

# Building Momentum

President's Report | 2024-2025



UNIVERSITY OF  
SOUTH ALABAMA

FLAGSHIP OF THE GULF COAST





You will not find it etched on the cornerstone of an ivy-covered building, nor in a book on a library shelf. You'll have a hard time even pinpointing its origin. **BUT THE USA WAY IS VERY REAL.**

*President Jo Bonner serves red, white and blue king cake during Carnival season.*

## President's Letter

When the last degree of Fall 2024 was awarded and Commencement concluded, the University of South Alabama's newest alumni were showered with confetti and the brassy sounds of Mobile's Excelsior Band joining South's Commencement Band in a procession out of the Mitchell Center.

Each Commencement is memorable. This one was a milestone, giving us our 100,000th graduate at the Flagship of the Gulf Coast.

The significance of that number inspired us to reflect on how far we've come since our founding in 1963 – a relatively short time ago, making South one of Alabama's youngest universities. It also got us thinking about our path forward.

As we travel the country visiting with alumni and friends in cities from the East Coast to out West, I get to talk about how we're seizing this moment and pursuing the opportunities that lie before us. "This isn't the same University I graduated from" we often hear from alumni who have not been on campus in a while.

In fact, the University of South Alabama has been exceeding expectations from the very start. We think big. And this year has been no exception.

Another year of growing enrollment. The addition of an apartment complex for student living. Finding new ways to deliver innovative academic healthcare across the region. Research funding reflective of a top-tier research university. A conference title in basketball and our second straight bowl victory in football. Record fundraising along with critical investments from our supporters in local, state and federal government.

Our accomplishments are many, as are the number of people who made them a reality. This report highlights our successes and is a tribute to those who deliver them – our students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends.

Their work is a reflection of what we've begun to call The USA Way, the embodiment of our culture and our impact on education, research and healthcare. You will find The USA Way beginning on the opposite page and running through this report.

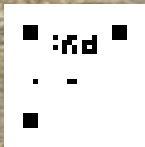
As South moves into the next year, we aim to continue to deliver results that exceed expectations. As with the construction of the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine building, we're building big and are on our way up.

Here's to confetti moments yet to come.

Jo Bonner

**On the Cover:** Construction on the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine is scheduled to be completed December 2026.

Executive Vice President Dr. Andi Kent and Associate Vice President for Global Engagement Dr. Richard Carter led a group of students to Greece in May.



Scan the code to watch The USA Way video introduced at Spring Commencement.

## Executive Vice President and Provost's Letter

In May, before the start of summer classes, I had the honor of traveling with seven of our inquisitive and enthusiastic undergraduate students to Greece for a course on leadership.

There, in the administrative boardroom with our hosts at the University of Thessaly in Volos, we pulled up a just-completed video that focused on The USA Way. Our students beamed with pride. I still do, thinking about that moment. (That video can be viewed through the QR code, opposite page.)

There is much to be proud of in the past year. Together, we've built a collection of accomplishments that have enriched our academic community, strengthened our healthcare system, advanced knowledge through research and prepared our students for a promising future.

What you're holding in your hands, or viewing online, is a highlight summary of activity at the University of South Alabama from the summer of 2024 through spring 2025.

This year's report marks a strategic shift from the previous format, which was structured around the University's reporting divisions. Here, we tell South's story through showcasing what makes us the Flagship of the Gulf Coast: excellence in education, healthcare and research; a campus and community that welcomes, encourages and connects; and outreach to engage South's loyal supporters and expand our impact.

It is a story that is being written every day, in places near and far, by so many students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends. It is the story of tiny babies being born at our hospitals, step-by-step advances in research and big blue-sky moments, from groundbreakings to commencements.

Six thousand miles away in Volos, I saw that story reflected on the faces of our seven students, proud of their University and their role in its next chapter.

Earlier in our trip, our group was walking in the city of Delphi when a man stopped us, recognizing the Jaguar logo on the T-shirt of Dr. Rick Carter, associate vice president for global engagement. The man's father had been part of the Greek delegation who attended the 1998 dedication of the Delphi tholos replica on our campus. Truly, it was a special moment showcasing our University's connections around the world.

When you are a Jaguar, South is always close by.

*Andi M. Kent*

Andi M. Kent, Ph.D.





It describes how we conduct ourselves with integrity, dedication and class, simply because it is right to do so.

**THE USA WAY** is being proud, with a grateful heart and a big smile, when our students walk across the stage to receive their diplomas in a Mitchell Center filled with glistening eyes and pure happiness from fellow graduates, families, faculty and friends.



# Academic Distinction

**GREAT ACADEMIC OUTCOMES** begin with a clear, shared vision. South charted a course for academic excellence by focusing on key priorities: increasing student enrollment and retention, expanding graduate programs, and strengthening outreach to military-affiliated people and their families. The University made strides in measurably positive ways. Each initiative shows a commitment to caring for students from enrollment through graduation and preparing them for careers where they will thrive and lead on the Gulf Coast and beyond.



## Enrollment, Retention Both Increase

FIRST-YEAR ENROLLMENT IS UP MORE THAN 20% OVER TWO YEARS; RETENTION RECORDS SET

For the second straight year, enrollment increased for both fall and spring semesters. Fall 2024 enrollment was 14,003, a 1.71% increase over fall 2023, with first-year enrollment up more than 20% over the previous two years.

Retention rates continued the good news. The University saw record five-year and six-year graduation rates. Of second-year students in the 2022 cohort, 68% returned to South for their third year. That's three percentage points higher than the previous record retention rate for year two to three.

The College of Engineering led all colleges with a 13.1% increase in enrollment. The School of Computing and the Pat Capps Covey College of Allied Health Professions tied for the top one- and two-year retention rates in fall 2024 at, respectively, 81% and 77%.

Summer 2025 enrollment totaled 7,731, a 2.87% increase over the previous year, helped by Summer Start, a six-week session in June and July that allows first-year students to get an early start on their college experience — and seven early credits. Summer Start debuted in 2023.

**14,003**

FALL 2024 ENROLLMENT

**126**

NEW HONORS COLLEGE STUDENTS, A RECORD

## MORE TO LEARN

South continues to expand its educational offerings. The following programs have been added over the past year.

