

SPRING 2025



ATHENS STATE
UNIVERSITY

SHRM NEWSLETTER

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



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A Word from Barbara Mckinnie

Athens State SHRM Student Chapter President

To my fellow peers and future HR professionals,

I want to take this time to thank you for the opportunity to serve as your President this Spring semester. It has been an honor to work beside you as we continue to learn and grow together. I would like to thank the Executive Board and our Advisors for their continued support and hard work.

Becoming an HR professional was not on my agenda when I began my journey at Athens State University, however, it has become my passion. To witness growth and development among people gave me a new meaning of what it means to serve. Never forget that there are people behind the policies and rules that you will soon be responsible for enforcing. The human side of HR is truly the heart of what we do.

To the incoming Executive Board, congratulations on your new role. It is a labor of love that produces many blessings. I encourage you to prepare now, stay focused, and remember why you volunteered to be a supporter to the people who will soon offer support to others.

As this semester comes to a close, I would like to encourage you all to take advantage of the information you have received through our meetings, conferences, and networking opportunities. This year, we focused a lot on personal development and providing opportunities that put members in positions to build your own personal network. If you haven't, create a LinkedIn account and connect. You never know what possibilities await.

Best wishes,
Barbara McKinnie

AFFILIATE OF



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BETTER WORLD™**

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



Barbara McKinnie

President



Sharifah Aburbaker

Vice President of
Student Relations



Savannah Graner Cornelius

Director of Communication and
Chapter Information Systems



Ashley Powers

Director SHRM of Merit Award



Trudy Rudolph

Secretary



Coleen Driggers

Treasurer



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2025 ALSHRM Student Leadership Conference

February 24-25, 2025

Athens State Takes 1st Place at ALSHRM Student Leadership Conference!

An event full of wins, wisdom, and career-changing connections

Athens State University students showed up and showed out at the 2025 Alabama SHRM Student Leadership Conference—bringing home 1st place in the statewide case competition and soaking up an unforgettable two-day event of learning, networking, and growing alongside other future HR leaders.

Hosted right here at Athens State, the two-day event brought together students from **seven colleges across Alabama** along with HR professionals from every corner of the industry. From talent management to labor relations, healthcare to government, the guest speakers and mentors were full of career advice and real-world insight. ATSU SHRM Student Chapter Director of Communications and Chapter Information Systems Savannah Graner Cornelius summed it up perfectly:

“It was a pleasure to attend the ALSHRM Student Leadership Conference at Athens State University,” one attendee said. “It provided so many wonderful learning and networking experiences, and I am deeply grateful to be a part of a community that helps develop the next generation of leaders in HR.”

Real Talk from Real HR Pros

For many students, this wasn't just another event—it was a major turning point.

“The Alabama HR Student Leadership Conference was brilliant!” said ATSU SHRM Student Chapter President. “Two days of HR professionals pouring into students from seven different colleges was a sight to see! We got to speak with people from every corner of the HR world—manufacturing, healthcare, consulting, government, and more.”

McKinnie added, *“It reminded me that we are not alone in HR. There are so many people willing to guide us. I’ve attended several HR events, but none focused so clearly on student success. I hope other students get to experience something that can change the trajectory of their life.”*

The Competition: AI, Ethics & Innovation

The big highlight? The **statewide case competition**, where teams had just one week to tackle a real-world HR challenge—creating a strategic plan for using AI in hiring, while navigating the legal, ethical, and diversity-related issues that come with it.

Athens State University team members Ashley Powers, Sharifah Abubaker, and Leslie Doody, came through with fresh ideas, strong teamwork, and thoughtful solutions—and their presentation earned them the top spot in the competition.

“This competition wasn’t just about winning,” said ATSU SHRM Student Chapter Vice President Sharifah Abubaker. “It was about problem-solving, teamwork, and preparing for real-world challenges in HR. It reinforced why I chose HR. Problem-solving for people is challenging and rewarding—but it's worth it.”

“There were moments of stress,” added Abubaker, “but looking back, I wouldn’t trade this experience for anything. It made me a better problem-solver and leader, and it opened up a whole new level of growth.”

2025 ALSHRM Student Leadership Conference

February 24-25, 2025



Real Lessons for the Real World

This wasn't your average case study. First place winner and ATSU SHRM Student Chapter Director of Merits Ashley Powers shared how the team had to completely rework their solution after realizing something important was missing—right near the end!

