

# Neighborhood Revitalization Through Entrepreneurship Education: A “Small” Anchor Institution’s Strategy and Impact

Penelope J. Prenshaw, David H. Culpepper,  
Blakely F. Fender, and Paul S. Thomas

## Abstract

This study investigates the impacts of a small anchor institution, Millsaps College, on the revitalization of an inner-city, socioeconomically challenged community in Jackson, Mississippi. The motivation for this effort was both altruistic and academic: Both the desire to help an underserved community adjacent to campus, and the goal of providing students with valuable and meaningful entrepreneurial learning opportunities, compelled this work. The strategic approach was community centered, with a focus on partnerships to leverage creative assets for economic development. This work has yielded both quantitative and qualitative impacts, having supported improved physical characteristics in the neighborhood and business environment and elicited positive responses from the residents. This approach serves as a model for smaller anchor institutions to both foster creative entrepreneurship in their communities and provide a vehicle for students to gain valuable business experience.

*Keywords: entrepreneurship education, creative economy, anchor institution, underserved community, urban revitalization, higher education, business education*



**T**his study examines the impacts of entrepreneurial activity by the Millsaps College Else School of Management in its neighboring community, Midtown, in Jackson, Mississippi. The work is supported by Millsaps students, faculty, and community partners and focused primarily in the creative economy to support neighborhood revitalization and economic development in an urban community. Much has been written about anchor institutions’ role in economic development and urban revitalization (Ehlenz, 2018; Spirou, 2021; Stone & Stoker, 2015). However, few studies have focused on anchor strategies that promote entrepreneurship initiatives targeting residents and businesses in underserved communities (O’Brien et al., 2019; Wang, 2021). Similarly, much has been written about creative industries’ contribution to urban development (Florida, 2002). The creative economy en-

compasses economic activities related to the visual and performing arts, design, film, video and media, literary and publishing, culinary arts, and museums and heritage industries—which together leverage creativity and culture to generate economic value and community vitality (Mississippi Arts Commission, 2011). However, few studies have examined creative industries’ contribution to revitalization in socioeconomically challenged, urban communities (Wang et al., 2021). This study examines the replicable strategies of a small anchor institution—defined as a place-based college or university whose relative economic and social impact is significant within a smaller or less-resourced community—an area that has received less scholarly attention than strategies of large, urban anchor institutions (Dache & Catone, 2022; Spirou, 2021). Further, this study outlines the impacts of the small anchor strategy following a 10-

year investment in the community—addressing the need for empirical assessment of anchor strategy outcomes (Ehlenz, 2018).

This article will first provide the context for Millsaps College's work as an anchor institution by reviewing higher education's third mission, community development, as opposed to its teaching and research missions, and will then describe the role of an anchor institution's neighborhood revitalization. In describing the college's role in this work, we will then examine the entrepreneurial approach focused on creative industries to spur economic growth. We then detail this replicable example of an anchor institution's strategy to support neighborhood revitalization while providing experiential learning for students, utilizing project teams made up of faculty and students. Subsequently, a socioeconomic impact study is discussed, and the outcomes show positive, striking changes in the targeted community without the displacement that often comes with revitalization strategies. Finally, the article ends with a discussion and conclusion.

### **Context for Our Work: Higher Education's Third Mission in Civic and Economic Development**

For over two decades, institutions of higher education have been called upon to do more to contribute to the civic (social and communal) and economic development of their regional (or local) areas (Audretsch & Belitski, 2021; Chatterton & Goddard, 2000; Pugh et al., 2016). This expectation is sometimes referred to as the university's "third mission" along with teaching and research. It is not our intention to provide a history of higher education's third mission activities; however, a brief description is provided to give context for the unique case study that follows.