### Graduate programs:

- College of Arts and Sciences: Doctor of Philosophy in Environment and Society; Master of Science in Applied Statistics; Master of Science in Environmental Sciences; certificate in Geographic Information Systems.
- Mitchell College of Business: Online Master of Business Administration.

### Undergraduate programs:

- College of Engineering: Bachelor of Science in Aerospace Engineering.
- Mitchell College of Business: Bachelor of Science in Entrepreneurship; Bachelor of Science in Real Estate; Bachelor of Science in Professional Sales.



## 100,000 Graduates and Counting

The December 2024 Fall Commencement marked a milestone: The 1,348 degree candidates put the University above 100,000 total graduates. South's newest alumni and their families celebrated with a march out of the USA Mitchell Center to the sound of Mobile's Excelsior Band.

## James Named Engineering Dean

Dr. Darryl James took office as dean of the College of Engineering on Oct. 1, 2024, with a vision of making the college a national leader in transformative engineering research, education and innovation.

"We will empower our people to push the boundaries of knowledge, create sustainable solutions to global challenges and foster collaborations within the USA community and with industry partners," he said.

James has bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees in mechanical engineering. He came to South after more than 30 years at Texas Tech University.



**63**

UNDERGRADUATE MAJORS

**57**

GRADUATE PROGRAMS



## SUPPORTING THE MILITARY

The new Office of Military Services, an expansion of the former Office of Veteran Affairs, has accomplished much since its creation in September 2024:

- The University has achieved Military Friendly School Gold Award and Military Spouse Friendly School status for 2025-26.
- HigherEdMilitary has designated South as a Purple Heart University for its support of Purple Heart recipients. Also, the Military Order of the Purple Heart added South to its Alabama Purple Heart Trail.
- At South's first Military Affiliated Resource Fair, on-campus and community partners showcased resources and opportunities for students, faculty and staff.



**David Blair** has more than 18 years experience leading military services programs at universities.

David Blair, who leads the office, is a retired U.S. Army sergeant major with more than 18 years of experience leading similar programs at the University of Alabama and Mississippi State University. He has embarked on a tour of military education fairs at military installations, particularly promoting South's growing lineup of online graduate programs.

In addition, as part of its continued commitment to supporting the armed forces and developing future military leaders, South unveiled a new ropes course adjacent to the newly renovated ROTC facility for Army and Air Force cadets.

**280** STUDENTS STUDIED ABROAD IN 31 COUNTRIES

# 750

HIGH SCHOOL VISITS, COLLEGE FAIRS AND OTHER OFF-CAMPUS RECRUITMENT EVENTS; 51 GROUPS OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS BROUGHT TO CAMPUS ON JAGUAR ATHLETICS BUSES

## South's New Flagship Leaders

Leaders — the kinds of students that every university wants — now have extra incentives to both choose South and stay for four years. The 120 recruits in the University's Flagship Leaders program will become Jaguars in the fall 2025 semester.

The new program invites applications from high school students with a GPA of at least 3.0 and a history of leadership in and out of the classroom. That can include community service, affiliations with school and nonschool organizations, positions of responsibility in student government, academics, athletics or the arts, and more.

Those who qualify receive renewable scholarships of \$1,000 to \$2,000 annually for four years, plus mentorship and leadership development opportunities on campus. This fall's pioneering Flagship Leaders will receive a total of \$180,000 in scholarships for the year.

Each year's fall class of Flagship Leaders gathers with their families in the preceding spring semester for an on-campus luncheon, interviews and determination of scholarship amounts. Next year's Flagship Leaders Day is scheduled for Feb. 20.

## Graduate School Gains

The Mitchell College of Business graduated 20 Ph.D. students, a significant increase from its five-year average of 10. It made the college the University's largest producer of research Ph.D. graduates in a single year.

That's a notable step on South's path from Research 2 to top-level Research 1 status in the research activity rankings of the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. The number of research doctorates awarded is one of two components in the ranking system, the other being the amount of research expenditures.

Both threshold numbers are three-year averages. South is within sight of both goals. The

University's most recent annual research spending total of \$70 million easily tops the \$50 million R1 threshold. In 2024-25, South awarded 47 research doctorates in fall 2024 and spring 2025 combined, with 14 more expected in summer 2025 — a total of 61. The R1 three-year minimum average is 70.

Other colleges also reported graduate-student gains. Graduate enrollment in Arts and Sciences increased 7% in fall 2024. The graduate program in systems engineering, an interdisciplinary approach to engineering design of complex systems, achieved record enrollment of 20 master's and 70 doctoral students.



## Classroom on the Bay

Students at the Stokes School of Marine and Environmental Sciences, the fastest-growing such program in the United States, will soon study at an outdoor classroom over a beautiful bay, stepping into the water to carry out class assignments. The Outdoor Living Lab, connected to a beach by a pier, is planned at Aloe Bay, 40 minutes south of the University campus. The University of South Alabama Foundation donated land there to the University in 2023. Five civil engineering students designed the structure as a capstone project in the spring of 2025. It's scheduled to be ready by next summer.



**31%** ENROLLMENT INCREASE, FALL 2023 TO FALL 2024, STOKES SCHOOL OF MARINE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

# 7TH

NATIONAL RANKING BY CYBERSECURITY GUIDE OF THE SCHOOL OF COMPUTING CYBERSECURITY MASTER'S PROGRAM



## U.S. News Ranks South Programs

Five graduate programs from the Pat Capps Covey College of Allied Health Professions appeared in the influential U.S. News & World Report annual education rankings: audiology, occupational therapy, physical therapy, physician assistant and speech-language pathology.

South also achieved rankings among global universities — one of only 280 listed out of the nearly 4,000 U.S. universities — national universities, and top public schools, and for social mobility (enrolling economically disadvantaged students).

South's highest U.S. News ranking was for medical school graduates practicing in health professional shortage areas: ninth. The medical school was also ranked for graduates practicing in rural areas and practicing in primary care.