"It pushed us beyond what we're used to learning and handling. We didn't realize a crucial piece was missing until we were almost finished. That meant tearing it down and rebuilding from a totally different perspective."

"What looked like a straightforward case turned out to be way more complex. That's what taught me the biggest lesson: never overlook the small details, because they can change everything. That's exactly what HR professionals deal with in the real world."

A Huge Thank You to Our Mentors

The event wasn't just about showcasing skills—it was about feeling supported, inspired, and prepared to take the next step.

"I want to thank everyone who helped make this event such a success," said McKinnie. "Your heart work and dedication to students doesn't go unnoticed. You made us leave with a sense of 'I can' and 'I will.' I hope to pay it forward and share what I've learned with others. Your legacy of greatness will continue."

Proud to Be Athens State

This experience shows just how powerful it can be when students are given a platform to lead, think critically, and rise to the challenge. The Athens State team's first-place win is more than just a trophy—it's a sign that we're preparing for real success, one opportunity at a time.

By Dr. Tina Camba



Ogletree Deakins HR Conference

March 11, 2025

SHRM Students Take the Mic: Introducing Legal Experts at the Ogletree Deakins HR Conference

At the Ogletree Deakins Human Resource Conference, students from the ATSU SHRM Student Chapter had the rare opportunity to not only attend but actively participate in one of the most dynamic HR events of the year. In a powerful display of professionalism and confidence, a handful of students, Sharifah Abubaker, Michelle Bissell, Barbara McKinnie, and Kimberly Wilcox were selected to introduce the keynote speakers—seasoned attorneys specializing in labor and employment law—before an audience filled with HR leaders, professionals, and legal experts from across the region.

“As a student, it was empowering to stand before a crowd of HR professionals and introduce some of the voices leading our industry forward,” ATSU SHRM Student Chapter Vice President Sharifah Abubaker shared. This experience did not just showcase the students’ poise; it symbolized a bridge between academic learning and professional impact.

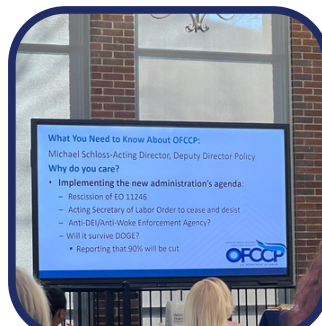
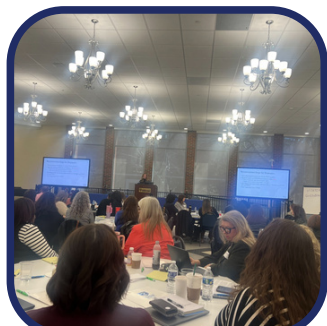
Abubaker reflected on the moment, saying, *“Introducing the speakers wasn't just a task—it was a privilege. Each one brought valuable insight that resonated deeply with me as a student, but with professionals alike.”* These introductions were not merely ceremonial; they were moments of connection, confidence-building, and real-world engagement.

Newly elected ATSU SHRM Student Chapter Director of Student Relations for the 2025- 2026 school year. Michelle Bissell added, *“The Ogletree Deakins Conference was a wonderful experience that allowed me to connect with and learn from others in HR.”* From networking with industry leaders to soaking in discussions about emerging workplace challenges, students were immersed in the current legal issues shaping the future of HR.

The event's theme focused on the ever-changing legal landscape affecting workplaces today. ATSU SHRM Student Chapter President Barbara McKinnie summarized the experience: *“This dynamic conference explored the evolving landscape of laws and policies under the current administration. They offered critical insights and bold conversations on how to maneuver through administrative transitions. As a student, I was inspired by the thought-provoking discussions on the legal challenges of our nation.”*

For these students, standing at the podium was not just about making an introduction—it was a defining moment in their professional journey. The Ogletree Deakins Conference served as a living classroom, reinforcing the importance of legal literacy in HR and highlighting the meaningful role students can play in shaping the profession’s future.

By Dr. Tina Camba



Career & Workforce Expo

April 17, 2025

Attending the 2025 Career and Workforce Expo at Athens State was a rewarding and eye-opening experience. While we were not there as hiring agents, it was a pleasure to answer questions about the university and the SHRM Student Chapter. For me, the interview tips and networking bingo game were the highlight of our participation. While interacting with other students is always an honor and privilege, these activities force me to step outside of my comfort zone. They have a way of extending me and showing me how others who do it regularly learn. The strategies help me think creatively. I am always looking for takeaways when I have the opportunity to make it to the campus.