Early third mission efforts in higher education were primarily social and civic related; they were the domain of students and academic affairs focused on community outreach and service-learning (e.g., volunteering, mentoring). Beyond these efforts at community engagement, universities primarily promoted their role as major employers and purchasers in impacting the local economy (Netter Center for Community Partnerships, 2008; Sladek, 2017; Wittman, 2012). The next stage of community engagement by colleges and universities was applied research, driven primarily by

higher education's financial needs; in part because of shrinking state appropriations, colleges and universities began focusing on applied research with efforts to become more entrepreneurial. Also referred to as the triple-helix model of university-industry-government collaborations, especially in high tech, this model was the next path to economic development and wealth creation (Audretsch & Belitski, 2021; Nelles & Vorley, 2010; Schaeffer & Matt, 2016; Smith & Bagchi-Sen, 2012). This "academic entrepreneurship" approach to economic development was executed at two levels. First, external centers based primarily in science and technology departments supported business innovation, technology transfer, and commercialization—patenting, licensing, and spin-offs of research (Nelles & Vorley, 2010). Second, in campus-based business schools, internal entrepreneurship programs were developed with incubators to support student start-up ventures (Jones & Hegarty, 2011; Smith & Bagchi-Sen, 2012). What was increasingly disconnected from this entrepreneurial approach by the university was any direct involvement with the local economy. In fact, the more successful the knowledge transfer (i.e., academic output of the university) and the more globally oriented the university, the more disconnected the university became with its local economy (Fernández-Esquinas & Pinto, 2014). Certainly, the university's stronger reputation earned with these academic successes can increase enrollment, which in turn affects the local economy, but the university's motivation appeared to be primarily self-serving.

### **The Role of the College or University as an Anchor Institution**

Beyond these self-serving entrepreneurial efforts in higher education, some institutions of higher education have begun to take seriously their roles as anchor institutions in their communities. Anchor institutions are defined as having a large physical presence in a community, located next to an urban, often distressed neighborhood (Ehlenz, 2018). According to estimates, urban-serving institutions—which are frequently described as anchor institutions—represent approximately two thirds of all institutions of higher education in the United States (Why Public, n.d). Third mission activities among higher education anchors, particularly their economic development strategies, have focused on revitalization efforts

in neighboring communities. Early research on the role of urban universities as neighborhood anchors supporting revitalization efforts was case-based and mostly descriptive, with little empirical assessment of outcomes. See, for example, university efforts at the University of Pennsylvania (Rodin, 2005), Ohio’s public universities (Bromley & Kent, 2006; Sterrett, 2009), Portland State University (Bunnell & Lawson, 2006), and Wayne State University (Briller & Sankar, 2013). Among these anchor institutions, the revitalization investments in the adjacent neighborhoods primarily targeted the university community with new university facilities. Further, these anchor revitalization efforts were described as resulting from the campus communities’ engagement and/or partnerships, with little evidence of neighborhood residential involvement, input, or benefit. Broader initiatives like Johns Hopkins University’s support of the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses program aimed to bolster citywide economic development, but these efforts also excluded direct residential participation or neighborhood-based planning in their design (Hub Staff, 2017).

The literature on colleges and universities working in neighborhood revitalization has evolved over time from early ideas of thinking about neighborhoods adjacent to institutions of higher education, to understanding a “shared value” approach, to cultivating social entrepreneurship, to, finally, fostering creative economies.

### From Downtown to Neighborhoods

In their book *Urban Neighborhoods in a New Era: Revitalization Politics in the Postindustrial City*, Stone and Stoker (2015) identified university anchors as key players in urban revitalization and as more effective advocates for residents in the neighborhood than local officials. In their book, comprised of six case studies, five from the United States and one from Canada, Stone and Stoker described a promising shift in urban renewal policy from a singular focus on downtown and business areas to one that includes neighborhoods. However, tensions exist between residents and those “elite actors” (local government and business leaders) concerning what should be the focus of neighborhood revitalization efforts. Residents want priority given to services—for example, better schools and job training—rather than infrastructural improvements. These case studies proposed

that university anchors located next to economically challenged neighborhoods may be in a better position than “elite policy actors” to connect with the people in the neighborhood and effect neighborhood improvement. Higher education anchor institutions offer a potentially more successful path to urban renewal through their longer term presence and more open, flexible, and shared-value approach.

Efforts by anchor institutions to engage in neighboring communities must not only include residents but also must avoid displacement and gentrification. Research in this area must analyze the measurable impact of the work by anchor institutions. For example, Ehlenz (2016) evaluated the University of Pennsylvania’s revitalization efforts in neighboring University City. Employing census data (population, poverty, median household incomes, and residential vacancy and tenure), University City, relative to the larger West Philadelphia neighborhood, showed only modest improvement. Further, a subarea in the neighborhood that received significant investment, including access to enrollment in the Penn-sponsored public school, accounted for most of the positive changes, and in turn resulted in significant gentrification. Again, little detail was provided regarding the influence and involvement of residents in the revitalization process.