Also ranked were graduate programs in biological sciences, computer sciences, earth sciences, psychology and nursing (online); undergraduate programs in biological sciences, computer sciences, earth sciences, engineering, business and psychology; and South's overall nursing programs and online bachelor's offerings.

## No. 1

FINISH, HEALTH, KINESIOLOGY AND SPORT QUIZ BOWL TEAM, AMERICAN COLLEGE OF SPORTS MEDICINE SOUTHEAST ANNUAL MEETING



## WINS IN THE CLASSROOM

The University's commitment to academic excellence includes Athletics. The department's current single-year academic progress rate (measuring the retention and academic eligibility of student-athletes) is 989, above the overall Division I four-year average of 984. Ten teams had a perfect single-year score of 1,000.

In spring 2025, South's student-athletes earned an average GPA of 3.22.



## Good as Goldwater

Three Honors College students won prestigious Goldwater Scholarships. Genevieve Batman, a junior exercise science/interdisciplinary studies major, wants to research muscular injuries among performing artists. Junior chemistry major Gabriel Merchant plans to study environmental and health effects of inorganic compounds. Sophomore chemistry major Mary Helene Marmande hopes to work on drug discovery.

Goldwater Scholarships are awarded to undergraduates interested in research careers in natural sciences, mathematics, or engineering. Only nine students in Alabama received this award in 2025. Nationally, 441 recipients were chosen from 1,350 undergraduates nominated by 445 institutions.

Winners receive up to \$7,500 for tuition, room and board, books and fees in each remaining

undergraduate year.

"This recognition only validates what all of us already know," said Dr. David Forbes, professor of chemistry and Goldwater Scholarship Program campus representative. "We have the nation's best enrolled in our classes, engaged in the research activities across campus and serving within our community."

Goldwater Scholarships were first awarded in 1989. In only one other year has South had as many as three scholars: 2020, when there were four.

# 98.4%

PASS RATE, 2024 REGISTERED NURSE EXAM, COLLEGE OF NURSING

# 151%

AVERAGE ANNUAL GROWTH IN SUPPLY CHAIN AND LOGISTICS COURSES ENROLLMENT SINCE THE PROGRAM'S INCEPTION IN 2021

# 23,000+

VISITS BY NURSING, ALLIED HEALTH AND MEDICAL STUDENTS, AS WELL AS VISITORS, TO THE SIMULATION LAB

# 94%

OF INCOMING WHIDDON COLLEGE OF MEDICINE STUDENTS ARE FROM ALABAMA



**THE USA WAY** is being passionate about our role in teaching, research and service — three elements of a single mission with a common theme: to be the best we can be in all that we do.

# Discovery and Innovation

**RESEARCH AT SOUTH IS** rooted in purpose. With more than \$70 million in expenditures in fiscal 2024, we're investing in both generating new knowledge and finding community-focused solutions. Leadership is shaping a strategic initiative to guide research efforts for years to come. It will be fueled by collaboration and a drive to discover, with results that help people and industries move ahead.

# New Research VP Eyes Opportunity

DR. ALLEN PARRISH BEGINS THE GROUNDWORK FOR A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR RESEARCH AT SOUTH

Dr. Allen Parrish became vice president of research and economic development at the University of South Alabama on April 1. He is organizing the Office of Research and Economic Development around a process to create a strategic plan that will inform research at South for the next several years.

"This is our chance to think about the long game," he said. "How are we going to structure ourselves going forward to best contribute to research in the United States and the world?"

That planning began the moment Parrish arrived at South. Office of Research and Economic Development staffers greeted him with an extensive briefing book about the office and the University. In late April, the office held a staff retreat to strategize about how to meet challenges ahead.

Parrish envisions a branded initiative that will lay out clear

goals and a pathway to achieving them. Such an initiative would fit with the University's objective of advancing toward achieving R1 status in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. That's the top tier of research institutions.

Discussions have begun across the University. In an email to faculty and staff acknowledging uncertainty surrounding research funding nationwide, Parrish said, "As more clarity emerges around funding landscapes and strategic growth opportunities, with your help, we will be preparing to position the research enterprise for significant progress. Please watch for announcements regarding town halls and other planning activities."

Parrish has extensive experience in research, economic development, computer sciences and university administration. Most recently, he was executive director of the Alabama Cyber Institute,

one of the University of Alabama's signature research institutes, and he has served as interim vice president of research at the University of Alabama. He was also a senior workforce development adviser for the Alabama Transportation Institute and a professor of computer science at the University of Alabama.

He has been associate vice president for research at Mississippi State University and a professor and chair of the Cyber Science Department at the U.S. Naval Academy.

In his email to South researchers, Parrish noted that research proposal submissions at the University were up more than 7% compared to the same time the previous year. "Our office is open for business," he said, "and South's research enterprise remains active and growing."

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**389**  
EXTERNAL AWARDS  
TOTALING  
\$114 MILLION

(Research data is from fiscal 2024.)

# South Expands Weather Network

A \$3 million award from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is helping to expand the South Alabama Mesonet, a ground-based automated weather monitoring system, across 20 counties in Alabama's Black Belt region, adding to the eight south Alabama counties previously covered.

Each monitoring station takes 24 different atmospheric and soil readings every minute. That can help the National Weather Service predict weather threats. Agriculture, aviation, energy and forestry organizations also find the data valuable.

The funding, secured by U.S. Sen. Katie Britt, R-Ala., will expand the South Alabama Mesonet system across more than a third of the state and connect areas previously covered only by satellite monitoring. Dr. Sytske Kimball, professor of meteorology and department chair, founded the Mesonet in 2004.



# RAISING SOUTH'S RESEARCH PROFILE

As part of its core mission, the University of South Alabama conducts research that addresses issues relevant to the Gulf Coast and the world. Here's a sampling of research awards, listed by principal investigator.

- Dr. Mikhail Alexeyev, associate professor of physiology and cell biology, \$999,996 from the National Science Foundation to develop "designer" mitochondria for potentially treating mitochondrial disease.
- Dr. Sean Powers, director of the Stokes School of Marine and Environmental Sciences, \$1,488,000 from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for optimizing social and environmental benefits of investment in coastal Alabama.
- Dr. Martin Frank, associate professor of physics, \$197,658 from the National Science Foundation for particle physics research, including visits to U.S. and European laboratories.
- Dr. Santanu Dasgupta, assistant professor of pathology and researcher at the USA Health

Mitchell Cancer Institute, \$423,500 from the National Institutes of Health to develop a blood test for triple-negative breast cancer.

