only so much to do in Birmingham.”

“I think my public school system (Hoover), but I understand that education in Alabama isn’t where it needs to be. That would keep me from moving back.”

“The education system in Montgomery is horrible. No capital city I have been to is as desolate as Montgomery. It gives history book.”

“Staying in state has made me appreciate Alabama in an intentional way. I want to make change here. I want to make improvements.”

“I don’t think I love Huntsville, but the growth of the city makes me want to stay here.”

“There is nowhere else I would rather be. With so much opportunity, there is nothing worth leaving for.”

“There is a huge misconception that southern culture is white supremacy and bad governance.”

“Alabama isn’t the same as home (Tennessee).”

“It is cheap here, but it is cheaper in Texas.”

## University of Alabama in Huntsville (Chandler R)

### Interviewees:

Interview 1: Jacob Bishop, Track and field assistant coach.

- Jacob is from Martins Ferry, Ohio
- He is an alumni here at UAH where he ran distance/cross country
- He started off as a graduate assistant after graduation and then just got promoted to assistant coach.
- Why UAH was chosen: For athletic and academic opportunities
- Does he plan on staying in AL: He is graduated and currently chose to stay in AL for his job preference which is coaching, but it might not be permanent.
- Description of AL to another friend in another state: Don't put a general idea of AL in your head before getting there, because it has a lot to offer. Outdoor activities, communities, provides happy-medium size cities compared to other states that have very massive cities that provide a very different environment for somebody moving.
- If you were president at UAH, what would you change: Would change student to athlete involvement in regards to events and being more proactive to have students to engage. It is crucial to get the student body and athletes involved with one another.

Interview 2: Mike Gizzi, Track and field sprinter

- Mike is from Covington, Georgia
- He is a current sophomore/junior here at UAH where he is a sprinter.
- Has been at UAH since his freshman year
- Why UAH was chosen: One of the only options for track, a really good offer, and academics was great here.
- Does he plan on staying in AL after graduation: No, he does not like AL and even the huntsville area. He likes areas like Georgia, Florida, and Texas.
- Description of AL to another friend in another state: Besides bham, huntsville and mobile has nothing but interstates, trees, and grass.
- If you were president at UAH, what would you change: He would put a tack here because we currently do not have one. The track team is one of the best teams here at UAH and can bring in so much money from competitions. Likes how the engineering building is being built. Wouldn't change too much about campus, possibly some renovation.

Interview 3: Max Shulman, Men's basketball assistant coach

- Max is from Chattanooga, Tennessee
- He is an alumni here at UAH where he played basketball under his dads coaching
- After graduation he chose to stay here at UAH to become one of the assistant basketball coaches.
- Why UAH was chosen: Basketball, Academics, and also it being close to home.
- Does he plan on staying in AL: Because his job currently requires him to stay in state, and it is a cool state.
- Description of AL to another friend in another state: It's a good place, and huntsville is a good place. It is not as country as people think it is, but it's cool.

- If you were president at UAH, what would you change: He would want to make it more friendly to students in general, but also with frats and sororities.

#### Interview 4: Hannah Gant, Women's Track and field thrower

- Hannah is from Pisgah, Alabama
- She is a current senior here at UAH where she is a thrower
- Why UAH was chosen: For academic opportunities and getting signed for track which was an added bonus.
- Does she plan on staying in AL: Wants to transfer out of state for grad school but plan on returning to AL post academics.
- Description of AL to another friend in another state: It depends on what part of AL. Her hometown had people bringing their horses to school, but the cities are very diverse. The only thing that is super consistent through AL is a love of football and the amount of diversity all around the state.
- If you were president at UAH, what would you change: Main thing she would change right now is the access to affordable food. The Den here at UAH is charging 14 dollars for a burger that does not come with fries or a drink. It is not cheap and less affordable for the students here on campus. She thinks that the prices of on-campus dining needs to reflect the target audience of college students and their socioeconomic situation. She believes that a good way to do this would be by allowing meal swipes to be accepted at more dining locations as well as lowering the prices of menu items.

#### Interview 5: Cali Pollastro, Women's Track and field high jumper

- Cali is from Rock Springs, Wyoming
- She is a current sophomore/junior here at UAH where she is a high jumper
- Why UAH was chosen: for the excellent track team and program.
- Does she plan on staying in AL: Don't know where she wants to go after graduation, but she is not opposed to staying in AL.
- Description of AL to another friend in another state: Would describe AL as different and a fun state with a lot of fun things and places (especially huntsville).
- If you were president at UAH, what would you change: Not sure what she would change but as a student she feels pretty content with the school and has had a great experience.

#### Interview 6: Madison Thome, Nursing student and former track athlete for UAH

- Madison is from Huntsville, AL but born in Temple, Texas
- She is a current nursing student in her senior year
- Why UAH was chosen: Received a track scholarship and the nursing program is extremely good.
- Does she plan on staying in AL: when she graduates she would like to move to Colorado, but also might stay in AL.
- Description of AL to another friend in another state: Alabama is not what most people think. It is beautiful and full of rolling hills, rivers, and hikes. There are also several cities which offer a variety of



activities, shopping, art galleries, coffee shops, etc. She said if the city is not your thing, there is beautiful countryside as well that is usually surrounded by lakes. While it is beautiful geographically, the people overall are mostly kind and life is a little slower and allows one time to reflect and appreciate where they are.

- If you were the president at UAH, what would you change: She would develop affordable food options on campus and see if surrounding restaurants would take dining dollars or charger bucks.

Interview 7: Micah Pruitt, Graduated from UAH as an engineering major

- Micah is from Birmingham, AL
- She works here in huntsville and just graduated from UAH
- Why UAH was chosen: The location and degree program.
- Does she plan on staying in AL: Since she has recently graduated, she has been staying in AL but is open to living somewhere else if the opportunity presents itself.
- Description of AL to another friend in another state: Alabama has very bipolar weather but since she has lived there her entire life then she is a little biased when it comes to saying how she loves the south and the food in AL.
- If you were the president at UAH, what would you change: She would advocate for more diversity and inclusivity with all cultures at UAH. She would create more diverse environments and use the input from all the students to really make UAH cater to everyone in the best way possible.

Interview 8: Trae, Regular student, not known of his major

- Trae is from Baltimore, Maryland
- He is currently a sophomore at UAH
- Why UAH was chosen: He chose UAH because of the facility and the attention that UAH would give from professors being at a small school.
- Does he plan on staying in AL: He said absolutely not and would either go back to Maryland or florida.
- Description of AL to another friend in another state: It is very different from a big city but it is very easy to live in.
- If you were the president at UAH, what would you change: He would reach out and connect with more minorities.

Interview 9: Jonathan Bennett, nursing student

- Jonathan is from Birmingham, AL (Alabaster)
- He is currently in his senior year in the nursing program
- Why UAH was chosen: Received a scholarship
- Does he plan on staying in AL: No, he plans on moving to Georgia
- Description of AL to another friend in another state: There is not much to do in the state of AL but it is overall still very enjoyable once you are there for a while.
- If you were the president at UAH, what would you change: He would prob. change the parking rules to begin with (who wouldn't) and continue to rebuild and renew infrastructure.

Interview 10: Sasha, major in communications

- Sasha is from Tuskegee, AL
- She is a current Junior and apart of a sorority
- Why UAH was chosen: She wanted a new change of scenery. Met a college recruiter during a college fair in highschool that told her about UAH and what they offered.
- Does she plan on staying in AL: No, she does not

- Description of AL to another friend in another state: Alabama is a place full of crazy weather, but it is also full of different people from all walks of life. There is so much that AL can offer and it is all about what you make it with even building relationships on the way.
- If you were the president at UAH, what would you change: She would change different policies such as limits of assistance with financial aid resources. Also, would make sure that each organization is getting enough funding and support on and off campus. She would connect with more businesses outside of just Huntsville to bring students more opportunities. Also, she would give students a chance monthly to come talk to her and bring her updates on things that they feel are needed to be changed or improved within the school (open door policy).

Interview 10: Tyler Berry, Graduated from UAH as a business major

- Tyler is from Decatur, Alabama.
- He is currently in huntsville working and also owns his own company
- Why UAH was chosen: He chose UAH because of the reputation the school has in assisting students to prepare and search for high quality jobs. UAH also gave him more opportunities to stand out than other schools as well.
- Does he plan on staying in AL: He plans on staying in Alabama for at least the next 3 years to build his resume with experience in Huntsville.
- Description of AL to another friend in another state: He would describe Alabama as a “start-up” state. This is due to the manageable cost of living compared to other states. There are cities within the state that provide activities to keep you occupied. However, the cities aren’t too crowded to the point where you would feel lost.
- If you were president at UAH, what would you change: He would create more opportunities for minorities to express themselves through their talents, beliefs, and creativity. He would also ensure that each minority student would have consent before having pictures taken of them at the school (for advertisement on the school’s social media pages) so that they would feel protected.

#### **Student’s Perceptions of Alabama:**

- To me the interviews have shown that most of the students on campus have a 50/50 chance of staying in AL post graduation. Most perceive AL as a start up place to be at but not a place to stay for long. There were some troubles with how they were saying the weather in AL can be very weird and that it could make them want to move where the weather is more consistent. I also saw that the students I interviewed have a preference of living in a bigger state that will I assume fit more of the younger population.

#### **Factors Influencing Post-Grad Decisions:**

- I would say what has truly been an influence with the ones I have interviewed is that AL is not a place to stay if wanting to live in a bigger city. Now with engineers or business majors there are more jobs available in AL for them to be able to live comfortably in AL. With the other students that have other career paths would have to go to another state to be able to pursue their career and start building up to keep their family stable when that comes.

### **Major Themes:**

- The main thing that was repeated was the weird weather and how AL is full of diversity but sometimes too diverse when it comes to certain things. Also, most knew that AL is more of just a football state and somewhere that you can enjoy some good southern soul food.

### **Identified Opportunities:**

- Honestly like I said before business and engineering majors have way more opportunities than any other career path taken that is in AL especially in huntsville. The people that I interviewed that live in huntsville or close to huntsville have completely seen a growth of change in huntsville and others are not aware of the opportunities that huntsville can give them.

### **Notable Quotes:**

- I believe that most of the questions I answered before this one and just the answers to the interview questions will explain how notable these students were when talking about AL.

## **The University of Alabama in Huntsville (Brian N)**

### **Interviewees:**

Interview 1: Zoe Johnson, Psychology Major

Selected because they live at home, but involved with SOAR (service group on campus)

Interview 2: Soali Gonzalez, Psychology Major

Selected as a student representing the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

Interview 3: Emmi Phillips, Computer Science

Selected because they are from Tennessee, very involved with on campus activities

Interview 4: Tanner Land, Organic Chemistry

Selected because they are from Tennessee, wanted a biological science student represented

Interview 5: Hayden Heathcoat, Physics

Involved in Greek Life, and works as an RA

Interview 6: Gracie Pettus, Political Science

Involved in Greek Life, RA, and holds an off campus job

Interview 7: Luke Novak, Aerospace

From Tennessee, involved in Space Hardware Club

Interview 8: Anna Cottingham, General Business

From Alabama, business major and new RA

Interview 9: Todd Brownbridge, Electrical Engineering

From Birmingham, lives off campus, engineering major

### **Student's Perceptions**

Generally student perceptions were that Alabama is not really a very strong place for living a graduate or postgraduate life. A lot of concern within the quality of the education from primary through high school and concerns of negative stereotypes holding true to the people that live in Alabama from LGBTQ inclusivity to support of minorities. This doesn't surprise me much with Alabama's track record with education across the past decades.

### **Factors Influencing Post-Grad Decisions**

Mostly comes down to job/graduate possibilities that are presented elsewhere and better environments for raising a family. Perception of ideal location comes from personal experience, opinion, and goals within long term life.

### **Major Themes**

A lot of talk over the quality of education and the quality of the cities themselves. Many of the students interviewed expressed concerns over the type of politics and QOL that comes with living in Alabama from negative stereotypes to the state holding a reputation as a Southern Fried Football school. Much of the reasoning of people not wanting to stay in Alabama or in the south in general comes from the idea of living their whole life there and wanting to explore bigger, better, and ultimately different environments.

### **Identified Opportunities**

A lot of change needs to be made in terms of the reputation of job availability as well as the perception of the state as a whole. There were a good number of people interviewed that expressed excitement about the development in Huntsville and northern Alabama but that the rest of the state holds a much different tone.

### **Notable Quotes**

“I think that generally AL as a whole is conservative and unsafe for certain minorities but there are organizations and communities that are loud about fighting for them.”

“Their school system is absolute garbage, born in TN I had speech issues and AL did not want to help with speech therapy at all. This was one of the reasons I got held back.”

“It’s not a BAD place to live, there is stuff to do and good people. It definitely has its flaws, maybe more so than other states. Other places from Huntsville are not the most inviting places.”

“If they do say that they care about our education, it seems like nothing is done to improve it. More money is spent on sports while computers for lab are outdated and falling apart.

“Widen I-65, lower the business tax, and make it easier for businesses to form. Make sure taxes are more transparent in where they are going. “

## *University Profile – Student Interviews*

### **AUBURN UNIVERSITY-MONTGOMERY**

Kevin D. Brooks

#### **Interview Subjects (List Name, Title if Relevant, Brief Reason for Interviewing):**

- Interview 1: Baxter, GIS Major - ALDOT Oversized-Way Permitting Department  
Selected for his knowledge in issuing permits for over-the-road oversized loads in the transportation department.
- Interview 2: Jackson, Graphic Design Major - Entrepreneur  
Selected for his knowledge of entrepreneurship and music production.
- Interview 3: Floyd, Computer Science Major - State Department of Alabama Jr. Programmer  
Selected for his knowledge of computer science.
- Interview 4: McInvale, Business Management Major w/Minor in HRSM - Pharmacy Tech  
Selected for her knowledge in pharmacy.

All participants were enrolled in Auburn University-Montgomery (AUM) College of Business, all natives of Alabama. Their ages range from 21 to 28 years old. The participant occupations consist of two Alabama State employees, one entrepreneur, and one pharmacy employee. The participants reside in Prattville, Alabama, and commute weekly for school and work. One participant lives in Montgomery, Alabama.

#### **Student's Perceptions of Alabama:**

Yes, the students who were interviewed matched my expectations of their general perceptions of Alabama. Everyone stated that Alabama is an okay place to live. They believe the state is simple, stagnant, southern, and primitive. They said the public school systems are low-performing, and the job market needs to be more significant. I was surprised by the perspective of one participant, who identified that AUM scholarships are available for students from low-income families, the military, or the GI Bill. This leaves students from middle-class families who are in pursuit of a college education barely able to make ends meet. There are so many ways students pay for college, mainly through the sources of FASFA, scholarships, and, in rare occurrences, college savings. The SRC data for the 22-23 school year reflects that 43% of students within the state receive a degree and pursue an occupation outside the state. The participants I interviewed stated that 75% would stay in the state. In comparison to the 67% data of participants from Alabama. All the participants who were interviewed were 100% Alabama natives.

