

The official newsletter of the Athens State University
SHRM Student Chapter #5695



A Word from Savannah Graner Cornelius

Athens State SHRM Student Chapter President

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To my fellow members,

I would like to take a moment to express my deep and heartfelt gratitude to this incredible student chapter and its amazing members. Serving on the ATSU SHRM executive board for the past two years has been a true pleasure. Words cannot begin to describe how grateful I am to be a part of this organization and what it means to me. As a member, I have gained so many treasured friends, wonderful connections in our local HR community, and valuable insights into a variety of HR and business topics.

I would also like to extend my sincerest thanks to our fantastic volunteer leaders and chapter advisors for the dedication and passion you bring to this chapter every day. Through your hard work and commitment, we are able to offer a range of valuable opportunities to our members, enabling them to learn and grow throughout their academic journeys and beyond. These experiences have a profound impact. As members of this remarkable organization, I implore each and every one of you to take full advantage of the opportunities provided, as they truly make a difference in your professional development journey. As my time at Athens State and with ATSU SHRM comes to a close, I want to express my commitment to remaining involved and supporting our chapter throughout my career. I encourage all of you to stay engaged and connected with the chapter as well through our ATSU SHRM Alumni Group.

To our graduating members, congratulations on successfully completing your academic journey and crossing the finish line! I know that the journey is not easy and that many challenges arise along the way. However, your dedication and perseverance are commendable, and you should be very proud of your accomplishments! To our members who are continuing their pursuit of higher education, I wish you all the best on your journey. Remember that you are capable of achieving your goals, so keep pushing forward! Best of luck to everyone, and I hope our paths will cross again in the future.

Onward Ever!
Savannah Graner Cornelius

Meet the Team



Dr. Tina Camba

Assistant Professor of Management/
HR Management at Athens State, Co-Advisor
for ATSU SHRM Student Chapter



Dr. Gary Valcana

Associate Professor of Management, at
Athens State, Co-Advisor for ATSU
SHRM Student Chapter



Savannah Graner Cornelius
President



Sharifah Aburbaker
Vice President



Ashley Powers
Director of SHRM Merit Awards



Kimberly Wilcox
Director of Communications



Trudy Rudolph
Secretary



Michelle Bissell
Director of Student Relations



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ATSU SHRM/NASHRM Limestone County MSA Discussion Panel

September 17, 2025

Attending the "Future-Ready HR: Strategies for Embracing Change and Transformation" discussion panel luncheon was both insightful and inspiring. Each panelist — Jason Thrasher, Jennifer Vaden-Washington, and Cierra Johnson-Belser — shared perspectives that prompted us to reflect on how HR can grow and adapt in today's evolving workplace. Jason's three pillars—trust self, trust the training, and trust the network —stood out as a simple yet powerful framework for building confidence and credibility. This emphasis on trust should empower us and boost our confidence in our abilities. Jennifer's focus on emotional intelligence, paired with her organization's annual leadership training, emphasized the need for continuous development and preparing leaders to manage conflict effectively. Managing conflict is especially critical as multiple generations in the workforce bring diverse values, communication styles, and approaches that require adaptability and empathy to lead successfully.

Cierra's perspective on the future role of HR was the most impactful for the entire audience. Cierra's advice to bring the data, bring the solutions, and be prepared for that seat at the table was simple but incredibly impactful. It reinforced the idea that HR professionals must not only advocate for a strategic voice but also back it up with evidence and actionable solutions. This underscores the need for HR to provide data-driven solutions, as these can guide effective decision-making and strategy development. On a personal note, I also valued Cierra's challenge to HR to let go of the fear of failing and move beyond doing things the way they have always been done. She left with a profound impact on the entire audience. Her advice to bring the data, bring the solutions, and be prepared for that seat at the table was not just simple, but incredibly powerful. It reiterated the notion that HR professionals should not only advocate for a strategic voice but also substantiate it with evidence and actionable solutions. This underscores the need for HR to offer data-driven solutions, as they can guide effective decision-making and strategy development. On a personal note, I also appreciated Cierra's challenge to HR to overcome the fear of failure and move beyond traditional approaches. Combined with Jason's reminder that HR is the value-add, the discussion underscored the importance of being proactive, innovative, and confident. Overall, it reinforced that future-ready HR means blending self-trust, continuous learning, emotional intelligence, data-driven solutions, and adaptability across generations to embrace change and lead transformation with confidence.



