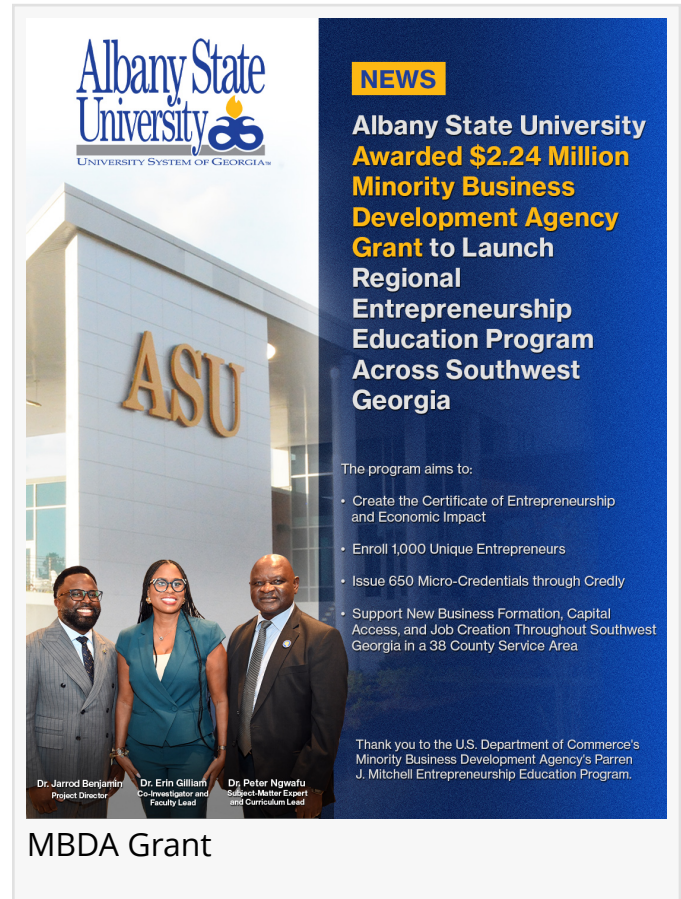


# Albany State University Awarded \$2.24 Million MBDA Grant to Expand Entrepreneurship Education Across Southwest Georgia

*Two-year initiative will provide entrepreneurship education and credentials to 1,000 entrepreneurs across a 38-county service area.*

ALBANY, GA, UNITED STATES, October 1, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Albany State University](#) (ASU) has been awarded a \$2.24 million competitive grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce's [Minority Business Development Agency](#) (MBDA) to develop and launch a regional entrepreneurship education program serving Southwest Georgia.

The two-year initiative will provide entrepreneurs with practical business education, industry-recognized credentials and connections to resources designed to help them start, strengthen and grow their businesses. The program will serve a 38-county region anchored by the Albany metropolitan area and aims to reach 1,000 entrepreneurs during the grant period.



The graphic features the Albany State University logo at the top left, above a photo of three individuals standing in front of an ASU building. To the right of the photo is a blue box with white and yellow text. The text includes a 'NEWS' header, the grant details, a list of program aims, and a thank you message to the U.S. Department of Commerce's MBDA.

**Albany State University**  
UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA

**NEWS**

**Albany State University Awarded \$2.24 Million Minority Business Development Agency Grant to Launch Regional Entrepreneurship Education Program Across Southwest Georgia**

The program aims to:

- Create the Certificate of Entrepreneurship and Economic Impact
- Enroll 1,000 Unique Entrepreneurs
- Issue 650 Micro-Credentials through Credly
- Support New Business Formation, Capital Access, and Job Creation Throughout Southwest Georgia in a 38 County Service Area

Thank you to the U.S. Department of Commerce's Minority Business Development Agency's Parren J. Mitchell Entrepreneurship Education Program.

Dr. Jarrod Benjamin  
Project Director

Dr. Erin Gilliam  
Co-Investigator and Faculty Lead

Dr. Peter Ngwafu  
Subject-Matter Expert and Curriculum Lead

MBDA Grant

The grant was authored and submitted by Dr. Jarrod Benjamin, Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management at ASU, who will serve as Project Director. Funded through the MBDA Parren J. Mitchell Entrepreneurship Education Program, the initiative, titled "Leveraging Regional Assets and Technology Commercialization: The Albany State University MBDA Parren J. Mitchell Entrepreneurship Education Program," will operate from September 1, 2026, through August 31, 2028.

"This award allows Albany State University to build a durable engine for entrepreneurship, capital access, and job creation in the communities we serve. We designed this program to meet Southwest Georgia's entrepreneurs where they are to connect them to the region's anchor industries, to capital, and to the practical skills they need to launch and grow viable businesses."

- Dr. Jarrod Benjamin, Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, Albany State University

Through the initiative, Albany State will develop and implement a new, evidence-based entrepreneurship curriculum specifically designed around the needs and economic strengths of Southwest Georgia.

Rather than adopting an existing program, ASU will develop coursework based on the region's industries and opportunities, including food and beverage manufacturing and agribusiness; defense, logistics and advanced manufacturing; consumer goods and packaging; healthcare; and logistics and distribution.