- Dr. Thomas Rich, professor of pharmacology, \$476,440 from the National Science Foundation for a light sheet microscope, which can image fragile biological samples.
- Dr. Mark Gillespie, professor of pharmacology, \$605,678 from the National Institutes of Health for testing a new hypothesis about a common contributing factor in lung disease.
- Dr. Thiago Bruder, assistant professor of physiology and cell biology, \$1,045,238 from the National Institutes of Health for exploring the role of the protein progranulin in regulating blood pressure.
- Dr. Tuan Tran, assistant professor of biology, \$502,995 from the National Science Foundation for exploring the disease-resistance functions of plant cell structures called nanodomains, with undergraduate students helping with the research.

# PRESTIGIOUS PUBLICATION

The acceptance of an article for publication in the prestigious journal Nature highlighted a strong year for researchers at the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine and the USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute.

**Dr. Simon Grelet**, assistant professor of biochemistry and molecular biology at the College of Medicine and a researcher at the Mitchell Cancer Institute, led the Nature-published study. It revealed, he said, "that the nervous system actively drives cancer progression by conferring adaptive

advantages to tumor cells." That knowledge could point toward new cancer therapies.

Another groundbreaking study showed for the first time that DNA plays a direct and active role in the regulation of gene expression, challenging traditional views that proteins are the sole mediators of that process. Led by **Dr. Glen Borchert**, professor of pharmacology in the College of Medicine, the study was published in the journal Nucleic Acids Research.



## Beyond Research

Grants and other external funding administered by South's Office of Research and Economic Development support more than research. Included in the past year:

- \$3.2 million from the Alabama Department of Education for the College of Education and Professional Studies to support the Alabama Math, Science and Technology Initiative to improve math and science teaching.
- \$1.7 million from the Alabama Department of Public Health for South's Center for Disaster Healthcare Preparedness to help the state's nine regional healthcare coalitions prepare for emergency incidents.
- \$742,500 from the U.S. Department of Justice to expand South's sexual assault victim services program, HEART, and help develop a promising-practices guide to be used on other college campuses.
- \$700,000 from the Alabama Department of Public Health for the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program.
- \$586,108 in RESTORE Act funding for mapping, modeling and monitoring work on the City of Gulf Shores' Little Lagoon Restoration Project.

**515**

PROPOSAL SUBMISSIONS



## South Honors Researchers

The Office of Research and Economic Development honored five faculty members in October at the University's annual Technology and Research Showcase. Here are the honorees and their research topics:

- Dr. Todd McDonald, professor of computer science — cybersecurity.
- Dr. Alison Robertson, associate professor of marine sciences and senior marine scientist at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab — marine toxins.
- Dr. Troy Stevens, Lenoir Louise Locke chair of physiology and cell biology — COVID-19.
- Dr. Bret Webb, professor of civil, coastal and environmental engineering — coastal resilience.
- Dr. Shenghua Wu, associate professor of civil, coastal and environmental engineering — construction materials.

**16%**  
YEARLY INCREASE  
IN NUMBER OF  
EXTERNAL AWARDS

**10**  
PATENT  
FILINGS

## 500,000+ Citations

In October 2024, Dr. Joe Hair of the Mitchell College of Business reached a stunning, seldom-equalled research achievement: His business and marketing articles were cited for the half-millionth time.

Hair is distinguished professor of marketing and directs the college's Ph.D. program. He ranks first in the world among professors cited in marketing, multivariate data analysis and structural equation modeling. He's also a management consultant and textbook author.

He said he continues to teach graduate courses because that keeps him current in his field and gives him feedback that helps in updating his books: "Teaching and research go hand in hand."



**27**

INTERNAL AWARDS TOTALING  
\$223,123 BY OFFICE OF  
RESEARCH AND ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT



**THE USA WAY**

is being caregivers and healers who give hope to patients, providing world-class care from exceptional talents through the region's only academic health system. Being the biggest has never been the goal. Instead, we choose the path of being better — better every day than we were the day before.

1

CANCER INSTITUTE

2

STATES WITH USA HEALTH LOCATIONS

3

HOSPITALS

40+

CARE DELIVERY LOCATIONS

*Bed of Flowers, a sculpture featuring 120 pink-painted aluminum flowers on bronze stems, blossomed last fall in front of the Pediatric Emergency Center at USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital. San Francisco artist and Mobile native Gay Outlaw created the artwork. Arlene Mitchell, then the chair pro tem of the USA Board of Trustees, commissioned it.*

# Academic Healthcare

**THROUGH OPERATING USA HEALTH**, the largest public health system and leading academic medical system in the region, we know how much those we serve rely on us. We take to heart our mission to help people lead longer, better lives. And we're reaching people where they are — at more than 40 locations in Alabama and Mississippi. Our mission goes beyond treatment. We teach, discover and serve. Together, we're transforming medicine and lives along the Gulf Coast.

## FOX NAMED INTERIM CEO

Dr. Natalie Fox has been named interim chief executive officer at USA Health. Fox has held leadership positions since 2011, including serving as chief physician enterprise officer overseeing a network of more than 400 physicians, 300 advanced-practice providers and more than 300 residents and fellows who provide care throughout the region. She earned bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees in nursing from the University of South Alabama.

In 2025, she was named dean of the current Leadership Mobile class, underscoring her commitment to leadership

development and community engagement. She also serves as University President Jo Bonner's designee on the board of the Alabama School of Healthcare Sciences, a residential high school scheduled to open in Demopolis in 2026.

As interim CEO, Fox succeeds Owen Bailey, who announced his retirement in May after nearly 38 years in healthcare administration. He had been CEO of USA Health since 2016 and was a driving force behind the health system's growth from seven facilities in 2016 to more than 40 care-delivery sites in 2025.