By Zoe' Kelsey

ATSU SHRM/NASHRM Limestone County MSA Discussion Panel

September 17, 2025

At the “Future-Ready HR: Strategies for Embracing Change and Transformation” discussion panel on September 17th of 2025, we as a SHRM student chapter were honored to have the opportunity to learn from Cierra Johnson-Belser, Jason Thrasher, and Jennifer Vaden-Washington. Chapter president, Savannah Graner Cornelius, gave detailed introductions to our keynote speakers in front of an audience of students and HR professionals. Throughout the discussion panel, Savannah asked several well-thought-out questions, and the responses received were insightful and demonstrated a deep understanding of the topic.

The panel began with the introduction of Cierra Johnson-Belser, founder of Enspire Executive Solutions, and is additionally the Alabama Regional Manager for NextOp Veterans and Program Coordinator of Momentum North Alabama. She claims to have “fallen into HR” when she was working on automotive projects and managing three thousand people. She works primarily in the talent acquisition space, helping “underrepresented communities to make sure they get access to the talent that they need to have fulfilled careers.” Then we were introduced to Jennifer Vaden-Washington, Director of Human Resources at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center, who has been there for almost ten years. Her career started with managerial roles, and she says she also “stumbled into HR.” Jason Thrasher is introduced last, as he serves as Director of Human Resources at Sim Tech. Inc. and is the founder of BestLife50. He is also an active mentor of NASHRM’s Mentor University. He says that HR must be “very adaptable and flexible and proactive.”

The discussion panel begins in earnest, the first few questions revolving around culture and mindset. Savannah asks about the biggest cultural barriers to change and how our panelists overcome them. Cierra goes first, telling us that we need to “let go of the fear of failing” and that “we also have to keep it people-centered.” Jason then spoke on how the goals of HR must align with the goals of the organizations they’re working for. Jennifer mentioned how we need others to “see HR as more than just policy police...We really are there to support the organization.”

The next few questions revolve around inclusion, diversity, and well-being, and Savannah mentions how there has always been a focus on physical health, but the conversation has shifted to include mental health as well. Quick to pipe up is Jennifer, stating, “Mental health is health. That’s a huge mindset that everyone kind of needs to shift towards. Whenever we have a change, the human brain will panic. Humans crave predictability, and anytime there is a form of change, people are going to struggle with it. Good change is still change, the brain will process it the same way Be consistent with how you implement change.” Cierra then mentions how change is exhausting, and we need to support employees through that change, in the organization or not.

Before Savannah opens the floor, she asks a final question, “How would you advise people who are making this transition to get that seat at the table?” Cierra is quick to say, “You need to know your worth. You know your skillset better than any employer or resume... You have to be good and confident in your skill set to know that you can sell it to that particular role and that particular HR person.”

The final question asked is “What’s one key takeaway or mindset shift you hope people walk away with today?” Cierra tells those in attendance that it is “Your time to shine,” and Jennifer tells us that change is hard and we need to be willing to embrace that hardship. Jason wraps up the panel, stating, “Believe in yourself every single day... that helps you get through some of the toughest challenges.”

Overall, the discussion panel was a fabulous experience that provided valuable insight into the world of HR. Hearing from these professionals was eye-opening, reinvigorating, and offered a fresh perspective for participants on the opportunities and challenges within the field. It encouraged students to thoughtfully reflect on their career, workplace culture, and the evolving role of HR in organizations.

By Hannah Edmonds

Bear Bash: Student Convovation

August 22, 2025

Nothing kicks off a new school year like a sun-soaked celebration filled with energy, excitement, and Bear pride!

