



**East Carolina University  
 Miller School of Entrepreneurship  
 Division of Research, Economic Development and Engagement  
 Rural Innovation Strengthening Eastern NC 29 (RISE29)**

**USASBE Excellence in Co-Curricular Innovation Award  
 Excellence in Entrepreneurship Education Awards**

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## Beginning of RISE29

Spurred by population loss and declining employment opportunities, East Carolina University (ECU) developed a comprehensive strategy for rural economic development in 2014. This strategy included creating an entrepreneurial culture on campus and developing small business capacity in rural communities. Over the past five years, ECU has: convened senior campus leaders in a Regional Transformation Council that meets monthly to support curricular and co-curricular programs and resource needs; developed innovation spaces on campus; created an innovation and entrepreneurship living and learning community in campus housing; launched the Miller School of Entrepreneurship (MSoE) and an entrepreneurship baccalaureate degree program; and, continues to build partnerships with communities and industries in eastern North Carolina (eNC) to empower rural prosperity.

These activities set the stage for student entrepreneurs to have programming to support connections outside the classroom. Thus, the Miller School of Entrepreneurship and the Division of Research, Economic Development and Engagement (REDE) sought and received a \$1 million award from the Golden LEAF Foundation to support rural economic prosperity through innovation and entrepreneurship. With the award, ECU launched its first university-wide program, RISE29 – reflective of the 29-county region ECU serves in eNC – targeted toward transforming students into emerging entrepreneurs who represent a new generation of business owners in the region. The grant supports and strengthens partnerships between ECU and surrounding eNC counties. As a result, ECU graduates create new ventures and sustain existing businesses through continuity and optimization plans.

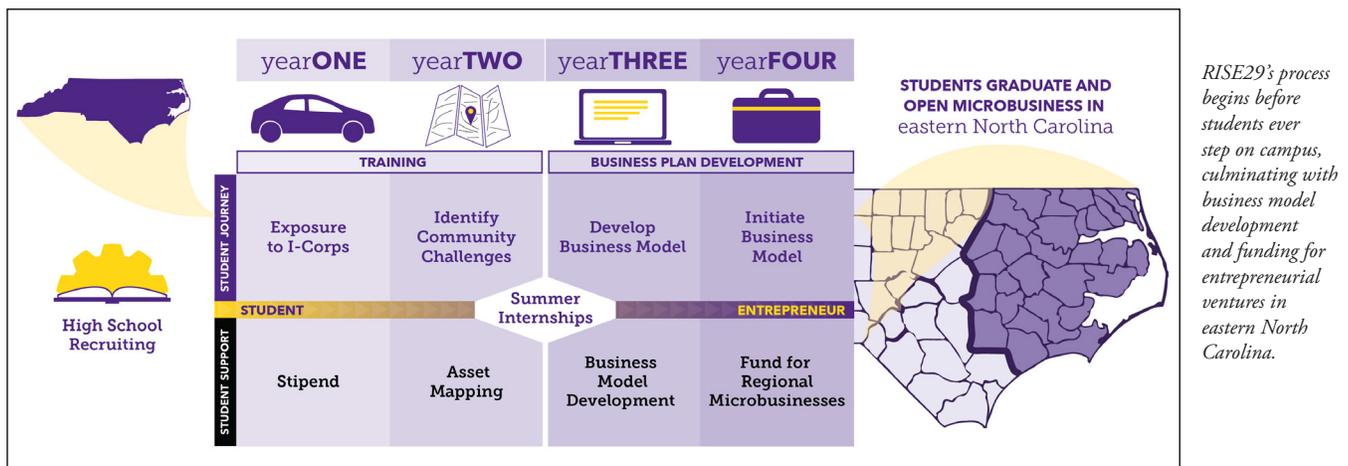
## Heart of RISE29

The heart of RISE29 lies with student entrepreneurs responding to community driven need. RISE29 partners gather community input to target projects across eNC. Advanced data analytics tools housed at ECU’s Economic Growth Collaboratory (EGC) provide economic development intelligence that is paired with mentoring programs in the MSoE, fueling the program’s success rate. RISE29 leverages investments made by ECU and regional partners – notably, new facilities including laboratories, greenhouses, and collaborative spaces on the ECU campus. Additionally, regional partners provide expertise, assets and infrastructure, including human capital, facilities, funding, and access to existing programming at community colleges, chambers of commerce, downtown development corporations, and small business technology development centers.

## RISE29 Process

RISE29 is a holistic approach to job creation and retention in eNC. RISE29 students begin their journeys with a business idea, a technological innovation, or a desire to help a community. Advancing through the program, students are placed into teams before receiving research and development support and business model mentoring. Teams then follow one of two paths: launching a microenterprise or enacting an established business continuity plan. Newly launched microenterprises provide an economic boost to the region, while continuity plans may include succession or expansion proposals aimed at preserving and enhancing economic vitality through job retention. Finally, RISE29 entrepreneurs receive continued mentoring after graduation to help sustain business success.

Figure 1. RISE29 Process.



**Figure 2. Pirate Entrepreneurship Challenge.**



*In 2018, the inaugural, three-round Pirate Entrepreneurship Challenge (PEC) concluded with personalized gift boutique Simple and Sentimental taking first place and a cash prize of \$12,500. Today, Simple and Sentimental is on track for almost \$1 million in sales by 2020. The PEC is one of the pathways developed to build microenterprises in eNC.*

### **Key Goals of RISE29**

- Reverse the trend of declining population and economic opportunities in much of eNC.
- Help create 150 jobs in rural communities and up to 50 new business ventures.
- Provide long-term business-growth strategies for current and budding business leaders.
- Make ECU the statewide leader in the number of student-led startups.