#### **Factors Influencing Post-Grad Decisions:**

All participants said that the primary influence for choosing Alabama as their postgraduate destination is their family residing here. Some have already begun their career with the State Department; however, they all said they would relocate to another state if certain conditions were present. For example, living costs and income allow them to live comfortably. If the state of Alabama had an abundance of jobs that paid well and the cost of living were the same as Alabama's, they would leave it. The two participants who worked for the state of Alabama feel their jobs somewhat compensated them. One even said he is paid the same amount as national

norms for his occupation. As a result, their family and occupation make Alabama their home. All the participants were born and raised in Alabama, which anchors them here to the state. The key factors convincing people to stay in Alabama are family, education, and occupations matching projected salaries. Participants said that they chose AUM because of the school's family culture and the cleanliness of the campus. Participants stated that AUM was the most prominent public college nearest their homes. The library, campus tours, tutoring services, and student activities are the supports that make them feel like they belong at AUM. One out of the four participants stated that the beauty of Alabama's beaches, mountains, and nature made him choose the state of Alabama. Two out of four participants expressed concern about the status of the public school system and its impact on the present and future economy.

### **Major Themes:**

Several things came up during the interviews that were common for the students. AUM students believe the tuition is fair compared to Montgomery's sister schools and four-year universities. All participants said they would keep a home in Alabama because they plan to return but do not have to live here necessarily. The states that the participants referenced that they would like to have entertainment and job markets like Georgia, New York, Florida, and Texas. All participants had families and occupations in Alabama.

A few expectations differed depending on the college major or gender. The GIS major was comfortably planted in Alabama because it is a relatively new field with abundant jobs and low competition. He has work experience in the area, allowing him to commit to the occupation and remain in the state. The entrepreneur in the group looks to go into business making comic books. Three participants said that they would leave Alabama to live in another state if the job paid better than Alabama. One participant said he plans to remain in Alabama because of his tight-knit family. The female in the group was focused on AUM making college affordable, paid internships, and networking opportunities with future employers that would improve student support services. The participant who does computer programming said that Alabama should update their systems to compete with other states because the current ones are out of date. With new businesses, Alabama's roadways could be improved to support travel, work commutes, entertainment, and the local economy.

### **Identified Opportunities:**

Students need to know how living costs impact the local economy and public education available to the community's youth. Students should consider the local job market when choosing a college major. Funding for college, choosing a college major, employer networking, and student support are available on campus. Students need to know if the curriculum for their degree matches the systems and processes in use at their prospective employers. Participants suggested that college students visit Indeed and other job search sites to determine their area's job market before choosing a major.

### **Notable Quotes:**

The quotes that stood out to me during the interviews are as follows:

- You are never too old to learn. Put God first, let him lead the way, and do not look at an "L" as lost; you only truly lose when you quit. - Jackson -
- As far as outdoors and stuff, it is one of the most beautiful outdoor states. - Baxter -
- I do like 1st-Gen. It did start me off and opened me up to many more things outside of 1st-Gen. - Floyd -
- You need a master's if you want to go into upper management. - McInvale -
- Many jobs that hire people with a bachelor's degree should offer tuition reimbursement if you choose to further your education to a master's degree. Any assistance helps! - McInvale -

## Final Profile

### **The University of West Alabama**

Interview #1: Paley Lauck, Senior Athletic training student. Graduates in December gives an outlook into working in sports.

Interview #2: Michael Sharpley, Psychology Master's student. Wants to be an entrepreneur and run his own business.

Interview #3: Laila Vallejo, Elementary education major. Is only focused on becoming a preschool teacher.

Interview #4: Sohga Katsumata, IMC Major. From Japan and enjoys being country side.

### **Student's Perceptions of Alabama**

General perceptions of Alabama gathered from the students interviewed were that Alabama is more of a place with lots of land and they think of the country when they think of Alabama. I think this perception is led by only what they have seen from their experiences. Some of the students mentioned that they would not mind staying in Alabama after graduation because they enjoy where they are from but others also talked of wanting to go experience new places and bigger cities not in Alabama. One thing that surprised me was that the exchange student I interviewed mentioned he enjoyed being country side and that Alabama gave him that.

### **Factors Influencing Post-Grad Decisions**

One factor that stood out to me was that none of the four people I interviewed mentioned their family. They only mentioned where they would most enjoy themselves and get the most opportunities. Social Media plays a part in some decisions because this is what students refer to find certain places to visit and to discover new places. I think if students were able to actually see proof that Alabama does have a mixture of big-city life and small-town feel they would believe there was more opportunity there.

### **Major Themes**

The theme that stood out to me is opportunity. Most students do not associate Alabama with having endless opportunities like other states. I believe Alabama is thought of as a "country" place where not a lot of big outgoing things happen.

### **Identified Opportunities**

Students need to see that there are big opportunities here that cater to what they are going to school for. Not only opportunity but also quality of life is something they should know.



## University Student Profile

**Overview:** SRC Cohort 1 identified broad trends related to students' impressions of Alabama using previous research and informal observations. Your role is to build on their understanding by building a profile of your university. You will act as a qualitative researcher, gathering quotes, themes, and observations from your peers.

**Target Interviewees:** Each SRC member should interview 4 peers. Together, seek to represent a wide variety of viewpoints and experiences. Consider in-state and out of state students, racial and socioeconomic variety, differing majors and levels of campus involvement, a variety of student-group affiliations. Please gather the contact information for your interviews and create a database.

### **Final Profile Template: Halla Al-Moradi**

**Your University Name: The University Of Alabama at Birmingham**

**Interview Subjects (List Name, Title if Relevant, Brief Reason for Interviewing):**

Example:

Interview 1: Kala Bhattar

Interviewing an out-of-state Indian American woman about her perspective on living in Birmingham, Alabama provides valuable insights into the local community and highlights the challenges faced by residents. Her perspective as an individual belonging to an ethnic minority group adds depth to the discussion, shedding light on issues related to diversity, equity, education, healthcare, and social justice.

Interview 2: Haley Weaver

Was selected because she offers a glimpse into the complexities of living in rural Alabama and then moving to the city, providing a personal perspective on the state's strengths, challenges, and the factors that shape individuals' decisions about their future.

Interview 3: Phadera Manuel

Interviewing Phadera provides an opportunity to understand the experiences and concerns of an African American female student in Alabama, contributing to discussions about race, safety, and cultural diversity within the state. Her insights can help foster dialogue around creating a more inclusive and equitable environment for all residents.

Interview 4: Wajiha Mekki

Interviewing Wajiha on Alabama allows for a discussion about the state's efforts to address misconceptions, improve infrastructure, enhance safety measures, and create a more inclusive environment for residents and students from diverse backgrounds. Her perspective contributes to the dialogue on making Alabama a more attractive place for individuals from various ethnic backgrounds and can inform initiatives aimed at fostering diversity and inclusivity within the state.

**Student's Perceptions of Alabama:**

Write a short paragraph about general perceptions of Alabama as understood by students. Include interpretation – did this match your expectations? Did anything surprise you? Does this align with data and conclusions from prior Retain Alabama research and SRC work?

The students' responses paint a complex picture of Alabama. While there is an appreciation for its kindness and resilience, concerns about the political climate, racial prejudices, and safety persist. The students highlighted the need for better opportunities, equity, and social safety nets, aligning with existing data that showcases disparities in education and healthcare. The surprise came in their varied perspectives, demonstrating the state's diverse challenges and strengths. While some aspects matched expectations, such as the Bible Belt's conservative influence, the students' nuanced experiences underscore the importance of addressing social disparities and fostering inclusivity. Their viewpoints align with prior Retain Alabama research, emphasizing the need for targeted efforts in education, social policies, and community safety to create a more inviting environment for all residents.

### **Factors Influencing Post-Grad Decisions:**

What factors stood out as major influences for choosing a post-grad destination? Who and what is affecting students' perceptions of ideal locations? If all other factors remained constant, is there one key factor that would persuade students to stay in Alabama?

Major influences for choosing a post-graduation destination varied among the students. For the out-of-state Indian American woman (Kala), factors like better opportunities, equity, and social safety nets were crucial. For the white in-state student (Haley) emphasized family and a desire to serve underserved populations while considering the political climate and social prejudices. The African American in-state student (Phadera) prioritized salary and safety, acknowledging the impact of racism and high crime rates. The Asian American out-of-state student (Wajiha) focused on improved public transportation and additional resources. A combination of personal values, family ties, social climate, and opportunities influences these preferences. Perceptions of ideal locations are shaped by exposure to diverse environments, education, and social interactions, with urban centers often seen as offering better opportunities and acceptance. If all other factors remained constant, the key factor that could persuade students to stay in Alabama appears to be the improvement of social safety nets and resources. Enhanced public transportation, better job opportunities, and increased support for underserved communities could make a significant difference, addressing concerns across different aspects like safety, equity, and social welfare. Such improvements could create a more attractive environment, encouraging students to consider staying in Alabama post-graduation.

### **Major Themes:**

Across all discussions, what themes stood out to you? What did you identify as common experiences for the whole group? Where did different majors or individuals differ strongly?

Across the discussions, several themes stood out, highlighting both common experiences and unique perspectives within the group. One prevalent theme was the significance of social safety nets, equity, and job opportunities as key factors influencing students' decisions to stay in Alabama post-graduation. The importance of family ties and a desire to serve underserved populations also emerged as shared values, connecting multiple participants. In terms of common experiences, all students shared concerns about social issues, such as racism and prejudices against minority and LGBTQ+ communities. Additionally, they all expressed the desire for better educational opportunities, improved public transportation, and a more inclusive political and social climate in their ideal locations. However, differences were evident based on individual backgrounds and preferences. For instance, the out-of-state Indian American woman and the Asian American out-of-state student emphasized the importance of social safety nets and better opportunities, reflecting a focus on systemic support. In contrast, the white in-state student prioritized

family ties and community service, showing a strong connection to local communities. The African-American in-state student highlighted concerns about racism and high crime rates, focusing on the challenges faced by marginalized communities within the state. My perspective, as a Muslim in-state woman, is related to religious tolerance, cultural understanding, and community acceptance, which might not have been explicitly discussed in the given responses. My perspective could provide valuable insights into the intersectionality of faith, ethnicity, and regional identity within Alabama.

### **Identified Opportunities:**

What do students need to know to consider staying in Alabama? What are challenges that could easily be addressed with more information?

To encourage students to consider staying in Alabama, it is essential to provide them with comprehensive information about available job opportunities, career growth prospects, and industries thriving within the state. Students need access to data regarding salaries, job markets, and networking opportunities specific to their fields of interest. Transparent information about educational and skill development resources, including scholarships, internships, and vocational training programs, can also empower students to make informed decisions about their future in Alabama. Additionally, addressing challenges related to social safety nets, equity, and inclusivity through clear and accessible information is crucial. Providing students with details about initiatives, policies, and resources aimed at supporting underserved populations, ensuring healthcare access, promoting LGBTQ+ rights, and fostering racial and cultural acceptance can help dispel misconceptions and foster a more inclusive environment. Transparency regarding ongoing efforts to improve public transportation, enhance community safety, and create a welcoming atmosphere for individuals from diverse backgrounds can also play a significant role in encouraging students to stay in the state. Ultimately, accurate, up-to-date, and easily accessible information can empower students to make well-informed decisions about their future in Alabama.

### **Notable Quotes:**

What if any, quotes stood out to you?

From Interview 1: "Our tax dollars are not being used to benefit us. Our voting rights are not equal, and health equity is a real issue."

Why it stood out: This quote encapsulates the frustration and urgency for social change, highlighting systemic issues and the need for equitable policies in Alabama.

2. Interview 2: "Factors that would influence me to stay in Alabama is my family and to serve the huge amount of underserved populations."

Why it stood out: This quote underscores the importance of community and social service, indicating a deep sense of responsibility and commitment to the local population.

3. Interview 3: "Factors include what my salary would be and how safe it would be to live here. The negatives are racism and dangerous cities/high crime rates."

Why it stood out: This quote highlights the dual concerns of economic stability and personal safety, emphasizing the need for a secure environment and addressing racial disparities.

4. Interview 4: "Improved public transportation would result in me staying in Alabama... safety is also an issue that results in my hesitation to stay long-term in Birmingham and Alabama."

Why it stood out: This quote points to tangible issues like public transportation and safety, showing the practical aspects that influence the decision to stay, and emphasizing the need for infrastructure improvements.

These quotes offer deep insights into the students' concerns, ranging from systemic challenges to personal safety, family values, and a commitment to community service. Each perspective provides a nuanced understanding of the factors shaping their perceptions of Alabama.

## University of Montevallo

### Interview Subjects:

Interview 1: Cole Swain, President of Math Club and Co-President of Astronomy Club

Selected for his concentration in a STEM field (Mathematics major and Computer Science minor), a growing industry in Alabama. He is heavily involved in the Math Department. He is also involved in Greek Life and is an out-of-state student.

Interview 2: Vanessa Avalos, Elementary Education Major and member of SGA

Selected because she is involved in SGA and majors in education. She has been involved with TRIO Upward Bound and has conducted undergraduate research. She is also an in-state student.

Interview 3: Wesley Walter, English Major and Managing Editor for the Newspaper

Selected because of his familiarity with students in the humanities and his involvement in journalism. He is an in-state student.

Interview 4: Lucy Frost-Helms, Social Sciences Major

Selected for her familiarity with the community and her broad social circle. She is a high-achieving, out-of-state student.

Interview 5: Will Burke- Psychology Major, member of Alpha Kappa Lambda

Selected for his involvement in Greek Life and is an out-of-state student.

Interview 6: Manuel Munoz-Exercise Nutrition Science Major, Resident Hall Director

Selected for his involvement in the Housing office, provides a perspective from a student athlete (men's soccer team), and is a senior who has had much involvement and experience on Montevallo's campus.

Interview 7: Paris Battle- Freshman, Undecided for Major

Selected for her desire to pursue the nursing program next fall, a popular field in Alabama's colleges, and provides a new student's perspective.

Interview 8: Aidan Golden- History Major, member of SGA

Selected for his perspective as a student athlete (member of cross country and track) and his involvement as SGA's Director of Sports Promotion.

#### Student's Perceptions of Alabama:

Students at Montevallo generally view Alabama as a place they would consider living in the future. It has many characteristics that appeal to the students we interviewed including open space, proximity to family, and cultural opportunities in Central Alabama. This is unsurprising. Montevallo mainly recruits in-state students with ties to Alabama. Many of the out-of-state students are attracted to Montevallo's campus and community. Some of the students' reservations align with findings from prior SRC work. Students want a higher quality of life that includes more public transportation and walkable areas. Several students were dissatisfied with relevant job offerings and the salaries they could expect from their jobs. The students who are considering leaving Alabama are often searching for better opportunities.

#### Factors Influencing Post-Grad Decisions:

Many of the students that we interviewed were drawn to Montevallo for the campus and lifestyle. Our campus is beautiful, historic, and walkable. A couple of students are considering post-graduate education because they are unaware of opportunities they can pursue solely with their bachelor's degree. When it comes to postgraduate education, some of the students interviewed believed there were better schools for their degrees out-of-state.

#### Major Themes:

A common desire among different students was for more public transportation and walkable areas. There was also an affinity for having space and robust educational opportunities for future families. Students going into in-demand fields like education and nursing are generally aware of their opportunities. Most students were not opposed to living in Alabama. Out-of-state students enjoy Central Alabama. In-state students also have had positive experiences in Alabama but want to try living somewhere else for a new experience. Several students are dissatisfied with Alabama's politics and do not feel like their values are represented in government.