The Bear Bash, held on August 22, 2025, brought together students and faculty for a lively celebration under the blazing summer sun, proving that the heat of late summer felt far from the chill of autumn. This vibrant event was an excellent opportunity to forge new connections and reconnect with fellow students from past semesters.

The day was filled with an array of spirited activities that showcased the pride of Athens State University. Each college department collaborated seamlessly, ensuring that every participant felt welcomed, and no question went unanswered. Despite the sweltering temperatures, the campus tour was a highlight, infused with humor, rich history, and the blossoming of new friendships.

Participants were showered with an assortment of delightful gifts, including stylish sunglasses adorned with the Athens State University logo and various pieces of memorabilia that attendees cherished. As confetti filled the air, creating a festive atmosphere, the ice-cold Athens State University water was a refreshing treat embraced by guests as they mingled.

For me, the campus tour was particularly captivating; I have a deep appreciation for the intriguing history that surrounds this gorgeous campus. The stories of its past, coupled with the enthusiasm of fellow attendees, made the day not only entertaining but also memorable, leaving everyone with a sense of community and pride in being part of such a vibrant institution.



By Kimberly Wilcox

Transfer Day

September 20, 2025



Transfer Day was an exciting and vibrant event filled with fresh faces. On September 20, 2025, Athens State University warmly welcomed incoming students to meet faculty and advisors. The financial department was on hand to address any urgent questions. Success coaches were also present, offering support, along with the Athens State Bonners. The day included a campus tour for new students, information about available programs, and details on how transfer credits work.

A highlight of the day was the Athens State SHRM Chapter table, where Savannah Graner Cornelius, President; Trudy Randolph, Secretary; and I, Kimberly Wilcox, Communications Director, greeted visitors and explained our chapter's purpose. The meet-and-greet event was a great success. We shared valuable information about our chapter and handed out merchandise—this was definitely one of the best parts.

It was a fantastic opportunity to meet new people and share our chapter's goals: education, community service, and building a network of professionals who will support one another in the future.



By Kimberly Wilcox

58th Annual Tennessee Valley Old Time Fiddlers Convention

October 2-4, 2025

Every fall, Athens State University comes alive with the energy of the Fiddlers Convention, a tradition that brings together music lovers, families, alumni, and our local community. As a student leader involved in campus activities and a proud member of the SHRM chapter, I've had the privilege of experiencing this event not just as an attendee, but as a volunteer.

This year, our SHRM chapter helped run the cotton candy booth as part of our fundraising efforts. It was a simple job with a significant impact. From early morning setup to the last swirl of pink sugar, our team worked together to serve visitors, raise money for student programming, and represent Athens State with pride. Seeing children light up at the sight of fresh cotton candy, and knowing that our work supported future scholarships, events, and professional development, made every sticky moment worthwhile.

Volunteering at Fiddlers reminded me why student leadership matters. It's about showing up, building connections, and giving back to a campus community that gives so much to us. I left the event feeling tired, yet a little sugar-coated, but incredibly grateful to have been part of something that brings tradition, teamwork, and community spirit together in such a meaningful way.

By Sharifah Abubaker



ATSU SHRM Fall Mixer

November 7, 2025

On November 7, 2025, I had the pleasure of attending the ATSU SHRM Student Chapter's annual Fall Mixer. It was held at the LaunchBox in downtown Athens, a space I hadn't visited before. I was impressed to learn that it supports local entrepreneurs and recent graduates. The LaunchBox is truly an incredible community resource.

The event itself brought together students, faculty, alumni, and HR professionals for an evening of connection, conversation, and camaraderie. While the setting was relaxed, the evening offered meaningful opportunities for mentorship, networking, and shared insight.

The game Telestrations brought plenty of laughter, thanks to the group's wildly creative (and often unrecognizable) drawings. Events like the Fall Mixer serve as powerful reminders of the value of shared experiences and the importance of community within the HR field. As a student just beginning my journey, it was exciting to see how much possibility exists in this profession. It's about people, purpose, and possibility.