### **Evidence of Program/Pedagogical Innovation/Co-Curricular Innovation**

Student led microenterprises emerge from multiple starting points, with most following four parallel pathways:

- 1) Presentations by local officials on community needs and existing infrastructure to support microenterprise creation;
- 2) Business continuity and optimization opportunities presented by regional industry;
- 3) The Pirate Entrepreneurship Challenge (PEC) business pitch competition, open to all ECU students (with more than 160 entries since 2017); and,
- 4) Students working with faculty in the EGC and MSoE to identify emerging trends and opportunities for launching microenterprises in eNC with potential expansion throughout the region.

RISE29 supports existing industry in eNC by allowing small to medium enterprises to pitch project needs to student teams with the goals of sustaining and growing their businesses. Student and faculty teams are fielded by prioritizing individual interests and skills to develop multidisciplinary teams that support each business. Linkages through courses, independent studies and internships allow students to connect their curriculum with rural communities in innovative ways.

With the university as a partner, communities translate macroeconomic data into main street application for new, sustainable ventures. Faculty and staff who are part of RISE29 work with student teams to examine preferred venture opportunities based on interest, competitive environment, available resources, incentives, and market data. As students work with faculty and industry mentors to examine gaps in the regional economy and research potential supply and value chain operational improvements, they boost the critical mass of entrepreneurs across eNC. Ultimately, RISE29 will contribute to a vibrant rural economy across eNC.

### **Nominee Information**

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# Supplemental Graphic 1



## Student Testimonials



*“The RISE29 program caught my interest as a way to be involved with the community while gaining professional experience. In my opinion, the best way to validate your education is to give back to the community. This helps to create a positive cycle of personal and communal development.”*

**Joshua Spears, RISE29 Intern**



*“What interested me most about the RISE29 program is its initiative to help create jobs in rural communities. This program helps not only communities, but entrepreneurs that are looking to start a business.”*

**Adrienne Yacovone, RISE29 Intern**

## Partner Testimonials



*“Beaufort County believes that the regional approach taken by ECU on this project will not only help serve the needs of the RISE 29 counties, but will also help grow a community of support between all the counties. ECU has a strong history and a proven model of supporting rural eastern North Carolina... the extension of this model through the Miller School of Entrepreneurship to help grow and support new businesses is very exciting and one the county strongly supports.”*

**Brian Alligood, Beaufort County Manager**



*“Martin County views this collaborative, regional project as a critical step to encourage entrepreneurial growth and provide support as we seek to strengthen our local economy. Small business creation is essential to the long-term health of rural communities, and we’re excited about the opportunity to partner with East Carolina University...”*

**David Bone, Martin County Manager**

## Client Testimonials



*“We attribute much of the company’s successes and overall growth to partners like ECU who have shown much interest in our brand, its mission, and the desire to create an impact for the local community. Glean would not be where it is today without our partnership... the university has been by far one of our largest supporters and advocates, and we cannot begin to express how thankful we are to have developed such a special relationship.”*

**Will Kornegay, Co-Founder of GLEAN**



*“There is no better sight to a fellow Pirate than to see purple and gold in your own community. A project like this truly demonstrates the mutually beneficial relationship between eastern North Carolina and ECU. We wholeheartedly believe that this can be a resurrection of our local economy. I foresee an extremely prosperous collaboration in all of our futures.”*

**Kris Noble, Hyde County Manager  
ECU MBA**

## Supplemental Graphic 2

### By the Numbers



**146**  
Students



**46**  
Student Interns



**18,385**  
Field Work Hours  
Recorded



Empowers **rural prosperity** across eastern North Carolina



Creates **new business enterprises** and develops **sustaining continuity plans**



Fueled by **big data analytics**



ECU has committed to lead the state in **university-backed student startups**

### Student Resource: **ConnectEast**



ECU launched a new platform that connects students, staff, faculty, businesses, mentors, and local communities with one another to create and grow new job ventures in eastern North Carolina. The platform, called ConnectEast, uses artificial intelligence to match a user's need with an expert in their field to provide solutions and mentoring. Users sign up, ask a question, and get advice from a curated list of experts developed by ECU's Economic and Community Engagement team. The university believes this platform will alleviate some of the challenges students face when starting a new business, leading to more successful ventures in the region.

### Student Resource: **Entrepreneurship Internship Course**

This fall, ECU offered a new academic course, Entrepreneurship 4995, providing students an opportunity to grow their entrepreneurial skills through hands-on experiences. ECU believes that internships should be extremely valuable enterprises, and through ENTR 4995, students develop a comprehensive understanding of entrepreneurship through an engaged learning experience with an external client. As part of the course students participate in on-site visits with clients, research the history of the businesses and community their interacting with, develop professional consulting documents, and lead a final professional presentation of their findings to their client and internship cohort.



## Dean Support Letter



College of Business  
Office of the Dean

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September 24, 2019

Dear USASBE Leadership:

I am writing to offer my full support for the Miller School of Entrepreneurship (in the College of Business) to submit the RISE29 program for the USASBE Excellence in Co-Curricular Innovation Award presented at the 2020 conference. The Miller School is already a sponsor for that conference and the faculty are committed to remaining active members for the foreseeable future. Drs. Michael Harris and Dennis Barber are taking the lead in this award submission and they both consider USASBE as one of the preeminent organizations for entrepreneurship and small/family business. In addition, Dr. Barber has agreed to serve as a future judge for the USASBE Awards program.

All the best for a successful 2020 conference. Please let me know if you need any additional information.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul H. Schwager", written in a cursive style.

Paul H. Schwager, PhD  
Dean and W. Howard Rooks Distinguished Professor  
College of Business  
East Carolina University