For me, the highlight was attending Dr. Boden's professional development training. Having a few of my superiors attend from another state was gratifying for me. They are still discussing the knowledge learned as well as the pearls of wisdom that inspired them. I, for one, am a proud manager.

By Trudy Rudolph



Community Cleanup with KALB

April 18, 2025

I had the immense pleasure of assisting KALB and representing Athens State University's SHRM Student Chapter at a community cleanup event. This event was a wonderful opportunity to engage with the local community and contribute to the beautification of our neighborhood. Our primary task was to pull weeds and lay out new mulch to enhance the appearance of the center island, a small yet significant area that often goes unnoticed but plays a crucial role in the overall aesthetics of the community.

As we diligently worked under the sun, we were met with a wave of support and appreciation from the community. The sound of honking cars and the sight of people rolling down their windows to express their gratitude for our efforts was truly heartwarming. It was a reminder of the positive impact that collective action can have on a community. Even the mayor took the time to drive by and personally thank us for our hard work, which was a testament to the importance of our efforts.

Participating in this event was an enriching experience for me, especially given the positive experiences I've had in Athens. The city has always been a welcoming and supportive place, and I feel honored to give back to the wonderful Athens community. It was a day filled with camaraderie, hard work, and a sense of fulfillment, knowing that we were making a difference in our neighborhood. I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of such a meaningful initiative and look forward to continuing to contribute to the community in the future.

By Dalton Thrasher



ATSU SHRM Alumni Spotlight

Dawn Murph



I am Dawn Murph, a proud alumnus of Athens State and the Athens State SHRM Student Chapter. I graduated in 2022 with a Bachelor of Science in Human Resource Management. At ATSU, I developed a strong foundation in HR principles and practices that prepared me for my career. I attribute much of that to my time serving in the Athens State SHRM Student Chapter.

After graduation, I began my professional journey as an HR Assistant in the manufacturing sector, where I gained valuable hands-on experience. Today, I have the privilege of working as a Corporate HR Generalist for a global conglomerate, supporting

teams and initiatives across various regions of the world. I am actively engaged in the SHRM community, where I currently serve on a local SHRM board. My involvement allows me to stay connected with industry trends while giving back to the HR community.

Outside of my career, my husband Jason and I are deeply involved in our church and value spending quality time with family and friends. We also love to explore new places and enjoy traveling around the world. Traveling gives me the opportunity to pursue my love for landscape and nature photography.



Spring 2025 ATSU SHRM SPEAKERS



On January 21, the ATSU SHRM hosted Caitlin Sampson for an engaging discussion titled "Unlocking Your HR Potential: Competencies for Certifications and Beyond." Her presentation provided a clear breakdown of HR competencies that resonated with everyone. What set Caitlin apart was her ability to simplify these concepts, connecting them to relatable real-life situations. She offered invaluable advice on how to approach HR certifications for career advancement, emphasizing that HR is about understanding people, not just policies. Caitlin reminded us that HR professionals do not merely manage; they connect with individuals and provide vital information. Her approachable style and enthusiasm made the session both enjoyable and inspiring. Everyone left with a deeper understanding of HR competencies. Caitlin's key message for anyone pursuing or advancing a career in Human Resources was that mastering competencies extends beyond obtaining certifications; it also involves becoming a more effective and impactful HR leader. She concluded with an inspiring reminder: "There's always something to learn in Human Resources."

By Erika Mack



On February 18, 2025, our SHRM Student Chapter was honored to welcome Jeff Yenser, SPHR, for an engaging discussion on an emerging trend in the HR profession: fractional leadership. His presentation, titled "Your Future is Fractional," introduced us to a career path that combines flexibility, strategic impact, and entrepreneurial thinking. Jeff spoke about the growing demand for professionals who can provide specialized HR support on a consulting basis. He explained that a successful career in HR does not have to follow a traditional full-time path. Instead, professionals can make a meaningful impact through flexible roles that align with their expertise and interests. His presentation revealed how the HR field continues to evolve, and how fractional work is becoming a viable and rewarding option. Jeff's visit gave us valuable insight into the evolving nature of HR and opened our eyes to a wider range of possibilities for the future.