By Heather Maddox



Pal Pair-Ups: Peer Mentorship Program

This semester, ATSU SHRM launched a new peer mentorship program called Pal Pair-Ups, designed to help our members support each other through friendship, guidance, and shared experiences. The program was inspired by a suggestion from one of our executive board members, Ashley Powers. Initially conceived as a team-bonding idea among the executive team, we quickly decided to expand it into an offering for all members. After careful planning and collaboration on the program's details, we were thrilled to see several members sign up to participate. Pal Pair-Ups is all about connecting two students so they can help each other succeed, both in school and in our SHRM student chapter. Think of it like having a built-in buddy who checks in, keeps you on track, helps you through the lows, and celebrates the wins with you. The program offers a casual yet meaningful experience for its participants.

As a participant in the program, I have thoroughly enjoyed connecting with my pal, Alena Vajukic. We have had several phone conversations and exchanged texts about various topics. Our discussions have ranged from navigating our courses and addressing curriculum-specific questions to balancing work, school, parenthood, and life in general. It has been amazing to feel like you have a friend in your corner who truly cares about your success and is cheering you on. I couldn't have asked for a better pairing, and I am so grateful that ATSU SHRM offers programs like this to its members. I highly encourage all of our members to take advantage of this program, and I look forward to seeing its ongoing success and potential for expansion in the future!



By Savannah Graner Cornelious

Louie, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful Pair-Up!

Athens State University's new Pal Pair-Up program launched this fall semester to empower students to help one another succeed in school and celebrate successes together. From my personal experience, this buddy program gives me a strategic support system that is changing the way I navigate college life.

My Pair-Up pal, Savannah, is a senior, a fearless leader, and someone I genuinely look up to. She's already walked the path I'm on now, so our conversations make me feel better prepared for what is to come. Savannah helped me set realistic academic goals, shared her class notes to better prepare me for upcoming exams and assignments, but more importantly, she helped me stay accountable.

Pal Pair-Up can transform casual chats into powerful conversations about future career planning, effective time management, and leveraging quick check-ins as career planning tools. Pair-Up buddies can be a valuable resource to help students polish their resumes, practice interview questions, or share creative ways to stay organized and motivated throughout the semester.

The Pal Pair-Up program makes success more rewarding and meaningful when it's achieved together, strengthening the sense of community at Athens State University.

By Alena Vajukic

ATSU SHRM Alumni Spotlight

Alethia Jordan



Alethia Jordan, EMBA, SHRM-CP, is a native of Huntsville, AL. She holds an Executive Master of Business Administration from Faulkner University, graduating summa cum laude in 2024, and a Bachelor of Science in Human Resource Management from Athens State University, also graduating summa cum laude in 2020, where she served as Director of Communications and Social Media and President of the SHRM Student Chapter. Alethia also earned an Associate of Science degree from Calhoun Community College in 2017 and served as a Warhawk Student Ambassador.

With extensive experience in various industries, Alethia has expertise in employee relations, recruitment, onboarding, benefits administration, HRIS management, compliance, and talent development. Her career spans roles in human resources consulting, municipal government, and aerospace/defense government contracting, where she excelled in optimizing HR processes and enhancing organizational strategies.

Upon graduating, Alethia continues to make a conscious effort to demonstrate the importance of leadership, hard work, commitment, dedication, and perseverance. She remains deeply committed to professional growth and community engagement, having held leadership roles in organizations like NAAHR and NASHRM. Her dedication to advancing workforce development and promoting diversity has earned her recognition. Additionally, she supports the Women's Economic Development Council Foundation (WEDCF) through volunteer work. Alethia recognizes that young adults tend to learn and do by what they see, she strives to lead by example, and it is her passion to inspire others to make a difference.