#### Identified Opportunities:

Some students simply do not know about opportunities in their desired fields. They have made it clear that they are open to these opportunities if they exist. If students are made aware of competitive opportunities in their fields or adjacent fields, they may consider them.

Notable Quotes:

“I would consider returning to Alabama at some point, however, I would like to live in a different area of the country for a while. I would like to experience a different setting/environment because I have lived here for a large portion of my life.”

“I have a strong emotional connection to Alabama and the South in general. Despite its issues, I think that the culture of the South and a slower-paced life is much more suitable for me.”

“Living in a city like Montevallo is nice because it’s a lot smaller and life isn’t that busy.”

## University Student Profile

**Overview:** SRC Cohort 1 identified broad trends related to students' impressions of Alabama using previous research and informal observations. Your role is to build on their understanding by building a profile of your university. You will act as a qualitative researcher, gathering quotes, themes, and observations from your peers.

**Target Interviewees:** Each SRC member should interview 4 peers. Together, seek to represent a wide variety of view points and experiences. Consider in-state and out of state students, racial and socioeconomic variety, differing majors and levels of campus involvement, a variety of student-group affiliations. Please gather the contact information for your interviews and create a database.

### **Final Profile:**

#### **Alabama A&M**

##### **Interview Subjects (List Name, Title if Relevant, Brief Reason for Interviewing):**

###### **Interview 1: Maxwell Joyner, Sophomore Bio Technology, from ATL, GA**

He does not want to stay in Alabama because there are more and greater opportunities for his major in other states. He believes that depending on the area of the state and your major, you will have a variety of benefits. What also turns him away is that the state does not show enough support, let alone the need for his major. A&M can do better at advertising opportunities regarding his major. ( A&M promotes engineering, etc.) What he does like about the states is that they're growing and expanding as the population increases.

###### **Interview 2: Josiah Scoon, Sophomore, Computer Science, from Montgomery, AL**

He prefers not to stay in Alabama because he simply does not like the state or what it offers. He believes that there are greater benefits in other states that Alabama does not offer, and based on his major, Alabama is not fulfilling the position that other states are making it seem. The one thing that would keep him here would be the nature and the amount of greenery the state has.

###### **Interview 3: Mike Davis Jr., Senior, Mechanical Engineer, from Montgromey, AL**

Mike does not care where he stays, but it does come down to which company/state pays him more. He does believe that there are the same benefits as in other states. He also believes that Alabama is providing opportunities for his major, like the company Boeing. He says that A&M provides a great deal of opportunities for his major, and what he loves most about the state is that it's growing.

###### **Interview 4: Samya Whiteside, Sophomore, Computer Science, from Muscle Shoals**

She does not plan to stay in Alabama because of wanting something new. She does not know for sure if Alabama has the same benefits as other states. She believes that A&M provides her major with numerous opportunities and feels as if she can come back to Alabama to grow and start a family. What she loves most about HSV is that it is bigger than her home town.

###### **Interview 5: Tamya Houston, Grad Student, Counseling, Mobile, AL**

After graduating, she intends to reside in Alabama for at least a year while working towards obtaining state licensure in the area of counseling. Once accomplished, she does plan on moving to Texas or returning to Tennessee to continue her endeavors. There are similar benefits in Alabama for her career path; however, she has always had a desire to experience living in other states. She has noticed that A&M has improved its efforts to offer resources for her major. However, her department specifically needs more faculty and opportunities presented at the career fairs. Many students have failed to attend career fairs because of a lack of interest in



counseling. She enjoys the familiarity that Alabama provides as somewhere where she has made lifelong connections, and she also enjoys the atmosphere of Huntsville and the fact that it is showing growth as a city.

#### **Interview 6: Eboni Leiws, Sophomore, Education, from Memphis, TN**

She plans on residing in Alabama after graduation. She will hopefully be an elementary school teacher by then, so her teacher license will only be good in Alabama. Also, she loves Huntsville as a city, so she would love to stay here for a few years. She does believe that she can stay here in Alabama for her career because there are plenty of schools all over the state to teach. What she likes most about Huntsville, Alabama, is the beautiful scenery, especially downtown at night. Also, she loves how quiet it is/ not as violent compared to her city

#### **Interview 7: Javeen Thompson, Sophomore, Forestry, from Andalusia, AL**

He does plan to reside in Alabama, not only because he has lived here his entire life but also because he believes that Alabama has given him something no other place can give him; a sense of purpose within the community. Although his plans do change, Alabama will always be his fallback home. For his career in particular, forestry, he has options all over the world to choose from in terms of future employment. Sadly, due to social influences and a lack of resources, many individuals find themselves feeling as if they have to move to an entirely different state in order to receive better benefits. He believes that you are not properly advocating for positions outside of your traditional career opportunities, such as urban forestry, filming, design, linguistic science, etc. Also, to promote such opportunities, it is best done via social media platforms or physical sites such as community groups and surrounding communities. He can reside in Alabama for his career. As an aspiring special uses coordinator and plan to either work for the USDA or a private industry/company. What he likes most about Alabama is the importance of tradition and how sometimes we have to let go of it or move on in order to better ourselves or progress effectively. Alabama has definitely undergone a lot of change, some places more than this, but he believes that Alabama is on its way back to becoming a good and wonderful place.

#### **Interview 8: Erica Doss, sophomore Biology major, from Andalusia, AL**

Upon graduation, she plans to stay in Alabama because she has found a graduate school program that allows her to successfully attend medical school in Alabama with considerably less debt if she does stay in Alabama to practice once she graduates and completes her residency. Speaking for herself as a person hoping to attain an MD, Alabama is on the lower end of the spectrum for doctors due to most areas being considerably rural. Alabama does not provide many 'backup' options for a person with a biology degree. There are a lesser number of other options other than MD, and most of these are related to relatively bigger or growing cities. Also, many hospitals in rural areas do not get the funding needed to remain operational, making it hard for those in that area to receive consistent healthcare, and it just so happens that many of these communities have a higher African American population.

#### **Student's Perceptions of Alabama:**

Specifically, with Huntsville growing as rapidly as it is, it will eventually be as big a city as Birmingham. However, the ability to live any kind of lifestyle provided within the city of Huntsville is what she likes most about it. Huntsville allows a person to live as richly or as rurally as they please. Living closer to the mountains would replicate the rural living aspect, and living anywhere near downtown provides a more city-like look.

#### **Factors Influencing Post-Grad Decisions:**

Alabama needs to improve promoting other major jobs/careers and what comes with that is the pay rate. The majority of students are looking for jobs that have good pay so that they can either live a comfortable lifestyle or an adventurous one.

### **Major Themes:**

Between our interviews, it came down to a split decision. Some were saying that Alabama is good and that there are minor improvements that need to be made, while the rest said that they would just top up and leave the state because they knew what better opportunities there were for themselves and their careers. However, it's clear that a more in-depth analysis of the economic and professional landscape in Alabama is needed to make informed decisions about staying or leaving. The perspectives of those who choose to stay can provide valuable insights into the potential for positive change within the state's job market and infrastructure.

### **Identified Opportunities:**

The majority of them said that they want Alabama to provide more opportunities for their careers and promote all jobs/careers. They emphasized the need for a diverse and inclusive job market that not only supports their own career goals but also ensures that individuals from all backgrounds have access to meaningful employment. Furthermore, many participants expressed the importance of investing in education and providing more internships/Co-Ops, with the skills needed to excel in various career paths. Overall, their collective sentiment highlighted a strong desire for a vibrant and equitable job market in the state, benefiting both their personal aspirations and the broader community.

### **Notable Quotes:**

What if any quotes stood out to you?

## **Athens State University SRC Report**

The data collected during interviews with Athens State University students provides valuable insights into the demographics, aspirations, and concerns of the student body. This comprehensive analysis sheds light on the diverse characteristics and perspectives of Athens State University students. The majority of interviewees (60%) fell within the 18-21 age group, showcasing a vibrant campus community with a significant population of traditional college-age students. Meanwhile, 20% of participants were aged 22-25, and another 20% were 31 or older, highlighting the university's inclusive environment for learners of various age ranges. In terms of gender distribution, 60% of participants were male, and 40% were female, indicating a relatively balanced representation across genders.

Athens State University boasts a rich tapestry of campus involvement, with students engaged in diverse activities such as the Athenian Ambassadors, Kappa Pi, Phi Theta Kappa, SHRM, and the Bonner Leadership Program. This multifaceted engagement contributes to a vibrant and dynamic campus culture. Majors and fields of study among interviewees reflected a broad spectrum, including Graphic Design, Education, Human Resource Management, Computer Science, and Business. This diversity underscores the university's commitment to offering a comprehensive array of academic programs. Among the interviewed students, 60% were seniors, 20% were graduate students, and 20% were juniors, highlighting the varied academic levels within the sample.

When questioned about their post-graduation plans, 80% expressed an intention to seek employment in Alabama, while 20% were uncertain about their plans. This data underscores a strong inclination among students to contribute to Alabama's workforce. Responses regarding preferred industries or fields after graduation varied widely, encompassing public relations/advertising, teaching, cybersecurity, and some remaining undecided. Concerning internships or co-op opportunities within Alabama, 60% of students actively sought such experiences, while 40% did not. This indicates a proactive approach by a significant portion of the student body in gaining practical, field-related experiences.

When asked about the university's preparedness for their careers in Alabama, 30% of students responded positively, while 40% felt inadequately prepared. Regarding the anticipated duration of stay in Alabama after graduation, 40% planned to stay indefinitely, 40% intended to stay more than 5 years, and 20% planned to stay 1-2 years. Factors Influencing Departure from Alabama: Among students not planning to stay in Alabama post-graduation, one cited the absence of desired job opportunities, such as SpaceX or Tesla, as a primary reason.

Students provided insightful recommendations for enhancing Alabama's appeal to college graduates. Suggestions included providing more opportunities and funding for arts education, increasing teacher salaries, advocating for lottery and abortion rights, and improving the state's marketing as a career hub beyond major cities.

In conclusion, this data offers a comprehensive overview of Athens State University students, their aspirations, and their perceptions of Alabama as a post-graduation destination. These findings can serve as a foundation for targeted initiatives aimed at retaining talent within the state.

## University Student Profile

**Overview:** SRC Cohort 1 identified broad trends related to students' impressions of Alabama using previous research and informal observations. Your role is to build on their understanding by building a profile of your university. You will act as a qualitative researcher, gathering quotes, themes, and observations from your peers.

**Target Interviewees:** Each SRC member should interview 4 peers. Together, seek to represent a wide variety of viewpoints and experiences. Consider in-state and out of state students, racial and socioeconomic variety, differing majors and levels of campus involvement, a variety of student-group affiliations. Please gather the contact information for your interviews and create a database.

### **Final Profile Template:**

#### **Jacksonville State University**

##### **Interview Subjects (List Name, Title if Relevant, Brief Reason for Interviewing):**

Interview 1: Kadence Hawkins, Forensic Investigation Major

Selected for involvement in the Honors program and Lambda Sigma, and the FI major.

Interview 2: Reilloy Small, Emergency Management focused Homeland Security

Selected for hometown (Lawrenceburg, Indiana), no IFC relations

Interview 3: Harli Smith, Psychology

Selected for involvement with Honors Program, NSCS

Interview 4: James Perrin, Education with a focus in History

Selected because he is the President of SigEp and his goals and aspirations after graduation

Interview 5: DaLaney Leeth, Psychology

Selected for involvement, plans post-graduation

Interview 6: Jaden Handley, Family & Consumer Sciences Education Major

Selected because a transfer student from a private institution, involvement in SGA

Interview 7: Kayla Lee, Nursing Major

Selected because she is on the top scholarship JSU offers

Interview 8: Chloe Thompson, Criminal Justice Major

Selected for involvement in Southerners and Lambda Sigma

Interview 9: Jazmin Day, Respiratory Therapy Major

Selected for unique perspective of attending college in her hometown, also for involvement in Sigma Alpha Omega Sorority

### **Student's Perceptions of Alabama:**

**Write a short paragraph about general perceptions of Alabama as understood by students. Include interpretation – did this match your expectations? Did anything surprise you? Does this align with data and conclusions from prior Retain Alabama research and SRC work?**

**Kolby-** Many students love the state because of the fact that they were born and raised here and don't want to leave loved ones behind. Others love it because of its natural beauty and opportunities. On the opposite end of the spectrum, some don't like it because they have either "suffered" here long enough or they come from somewhere else. Everyone thinks the state is pretty, just not a lot to do/ thinks other places have more. This didn't really surprise me because growing up most people were already in either of these two mindsets about the state. I was surprised to hear out of staters say how beautiful the state is even if they didn't think anything else was nice.

**Aubrey-** Each person I interviewed indicated that they felt pretty strongly they would remain in the state following their college graduation. However, they also indicated some not as positive feelings about certain aspects of the state. For example, entertainment options were a common topic that came up. I had a student mention they felt like Alabama is viewed in a negative light, and they think things need to be done to help show people Alabama is more than its past. I was not surprised to hear anything my peers expressed, I have had conversations about the same topics before, and many people my age seem to share the same thoughts. I also absolutely think these comments are consistent with what we discovered last year on the Retention Council. Two of the four areas we highlighted were quality of life and diversity, equity, and inclusion, and these are the two areas I felt came up the most in my interviews.

### **Factors Influencing Post-Grad Decisions:**

**What factors stood out as major influences for choosing a post-grad destination? Who and what is affecting students' perceptions of ideal locations? If all other factors remained constant, is there one key factor that would persuade students to stay in Alabama?**

**Kolby-** The major factors were family and benefits. Most people recognize that there is plenty of opportunity for them within the state, it's just that other states have better benefits in terms of higher pay, insurance, etc. Those staying in the state want to stay here to stay close to nature or their families while those wanting to leave either come from somewhere else or they care more about higher pay than staying in state. Political beliefs also play a large role in whether people want to stay even though they didn't directly bring it up. Those who are opposed to Alabama's current politics all wanted to move whereas those who agreed or were in between wanted to stay.

**Aubrey-** The most common factor in choosing a post-grad destination seemed to be the ability to find a well paying job. I interviewed students from a wide range of majors, and while they said this was very important, none of them felt they would not be able to find a well-paying job in the state. A few of my peers did express interest in having a better system to help them find a job. However, an education major divulged to me that within their major students almost always have a job a semester prior to graduation. Over half of the students I interviewed expressed interest in moving to Huntsville post-grad. The other student also indicated that they would likely move to a bigger city to pursue more job opportunities and entertainment options. Overall, it seems there are many students who will remain in the state if they can be connected with well-paying jobs and options to enhance their quality of life.

### **Major Themes:**

**Across all discussions, what themes stood out to you? What did you identify as common experiences for the whole group? Where did different majors or individuals differ strongly?**

**Kolby-** Some major themes that stuck out to me was everyone said there was a lot of opportunity and demand for them within the state. This means that people know there are jobs, its just there is an issue with how desirable these jobs are. Another thing that stood out to me was that almost no one knows about what kind of social opportunities there are within the state. The one person that was aware had to discover and search for it herself. It was never easy to find and there is a lack of advertisement. There was almost no difference between majors.

**Aubrey-** I've already touched briefly on some of the common themes I found within my discussions. These include quality of life, well-paying job options, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. I feel as though we did a very good job last year identifying the shortcomings many college students see in Alabama. Now, we have to take these and turn them into something tangible we can use to retain students. I did also notice that those entering healthcare and education seemed to have no doubt they could find a job in the state. I had expected as much from the education major, but the opinions of those entering healthcare surprised me.