Further, research on the impact of anchor institutions on surrounding areas has begun to consider the development of conceptual frameworks to analyze anchor universities’ strategies and associated impacts on revitalization efforts. Fernández-Esquinas and Pinto (2014) detailed the potential contributions of universities to urban regeneration across four dimensions: physical infrastructure, human resources, economic development, and civic engagement. They made explicit the need to connect university third mission activities to the local community level, and, in so doing, incorporated the previously disconnected stream of research in urban studies.

### Shared Value Approach

Employing two contemporary frameworks describing a shared value approach to revitalization efforts, Ehlenz (2018) empirically assessed the revitalization strategies of 22 anchors. Ehlenz found a significant disconnect between what anchors should do and what they are doing. First, “local” was a

relative term, with few anchors identifying a specific neighborhood focus. The geographic target was typically much more regional. Second, there was little evidence of a shared value approach to socioeconomic initiatives, resulting in economic activities that were primarily focused on local hiring and procurement, policies that had been ongoing and not a response to community needs. Similarly, the social and civic engagement was more traditional community outreach and not part of an economic revitalization effort. Finally, what was most prevalent was the emphasis on physical revitalization and investment in commercial and residential development targeting the university population. All in all, these physical renewal strategies align with the research highlighting universities' place-based investments that lead to rising housing costs and gentrification (Ehlenz, 2016; Spirou, 2021). Ehlenz (2018) found that university-reported revitalization efforts have not resulted in mutually beneficial outcomes, but in results primarily motivated by anchor self-interest, not neighborhood concerns.

Recently higher education anchor institutions have attempted to merge urban revitalization efforts with academic entrepreneurialism to create innovation clusters to spur economic growth in adjacent neighborhoods while also achieving institutional growth. In his book *Anchoring Innovation Districts: The Entrepreneurial University and Urban Change*, Spirou (2021) investigated six universities' anchor strategies to drive urban economic development via the technology commercialization process. The six anchors were Georgia Institute of Technology, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, University of Pennsylvania, Arizona State, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, and University of West Florida. Among the six anchors, Tech Square at Georgia Tech and Kendall Square at MIT were the most advanced districts, moving beyond supporting faculty and student research, commercialization, and business creation to attracting corporate innovation centers and headquarters surrounded by retail and residential infrastructure. Also present, however, were significant housing affordability issues, displacement, and gentrification. Three others, Schuylkill Yards at Drexel, developed in partnership with the University of Pennsylvania, PHX Core at Arizona State, and the Chattanooga Innovation District at UT Chattanooga all saw progress with commercial and residential development to

support a developing innovation ecosystem, and all three had considerable displacement and gentrification in their adjacent neighborhoods. Efforts by the University of West Florida and their Innovation Institute in downtown Pensacola saw less of a negative impact on the community due to the smaller residential population of the downtown area. Overall, Spirou surmised, after his study of the six university anchor strategies, "economic development does not necessarily translate to community development" (p. 202). For broader discussion on the disconnect between economic development and economic inclusion, see also the New Growth Innovation Network (n.d.) and High Road Strategy Center (n.d.).

### Social Entrepreneurship

As evidenced above, universities' entrepreneurial efforts have been impactful for the university but often disconnected from, if not harmful to, the economy of the local community. Even anchor universities that focus on economic development near campuses have primarily advanced the interests of the university and not the local neighborhood. Furthermore, even as some revitalization impacts, like beautification, safety enhancement, and public infrastructure improvements, are important to residents and existing businesses, negative impacts such as displacement and gentrification have also resulted. What has been largely missing in all these local civic and economic development efforts by institutions of higher education has been a focus on entrepreneurial education targeting residents and businesses as entrepreneurs and owners. To date, only one case study, Morris et al. (2011), has detailed a university-based entrepreneurship program and its impact on a local challenged, inner-city neighborhood. Their approach focused on community-based entrepreneurship and multifaceted partnerships, with a goal of fostering 100 startups over 5 years. Program components included training programs, courses and consulting services, a micro-credit fund, an entrepreneur's association, a community board, an incubator facility, and a test kitchen. A number of quantitative outcome metrics were provided, including the number of students and faculty engaged, loans, workshops, attendees, new ventures, and new jobs. Interestingly, Morris et al. described the progress as complex and disjointed. Overall, the initiative supported the launch of 48 ventures; however,

these ventures were primarily businesses in competitive, low-growth markets. What was not evident, the authors concluded, was the development of entrepreneurial talent launching innovative startups.