FALL 2025 ATSU SHRM SPEAKERS

By Trudy Rudolph



Dr. LaFevor delivered an informative and inspiring presentation on how HR certification skills, guided by the SHRM Body of Applied Skills and Knowledge (BASK) framework, prepare individuals for successful HR careers. She explained the value of an HR career, emphasizing HR's role in shaping culture, improving engagement, and driving organizational success. She encouraged future HR professionals to prepare through formal education, professional certification, and hands-on experience. Dr. LaFevor highlighted that certifications such as the SHRM-CP and SHRM-SCP validate both technical knowledge and behavioral competencies essential for today's HR professionals. Her confident and structured delivery blended practical insights with motivating examples. Throughout the presentation, she used real-world examples and visuals to outline key SHRM BASK competencies, including leadership, communication, business acumen, consultation, and ethical practice. She explained where to develop these skills through SHRM resources, workshops, internships, and networking, and discussed strong job prospects for HR professionals across industries. She concluded by noting that key HR skills vary by career track, from analytical and compliance skills for specialists to strategic decision-making for executives. Dr. LaFevor's enthusiastic and professional delivery kept us engaged and inspired us to pursue SHRM certification.



Dr. Camba delivered an engaging and informative presentation on how HR professionals can effectively guide organizational change. She emphasized that change is inevitable and that HR plays a vital role in helping employees adapt. She identified common causes of resistance, including fear, uncertainty, and lack of trust, and provided strategies to overcome them through communication, leadership alignment, employee involvement, and skill training. Her structured approach and real-world examples made complex ideas easy to follow and apply to practical HR situations.

Throughout the presentation, Dr. Camba's confident and enthusiastic delivery kept the audience engaged through questions and discussion. The visuals and examples reinforced the importance of empathy, collaboration, and recognition in achieving employee buy-in. She concluded by emphasizing that effective change leadership begins with inclusion, open communication, and shared accountability, inspiring listeners to view change as an opportunity for growth and improvement.



"When we become emotionally triggered," Mr. Bently explained, "it's easy to slip into reactive patterns driven by our survival or emotional brain states." In the survival state, we focus on fight, flight, or freeze, while in the emotional state, responses are shaped by feelings and past experiences. The goal, he noted, is to engage the executive brain responsible for reflection and intentional choice. Emotional agility teaches us to treat emotions as data—signals that help us understand what is happening—allowing professionals to shift from reaction to reflection and respond more thoughtfully.

To make this practical, Mr. Bently introduced a mental model map to help us understand situations, events, and intra-actions. By recognizing and engaging with emotions flexibly, employees and leaders can align responses with organizational priorities, maintain clarity under stress, and collaborate more effectively. He concluded that when emotions are seen as valuable information, they become assets that drive better decisions, resilience, and a healthier workplace culture.



Jennifer Baden Washington, Director of Human Resources at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center, emphasizes the importance of emotional intelligence and soft skills in HR. While hard skills are easier to teach and measure, soft skills are highly valued, especially in HR roles, and her organization prioritizes them in interviews because of their impact on success. Emotional Intelligence (EI) is the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and use emotions positively at work and in life. It is the most requested training topic for managers because it improves teamwork, conflict resolution, adaptability, confidence, and performance, while also reducing stress and increasing job satisfaction and retention. Although developing EI can be challenging due to factors like upbringing, trauma, and low self-awareness, expanding emotional vocabulary and learning how to apply it at work and in life is a valuable HR tool. The meeting concluded with Maya Angelou's quote reminding us that people may forget what we say or do, but they will always remember how we made them feel—reinforcing the power of emotional connection.

By Kimberly Wilcox

Fall Graduates



The Athens State University
SHRM Student Chapter would like to
congratulate the graduating
class of 2025!

The following ATSU SHRM members have informed us they are graduating this fall

Masters of Science Degree

Chantel Smith

Tommy Her

Bachelors of Science Degree

Ashley Powers

Heather Messer

Megan Stevenson

Steven Wilbanks



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All in Alabama

For many students, graduation brings excitement, relief, and a bit of uncertainty. Everyone starts asking the same question: “What’s next?” For some, that means moving across the country in search of opportunity. For others, it means looking closer to home and realizing there is a lot of potential right here in Alabama.