**2** NEW DA VINCI XI ROBOTS FOR MINIMALLY INVASIVE SURGERY

**587,359**

CLINIC VISITS IN ONE YEAR

**10**

SOUTH ALABAMA HOSPITALS IN THE RURAL HEALTH COLLABORATIVE PARTNERING WITH USA HEALTH

## Providence Pioneers Cardiac Procedure

USA Health Providence Hospital is successfully using pulsed field ablation, a breakthrough technology recently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, to treat patients with atrial fibrillation.

The hospital pioneered the procedure in Mobile. "As the regional leader in cardiac care, it is critical that we provide the latest technology for those we are privileged to serve," said Rick Metzger, CEO of USA Health Providence.

Atrial fibrillation is an irregular heartbeat. If medication and other treatments don't work, doctors often use cardiac ablation (surgical removal) to destroy heart tissue that is disrupting the heartbeat. The electrical signals used in pulsed field ablation can be targeted more precisely than older ablation technologies that use heat or cold, reducing the risk of damaging healthy areas of the heart or nearby parts of the body.

## New MRI for Children's & Women's

A \$2.7 million upgrade to the USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital MRI suite will provide patients with a relaxing, more efficient experience and faster imaging.

The upgrade adds a second MRI machine, a Philips Ingenia Ambition X unit. It scans much more rapidly and quietly than older models and soothes anxious patients with calm lighting and videos to watch during the scan.

MRI machines use helium, which is scarce and expensive, to cool their superconducting magnets. The new Children's & Women's scanner uses less than 1% of the helium that typical machines need and seals it to prevent costly leaks.

Thanks to a \$1.2 million donation from the University of South Alabama Foundation, the project included a remodeling of the MRI suite to make it feel more welcoming and peaceful for patients and improve workflow for staff. A congressionally directed \$1.5 million grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration and Department of Health and Human Services paid for the machine itself.



## Clinics on Wheels

USA Health, in collaboration with 10 rural hospitals in southwest Alabama, is outfitting three vans as mobile clinics to expand access to healthcare in more remote areas. USA Health was awarded a \$1.5 million grant from the state to purchase and maintain the vans for rural telehealth initiatives.

The vehicles, equipped with

medical equipment and audio and video capabilities, will offer clinical and virtual care along with community outreach. The project is designed to help rural healthcare providers and hospitals broaden their reach to residents they serve and provide specialty services not otherwise available in rural areas.

**900**

NEARLY 900 EMPLOYEES CALLED USA HEALTH HOME SWEET HOME FOR 51 HOURS STRAIGHT DURING HISTORIC JANUARY SNOWSTORM; 26 BABIES BORN



### USA Health Makes 'Best for New Grads' List

Forbes magazine has recognized USA Health as one of America's Best Employers for New Grads. USA Health was the highest-ranking Alabama employer on the 2025 list at No. 160 out of 500 companies, and the only one in the Mobile area.

The list derives from surveys of more than 100,000 young professionals at U.S. companies with at least 1,000 employees. Respondents rated not only their own employers but also previous employers and companies they knew through their industries or the experiences of family members and friends.

USA Health in 2024 announced an expanded focus on employee culture and experience, creating a new department aimed at making the company a place to grow, lead and make an impact. Company benefits include leadership development, tuition assistance and mentorship programs.

### Healing the Community Through Initiatives to Reduce Violence

The USA Health Center for Healthy Communities received a \$1 million grant from the State of Alabama to launch a public health initiative aimed at reducing gun violence among Mobile County youths. And the City of Mobile provided the center with \$750,000 to fund a Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Program at USA Health University Hospital.

The gun violence initiative will focus on court-involved and high-risk youths, using an evidence-based approach that treats violence like a preventable

disease. "We know that there are root causes that increase the risk of violence, just like with chronic diseases such as diabetes or hypertension," said Center for Healthy Communities Director Dr. Ashley Williams Hogue, a USA Health trauma surgeon and an assistant professor of surgery at the Whiddon College of Medicine.

The hospital-based intervention program engages with victims of violent crimes as they're being treated. It connects them and their families to community-based support services.

### FAST RELIEF FOR KIDNEY STONES

The Southeast is known as the kidney stone belt. Studies indicate that the prevalence of kidney stones is related to the region's high temperatures, plentiful precipitation and rich diets.

Because kidney stones can cause excruciating pain, USA Health University Hospital has opened an around-the-clock Kidney Stone Center. It provides consultations within 24 hours, rapid diagnostic imaging, minimally invasive procedures for faster recovery and medical management to prevent recurrence.

"Our goal is to fast-track treatment for patients suffering from a kidney stone," said Dr. Christopher Keel, a urologist at USA Health and chair of the Department of Urology at the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine. "That's why we are available 24/7 with immediate access to imaging and care."

1,200

PEDIATRIC PATIENTS YEARLY CONTINUE THEIR EDUCATION THROUGH 35 YEAR OLD

CLASSACT PROGRAM

12

TEENS COMPLETED

PROJECT INSPIRE,

AN EDUCATION AND MENTORSHIP PROGRAM FOR AT RISK YOUTH

### ALS CLINIC IS FIRST IN REGION

In December, in keeping with its commitment to serve the people of the Gulf Coast — including those with rare diseases — USA Health opened its Kelly Butler ALS Center at the Strada Patient Care Center.

The ALS center's namesake, a former Alabama state finance director, had asked USA Health to help amyotrophic lateral sclerosis patients in the region. The progressive neurological disorder is also called Lou Gehrig's disease.

A patient's first visit to the multidisciplinary clinic takes four hours. It includes consultations with a nurse, a neurologist, a physical therapist, an occupational therapist, a speech-language

pathologist, a respiratory therapist, a social worker and a dietitian. The center's neurologists are faculty members at South's Whiddon College of Medicine.

Butler died of ALS less than a month before the center opened. At the opening ceremony, his wife, Beverly, played a recorded message from her husband: "The happiness that I have in my name being on this clinic is dwarfed by the joy that comes from knowing that people living with ALS in Mobile and surrounding areas will have access to the services provided here."