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This award allows Albany State University to build a durable engine for entrepreneurship, capital access, and job creation in the communities we serve.”

*Dr. Jarrod Benjamin, VP for Student Affairs & Enrollment Management*

The program will provide participants with multiple ways to build their knowledge and credentials. Industry-recognized digital micro-credentials will be issued through Credly, allowing entrepreneurs and students to demonstrate specific skills and competencies as they progress through the program.

The micro-credentials will also serve as building blocks toward a new 23-credit-hour Certificate of Entrepreneurship and Economic Impact, which ASU will launch as a stand-alone, industry-recognized certificate

program.

The certificate will be embedded into ASU's Bachelor of Business Administration and Master of Business Administration curricula, allowing future students to earn the credential as part of their degree programs. The certificate will also provide an option for entrepreneurs and other working professionals who are not enrolled in a degree program to pursue the credential independently. This approach will allow ASU to serve both current students and entrepreneurs throughout the region, creating a pathway for individuals to gain recognized entrepreneurship skills.

The program will also offer free, open information sessions and entrepreneurship bootcamps to introduce community members to the program and connect entrepreneurs to educational



Dr. Benjamin, Dr. Gilliam, and Dr. Ngwafu

resources. These efforts will be particularly important for reaching entrepreneurs in rural communities throughout the 38-county service area.

To help address technology barriers, ASU will establish a device loaner program providing laptops and tablets to eligible participants who may not have access to the equipment needed to participate in the program.

Participants will also receive guidance on accessing technology-transfer resources and opportunities to move new technologies and innovations from development toward the marketplace. These efforts are designed to strengthen entrepreneurship while supporting innovation and regional supply chains.

“We built this curriculum from the ground up for the entrepreneurs of Southwest Georgia, grounding it in evidence and in the real assets of our region. By teaching founders to navigate our innovation clusters and technology-transfer resources, and by embedding these credentials within our degree programs, we are equipping people with skills that endure and creating economic opportunity that stays in our communities.”

- Dr. Peter A. Ngwafu, Dean of the College of Business, Education, and Professional Studies, Albany State University

Over the two-year period, the program aims to enroll 1,000 unique entrepreneurs, issue 650



Albany State University Official Stacked Logo



Albany State Chimney



ASU C.W. Grant Student Union

micro-credentials, and support new business formation, capital access, and job creation throughout Southwest Georgia. The initiative is designed to strengthen the connection between education and economic development by giving entrepreneurs access to knowledge, credentials and resources that can be applied directly to their businesses.

The project is led by a team of Albany State University faculty and administrators with experience in entrepreneurship education, curriculum development, workforce development, grant management and regional programming.

Dr. Jarrod Benjamin, Project Director, serves as Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management. He has secured and managed more than \$26 million in federal, state and private funding and has experience launching micro-credentialing programs and workforce and cybersecurity training initiatives.

Dr. Peter Ngwafu, Subject-Matter Expert and Curriculum Lead, serves as Dean of ASU's College of Business, Education, and Professional Studies and Professor of Public Administration. He previously served as Principal Investigator on a \$3.5 million U.S. Department of Health and Human Services grant serving Southwest Georgia.

Dr. Erin Gilliam, Co-Investigator and Faculty Lead, serves as Vice Provost for Student Academic Progression. She will co-lead development of the entrepreneurship courses and Credly micro-credentials, design competency-based assessments for the credentials, and oversee academic quality assurance and alignment with national certification standards.

As Georgia's largest public Historically Black College and University (HBCU), Albany State University plays a significant role in the educational and economic development of Southwest Georgia. The University generates more than \$328 million in annual economic impact for the region and has a longstanding commitment to preparing students and community members for career and entrepreneurial success.

By incorporating the new entrepreneurship curriculum and Certificate of Entrepreneurship and Economic Impact into its academic offerings, Albany State will create a lasting educational infrastructure that extends beyond the two-year grant period.

The initiative represents an investment not only in individual entrepreneurs, but also in the businesses, industries and communities that contribute to the long-term economic strength of Southwest Georgia.

### About Albany State University

Albany State University is Georgia's largest public Historically Black College and University (HBCU), serving more than 6,800 students across undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs. Founded in 1903 by Dr. Joseph Winthrop Holley, ASU has served as a cornerstone of

educational access and community transformation in Southwest Georgia for 123 years. Albany State University generates \$328 million in annual economic impact, supports more than 2,800 regional jobs, and is nationally recognized for academic excellence, nursing education, and student success outcomes. A proud member of the University System of Georgia (USG), ASU is committed to expanding opportunity, advancing equity, and producing graduates who lead in Georgia and beyond. For more information, visit [www.asurams.edu](http://www.asurams.edu).

#### About the MBDA Parren J. Mitchell Entrepreneurship Education Program

The Parren J. Mitchell Entrepreneurship Education Program is administered by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Minority Business Development Agency under Assistance Listing 11.802, Minority Business Resource Development. The program supports institutions of higher education in equipping entrepreneurs with the skills to start and scale businesses, expand access to capital, and strengthen regional economies.

Rachel Lawrence, Ed.D.  
Albany State University  
+1 229-364-6683  
[media@asurams.edu](mailto:media@asurams.edu)

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