### **Identified Opportunities:**

**What do students need to know to consider staying in Alabama? What are challenges that could easily be addressed with more information?**

**Kolby-** They need to know that Alabama offers everything other states like Georgia or Florida do and that we are not behind offering less in terms of job quality and pay.

**Aubrey-** Students need to know about all of the opportunities that Alabama has to offer, whether that be in the job market, entertainment options, or otherwise. Additionally, students need to see what a career and life in Alabama could really look like. I think we need to work on a social media presence that highlights everything the state has to offer. For example, we could take turns visiting spots in the state and then highlight them on Instagram and TikTok. For me personally, I'd like to see that I can have the same life in Alabama that young professionals can find in Chattanooga or Savannah. I feel like social media is the single most effective way to reach my peers, and it's also inexpensive!

### **Notable Quotes:**

**What if any quotes stood out to you?**

“Alabama is the most beautiful state I've ever been in. It is infinitely times better than the concrete jungle that I come from, and I hope it never changes.”

# Campus Presentation Samples

Isaiah Huley & Onyebuchi Egwu



## OBJECTIVE Strengths

Cost of Living/ Quality of Life

Huntsville, Alabama, has two of the top 25 most affordable small metro areas in the US, including the number one slot, according to U.S. News Real Estates. With an average price of \$299,224, Alabama is the eighth most affordable state in the nation for home purchases.

Huntsville's downtown has experienced an improvement in recent years, with more options for dining, shopping, and housing available thanks to an upsurge in new construction downtown; a former cotton mill turned into a bustling arts center just west of downtown; and remodeled old middle schools now house restaurants, breweries, and an axe-throwing venue.

### Primary Objective

The Student Retention Council for Higher Education aims to encourage graduates to stay in Alabama after completing their education. Strategies include fostering alumni connections, creating job placement and entrepreneurship programs, promoting civic engagement, enhancing the quality of life, advocating for affordable housing, providing professional development workshops, and emphasizing cultural diversity. Regular assessments are recommended to understand strategies based on student needs and feedback.



### Career Opportunities

Huntsville, Alabama, thrives on a diverse economy driven by aerospace, defense, and STEM opportunities. Major employers such as NASA, the U.S. Army, Boeing, SAIC, and Northrop Grumman are complemented by a Toyota manufacturing plant.

The city's economic strength is further bolstered by healthcare opportunities provided by Huntsville Hospital and Crestwood Medical Center, as well as the importance of education institutions like Huntsville City Schools and local universities

### Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Throughout the journey, especially in the areas of salary data, work environment, and effective recruitment, Huntsville is striving to eliminate biases and obstacles. Major corporations within the state, such as CCI, aim to provide opportunities for communities of color, including the acquisition of innovative and diverse knowledge via the growth of workforce development initiatives around the state.



## Why Should I Stay in Alabama?

### Who Are We?

Student Retention Council is a collection of student representatives from all 14 public universities seeking to find ways to make Alabama a more exciting place to learn, work, and live after college.

### Who Are Your Representatives?



Chandler Robinson



Brian Niswonger

### An A+ for Alabama!

### Quality of Life and Affordability

Alabama is #3 on the Top 10 Most Affordable States, the 3rd lowest in cost of living, and the 2nd cheapest place to live in the US.



### Room to Grow!

Alabama is a growing state, especially in our region of North AL. Huntsville has made a huge appearance as the most growing city in the US.



### A Working State

Alabama is surrounded by engineering, agriculture, and business. Alabama also has STEM centers throughout the state with Medical, Aviation, and Legal opportunities. Huntsville has NASA, Redstone Arsenal, Boeing, and so many more career opportunities!

At UAH, we host job fairs so we can get the students where they want to be in their career.

### A Diverse State

In Alabama regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion we have shown an increase in diversity. Alabama ensures that educational equality, job fairness and opportunities are provided by law. If you experience or oversee any form of discrimination, report it to a trusted individual.



Scan Here for more resources!



PLEASE TAKE THIS QUICK SURVEY

ISABELLA CAMPOS AND HALLA AL-MORADI

UAB SRC

# ALABAMA'S STRENGTHS

**COST OF LIVING:** ALABAMA HAS THE 5TH LOWEST COST OF LIVING IN THE U.S.

**QUALITY OF LIFE:** ALABAMA IS ONE OF THE MOST BIODIVERSE STATES IN THE NATION, FROM NATURE PRESERVES THAT HOST ENDEMIC SPECIES OF FISH, TO MOUNTAINS WITH ATTRACTIVE AND ACCESSIBLE HIKING TRAILS, THE STATE OFFERS A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPERIENCE NATURE IN A HOLISTIC WAY. DESPITE HAVING A FEW UP AND COMING CITIES, ALABAMA MAINTAINS ACCESS TO NATURE, PROMOTING THE WELL-BEING OF LOCAL RESIDENTS!

**CAREER OPPORTUNITIES:** ALABAMA HOSTS CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN MANY EXPANDING FIELDS, ESPECIALLY AEROSPACE ENGINEERING IN THE UP AND COMING CITY OF HUNTSVILLE!

**DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION:** ALABAMA IS HOME TO THE MAGIC CITY ACCEPTANCE CENTER, AND ACADEMY. THESE LOCATIONS PROMOTE INCLUSION AND WELL-BEING, FOR EVERYONE. MOREOVER, BIRMINGHAM AND MONTGOMERY ARE THE HOME CITIES IN WHICH THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT TOOK PLACE, BOTH CITIES PAY HOMAGE TO THOSE WHO FOUGHT FOR EQUAL RIGHTS, AND TO THOSE WE LOST DURING THE MOVEMENT.

## RESOURCES

**CAREER/PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES:** ALABAMA HOSTS AN EXPANDING ECONOMY

**QUALITY OF LIFE/COST OF LIVING:** ALABAMA HOSTS ONE OF THE LOWEST COSTS OF LIVING IN THE STATE WITH THE HIGHEST QUALITY OF LIFE/ACCESS TO NATURE (I.E. OAK MOUNTAIN AND TURKEY CREEK.)

**RETAIN ALABAMA INITIATIVES:** ALL IN ALABAMA  
INSTA: @ALLINALABAMA

FUEL AL  
INSTA: @FUELALABAMA

INNOVATE BIRMINGHAM  
INSTA: @INNOVATE\_BHAM

STUDENT RETENTION COUNCIL  
INSTA: @SRC.AL



# GROW WITH BAMA

COST OF LIVING	QUALITY OF LIFE	CAREER OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ 3rd LOWEST in the country</li> <li>★ 2nd LOWEST housing costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Rapid Growth</li> <li>★ Thriving Communities</li> <li>★ Diverse Landscapes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Burgeoning Job Market</li> <li>★ Diverse Career Opportunities</li> <li>★ Growing Economy</li> <li>★ Business-Friendly Environment</li> </ul>

Explore a state where DIVERSITY is celebrated, EQUITY is championed, and INCLUSION is our strength. Join us in building a vibrant community that stands out for its commitment to equality and unity.

## Your story belongs in Alabama!



Mahkayla Young  
UWA Representative

Scan the QR codes to find out more about what Alabama has to offer.



## Jacksonville State University

Aubrey Whiddon & Kolby Hodges



The SRC is comprised of 2 student from each of the 14 public universities in Alabama! We were founded by the Higher Education Partnership, which advocates for Alabama's public universities! Our goal is to give Alabama's students a voice!

### Cost of Living

Alabama has the second lowest cost of living in the United States, and boasts costs 13% lower than the national average. Additionally, our state is affordable while still offering amenities found in states with significantly higher costs of living.

The career offerings in Alabama are diverse and continue to grow rapidly. Companies such as Regions, Alabama Power, and Hudson Alpha offer outstanding opportunities within our state.

### Career Opportunities

### Quality of Life

With 21 state parks for the nature lovers, and bustling city streets for those most at home in the city, there's something for everyone in Alabama.

Alabama has a rich history in the foundations of diversity, equity, & inclusion. We are the birthplace to activists such as Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King, and boast famous historical sights such as the Edmund Pettus Bridge and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice.

### Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

#### Resources:

<https://alabamaworks.alabama.gov/vosnet/default.aspx>  
<https://allinal.org/>

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# Thinking about Post-Graduation Plans? Consider Alabama!



## Alabama is Affordable

The average cost of living in Alabama is \$39,657



## Explore Alabama

Alabama has 21 state parks ranging from Gulf Coast beaches to the Appalachian Mountains!



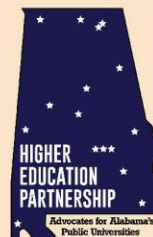
## A Wealth of History

Alabama has been the stage for historical events like the Civil Rights Movement. These events are memorialized through the Legacy Museum and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute



## Start a career!

Health, tech, and manufacturing are booming in AL! Alabama has always been a center for innovation. You can help continue this tradition!



Scan for Resources!



Scan to Complete Survey

Alex Martinez and Aubrie Chastain

# Why Alabama?



**AUBURN UNIVERSITY  
AT MONTGOMERY**



## Quality of Life

Alabama has an innovative culture where the surrounding communities are booming with agriculture, entrepreneurs, and small businesses (EDPA, 2021).



## Cost of Living

The cost of living is lower than in most states. A citizen who is single and makes at least \$16 an hour earning an annual income of 39,657 can live modestly in Alabama (Sofi, 2023). Furthermore, it is good news to know that rental and Mortgage loan housing costs only range from \$664 to \$1,250 compared to 47 of the other 49 states' higher mortgage rates (Tarpley, 2024).



## Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

The unique quality of Alabama's southern charm starts first with post-secondary education at four-year learning institutions that fuel the thriving labor force.



## Career Opportunities

Alabamians are an inclusive mix of nationalities that make up a diverse community of people who progress forward in education and careers. This is possible through equitable access to public support which opens mobility pathways to a productive future.



## Helpful Resources



# WHY CHOOSE ALABAMA?

## ABOUT US

The Student Retention Council is comprised of Alabama Public University Representatives creating and innovating improvements to life in Alabama after college.



## MEET YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

HALEY HOGGLE



CALEB SMITH



## CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Alabama added 41,700 payroll jobs in the last 12 months.



## DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Alabama has a rich history in fighting for civil rights. We have historical sites laying the foundations of DEI such as the Edmund Pettus Bridge and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice.



## COST OF LIVING

The cost of living in Alabama is 13% lower than the national average.



## QUALITY OF LIFE

Alabama ranks #4 in most biodiversity in the United States, and we have more biodiversity of any state on the east of the Mississippi River.

## WHAT ALABAMA STUDENTS ARE SAYING



"Specifically, the scenery, the people, and the atmosphere have all been welcoming to me as an out-of-state student."



"Alabama will always be home to me. There is so much diversity and opportunity."



"Alabama is a great place to settle down and raise children."

STUDENT RETENTION COUNCIL



HOSTED BY:  
THE HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP



[www.allinal.org](http://www.allinal.org)



<https://alabamaworks.alabama.gov/vosnet/default.aspx>



## Alabama: A Prime Destination for Your Post-Grad Journey

Presented by SRC Representatives:  
Ferrin Lewis and Landon Hale



### Alabama's Strengths:

- Cost of Living: Alabama boasts an affordable cost of living, allowing graduates to establish a comfortable lifestyle without breaking the bank.
- Quality of Life: With its rich cultural heritage and recreational opportunities, Alabama offers a high quality of life, ensuring a fulfilling post-grad experience.
- Career Opportunities: The state presents diverse career prospects, especially in specialized fields, fostering professional growth and development.
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Alabama promotes a diverse and inclusive environment, reflecting a commitment to fostering understanding and unity among its residents.

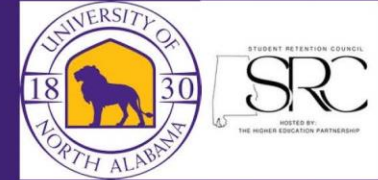
### Factors Influencing Post-Grad Decisions:

The pursuit of new experiences, better job opportunities, and family ties influence post-grad decisions. Specialized education, entrepreneurial ambitions, and urban living conditions are significant themes.

**Identified Opportunities:** To encourage students to stay, Alabama should focus on enhancing job opportunities, competitive pay, cultural activities, and community events. Addressing cost of living and expanding recreational options can make the state more appealing.

# HIGHER EDUCATION

RETAIN ALABAMA



SRC MEMBERS:  
JAELEN CATES  
BEN STARKEY

## Cost of Living

- Average Cost of Living in Alabama: **\$39,657** per year for a single individual
- **2nd-lowest** cost of living, **3rd-lowest** average price of goods, and **4th-lowest** average rent prices compared to the rest of the country
- Data gathered from the **Bureau of Economic Analysis**

## Quality of Life

- Alabama is home to dozens of state and national parks and sites, such as Monte Sano and Joe Wheeler state parks
- The U.S. Space and Rocket Center, Birmingham Zoo, and Hangout Music Festival bring many visitors to our state as well
- The Heart of Dixie is the origin of many sports legends and places, like Nick Saban and the Talladega Superspeedway
- The state is home to the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, Rosa Parks's famous Montgomery Bus Boycott, and the Freedom Rides Museum
- For more, visit [alapark.com](http://alapark.com) to find more adventures in Alabama

## Career Opportunities

Alabama has a vast selection of job opportunities. Some of the most prominent are aerospace, automotive, healthcare, technology, finance, manufacturing, tourism, resources, and retail. For more career opportunities, go to [alabama.gov](http://alabama.gov)

### Northern Alabama

- Northern Alabama is known as a hub for technology and research. It is also well known for aerospace and defense.

# LEARN IN ALABAMA. STAY IN ALABAMA.

NICK TOLBERT AND ALLISON POPE



THE STATE OF ALABAMA IS A GREAT PLACE TO GET AN EDUCATION. IT IS ALSO A FANTASTIC STATE TO WORK AND BUILD THE ROOTS FOR YOUR FUTURE.

## COST OF LIVING

In Alabama, it is a fact that you can live better for less. With a 25% lower cost of living than California or New York, every dollar you earn simply does more. Whether you want to own a home, go out on the weekends, travel across the state, raise a family, or anything else, you can do it all in Alabama for less than anywhere else.

## QUALITY OF LIFE

When looking at our 21 state parks and 9 national parks, with views ranging from the beaches to the mountains, and hundreds of concert venues, sporting events, festivals, fairs, and more scattering our state every day, it is hard to deny how great it is to be in Alabama. All of that, alongside one of the lowest violent crime rates in the U.S., make Alabama the destination for a good quality of life.

## CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Alabama's economy is diverse and dynamic, offering a wide range of career opportunities for college graduates. From aerospace and manufacturing to healthcare and technology, Alabama provides a fertile ground for professional development. Many multinational companies have chosen Alabama as their home, providing a wealth of employment prospects across various industries..

## DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Alabama acknowledges that the journey towards true diversity, equity, and inclusion is ongoing. The state takes pride in building a community that reflects the rich tapestry of diversity within the state. As a state with such a unique history, many steps are being taken to ensure that nothing is lost and that Alabamians have the opportunity to educate themselves on the valuable history of the state.