**THE  
USA  
WAY**

**THE USA WAY** is being fierce, like a Jaguar on the prowl, giving each play and every game our very best effort while representing the ideals of sportsmanship, character and honor. **THE USA WAY** is being humble, knowing that ours is a tradition steeped in decades, not centuries. Each person who came before has helped blaze the trail that we travel today, allowing us to build on the success of the past as we embrace the future.

**2,600+**

STUDENTS LIVING  
ON CAMPUS MOST EVER

# Campus and Community



**SOUTH IS A COMMUNITY.**  
We're also part of something bigger: a vibrant, opportunity-rich region of the Gulf Coast. We create a culture where care is felt in big and small ways. We bring resources into our communities, engaging with one another and learning together. We provide a point of pride as a home-grown institution with global reach. That's something to cheer about. Go Jags!

# A Home of Note

THE UNIVERSITY BROKE GROUND ON A \$10 MILLION HOME FOR THE JAGUAR MARCHING BAND; OTHER CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS ARE ALSO UNDERWAY

One of South's jauntiest community ambassadors and recruiting tools is getting a 25,000-square-foot, \$10 million home. In March, the Jaguar Marching Band performed at the groundbreaking ceremony for its new indoor-outdoor complex next to Hancock Whitney Stadium. Completion is scheduled for January 2026.

The complex will include rehearsal halls, dressing rooms, a music library, offices, storage space and a full-size, lighted practice field. Donations from the band, alumni and friends will supplement \$5.9 million in state funding and will allow the band to grow from 260 to more than 350 members. The band performs at football games and other campus events, and at parades and other occasions in Mobile and throughout the Gulf Coast region.

When students return for the fall semester this year, they'll enjoy updated new looks at the Student Center Food Court and the Marx Library Starbucks. The Fresh Food Co. dining hall and USA Bookstore got similar makeovers during the previous summer.

South's largest construction project, the \$230 million Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine building, began in May 2024 and is expected to continue through 2026.

Elsewhere on campus:

- The fast-growing Stokes School of Marine and Environmental Sciences moved into a 13,000-square-foot, \$8 million addition last summer, bringing its total space in the Education and Outreach Building to more than 32,000 square feet.
- Stanky Field, home of the Jaguars baseball team, got all-weather

artificial turf during the offseason to replace its grass surface, and the softball team's Jaguar Field saw its foul territory converted to artificial turf (retaining its dirt infield and grass outfield). The project cost \$2.9 million.

- Construction began in November on a new, \$15.6 million Central Energy Plant #3 and cooling tower to provide heating and cooling for the central campus loop and the new Whiddon College of Medicine building when it's completed. The plant should come online in January 2026.
- In August, construction crews are scheduled to finish a \$1.7 million pharmacy upgrade and addition at the Mitchell Cancer Institute-Fairhope.



**\$417**  
MILLION  
CONTRACT VALUE OF  
CAPITAL PROJECTS UNDERWAY,  
MAY 2024-MAY 2025

**168**  
CLASSES AND  
CULTURAL PROGRAMS  
BY UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARIES

# Jaguars for the Wins

With a Sun Belt Conference regular season men's basketball championship, a third winning football season in a row and a second straight football bowl victory, South Alabama sports teams gave students, alumni, community members and Jaguar fans everywhere a lot to cheer about.

Men's basketball Coach Richie Riley was named Sun Belt Coach of the Year for taking a team seeded 11th before the season to a 21-11 record and a tie for the conference title. First-year football Head Coach Major Applewhite led his team to a win over rival Troy University, snapping a six-game losing streak against the Trojans, and a 30-23 victory over Western Michigan in the IS4S Salute to Veterans Bowl.

Nine programs finished in the upper third of the conference or their division: men's basketball, football, men's cross country, men's golf, soccer, men's and women's tennis, men's indoor track and field, and volleyball. Two men's track and field athletes won their events at the Sun Belt Outdoor Championships: Reuben Booyesen in javelin and Kendal White in 400-meter hurdles.



**25-9** SOUTH ALABAMA'S  
WIN AGAINST TROY,  
OCT. 15, 2024

# USAPD UPGRADES PLANNED UNDER NEW LEADERSHIP

The University of South Alabama has secured \$5.5 million in state funding to support major infrastructure and equipment upgrades within the USA Police Department. These improvements will enhance the department's capacity to provide comprehensive public safety services across University and USA Health properties.

Chief Darren J. Baxley, a veteran law enforcement professional, assumed leadership of the department on June 10, 2024, bringing experience from his previous role at the University of Florida.

The USA Police Department is staffed by 27 sworn state law enforcement officers, each authorized by state legislation to enforce all applicable state and local laws. The department plays a critical role in ensuring safety

and security at the University's academic and healthcare facilities.

Planned investments include the acquisition of new police vehicles and other equipment along with facility upgrades and expansion to support the department's growing operational needs.



**17**  
NUMBER OF  
DIVISION I  
SPORTS

# SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTH

In its first year, the new Sustainability at South initiative has seen crews planting trees and working on projects to protect Three Mile Creek, which has its headwaters on campus. South named as its chief sustainability officer Dr. Steven Scyphers, an associate professor of marine and environmental sciences at the Stokes School of Marine and Environmental Sciences and director of the Center for Socio-Environmental Resiliency.

The sustainability committee organized its first campus Earth Day celebration and also gathered data to submit to the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education for tracking, assessment and accountability.

South addresses sustainability in its academic offerings as well. In 2024, the Stokes School added a Ph.D program in environment and society and a minor in environmental sciences, and split the bachelor's program in environmental and sustainability sciences into two concentrations, natural science and sustainability. South also offers a minor in sustainability.

The College of Engineering has established a new Interdisciplinary Center for Sustainable Engineering, led by Dr. Shenghua Wu, associate professor of civil, coastal and environmental engineering.

**5** FOOD TRUCKS ADD TO 16 OTHER DINING OPTIONS ON CAMPUS



**270+**

REGISTERED STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

**311,821**

VISITS TO THE STUDENT RECREATION CENTER



**45,029**

CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY SERVICE HOURS BY STUDENTS, FACULTY AND STAFF

## New Traditions in Housing

With enrollment growing and more than 2,600 students living on campus — the most in South's history — the University added a four-story, 560-bed residence hall by purchasing the Traditions at South apartment complex, across Old Shell Road from the Student Recreation Center and Stanky Field.