By Ashley Powers



"All Leaders Are Change Agents", that was the resounding message from Michele Haugh's impactful presentation at our March 18, 2025 ATSU SHRM meeting. Mrs. Haugh outlined a powerful roadmap for becoming a successful leader, starting with self-awareness. She emphasized the importance of knowing who you are, being open to change, and embracing constructive feedback as a tool for growth. One of the most powerful themes of her presentation was the role of trust and integrity in leadership. She encouraged students to lead with vulnerability and authenticity, reminding us that genuine relationships and a strong network are key to achieving lasting success. Mrs. Haugh urged students to not only grow individually but also to uplift those around them. Leadership, she shared, is about inspiring others, collaborating with purpose, and building people up along your journey. Her presentation was truly a breath of fresh air, perfectly timed as we welcome spring and all the change a new season brings. Her knowledge, grace, and wisdom left a lasting impression on everyone who attended.

By Barbara McKinnie



On April 15, 2025, ATSU SHRM had the privilege of having guest speaker Jay Gregson join us, where he delivered an insightful and thought-provoking presentation on the significance of character in the hiring process. Mr. Gregson makes a compelling argument that character, which encompasses an individual's personal morale structure, along with skills and knowledge, are essential for selecting the best candidates. To support this theory, Mr. Gregson proposes developing a character matrix to identify the key character traits necessary for organizational success. He also outlines a strategy for how organizations can foster character development, while acknowledging that some individuals may not possess the necessary character to align with the organization's values and expectations. Mr. Gregson concludes by emphasizing the importance of continuously evaluating and nurturing character to maintain a healthy and productive work environment. Ultimately, a candidate's character "will define their success and ability to help your company achieve its goals."

By Savannah Graner Cornelius

Meet the 2025-2026 Executive Board

**Congratulations to the newly
elected executive board for the
2025-2026 school year!**



Savannah Graner Cornelius
President



Sharifah Aburbaker
Vice President



Ashley Powers
Director of SHRM Merit Award



Dalton Thrasher
Director of Chapter Information Systems



Michelle Bissell
Director of Student Relations



Trudy Rudolph
Secretary



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Spring 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 Spring

Masters of Science Degree

Erika Mack
Hunter Vandresar
Jacee Butts
Kaylea Sparks
Madeline Harris
Whitney Moore

Bachelors of Science Degree

Ambre Harris
Anna Hamands
Candace Harper-Sanchez
Deanda Leslie
Kyle Brakke
Lauren Hooper
Lillee Warren
Michelle France- Melander
Sharifah Abubaker



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Spring Graduates



**The Athens State University
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Upcoming Events

SHRM Alabama

ALSHRM²⁵
May 12-14, 2025
Perdido Beach Resort

ALSHRM Conference in Orange Beach, AL (May 12 - 14, 2025)

Mark your calendar for the ALSHRM Conference happening from May 12th through 14th in the picturesque setting of Orange Beach, AL. This three-day event serves as a convergence point for professionals across Alabama, offering a distinctive opportunity to expand your knowledge, build valuable connections, and advance in your professional journey. ALSHRM's primary mission is to provide leadership, facilitate communication, and extend support to the numerous human resource professionals in Alabama, including those affiliated with SHRM chapters or independent members. Notably, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), with a substantial membership exceeding 250,000 individuals, stands as the global advocate for the human resources profession.

SHRM National Conference in San Diego, CA (June 29 - July 2, 2025)

HR is changing faster than ever, and the future of work waits for no one. Staying ahead means more than just keeping up—it means leading the charge. At SHRM25, hosted in the beautiful, sunny San Diego, you have an unmatched opportunity to connect with top industry experts and peers who understand your challenges.

With over 375 handpicked sessions, you'll dive deep into cutting-edge insights on AI advancements, emerging regulations, and the latest best practices reshaping our field. Engage in dynamic discussions, practical workshops, and inspiring keynotes that cover everything from managing a diverse workforce to innovative HR technologies.

This is not just a conference; it's a catalyst for your professional growth and a chance to future-proof your career. Network with thought leaders and HR professionals from around the globe, share experiences, and gather actionable strategies to take back to your organization.



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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**SHRM Membership +
Your Local Chapter Is the
PERFECT COMBINATION.**



Networking & leadership
opportunities



Career development



Over \$13,000 worth of
tools and resources

BEGIN YOUR JOURNEY



Join Now



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Savannah Graner Cornelius, Editor