WANT MORE RESOURCES? VISIT [ALLINAL.ORG](http://ALLINAL.ORG)



SCAN ME:



# WHY ALABAMA? RESOURCES



## Cost of Living

### Compared to All 50 States

- Alabama has the **2nd lowest** cost of living
- Alabama has the **3rd lowest** average price of goods
- Alabama has the **4th lowest** average rent prices

- Data obtained from the Bureau of Economic Analysis

## Quality of Life

### Outdoor Recreation & Sports

- Alabama is home to 450 miles of trails at 21 State Park locations including Gulf, Oak Mountain, and Cheaha State Parks
- College football powerhouses Auburn University and the University of Alabama to minor league baseball teams like the Montgomery Biscuits

### Entertainment

- Alabama is the birthplace of Mardi Gras in Mobile, has the Hangout Music Festival along the Gulf Coast, has Year-round shows at the Alabama Theatre in Birmingham, and more

### Historical Preservation

- From the Alabama Civil Rights Trail to the USS Alabama to Horseshoe Bend National Military Park, Alabama is a state with a rich history that has shaped the world we live in

## Career Opportunities

North Alabama	Central Alabama	South Alabama
Aerospace and Defense	Healthcare	Maritime Industry
Technology and Research	Finance and Banking	Tourism and Hospitality
Manufacturing	Manufacturing	Aerospace and Aviation

## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- Alabama State Department of Education
  - The *Alabama Achieves* is the strategic plan for 2020-2030
- Higher Education Access and Scholarships
  - Universities have programs that support student cultural groups and support scholarships that increase higher education accessibility to underrepresented groups

# Quality of Life Proposals

# Public Spaces:

Pitches and Prospects



# Why are Public Spaces Important to Young Professionals?

- Public spaces meet the needs for “social interaction, expression, and retreat.”
- Many young adults enjoy exposure to nature in some shape or fashion.



Examples of public spaces  
Montevallo students use

# Our Opportunity Statement

“Public spaces provide an important outlet for the development of entertainment and connection within a community.





# We Can Do

## Community Garden

- Planter Pots
- Single Space within Existing Area
- Designated Block



# Why it Will Work

- **Easy to Set Up**
- **Cost Effective**
  - \$3,750 and \$7,500 (University of Minnesota, 2022)
- **Individual Benefits (Egli, 2016)**
  - Physical
  - Mental
  - Social



# Steps to Get Started



- **Site preparation**  
Identify public spaces suitable for the garden project
- **Campus engagement**  
Reach out to campus groups (ex. greek life, philanthropy groups, clubs and other groups)
- **Routine maintenance**  
Compose a routine maintenance schedule to maintain the upkeep of the garden and delegate maintenance to campus organizations

# You Can Do

- Refurbishing a vacant building
  - Meeting space for local colleges, businesses, and citizens
- Multifunctional space:
  - Business training
  - Community events
  - Adult education

...

## Paterson Elementary School



# Why it Will Work...

- Working with cities to see if there are any buildings that are outdated or not in use.
- This site will serve as a community space for training, networking, and community events.



## For Example:

Alabaster City Schools (ACS) sold its central office buildings to the city to later become a sports multiplex and library in September 2022 (Love, 2022).

# Steps to Get Started

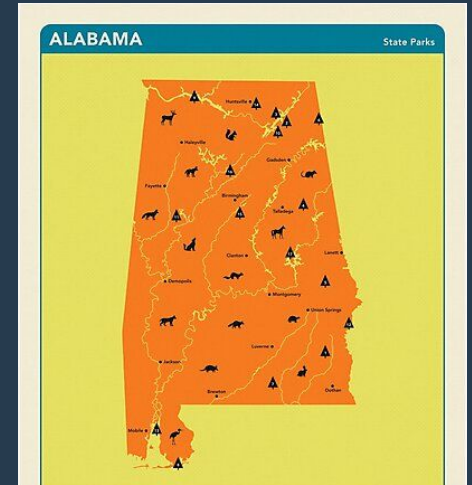
- **Locate Possible Opportunities**
  - What can we refurbish?
- **Budgeting and Funding**
  - What needs fixing, installing, replacing?
- **Community Engagement**
  - Who's interested?
- **Program Development**
  - What do people want?
  - Who's on board?



# Alabama Can Do

## State Park Expansions

- **Creation of New Parks**
  - Historic parks, hiking trails, picnic areas, etc.
- **Enhancement of Existing Parks**
  - Raising awareness
- **Creating Culture**
  - Parks Passport Booklet
  - Unique collectables



# Why it Will Work

- **Abundance of Sights and Experiences**
  - Biodiversity and Accessibility
  - Preservation and Conservation

- **Proven Economic Benefits**

(Stynes, 2003)

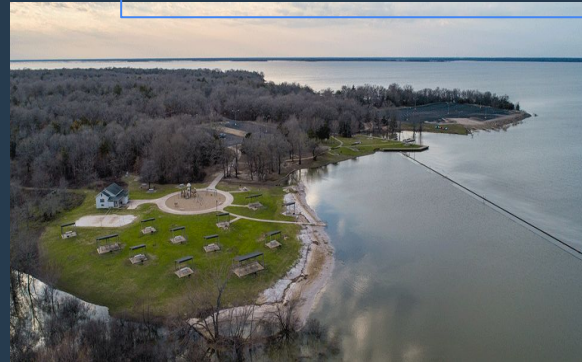
- Many opportunities for the local region to benefit from visitors of all types (Local, Non-Local Day Trips, Motel, and Camp)

(Alabama Wildlife Federation, n.d.), (National Parks Service, n.d.)

Connecticut has a passport program that has increased visitation to the parks, and it has helped fund the management of its state parks (Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, n.d.)



Texas utilizes their state parks to provide physical, mental, and economic benefits for Texans (Texas Parks and Wildlife, 2021).





# Steps to Get Started

- **Identify Locations and Opportunities for Growth**
  - What are local hidden gems?
- **Creation of Legislation**
  - Creation of Passport System
  - Annual Access Pass
- **Unique and Fun Merchandise**
  - Working with local artists
  - Creating a culture of activity
  - Support State Parks directly
- **Creation of Jobs and Internships**

For example, Alabama State Parks have partnered with Alabama small businesses to provide merchandise for a limited time. The merchandise has been popular and sold out. Alabama state parks have not produced distinct designs for each separate state park.



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# QOL: Public Perception



**Isabella Campos, Alex Martínez, Allison Pope, and Ferrin Lewis**



# Public Perception

**In today's society our perception is constantly changing due to our constant exposure to new ideas and opportunities. Resultantly, maintaining a positive public perception of Alabama is vital in attracting and maintaining graduates to join our workforce. Not only are topics like safety and education important, but graduates want to know that their overall quality of life will thrive in an area, this includes things like different ways to have fun and finding new experiences!**

# Opportunity Statement

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**How might we better connect young professionals to the state of Alabama to make them feel proud of where they live and work?**



# Project 1: You Can Do – #VisitYourTown

- **Social media utilization is incredibly valuable**
- **Highlight local entertainment, restaurants, and events to connect to the younger and older audiences**
- **Proper Search Engine Optimization is important**
  - **HASHTAGS!** They will help you appear on searches like “Birmingham Restaurants”
- **@BhamNow does well promoting events on social media**
  - **US Open and Paralympics publicize in a way that**

# You Can Do – Why It Will Work

- **Young people are going to places like NYC, Atlanta, and Chicago because they are well promoted**
- **Highlighting the entertainment, job openings, and restaurant options in your town will get folks interested**
- **A pretty post with compelling copy will draw anyone in - Make it cute and make it fun and people will want to learn more!**

# You Can Do – Steps to Get Started

- **Social media isn't hard to use, but it can be hard to target the right audience**
  - **Use hashtags and words of interest!**
- **Connect with local youth to find out what they want to see**
  - **Every school has influencers (student leaders or social media stars)**
- **Possible collaboration with local university students to collaborate with Advertising, PR, or Marketing students**
  - **This is great because it connects students further to the town!**



# Project 2: WE Can Do – Create Community Internships!

- **Municipalities could establish meaningful internships for college students, benefiting both parties. Given the significant role of social media in today's society for building rapport, having social media interns in local municipalities could greatly enhance trust and maintain the quality of life for entire communities, even beyond just the interns themselves!**



Image: US News and World Report

# We Can Do – Why It Will Work

**A healthy work environment is one of the most prominent factors in people's perceptions of locations. Adding social media to the mix aids in the perception part, allowing individuals from all over to see that Alabama has a thriving work environment within our culture!**

# We Can Do – Steps to Get Started

- **Spread the word to communities/municipalities about SRC**
- **Create internship opportunities focusing on social media, with the purpose of connecting with the community in a more modern way**
- **Find students who are looking for new opportunities!**
- **Make room for growth in these roles (i.e. graduate students mentoring undergraduates).**

# Project 3: ALABAMA Can Do – Improve the Alabama Talent Triad

- **The Alabama Talent Triad is database that compiles employment opportunities throughout the state. It also logs apprenticeships and even scholarships.**
- **In its current form, companies register their open positions on the website.**
- **Area of opportunity for further research**



**ALABAMA**  
**TALENT TRIAD**

# Alabama Can Do – Why It Will Work

- **Increasing the visibility of fulfilling internship opportunities will get students to “buy in” to local firms and businesses**
- **The publication of more jobs that require a diverse range of “knowledge-based” diplomas will change the perception of Alabama’s job market**
- **Internships that lead into job opportunities have the potential to retain more college graduates**

# Alabama Can Do – Steps to Get Started

- **Redesign the UI of Alabama Talent Triad**
- **Bring it under ACHE and the “All In AL” campaign and promote the database by advertising its functions, particularly on college campuses.**
- **Actively recruit businesses to the database and publish their job and internship opportunities**

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# Entertainment

QOL Project

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# 5 Star Entertainment

- Entertainment is vital for recent graduates and early-career professionals as it relieves stress, fosters work-life balance, facilitates social connections, inspires creativity, enhances cultural awareness, supports personal growth, boosts mental health, and helps balance digital consumption.
- Research reveals that students become creative and realize their talents when they are exposed to entertainment. They become more responsive in an entertaining environment as compared to the classroom environment. (Easy Reader News)
- “Students are looking to live and work in a city with plenty of professional opportunities, social activities and a sense of community,” one ACHE survey found. “Both in- and out-of-state students want a vibrant community with potential upward mobility and diversity when looking for a place to live and work, but there are slight differences between these groups.” (Business Alabama)



# Opportunity Statement

- **Strength:** Alabama offers a vibrant entertainment scene for recent graduates, with daytime options like outdoor activities, festivals, and cultural events. At night, the state comes alive with diverse nightlife, including live music, dining, and social venues, providing ample opportunities for young professionals to enjoy both daytime and nighttime entertainment.
- **Opportunity:** How can we get to these places where they are walkable, easy parking, easy access and affordable?





# PROJECT ONE: “Community Festival” (You Can Do)

For a day and night community event annually, how about organizing a “Community Festival.”

- During the day, you can have outdoor activities like a farmers' market, food trucks, live music, and games.
- During the evening, transition to a night market with entertainment such as outdoor movie screenings, live performances from local artists.
- This dual-day format offers a diverse range of activities, appealing to different preferences and schedules, making it an inclusive and engaging event for the community.

# WHY WILL IT WORK?

- This annual community festival benefits recent graduates by offering networking opportunities, cultural engagement, skill enhancement through involvement, diverse entertainment, and a positive social environment. It serves as a platform for showcasing local talent, fostering community involvement, and providing relaxation and enjoyment after the stresses of college and career transitions.
- "The best thing about being involved with festivals and events is the opportunity to help build a community, foster a sense of pride within a community, and engage a community," says Chris Romano, a business consultant with Thrivent Financial Services. "Honestly, in my professional career, I've never found something outside a community festival that can do that to the same degree." (University of Minnesota Extension)

## Hangout Music Festival



## Prattville CityFest



# STEPS TO GET STARTED

- 
- Define Purpose and Goals:
    - Clearly outline event objectives.
  - Form Planning Committee:
    - Assemble a diverse, skilled team.
  - Select Dates:
    - Choose a date and respective time of the year.
  - Secure Venue:
    - Identify suitable venue with needed facilities.
  - Obtain Permits:
    - Check and secure necessary permits.
  - Develop Budget:
    - Create detailed budget for all expenses.
  - Sponsorship and Funding:
    - Seek local sponsorships and explore funding.
  - Curate Activities:
    - Plan diverse day and night activities.
  - Engage Local Talent:
    - Book local musicians and artists.
  - Market the Event:
    - Implement a comprehensive marketing strategy.
  - Coordinate Logistics:
    - Plan transportation, parking, waste management, and security.
  - Involve the Community:
    - Encourage community participation and feedback.
  - Evaluate and Adjust:
    - Assess success, gather feedback, and make improvements.

# Premiere Showcase

## → Months 1-2:

- Launch a teaser campaign on social media and local platforms to announce the festival's return and showcase sneak peeks of confirmed attractions, performers, and vendors.
- Highlight the diverse lineup of activities and entertainment, including live music acts, interactive workshops, culinary delights from food trucks, and unique artisanal products at the farmers' market.

## → Months 3-4:

- Host a press conference or media event to unveil the festival's full lineup and officially announce key headliners, celebrity appearances, and special guests.
- Invite local media outlets, influencers, and community leaders to generate buzz and coverage for the event.
- Release promotional videos, artist spotlights, and behind-the-scenes glimpses to build anticipation and excitement among attendees.

## → Month 5:

- Organize a community rally or kickoff event to rally support and involvement from residents, businesses, and volunteers.
- Showcase the festival's positive impact on the local economy, tourism, and community spirit.
- Encourage attendees to sign up for volunteer opportunities, vendor slots, and sponsorship packages to actively participate in shaping the festival experience.

# Preparation and Planning

- Month 1:
  - Establish festival communities and task forces responsible for programming, logistics, marketing, sponsorship, and volunteer coordination.
  - Define roles, responsibilities, and timelines for each team and begin outlining an comprehensive event plan.
- Months 2-3:
  - Secure venue permits, contracts with vendors, performers, suppliers, and insurance coverage for the festival.
  - Develop a detailed budget outlining expenses for talent booking, production, marketing, permits, equipment rentals, and other operational costs.
- Months 4-5:
  - Launch a robust marketing and promotional campaign across multiple channels, including digital advertising, print media, radio spots, and outdoor signage.
  - Create engaging content such as teaser videos, artist interviews, and interactive social media campaigns to build momentum and drive ticket sales.
  - Finalize event logistics, including stage setups, sound and lighting systems, security, parking, and sanitation measures.

# Community Engagement and Participation

- Engage local businesses, organizations, and schools through partnership opportunities, sponsorships, and collaborative initiatives.
  - Encourage them to host satellite events, offer promotions, or sponsor festival activities to enhance the overall experience for attendees.
- Recruit volunteers from the community through outreach efforts, volunteer fairs, and online platforms.
  - Offer training sessions, orientation workshops, and incentives such as free festival passes, merchandise, or recognition to attract and retain volunteers.
- Establish community advisory boards or focus groups to gather feedback, input, and ideas from residents, stakeholders, and cultural groups.
  - Incorporate their suggestions into the festival programming and planning process to ensure inclusivity, diversity, and representation.



# PROJECT TWO: “Setting the Theatre Stage” (We Can Do)

Have municipal and university theater organizations collaborate in a community-based play

- Invite students and local actors to participate in a play about a story relevant to the area
- Allow students and members to create their own play that is meaningful to them
- This performance could be incorporated with a potential capstone project and occur once a year.