Apartments are furnished and have two, three or four one-person bedrooms, each with a private bathroom, plus a shared living room, full kitchen, washer and dryer. The complex includes reserved parking, a pool, a clubhouse and a computer room. JagTran buses transport students, and USAPD patrols the property.

Undergraduate (sophomore level and up) and graduate students are eligible for Traditions at South. Per-person semester rates are \$3,550-\$4,250. Meal plans are optional.

South began renovating the entire property, including apartments and common areas, in spring 2025.

## Winning at Giving

The University backs its commitment to serving its region with action. South Serves, the Office of Community Engagement's online volunteer portal for students, faculty and staff, facilitated 45,029 service hours this year by 2,902 students and 207 faculty or staff members.

That's a 23.8% increase in hours from 2023-24, with an economic value calculated at \$1.28 million. Fraternity and sorority members accounted for more than 27,000 of those hours.

Student-athletes also came up big. The men's basketball team not only tied for the Sun Belt Conference regular-season championship, but it also led all NCAA Division I men's basketball

programs in community service for 2024-25.

The women's basketball team and combined men's track and field/cross country teams finished second nationally in their respective sports. Football placed third, women's track and field/cross country fourth, softball fifth, women's tennis eighth and men's golf 10th.

Overall, Jaguar athletics finished 15th among the nation's 365 Division I institutions. In Helper Helper's Fall 2024 Service Challenge, which tracked community service hours and the percentage of student-athletes volunteering from September through December, the University placed third.

## Miss University of South Alabama Crowned

After a 13-year absence, the Miss University of South Alabama competition returned, with Maleigha Lewis selected as the 2024-25 Miss University of South Alabama. Her initiative, Happy Plate, focused on fighting the stigma around food insecurity and providing resources for healthier living. She received a \$5,000 scholarship. Sydnee Cantley, right, was first alternate, and Sarah Claire Hults was second alternate.





**THE USA WAY** is being fiscally prudent, not wasting what we have been given. A university built on a solid foundation is like the wise man's house built on rock.

**THE USA WAY** is about discovering the servant leader in each of us. Sometimes we are called to lead. Other times, we are meant to serve. No matter which, **THE USA WAY** is the North Star that we choose to follow.

11

CITIES WITH  
ALUMNI AND FRIENDS  
EVENTS SINCE JUNE 2024

# Advancement and Stewardship



**THE GRATIFYING SUPPORT SOUTH HAS RECEIVED** from our alumni and friends shows confidence that we act as good stewards of our resources. We take the long view, investing in scholarships, programs and equipment that improve lives through education, research and healthcare. We deliver on our promises and tell our story with pride. With new initiatives on the horizon, the Flagship of the Gulf Coast is charting a bold course into a bright future.



**\$45M** FISCAL 2024 FUNDRAISING GIFTS AND PLEDGES

## Medicine Building Gets \$5 Million Gift

FISCAL 2024 WAS ANOTHER RECORD YEAR FOR FUNDRAISING SUPPORTING THE UNIVERSITY AND USA HEALTH

Further evidence of the close ties between the University and the greater Gulf Coast community came when native Mobilian and local businessman Elliot B. Maisel committed \$5 million to help construct the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine building.

It was the biggest gift by an individual to the project. A large gathering space designed to encourage impromptu collaborations will be named the Maisel Family Forum. Maisel, Business Alabama magazine's 2024 CEO of the Year, is chairman and CEO of Gulf Distributing, a beverage distributor.

Construction continues on the \$230 million project, including a 295,000-square-foot building, with occupancy anticipated for spring 2027. It will include 54,000 square feet of classroom and office space, 92,000 square feet of research labs, a 16,500-square-foot anatomy lab suite, a 32,000-square-foot vivarium and a 4,400-square-foot storm shelter. The facility will allow the college to expand class size from a maximum of 80 students to 100, and eventually to 125.

The Maisel donation helped South to its third consecutive record fundraising year, with \$45.3 million in new gifts and commitments for fiscal year 2024. It was also the third straight year fundraising topped \$40 million. A total of 8,174 gifts and commitments came from 4,960 donors, 1,572 of them new donors. Other notable gifts include:

- An additional gift of \$2.65 million by Joe Shewmake, a 1970 math graduate of the University, brought the total for the Joe and Audrey Shewmake Endowed Scholarship to \$5 million. Shewmake then added more money to immediately activate scholarships in math and computing instead of leaving them as an estate gift so that he could meet the recipients and "witness these scholarships in action."
- A \$1 million estate gift to create the Barbara A. and Leonard C. Bush Endowed Scholarship Bachelor's of Nursing Fund and the Barbara A. and Leonard C. Bush Endowed Scholarship Master's of Nursing Fund. Barbara Bush earned a

bachelor's degree in 1990 and a master's in 1992, both in nursing from South, and eventually worked in hospital administration.

At USA Health, with the campaign for the Pediatric Emergency Center at Children's & Women's Hospital completed, the fundraising focus has shifted to supporting a new pediatric interventional radiology program at the hospital. Gifts will support the development of the interventional radiology lab and purchase of equipment. The 2025 farm-to-table event Local Goodness and its presenting sponsor, the USA Foundation, supported this initiative.

Other fundraising efforts underway focus on strategic priorities including student scholarships, the Stokes School of Marine and Environmental Sciences, the Jaguar Marching Band Complex, Jaguar Athletics and plans to construct a new College of Education and Professional Studies building at a more central location on campus.

University of South Alabama leadership and the USA National Alumni association hosted alumni and friends events at nearly a dozen cities since summer 2024: Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Pensacola, Florida; Biloxi, Mississippi; Atlanta; Houston; Washington; and, in Alabama, Montgomery, Birmingham and Huntsville. Ambassadors of the University continue to receive warm welcomes from those looking to strengthen their connection with South and its mission.