Over the past several years, Alabama has started to grow in new ways. From expanding technology hubs in Huntsville to strong healthcare and education networks in Birmingham, the state has been quietly creating space for innovation. Despite what some may think, choosing to stay in Alabama after graduation is not about settling for less. It is about recognizing the value of living and working in a place that offers both opportunity and connection. The cost of living allows for a more balanced lifestyle, and the sense of community makes a difference that cannot always be found in larger cities. Alabama offers a strong foundation for anyone ready to build a career, start a business, or create a life that is meaningful.



What we’re seeing across our state is being led by organizations that are reimagining how Alabama approaches talent and innovation. Innovate Alabama is one of the strongest examples of that effort. Its Asset Map connects entrepreneurs, investors, and ecosystem builders across the state, creating a network that strengthens local economies. It helps people find resources, identify partners, and understand the key industries shaping Alabama’s economic future. The ACCS Innovation Center is another major player in shaping Alabama’s workforce’s future. As part of the Alabama Community College System, the Center focuses on rapid, industry-aligned training that gets people into high-demand jobs quickly.

At Athens State University and across Alabama, the Student Retention Council (SRC) is helping students take that same message to heart. The SRC brings together students, educators, and lawmakers to strengthen the bridge between higher education and local careers. Through discussions and collaborative projects, students gain a clearer understanding of the opportunities Alabama offers and the value of building a future here. What the SRC has learned over the years is that there is something meaningful about staying and investing in the place that helped you grow. Each graduate who decides to stay strengthens the state’s workforce and gives back to the community that supported them. Every business that hires local talent keeps more opportunities within reach. Together, those decisions help create a cycle of growth that lifts the entire state.

Graduation often feels like a moment to look outward, but it can also be a moment to look around and see what is already here. Alabama is full of people who believe in their communities and who are working every day to make them stronger. The state’s future depends on that belief in people who choose to stay, lead, and build something lasting. Being “All In Alabama” is about pride, purpose, and potential. It means seeing the value of your home state, believing in what it can become, and deciding to be part of that future.

By Ashley Powers

Upcoming Events



ALSHRM HR Games in Tuscaloosa, AL (February 27, 2026)

Get ready for an exciting day of learning, competition, and connection! The ALSHRM HR Games will take place on Friday, February 27, 2026, at The Edge – University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa.

This Jeopardy-style event brings together SHRM student chapters from across Alabama universities for a fun and educational competition designed to help students prepare for the SHRM-CP exam.

Expect a full day of educational programming, networking opportunities, and interactive learning with HR students and professionals. Lunch will be provided for all attendees.

Registration details will be announced soon. Interested participants are encouraged to watch for the official registration link and additional event information.

SHRM National Conference in Orlando, FL (June 16 - 19, 2026)

Artificial intelligence, pay transparency, talent shortages, and deep transformations in organizational culture are rewriting the rules of work. Keeping up won't cut it—you need to lead.

SHRM26 is where you start. This is your front-row seat to the future of HR—packed with cutting-edge insights from top experts and peers facing the same challenges. From AI breakthroughs and evolving regulations to real-world strategies for navigating a rapidly changing workforce, SHRM26 delivers the clarity and tools you need to make informed decisions—and drive serious impact.

Join SHRM's global HR community and connect with people who get it. Share real experiences, dive into bold conversations, swap strategies, and spark ideas with peers who understand the pressures and possibilities. This is your moment to elevate your HR expertise, future-proof your career, and position yourself as a leader in shaping the future of work. Own your moment.



Connect with HR Professionals Through Limestone County-MSA SHRM

Do you live or work locally? Are you an HR professional or student interested in Human Resources, leadership, or organizational development? The Limestone County-MSA SHRM invites you to take part in a new and exciting opportunity to learn, grow, and connect!

Participate in local events where you'll have the chance to meet and network with HR professionals, attend presentations from dynamic guest speakers, and explore real-world insights into today's workplace challenges and trends. Whether you are pursuing a career in HR or simply curious about how great organizations manage talent and build culture, this is a great way to expand your knowledge and make meaningful professional connections.

Don't miss your chance to get involved!

Grow your skills, build your network, and discover the future of HR with Limestone County-MSA SHRM.

Follow NASHRM on LinkedIn to keep up with dates and meeting times.



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