# WHY WILL IT WORK?

- Community Involvement
- Participation
- Authenticity
- Revenue Opportunity
- Success in other areas
- Major cities have both performing arts and university organizations
- ◆ Alabama Shakespeare Theatre
- ◆ Red Mountain Theatre Company


## Cornell Theatre Collaborative



## Performing Arts Revenue by Cities

Metro area	Nonprofits	Revenues
<a href="#">Birmingham</a>	74	\$22,057,466
<a href="#">Huntsville</a>	51	\$5,056,710
<a href="#">Mobile</a>	33	\$3,529,779
<a href="#">Tuscaloosa</a>	22	\$2,084,347
<a href="#">Montgomery</a>	18	\$8,131,391
<a href="#">Daphne</a>	15	\$603,759
<a href="#">Florence, AL</a>	11	\$1,285,605
<a href="#">Decatur, AL</a>	9	\$1,120,188
<a href="#">Dothan</a>	8	\$1,254,005
<a href="#">Gadsden</a>	5	\$347,602

# STEPS TO GET STARTED

- 
- Define Purpose and Goals:
    - What theatres and universities are involved
  - Form Planning Committee:
    - Collaborate with professors and theatre administrators to cover logistics
  - Select Dates:
    - Choose dates with a academic year gap.
  - Secure Venue:
    - Identify suitable venue with needed facilities.
  - Obtain Permits:
    - Check and secure necessary permits and academic certifications.
  - Develop Budget:
    - What will the performance entail and what funding is needed
  - Sponsorship and Funding:
    - Seek local sponsorships and explore funding.
  - Engage Local Talent:
    - Reach out to current artists and students
  - Involve the Community:
    - Encourage community participation and feedback.
  - Perform!



# PROJECT THREE: “Emerging Future Filmmakers and Artists” (Alabama Can Do)

Have municipal state governments sponsor a film competition that connects youth with valuable resources

- Similar to writing competitions, high school students can send a film they have created
- This competition can be a 3 minute short film about anything relevant to their lives submitted in the fall
- Winners are able to work with University administrators to create a film to showcase at a municipal event in the spring.

# WHY WILL IT WORK?

## Sidewalk Film Festival



- Film Academic Resources
  - ◆ UA
  - ◆ UAB
  - ◆ USA
  - ◆ UM
- Existing Film Festivals
- Opportunity: Alabama boasts a multitude of different looks within a twenty to thirty mile radius
- Cheap Cost
  - ◆ 25% tax program for filming in Alabama



# STEPS TO GET STARTED

- Define Purpose and Goals:
  - What high schools, universities, film organizations want to be involved
- Government Involvement
  - ◆ Pass legislation and secure funding that can support the program
- Create a Lesson Plan
  - ◆ Work with high school and university instructors to create programs that facilitate the creative experience
- Select Dates:
  - What dates in the fall can students submit & spring to showcase
- Secure Venue:
  - Identify suitable location
- Obtain Permits:
  - Check and secure necessary permits and academic certifications.
- Involve the Community:
  - Encourage community participation and feedback.
- Showcase!

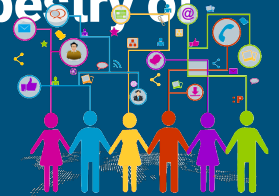
# Community Connection



# Why Are Connections Within the Community Important?

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**Building strong connections within a community is paramount for creating a thriving and supportive environment. These connections serve as a vital social support system, offering assistance in times of need and contributing to mental and emotional well-being by fostering a sense of belonging. The sharing of resources, whether in terms of knowledge, skills, or physical assets, enhances the collective capacity of the community. Celebrating cultural diversity becomes possible through interactions within the community, creating a rich tapestry of experiences.**



# Opportunity Statement

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**How can we enhance educational experiences to make Alabama an attractive place for young professionals and recent graduates?**





# Project 1: You Can Do-Faithful Connections

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**Create a platform connecting different religious communities for joint events, fostering understanding and collaboration.**



# You Can Do - Why it Will Work

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**Religious diversity is a cornerstone of Alabama's identity, with about 86% identifying as Christian, including various denominations as well diverse religious communities across Alabama from Judaism to Islam to Hinduism and etc. Engaging and retaining young professionals in this diverse religious landscape is crucial for fostering vibrant community.**

# You Can Do - Steps to Get Started

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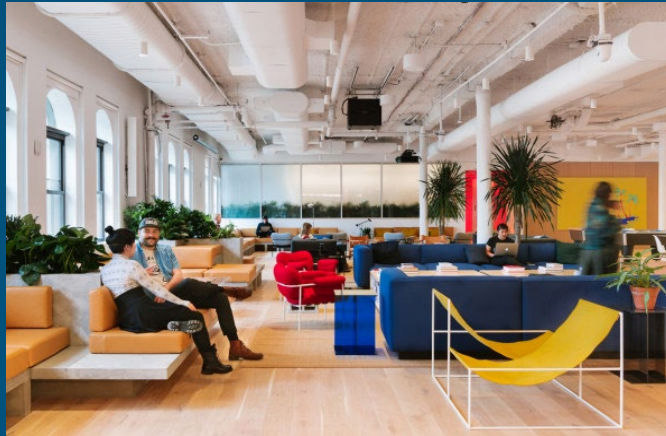


- 1. Identify key representatives from diverse religious communities.**
- 2. Plan joint events and activities to encourage interaction.**
- 3. Utilize online platforms to extend reach and engagement.**

# Project 2: We Can Do - School Innovations Hub

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**Establish a hub for sharing innovative practices among schools, fostering collaboration and excellence.**



# We Can Do - Why It Will Work

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**Successful models in other states highlight the positive impact of collaborative educational initiatives.**



# We Can Do - Steps to Get Started

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- 1. Identify schools willing to participate.**
- 2. Create a platform for sharing innovative practices.**
- 3. Organize workshops and conferences for educators.**

## Project 3: Alabama Can Do- Inclusive Recreation Programs

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**Launch statewide inclusive recreation programs at community centers to cater to diverse interests.**



# Alabama Can Do - Why it Will Work

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**Creating inclusive spaces encourages participation from all community members.**





# Alabama Can Do - Steps to Get Started

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- 1. Identify diverse recreation interests within the community.**
- 2. Develop programs catering to various age groups and interests.**
- 3. Promote and market inclusive recreation programs.**



## **Final Report – On Campus Presentations**

Your University: Alabama A & M University

Your Names: Onyebuchi Egwu & Isaiah Huley

Approximate Number of People You Presented To: 100+

List Organizations Reached: Athletes, D9 Organizations, Student leaders, International students.

It was very important to us that we choose students who had an open mind and was willing to help us come up with a solution. Why did you select these specific organizations (100 words or less):

These organizations were selected based on their representation of a significant portion of the campus population in Huntsville, ensuring broad engagement. By involving diverse groups, we aimed to capture a wide range of interests and viewpoints. These selected student organizations have close ties to the student body, making them ideal partners for gathering honest feedback and fostering active participation. Their involvement enhances the inclusivity and relevance of our initiatives, fostering a collaborative environment for addressing campus-wide concerns and promoting meaningful engagement among students. These specific organizations were selected to ensure broad representation across key relationships of the campus community. Athletes bring a unique perspective and influence, D9 organizations represent diverse cultural backgrounds and promote inclusivity, student leaders serve as liaisons between administration and students, and international students provide valuable insights into global perspectives. By engaging with these groups, we wanted to foster a comprehensive conversation, address varied concerns, and promote a sense of belonging and involvement among all students. Each organization brings a distinct perspective and voice to the table, enriching our efforts to create a vibrant and inclusive campus environment.

In your opinion, after sharing your presentation, what points were the most compelling for your peers? Why? (200 words or less)

The most compelling points for our peers likely revolved around the economic opportunities and affordability of living in Huntsville, Alabama. Highlighting Huntsville's ranking as one of the top 25 most affordable small metro areas in the US, with the number one slot, captured their attention. Also emphasizing the diverse economy driven by aerospace, defense, and STEM

opportunities, as well as major employers like NASA, the U.S. Army, and Boeing, would have underscored the city's potential for career growth and development. This information would have resonated strongly with our peers, especially those considering their post-graduation plans or seeking internship and job opportunities. The combination of affordability and robust job market prospects paints a compelling picture of Huntsville as an attractive destination for young professionals, offering both economic stability and a high quality of life.

Briefly discuss two – three ways your university helps connect students to meaningful career opportunities in Alabama? Consider the following: internships, career services, hands-on learning opportunities, mentorship etc. Please be specific and include details about how these opportunities support students making the state home after graduation. (500 words or less)

**Career Fairs:** Regularly organized career fairs provide students with the chance to interact with a wide range of employers from various industries in the state of Alabama. These events allow students to network, explore job opportunities, and gain insights into the local job market. By connecting students directly with Alabama-based employers, career fairs increase the likelihood of students securing positions within the state after graduation.

**Internship Programs:** The university offers robust internship programs that enable students to gain hands-on experience in their chosen fields while establishing valuable connections with local employers. Through internships, students develop relevant skills, expand their professional networks, and often secure full-time employment offers from the companies they intern with. These opportunities not only enhance students' career prospects but also encourage them to consider staying in Alabama post-graduation, as they have already established roots within the local professional community.

**Alumni Networks:** The university maintains active alumni networks that connect current students with successful alumni who have established careers in Alabama. These programs provide students with guidance, support, and valuable insights into career pathways within the state. By fostering relationships with alumni who have chosen to make Alabama their home, students gain a better understanding of the professional opportunities available locally and are encouraged to consider building their careers in the state after graduation.

These initiatives collectively support students in making Alabama their home after graduation by providing them with the resources, connections, and experiences necessary to succeed in the local job market. Through career fairs, internships, and alumni networks, students gain exposure to Alabama-based employers, develop relevant skills, and establish professional relationships

that increase their likelihood of securing meaningful employment within the state. Additionally, these opportunities foster a sense of belonging and community among students, encouraging them to invest in their future in Alabama and contribute to the state's economic growth and development. Overall, our university is committed to pushing students to pursue rewarding career opportunities in Alabama and build successful lives within the state post-graduation.

Any other remarks or comments about things that you learned or found interesting throughout the process.

N/A

Submit any photos of you presenting to your peers!

## **Final Report – On Campus Presentations**

Your University: Athens State University

Your Names:

Brooke Sinyard and Tiara Samuels

Approximate Number of People You Presented To:

Approximately 50 Athens State Students

List Organizations Reached:

SHRM, SGA, and Bonner Leadership Program

Why did you select these specific organizations (100 words or less):

SHRM, SGA, and the Bonner Leadership Program at Athens State were chosen to speak on student retention for their diverse perspectives. SHRM offers insights into workplace dynamics impacting student career paths. SGA represents student voices, crucial for understanding retention challenges. The Bonner Leadership Program fosters community engagement, addressing holistic student development. Their combined expertise offers comprehensive solutions for enhancing student retention in Alabama's higher education landscape.

In your opinion, after sharing your presentation, what points were the most compelling for your peers? Why? (200 words or less)

Students found the Student Retention Council's mission to resonate due to its promise of inclusive student representation. They appreciated the Higher Education Partnership's commitment to fostering collaboration among Alabama universities, foreseeing a unified front against retention challenges. The emphasis on statewide initiatives sparked enthusiasm, envisioning collective efforts enhancing educational experiences across campuses. The prospect of personalized support mechanisms, tailored to diverse student needs, captured their attention, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment.

Learning about innovative retention strategies inspired optimism, illustrating a proactive approach to student success. The emphasis on data-driven decision-making underscored transparency and accountability, instilling confidence in the council's efficacy. Students were drawn to the council's student-centered approach, prioritizing their voices in shaping policies and programs. The potential for tangible impact on their educational journeys, coupled with a vision for a stronger, more resilient higher education community in Alabama, left a lasting impression, fueling their eagerness to engage with the council and contribute to its endeavors.

Briefly discuss two – three ways your university helps connect students to meaningful career opportunities in Alabama? Consider the following: internships, career services, hands-on learning opportunities, mentorship etc. Please be specific and include details about how these opportunities support students making the state home after graduation. (500 words or less)

Athens State University prioritizes connecting students to meaningful career opportunities in Alabama through a multifaceted approach encompassing internships, career services, and hands-on learning experiences.

Internship programs play a pivotal role in this endeavor. Athens State collaborates closely with local businesses and organizations across Alabama to provide students with hands-on, real-world experience in their chosen fields. These internships are not only invaluable learning opportunities but also serve as pathways to employment post-graduation. By working alongside professionals in their respective industries, students gain practical skills, expand their networks, and enhance their employability. Moreover, many interns are offered full-time positions upon completion of their programs, illustrating the effectiveness of these partnerships in facilitating transitions from academia to the workforce. By fostering such connections, Athens State not only prepares students for successful careers but also contributes to the state's economic development by supplying skilled talent to local industries.

Complementing internship programs, Athens State's career services offer comprehensive support to students throughout their academic journey and beyond. Career counselors provide personalized guidance on resume building, interview preparation, and job search strategies, empowering students to navigate the complexities of the job market with confidence. Additionally, the university hosts job fairs, networking events, and employer panels where students can interact with recruiters and industry professionals from across Alabama. These opportunities facilitate meaningful connections between students and

potential employers, opening doors to internships, co-op programs, and entry-level positions. Moreover, career services continue to support alumni as they progress in their careers, providing resources for professional development and advancement. By equipping students with the skills, knowledge, and networks needed to succeed in Alabama's workforce, Athens State enhances retention efforts by encouraging graduates to remain in the state and contribute to its continued growth and prosperity.

Furthermore, Athens State emphasizes hands-on learning experiences that bridge the gap between theory and practice. Whether through research projects, service-learning initiatives, or industry partnerships, students have the opportunity to apply classroom knowledge in real-world settings, gaining valuable insights into their chosen fields. For example, students in STEM disciplines may collaborate with local businesses on innovative projects, while those in education may engage in practicum experiences in Alabama schools. These hands-on experiences not only enhance students' academic and professional development but also foster a sense of belonging and investment in Alabama's communities. By immersing students in real-world challenges and opportunities, Athens State encourages them to envision a future in Alabama, where they can make meaningful contributions to their chosen fields and the broader society.

In conclusion, Athens State University's commitment to connecting students to meaningful career opportunities in Alabama is evident through its internship programs, career services, and hands-on learning experiences. By fostering partnerships with local businesses, providing comprehensive career support, and offering practical learning opportunities, the university equips students with the skills, networks, and experiences needed to succeed in the state's workforce. As a result, graduates are more likely to establish roots in Alabama, contributing to its economic vitality and long-term prosperity.

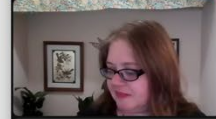
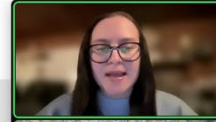
Any other remarks or comments about things that you learned or found interesting throughout the process.

Submit any photos of you presenting to your peers!



