Sweet Briar Launches Center for Business, Entrepreneurship & Innovation

Sweet Briar welcomes Laura Townsend to lead its new Center, expanding internships, entrepreneurship, industry partnerships and career opportunities.


Sweet Briar College Aerial View

SWEET BRIAR, VA, UNITED STATES, September 26, 2026 / EINPresswire.com/ -- Sweet Briar College is launching a new Center for Excellence focused on business, entrepreneurship, and innovation. Laura Townsend will join the college community at the end of the month to lead the center, including establishing a Business Council.

Sweet Briar's new Center for Business, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation will prepare students for successful careers after graduation and will augment the College's existing business major and other academic areas through new programming, additional internships, apprenticeships, opportunities to hear guest speakers, and more. The Business Council will support these activities by serving as an advisory board composed of ambassadors and advocates for Sweet Briar and all of its students.

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>
> *Laura Townsend, Director, Center for Business*

Townsend joins the College's faculty with experience in teaching, entrepreneurship, nonprofit leadership, and strategic planning. She earned a Master of Science in human relations from the University of Oklahoma and a Bachelor of Science in business management from Oral Roberts University. Townsend most recently served as director of engagement at the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center, leading strategic initiatives at the intersection of scholarship, government, and industry. She designed the center's programs and developed relationships with regional industry and institutional leaders to foster

its growth from the ground up. Townsend also directed the Innovate Living-Learning Community at Virginia Tech, which earned a spot as the top-ranked entrepreneurship LLC and a Model Entrepreneurship Education Program award from the United States Association for Small Business and Entrepreneurship.



Sweet Briar student Chloe Burchett '26 speaks at an alumnae leadership event, demonstrating the confidence and leadership skills the new Center for Business, Entrepreneurship & Innovation will help students develop.

"Sweet Briar is always seeking opportunities to grow its academic programs and community partnerships to invest in our campus, Amherst County, and the Commonwealth of Virginia," said President Mary Pope M. Hutson '83. "We are grateful to Laura Townsend for taking on this opportunity to build our Center for Business, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation, and I look forward to our work together with industry leaders to develop the program and invest in our students. This partnership offers incredible pathways for our students to grow into career-ready alumnae who will go on to make a difference in the world and demonstrate the importance of women's education and leadership."

Townsend shares President Hutson's valuation of investing in women's education, particularly within the center's focus area. "I have always been a strong advocate for women's entrepreneurship and leadership," she said. "I have had the opportunity to lead women's entrepreneurship programs and events in the past, and I love empowering visionary women with the tools, confidence, and connections they need to succeed. Sweet Briar's mission to 'challenge and inspire women' immediately resonated with me because that aligns so closely with my own passion and the work I have pursued throughout my career."

Sweet Briar's community is deeply rooted in collaboration, and the new Center for Business, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation is no exception. In addition to partnerships with the Business Council and regional industry leaders, Townsend's role will collaborate with and build on the existing strengths of the Career Services team, who work closely with students to secure internships and other extra-curricular opportunities; Alumnae Relations & Development staff, who will establish connections between the center and alumnae entrepreneurs and those working in business; the Margaret Jones Wyllie '45 Engineering Program, which has its own advisory council made up of executives at companies connected with engineering across the region; and Sweet Briar's current faculty in business and other areas, who will share existing connections and advise on the strategic direction of the center as it is built.

While engaging with stakeholders across the College and beyond, the Center for Business, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation will be housed within the Academic Affairs unit.

“Business is consistently among our largest majors, and many of our students in other programs also want to grow their capacities in entrepreneurship and consider how they can pursue innovation in their fields,” noted Dr. Lisa Powell, vice president of academic affairs, dean of the college, and chief sustainability officer. “We are so excited to be expanding opportunities for our students, while also strengthening relationships with businesses and organizations in our region and beyond.”



Laura Townsend, Director, Center for Business, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation

For prospective students, the new Center for Business, Entrepreneurship & Innovation adds another dimension to Sweet Briar’s hands-on approach to learning. Students will have opportunities to connect classroom learning with internships, apprenticeships, industry leaders, alumnae entrepreneurs and real-world business experiences. Whether they major in business, engineering, the arts or another field, students will have new opportunities to develop the confidence, connections and entrepreneurial skills to turn ideas into action. At Sweet Briar, women don’t just study leadership. They practice it. Learn more at sbc.edu/admissions.

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