### Alumni and Friends Events

SINCE 2022

**\$750**

COST OF A LIFETIME  
USA ALUMNI  
ASSOCIATION  
MEMBERSHIP

**101,793**

ALUMNI AS OF SPRING  
2025 COMMENCEMENT



### Board Elects New Leadership

The University of South Alabama Board of Trustees elected new officers in June 2025 for three-year terms. They are:

- Katherine Alexis Atkins '97**  
*chair pro tempore*
- Lenus M. Perkins '91**  
*vice chair*
- William Ronald Graham '90**  
*secretary*



## Honoring Alumni, Friends

The University of South Alabama National Alumni Association honored several alumni and friends in March for their contributions and achievements at the 20th annual Distinguished Alumni & Service Awards. Recognized were:

- Lenus M. Perkins and Dr. Mike Wojciechowski, who each received the Distinguished Alumni Award.
- Dr. Carol Scott Cash, who received the Distinguished Service Award.

- Patsy A. Kennedy and Ray H. Kennedy, who received the V. Gordon Moulton Distinguished Service Award.
- Dr. Robert V. Barrow, who posthumously received the William J. "Happy" Fulford Inspirational Achievement Award.
- The J.L. Bedsole Foundation, which received the Community Partner Award.

# BRAND NEW BRANDING

Ready.  
South.  
Go.

Ready.  
South.  
Go.



**\$50M**

2024 STATE LEGISLATIVE FUNDING

What is a brand? Simply a distillation of what you are. So when the Office of Marketing and Communications undertook a brand refresh this year, it simply clarified what the University had demonstrated itself to be over its 60-plus years of existence:

**With a name that has become synonymous with excellence along the Gulf Coast, the University of South Alabama leads the way by taking deliberate action to engage, educate and advance.**

The office has redesigned recruitment materials, campus signage and other promotional materials and incorporated new brand language – such as “Ready. South. Go.” – into media efforts of all kinds: paid (e.g., advertising), owned (our website and social media, etc.) and earned (coverage by news media and other outside entities).

Last fall, Marketing and Communications partnered with Web Services to launch an initiative to improve our No. 1 marketing tool: our website. Teams reviewed website traffic data, met with our content management system provider regarding best practices in higher education, reviewed dozens of university websites and conducted town halls with stakeholders. A new homepage for the site is expected to debut by spring 2026.

The new branding was also featured in the fall 2024 edition of South Magazine, which received a 2025 Circle of Excellence Gold Award from the Council for Advancement and Support of Education.

## HOME & GARDEN SHOW

ANTIQUES · DESIGN · INSPIRED LIVING

### Beauty for the Home, and for a Good Cause

Designers, antiques dealers and others who help create beautiful living spaces will offer goods, services and inspiration at the inaugural Home & Garden Show, a Providence Foundation fundraising event that will debut March 19-22, 2026, at the Arthur R. Outlaw Mobile Convention Center in downtown Mobile.

Proceeds will go toward bringing ECMO (extracorporeal membrane oxygenation) advanced life support technology to Mobile for the first time, at USA Health Providence Hospital. “ECMO will provide critical life-saving support for USA Health and all patients in the Gulf Coast region facing severe heart and lung failure, giving them a second chance close to home when all other options have been exhausted,” said Janée Bonner, honorary chair for the show and the wife of University of South Alabama President Jo Bonner.

**41,398**

SUBSCRIBERS TO A NEW NEWSLETTER REACHING FAMILIES AND SUPPORTERS OF STUDENTS



### NEW FUND SUPPORTS STUDENT-ATHLETES

Keeping up with changes in NCAA rules, Jaguar Athletics has created the Loyal, Strong & Faithful Fund to maximize revenue-sharing with its student-athletes. The name comes from the lyrics of the school fight song, “South!”

Since 2021, college athletes have been allowed to accept money from third parties for name, image and likeness deals. Division I institutions such as South are permitted to share revenues directly, starting July 1, 2025. Total payments are capped at approximately \$20.5 million per school in 2025-26 and will increase each year.

“All Jaguar supporters are encouraged to support the fund, as it directly impacts our ability to maintain the level of excellence we all expect,” said Dr. Joel Erdmann, director of athletics.

Mobile native Coley Krieg directs the Loyal, Strong & Faithful Fund, which was launched in April. Donations to the fund are tax-deductible and will directly support Jaguar student-athletes. Gifts can be given to the general fund or a specific sport program, but not to specific student-athletes.



Former Speaker of the House and U.S. Rep. John Boehner, R-Ohio, was the guest speaker at the March meeting of the President's Cabinet. Students and supporters were invited to a conversation between Boehner and President Jo Bonner.

### Operations Streamlined

The University of South Alabama is one enterprise with two pillars – the University side with its campuses in west Mobile and Baldwin County, and USA Health with facilities across the Gulf Coast region.

Over the past year, USA's operations have begun to reflect that.

- Buck Kelley, chief facilities management officer, now oversees maintenance, facilities services (grounds and landscape, environmental services and transportation services), and engineering, design and construction on all campuses and properties.
- Kristen Roberts, South's chief financial officer, assumed the same role over USA Health.
- Human resources functions at USA Health, in addition to those on the campus side, now report to Peter Susman, chief administrative officer.

### LARCHE NAMED USA GENERAL COUNSEL

Spencer Larche, who served as associate counsel and interim general counsel for the University of South Alabama, was named general counsel in February.

Larche graduated summa cum laude from Spring Hill College with a double major in business and psychology. He received his Juris Doctor from Marquette University Law School, graduating magna cum laude, and a certificate in sports law from the National Sports Law Institute at Marquette.

Before coming to South, Larche was a partner at Johnstone Adams LLC in Mobile.



**138**

(AND COUNTING) DIFFERENT PRESIDENT BONNER SPIRIT BUTTON DESIGNS



Finally, **THE USA WAY** is being a member of Jag Nation, throwing our J's with confidence and pride for all to see. Our destiny was not predetermined. Achieving it will never be easy. But from our very first days, **THE USA WAY** has led us to be ambitious, determined and bold, moving onward and upward, as the Flagship of the Gulf Coast. Go Jags!

*A record 7.5 inches of snow fell in Mobile, piling up throughout the course of one memorable day, Jan. 21, and breaking a record set in 1895.*





UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA  
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

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