# Student Retention Council

Higher Education Partnership of Alabama  
Brooke Sinyard



Ashley Powers

Danielle Collins



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## Tiara Samuels

**Major:** Graduate student studying Strategic Human Resource Management with a concentration in Talent Development

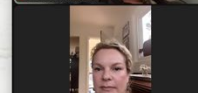
**Campus Involvement:** SHRM (student and national chapter), Bonner Leader Program (graduate intern), member of Sigma Tau Delta, and a member of Sigma Alpha Pi-National Society of Leadership and Success



Show active speaker video



John Winston

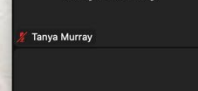


Amy Garrison (she/her)



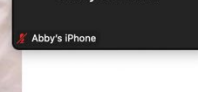
Samuel Barker

Tanya Murray



Tanya Murray

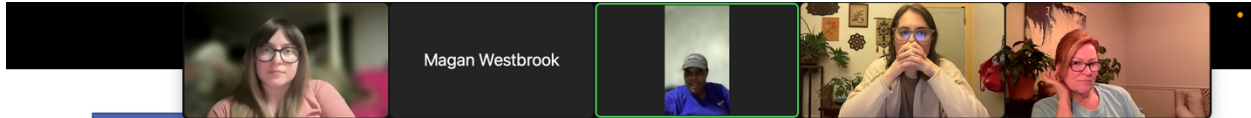
Abby's iPhone



Abby's iPhone

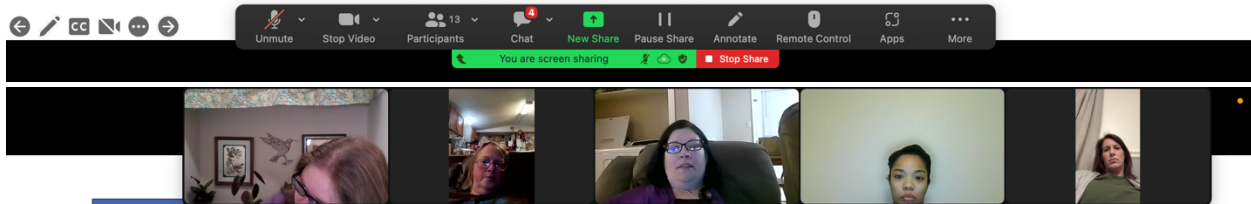
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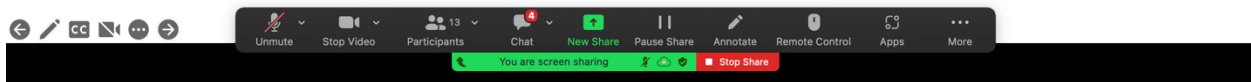
# Alabama Living Facts

- Alabama boasts a rich cultural heritage, with its vibrant music scene, historical landmarks like the Civil Rights Trail, and picturesque landscapes, including the Gulf Coast beaches and the Appalachian Mountains. Residents enjoy a slower pace of life in many areas, with opportunities for outdoor activities such as hiking, fishing, and camping.
- Alabama has one of the lowest costs of living in the United States. Housing prices, in particular, is significantly lower than the national average, making homeownership more attainable for many residents. This affordability extends to other aspects of daily life, including groceries, utilities, and healthcare.
- Alabama's economy is diverse, with strong sectors in aerospace, automotive manufacturing, healthcare, and technology. The state is home to major companies like Airbus, Mercedes-Benz, and Honda, providing ample job opportunities in engineering, manufacturing, and research fields. Additionally, Alabama's business-friendly environment and various incentive programs attract entrepreneurs and startups.
- Alabama has made strides in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion, particularly in recent years. Efforts to address historical injustices and promote social equality have led to initiatives aimed at fostering inclusivity and combating discrimination. Organizations and community groups throughout the state work to celebrate diversity and ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities for all residents, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or background.



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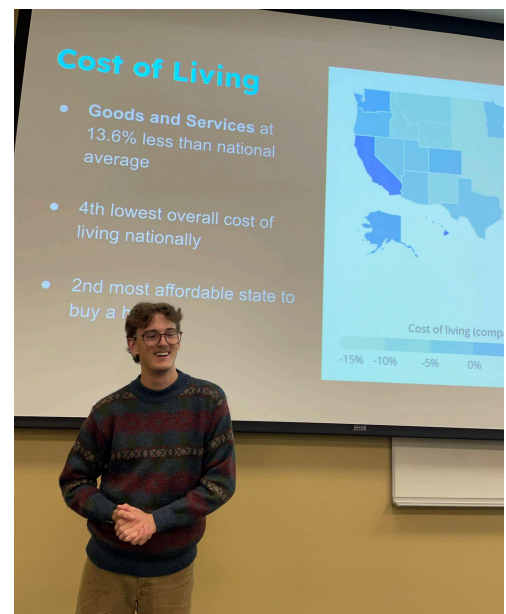
## The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) Student Retention Council Campus Report

### A Brief Letter from the University Representatives:

It has been a privilege and an honor to serve as the representatives for our university. We believe that the discussions, inquiries, and insights shared over the past year will contribute to the advancement of our state, making it a more vibrant and fulfilling place to live and work. We have received a wealth of feedback from our peers and are pleased to present some of the key findings. Thank you for this opportunity, and we are committed to continuing the success of our state. Best,

**Brian Niswonger, Chandler Robinson.**

Throughout the past couple of months, we have been presenting the opportunities and resources that are available to Alabamians. These topics were focused on Quality of Life, Cost of Living, Career Opportunities, and the importance of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to the incoming generation of young professionals. With these presentations, we were able to talk with approximately 460 students. The organizations and campus groups we presented to were UAH's Emerging Leaders program, UAH Athletics, and multiple Greek Life Organizations.



These organizations stood out in their commitment to personal development and leadership growth, as well as groups who would be good candidates for discussion on topics that mattered to them. We talked about the idea of working towards something that you are passionate about and how SRC works to empower the passions of those who live in Alabama. Many of the organizations that were presented to hold many of the leadership positions around campus can help to spread the message through their organizations and continue the conversation on state development.

## The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) Student Retention Council Campus Report - Continued

### Presentation Takeaways:

We found that while presenting, notes on the Quality of Life and Career Opportunities that can be found in Alabama were received well. In initial interviews, we found that Alabama has a reputation of being a state that primarily focuses on agriculture and some industrial work. This meant presenting the variety of parks, historical sites, and recreational/entertainment opportunities the state offers was a big point. This ties in with the career aspect of the presentation. Most, if not all, of the students agreed that they went to UAH because of the direct line towards employment that the institution offers for a good amount of degree programs. Highlighting the many diverse employment opportunities Alabama has to offer



UAH offers many opportunities for students across all colleges and concentrations to find employment and internship prospects. Events like our annual career fairs, online programs such as Handshake, or simply connections professors have within the field create employment possibilities for students to take advantage of. These direct lines of contact enable students to get a glimpse into the professional world and find success in gaining internships and jobs that can lead them to even more fulfilling work. Since UAH requires many students to conduct independent research as part of their senior capstone for their degree, they are often placed well on track in creating an enticing resume. Additionally, Huntsville and North Alabama are rapidly growing, opening the door for many graduating students to find their roots in new prospective businesses and big names such as Blue Origin, Hudson Alpha, Huntsville Hospital, and more.

Alabama is in a prime position to become a nationally recognized powerhouse of education, innovation, and everyday recreation. However, it is critical to acknowledge the desires and insights of the incoming generation of young professionals. It can be hard to get over the desire for possible greener grasses in neighboring states that have matured into their own economic and entrepreneurial forces. Yet, planting the seeds of tomorrow through conversation and action helps to create a better Alabama for everyone.

## **Final Report – On Campus Presentations**

Your University: The University of Alabama

Your Names: Allison Pope and Nick Tolbert

List Organizations Reached:

UA First Year Council and other misc. through SGA and Blackburn Institute

Why did you select these specific organizations (100 words or less):

The main group of students that leave the state after college are student leaders—all very involved and likely reach higher degree levels. These groups were great to target and educate about resources that would benefit them within the state.

In your opinion, after sharing your presentation, what points were the most compelling for your peers? Why? (200 words or less)

Many people appreciated the section about employment resources. AllinAL.com was a website that many people weren't aware of. We pulled it up in one presentation, and folks went crazy. There was a lot of appreciation for the amassed resources there. When asked, employment opportunities was the part of the presentation that stuck out most to many.

Briefly discuss two – three ways your university helps connect students to meaningful career opportunities in Alabama? Consider the following: internships, career services, hands-on learning opportunities, mentorship etc. Please be specific and include details about how these opportunities support students making the state home after graduation. (500 words or less)

The University of Alabama Career Center does well to connect students to career opportunities within the state. It is not their main focus to keep students in Alabama, but they have a wealth of resources and connections to give to students. The Career Center hosts events with local/Birmingham-based speakers and recruiters to connect students to career opportunities.

This is niche, but the Blackburn Institute connects UA students to the state of Alabama very well. It is niche because there is a rigorous application process and only 50 students have access to their resources. I wish there was an opportunity to connect to other students on campus, but alas. There is a government and rural Alabama experience trip each year to give students the opportunity to make connections with employers and Alabama issues.

Each college on campus gets students in contact with professionals in order to find post-grad jobs, but it is difficult to ensure that they are within the state. Because the alumni network is so broad, it is hard for the University to target in-state opportunities.

## **The University of Alabama at Birmingham**

Halla Al-Moradi and Isabella Campos

Approximate number of people presented to: ~200

Organizations reached:

Esperanza, First Impact, Spanish and Latino Student Association, Muslim Student Association, the Pre-Law Society, Generation Action, the UAB Undergraduate Student Government Association, and our own class peers spoken to outside of UAB registered student organizations.

Why did you select these specific organizations (100 words or less):

We felt as though these organizations often include peers with backgrounds or experiences from a wide variety of places, aside from Alabama. Receiving insight from these students particularly was most effective in getting holistic results with insights we might miss ourselves. Moreover, the students from these organizations were most eager and willing to participate!

In your opinion, after sharing your presentation, what points were the most compelling for your peers? Why? (200 words or less)

Our peers were most intrigued by the quality of life points we had to offer. In our one-pager we discussed the unique access to nature our state has. By discussing the benefits associated with access to nature, we found that students mentioned their desire to do more to improve their mental health and quality of life. Past this primary point, we also found that our peers were compelled by our discussions of culturally enriching opportunities, such as unique museums of all different topics (art, history, sports, etc.). Furthermore, at the mention of Birmingham and Montgomery being the birthplaces of the civil rights movement, students seemed eager to learn about these topics through the lens of these local and accessible cities.

Briefly discuss two – three ways your university helps connect students to meaningful career opportunities in Alabama? Consider the following: internships, career services, hands-on learning opportunities, mentorship etc. Please be specific and include details about how these opportunities support students making the state home after graduation. (500 words or less)

The University of Alabama at Birmingham is unique in utilizing people to establish and maintain meaningful connections. Not only does the university offer opportunities pertaining to competitive applications and online etiquette, but the staff themselves have proven to be the most functional in getting to know students and connecting them to professional opportunities where they will truly thrive, not just resume builders. The career center on campus has also been

reported to be highly beneficial not only in presenting opportunities, but providing resources for students to use in their interviews, such as professional wear.

Any other remarks or comments about things that you learned or found interesting throughout the process.

Submit any photos of you presenting to your peers!



\*Photo taken by Halla Al-Moradi



## **Final Report – On Campus Presentations**

Your University: University of North Alabama

Your Names: Ben Starkey, Jaelen Cates

Approximate Number of People You Presented To: 180

List Organizations Reached: Colligate Entrepreneurship organization, Lambda Sigma Phi  
Phi Gamma Delta

Why did you select these specific organizations (100 words or less):

I chose to present to these specific organizations because I felt they would have the broadest overall reach. The Colligate Entrepreneurship Organization and Lambda Sigma Phi are filled with students with a variety of majors. Members in these organizations are also from all different cities across the state as well as out of state. This provides a broad reach of individuals seeking a variety of career paths.

In your opinion, after sharing your presentation, what points were the most compelling for your peers? Why? (200 words or less)

The points that got across to my peers were that Alabama is a growing state, it is introducing lots of new businesses into small cities that are surrounded by bigger cities. Our peers want to move to a bigger cities because of job opportunities and they do not know of the opportunities that cities in Alabama are offering to them. After they found out what cities participated in the SRC program. They saw what major cities they were located next to and how they brought in lots of job opportunities to their area.

Briefly discuss two – three ways your university helps connect students to meaningful career opportunities in Alabama? Consider the following: internships, career services, hands-on learning opportunities, mentorship etc. Please be specific and include details

about how these opportunities support students making the state home after graduation.  
(500 words or less)

The University of North Alabama helps connect students to meaningful career opportunities in Alabama in a variety of different ways. One of which is through the multitude of internship opportunities available. The university has partnered with several local businesses that constantly offer internships. For example, the sales team at UNA partners with the company Greenway Automotive and often has representatives come out and network with students, as well as give real world scenarios within the sales industry. Another way the university and specifically career services highlight all the different career opportunities is through our career fairs. UNA offers a multitude of career fairs throughout the semester giving students the chance to network with businesses as well as get a feel for what it would be like working for them. This not only helps connect students with future jobs, but also helps them narrow down what career and specific jobs appeal to them. A third example is mentors such as Mitch Hamm at the Generator (a creative space at UNA) help coach students through projects and goals helping them to line up their future. They are what help students find opportunity within the state and find what makes this state a home.

Any other remarks or comments about things that you learned or found interesting throughout the process.

Some things we found interesting were how much cities have grown in Alabama and how they bring in lots of new job opportunities in every area. The cities represented in the process spend lots of time and money on projects for their communities to enjoy.

Submit any photos of you presenting to your peers!

## **Final Report – On Campus Presentations**

Your University: Alabama State University

Your Names: Ferrin Lewis and Landon Hale

Approximate Number of People You Presented To: 200

List Organizations Reached: SGA, National Pan-Hellenic Council, Royal Court

Why did you select these specific organizations (100 words or less):

- We selected these organizations because on-campus organizations are easily accessible to students, faculty, and staff. This proximity encourages more student engagement and participation in career-related activities, such as workshops, networking events, and mentorship programs. Additionally, these organizations can collaborate closely with academic departments to align career development initiatives with students' areas of study. This integration ensures that students receive relevant and timely guidance as they explore career options and pursue internships or job opportunities.

In your opinion, after sharing your presentation, what points were the most compelling for your peers? Why? (200 words or less)

- After sharing the presentation, the most compelling points for my peers were likely those that highlighted the practical benefits and tangible outcomes of the university's efforts to connect students to meaningful career opportunities in Alabama. These points include: internship success, the benefit of career services, and mentorship from not only the university, but from the community as well. Ultimately, presenting examples and success stories would have made the university's efforts to connect students to meaningful career opportunities in Alabama more relatable and compelling to peers.

Briefly discuss two – three ways your university helps connect students to meaningful career opportunities in Alabama? Consider the following: internships, career services, hands-on learning opportunities, mentorship etc. Please be specific and include details about how these opportunities support students making the state home after graduation. (500 words or less)

- Alabama State University works with local companies and businesses to offer internships to students that are relevant to their academic programs. Students receive hands-on

experience, improve their professional networks, and typically land full-time jobs after graduation thanks to these programs. ASU creates connections between students and Alabama-based businesses, which motivates students to think about pursuing jobs in the state. In addition to this, Alabama State University's career services department hosts a number of workshops, employment fairs, and networking opportunities throughout the academic year. These gatherings of local businesses, graduates, and students create valuable relationships and employment prospects in Alabama. Career advisers can assist students make the most of their abilities and experiences by providing them with individualized guidance, resume evaluations, and interview preparation for jobs inside the state.

Any other remarks or comments about things that you learned or found interesting throughout the process.

Submit any photos of you presenting to your peers!

## **Final Report – On Campus Presentations**

Your University:

University of Montevallo

Your Names:

Aubrie Chastain

Alex Martinez

Approximate Number of People You Presented To:

80

List Organizations Reached:

UM Student Government Association

UM Chi Omega

Why did you select these specific organizations (100 words or less):

We selected SGA because of the body's diversity and involvement across campus. SGA is composed of student leaders. We knew that presenting to SGA was a means of communicating to the entire campus. For each member of SGA that we reached, they would reach at least one to two more student organizations and their peer network.

We also chose Chi Omega because of the various grade levels and majors of their members. Reaching different grade levels was an important aspect of our presentations because the earlier students are able to realize their opportunities within the state, the better.

In your opinion, after sharing your presentation, what points were the most compelling for your peers? Why? (200 words or less)

The two areas of interest during our presentations were the Alabama Talent Triad and the EDPA's FuelAL project. None of the students we reached had ever heard of the Alabama Talent Triad before. We demonstrated its use by asking students what professions they may be interested in after graduating. Through using the database, we were able to locate jobs that utilized these students' skills and captured their interest.

Some of our peers were particularly interested in Fuel Alabama. They were enticed by the opportunity to sign up for free trips to explore cultural and career prospects around the state.

Briefly discuss two – three ways your university helps connect students to meaningful career opportunities in Alabama? Consider the following: internships, career services, hands-on learning opportunities, mentorship etc. Please be specific and include details about how these opportunities support students making the state home after graduation. (500 words or less)

We are proud to say that around 85 percent of Montevallo graduates remain in Alabama to work and contribute to their communities. This rate of retention is in large part due to Montevallo's active recruitment of Alabama natives, as well as its central and accessible location that allows for students to commute from all over Central Alabama. However, faculty and staff at UM also do their part to connect students to meaningful careers. At Montevallo, professors leverage their own professional connections to help their students find employment. Professors often bring in former students to give guest lectures. Through these guest lectures, students connect with former Falcons who have found success in Alabama. Additionally, academic advisors help students find internships in the state. A couple of examples include the City of Montevallo internship and the Alabama State Legislature internship. Professors also get their students engaged with the local community. Examples include environmental volunteer programming and the income tax workshop—a program that allows business students to provide free income tax counseling to local Montevalloans. These programs connect students with the local community and generate buy-in. The UM Career Development Center also helps students get connected to employers. The Career Center hosts regular events with local employers and helps students with their resumes and interview preparation. Additionally, the University often hires recent graduates to staff administration departments in entry-level positions.

Any other remarks or comments about things that you learned or found interesting throughout the process.

Overall, we were surprised to find out how many of our peers were excited to start careers in Alabama. Since our peers did not need convincing, we believed that the best way to help our campus community was to provide resources to help them get started. We were very happy to get such an enthusiastic response.

Submit any photos of you presenting to your peers!

These are photos of us presenting to UM SGA. We do not have photos of our presentation to Chi Omega because photos were not permitted in formal chapter sessions.



**Jacksonville State University**  
Student Retention Council

**Aubrey Whiddon & Kolby Hodge**

**Students Reached:** Approximately 200

**Organizations Reached:** Jacksonville State University Honors Program, Sigma Alpha Omega Sorority, Sigma Phi Epsilon Fraternity, SGA

**Reasons for Selecting these Organizations:** Both Kolby and Aubrey are heavily involved in the Jacksonville State Honors Program, and have connections within the organization, which allowed them to procure key opportunities to present to large audiences. They also realize that many of the highest achieving students at Jax State are members of the Honors Program, making them an important demographic to try and convey the Student Retention Council's message to. Kolby and Aubrey are also both involved in leadership roles within their respective Greek organizations, which allowed them the opportunity to speak to students who already have a personal connection to them. Finally, the SGA at JSU is filled with a variety of students from different majors, hometowns, and in different stages of their college careers, making it another important group to direct efforts at.

**Most Compelling Points to Peers:** Following their presentations to their peers, Kolby and Aubrey concluded there were a few different points which seemed to be the most impactful.

First, many of their peers were intrigued by the quality of life offerings Alabama boasts. It seemed to be common knowledge that Alabama had some state parks, but few knew Alabama was home to a total of 21!

It was also discovered that few students were aware of the resources available to them to aid in procuring a job. Many felt as though they were alone in the process, and were not even considering the resources available to them on their own campus. Several students revealed that utilizing these resources may lead to them finding a job in-state, and remaining in Alabama post-grad.



**Ways Jax State Connects Students to Careers in Alabama:** Jax State has a team of great career advisors within their different colleges. These advisors first and foremost aid students in connecting with potential internships and jobs. They are also there to help with editing resumes, personal statements, and even setting up online networking profiles. Additionally, Jax State hosts career fairs constantly, which allows students to dress professionally, bring their resumes, and personally connect with employers. As an example, the College of Business at Jax State hosts an event called BBQ with Bankers every semester. This event is targeted at business students, and allows them to have lunch and connect specifically with employers in banking and related fields.

**Additional Remarks:** Kolby and Aubrey both enjoyed the opportunity to connect with a portion of Jax State's campus, in their efforts to begin to understand what their peers need to remain in Alabama following graduation. The Student Retention Council also allowed them to inform their peers of just a few of the amazing careers and quality of life aspects Alabama has to offer. Jacksonville State is home to a plethora of talent, diversity, and interests, and with the aid of the Student Retention Council, there are renewed possibilities to keep many of these bright young professionals in the great state of Alabama!

## **Final Report – On Campus Presentations**

Your University:

University of South Alabama

Your Names:

Michael Roque

Crimson Harrison

Approximate Number of People You Presented To:

200

List Organizations Reached:

USA Student Government Association

USA Southerners

Alpha Epsilon Delta

Why did you select these specific organizations (100 words or less):

When thinking about organizations to reach out to, we thought about organizations that would have a diverse group of students. When talking about diversity, this included differences in culture, ethnicity, age, academic interests, and places of origin. With the USA Southerners, the official ambassadors of the University, all colleges are represented within the organization, and all ethnicities from freshman to senior representatives. Alpha Epsilon Delta is composed of all four undergraduate levels of study and represents the pre-health honor society. Student Government Association not only carries the same diverse representation but serve as leaders on different parts of campus, respectively. Thus, broadening the scope of our outreach.

In your opinion, after sharing your presentation, what points were the most compelling for your peers? Why? (200 words or less)

The most compelling points of our presentations included information about different career opportunities within the state. Our presentation outlined major industries based off region within Alabama. For example, south Alabama, central Alabama, and north Alabama. Since a lot of students are seeking employment after graduation, highlighting the different industries such as the maritime industry in south Alabama and aerospace industry in North Alabama facilitated what areas would be helpful first students when searching for employment opportunities. In addition, the impactful part of our presentation was our

emphasis on quality of life characteristics of the state. Specifically, we highlighted the outdoor recreation and sports opportunities within the region. Many students were brought to their attention of the abundance of natural resources we have within the state and how the state has capitalized on the preservation of its natural beauty. Also, connecting students with information about sports entertainment opportunities such as minor League Baseball teams and soccer teams provided students with information previously not known to them.

Briefly discuss two – three ways your university helps connect students to meaningful career opportunities in Alabama? Consider the following: internships, career services, hands-on learning opportunities, mentorship etc. Please be specific and include details about how these opportunities support students making the state home after graduation. (500 words or less)

The first way the University of South Alabama connects students to meaningful career opportunities in Alabama is through career services. This program on campus helps students with their professional development from all aspects. Services include mock interviews where students can practice their interview skills for future internships or future academic applications. Another useful service provided by this program is an online platform known as Handshake. Here, students can look at an online database of employment opportunities and filter these opportunities by interests and industry. Students are quickly connected to these opportunities and can apply for them. Another additional service that Career Services provides is a clothing service for students who might not have appropriate clothing for professional events such as interviews. Another helpful resource that is available to students through this program is academic advising and career advising. This way students are held accountable for their academic progress and are assisted with finding internships and learning how to boost their professional career through resume workshops and more.

Another valuable resource the University of South Alabama provides to its students is through the involvement with the National Alumni Association. The National Alumni Association supports its students through financial support. Students can apply for scholarships to help with their education. Additionally, one of the biggest student programs at the University of South Alabama or the USA southerners. This organization is made up of the official ambassadors for the university. Students can learn about professional development skills and are connected to a vast network of alumni from the university. Students serve as the liaison between undergraduate students and administrators, financial supporters, government officials, and alumni who visit the university. In addition,

the National Alumni Association hosts an annual career networking social where students are connected to mentors from all over the state of Alabama. Many include current employers that can take resumes and other resources students may provide to them.

Another valuable resource available to students is university counseling and testing services. Through this service, students can take a free online Wellness assessment and can send in consultation requests for services that they need. In times of mental health emergencies, this service connects students with free resources such as online mental health screenings and faculty and staff referrals. Students have access to confidential free counseling and crisis intervention services and can be connected to members of the USA community who are proficient and have access to valuable resources for students in need. In addition, if students don't have the proper resources that are needed to succeed in school such as technological equipment. The university provides students with access to computer labs and has a laptop loan service that students have year-round access to ensure their success within the classroom and other extracurricular aspirations they have.

Any other remarks or comments about things that you learned or found interesting throughout the process.

It was satisfying to connect students with valuable resources about the state of Alabama and career opportunities available to them post-graduation. Many individuals weren't aware of programs, resources, and events that existed to help in their decision-making process on thinking about where to live.

Submit any photos of you presenting to your peers!

## **Final Report – On Campus Presentations**

Your University: Troy University

Your Names: *Haley Hoggle, Caleb Smith*

Approximate Number of People You Presented To: *250*

List Organizations Reached: *FarmHouse Fraternity, Troy Student Government Association, Troy Freshman Forum, Troy Baptist Campus Ministries, Newman Center Resident Association*

Why did you select these specific organizations (100 words or less):

*We felt like these five organizations sampled the entire student body well. From Greek chapters to student government organizations, as well as on-campus ministries and student housing sectors, we believe that these groups give us an adequate representation of what the overall student body of Troy is feeling and saying. We wanted to reach out to groups who would be diverse in thought and background, so we could get their opinions.*

In your opinion, after sharing your presentation, what points were the most compelling for your peers? Why? (200 words or less)

*The Cost of Living was the most compelling argument for our peers. There is a strong desire amongst our peers to live in places that are family-friendly. Since the Cost of Living is lower than in a majority of states, peers can buy a house and support their families in the way that they would wish to. A majority of our peers here are from Alabama, so this is “home” to most of them. Many of them were born and raised here, and they wish to raise their kids here. Our peers like the idea of raising a family in Alabama. This is where peers can settle down later in life. Peers want to be able to provide for themselves and afford their basic needs. Peers want to be able to save up for retirement and have a work-life balance. A low cost of living enables these things. This is why this argument is most compelling to Troy students.*

Briefly discuss two – three ways your university helps connect students to meaningful career opportunities in Alabama? Consider the following: internships, career services, hands-on learning opportunities, mentorship etc. Please be specific and include details about how these opportunities support students making the state home after graduation. (500 words or less)

*Troy University's Office of Career Services does an amazing job of linking students with many different opportunities and career partners. The Office's Director, Ms. Lauren Cole (who actually came and spoke at the SRC October Professional Development Session), is an extremely well-connected individual and is always on the lookout for new companies and groups to come to campus for the students' professional benefit. Our individual colleges are also very proactive at hosting events for their respective students. For instance, the Sorrell 360 Center, the official professional development office for students in Troy's Sorrell College of Business (SCOB), hosts the "BBQ with Bankers" event each semester in conjunction with the Alabama Bankers Association. This event is always a favorite among SCOB students, as it allows them to network with esteemed Alabama banking and finance professionals over a nice, free barbecue lunch. Many students learn from these workshops, luncheons, and other events that Alabama has a lot to offer. Such as with the "BBQ with Bankers" event, people learn that there are major financial organizations in Alabama that offer just as many benefits, if not more, than out-of-state organizations. Troy does a very good job at bringing in-state organizations to our students and showcasing that Alabama is a thriving area for business, and that there are many reasons to live here post-graduation.*

Any other remarks or comments about things that you learned or found interesting throughout the process.

*One of the coolest things is seeing students from places like the Florida panhandle and adapting to life as an Alabamian. Normally, they start off talking about how they feel like "Alabama should be more like Florida", but by the end of their time at Troy, they usually fall in love with our state. Alabama is such a unique place and one that is very special, and so seeing people not from here falling in love with it is always heartwarming.*

*There is an overwhelming sense of pride to live in small-town Alabama. Most of our peers love the state of Alabama. This is "sweet home" to many of our peers- including out-of-state!*

## **Final Report – On Campus Presentations**

Your University:

The University of West Alabama

Your Names:

Mahkayla Young

Approximate Number of People You Presented To:

50

List Organizations Reached:

Integrated marketing communications, football, and athletic trainers

Why did you select these specific organizations?

I am primarily involved with Integrated Marketing Communications, football, and working closely with athletic trainers. That's why I chose to share my presentations with them. Building a connection with these groups enhanced their engagement and ensured they stayed attuned to the information I conveyed. Understanding their interests allowed for a more personalized and effective communication approach. By catering to their specific needs and preferences, I feel I really got my message across to them.

In your opinion, after sharing your presentation, what points were the most compelling for your peers? Why?

One of the most compelling points I found was the fact that Alabama boasts the third-lowest cost of living. This piece of information resonated deeply with many individuals I engaged with. It became evident that affordability held significant importance for them. Conversations with my peers let me know a common sentiment: the belief that residing in a financially accessible location empowered them to pursue various other endeavors, particularly in terms of entertainment and leisure activities. This realization underscored the fundamental role that economic factors play in shaping lifestyle choices and aspirations. The prospect of living in a region where expenses are manageable not only alleviates financial stress but also opens up avenues for broader experiences and opportunities. It was fascinating to witness how this single statistic could spark such an interest and optimism among those I interacted with, highlighting the profound impact that considerations like cost of living can have on individuals' perceptions and decisions regarding where to reside and how to allocate their resources.

Briefly discuss two – three ways your university helps connect students to meaningful career opportunities in Alabama? Consider the following: internships, career services, hands-on learning opportunities, mentorship etc. Please be specific and include details about how these opportunities support students making the state home after graduation.

Our career services center on campus is a great way for students to connect with different career opportunities in Alabama. One way they help students is by providing a “Job Shadow Program”. This program allows all undergraduate students to participate in an on the job experience to learn and gain knowledge about the career choice they want. Not only do they get a chance to see the career they want to pursue in action but they get to do it in Alabama which shows them what their career could look like in Alabama.

For specific programs on campus an internship is required. Most of the students try to find their internship in Alabama due to the convenience of being close to their home in Livingston. This is a plus for us trying to keep students in Alabama because they are doing their internships in Alabama which is showing them the perks of working in Alabama and also some students leave internships with job opportunities to stay in Alabama.

Any other remarks or comments about things that you learned or found interesting throughout the process.

I enjoyed sharing everything I’ve learned with all of my friends and peers. I did have a question come up about the recent changes in the diversity, equity, and inclusion that I feel I need to do some more research on.



# Student Retention Council 2023-2024



Final Report