More recently, Wang (2021) described university-based efforts to foster entrepreneurialism within their local “underserved communities” as nascent but encouraging. Wang’s study sampled 24 universities attending a national conference organized by the University of Washington that has been leading efforts to develop a network of entrepreneurial centers focused on local underserved communities. This network has since evolved into Ascend, a program in 15 cities to drive small business growth and job opportunities in underserved communities (GLY Partners, 2025). In Wang’s interviews with 18 entrepreneurship programs focusing on underserved neighborhoods, he found both direct and indirect impacts. These impacts, however, were primarily qualitative in nature and centered around three common themes. First, programs provide entrepreneurial training to build human capital and professional knowledge to grow women- and minority-owned business, delivered via classes, workshops, coaching, consulting services, and networking events. Second, these entrepreneurship programs promote economic development in disadvantaged neighborhoods, resulting in job creation and revenue generation. The author provided evidence from three universities detailing the number of jobs created and revenue generated. Third, these programs targeting underserved communities foster an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem, in particular social entrepreneurial efforts that strengthen the community.

### Creative Economies

The idea that a creative economy can be an important catalyst for economic development and urban renewal is not new. Richard Florida’s (2002) creative class theory of economic development argues that the key to economic development and urban revitalization is attracting the “creative class.” In his theory, urban success revolves around attracting creatives, such as artists, scientists, and architects. Florida argued that creative people are more tolerant, open, and inclusive, and in turn attract more people in creative-related occupations, which then powers economic growth in the area.

This creative economy revitalization model

has had successes; however, it does not necessarily target residents and businesses in the neighborhood but rather seeks to attract others from outside the neighborhood, which has resulted in displacement, gentrification, and socioeconomic inequality (Spirou, 2021; Wang, 2021). See, for example, the studies of Scranton (Rich, 2013), Knoxville (Markley & Sharma, 2016), Baltimore (Rich & Tsitsos, 2016), and Portland (Redaelli, 2018). More research is needed regarding creative entrepreneurship and, in particular, creative entrepreneurship targeting underserved communities (Chang & Wyszomirski, 2015; Wang, 2021; Wang et al., 2021; Welter et al., 2016). To our knowledge, only one study, Wang et al. (2021), has investigated an approach that focused on promoting creative entrepreneurship among local, underserved residents and businesses. We are aware of no university-based entrepreneurship programs promoting the creative economy to their local community to encourage economic growth and revitalization.

### A Small Anchor’s Strategy for Urban Growth: Millsaps College’s ELSEWORKS

Millsaps College, a small liberal arts college in Jackson, Mississippi, serves as an anchor institution in its urban community. The college’s entrepreneurship program, ELSEWORKS, was established in 2010 and demonstrates that a “small” anchor can foster economic growth in a challenged neighborhood adjacent to campus. The program is built on a community-centered model for urban renewal: It functions like a business consultancy where project teams (led by faculty, staff, and industry experts) guide student analysts in providing local entrepreneurs and organizations with a wide range of business services. In essence, Millsaps College, through ELSEWORKS, leverages academic resources to spur creative economy development in the nearby Midtown neighborhood while simultaneously providing experiential learning opportunities for students through real-world engagement.

### The ELSEWORKS Model and Mission

The mission of ELSEWORKS emphasizes student-led collaboration with resilient communities to foster economic impact and cultivate the entrepreneurial spirit in underserved neighborhoods. This mission highlights the dual focus on student development

and community impact. Recognizing the central role of students in achieving its mission, the program has defined clear student learning goals for participating “student analysts.” These learning objectives ensure that the educational outcomes for students align with the program’s community engagement strategy. Specifically, students participating in ELSEWORKS are expected to achieve the following:

- Develop entrepreneurial knowledge and practical business skills.
- Increase their confidence in successfully performing challenging, real-world business tasks.
- Gain an appreciation for the important role and function of entrepreneurs in society.

Together, the mission and learning goals underpin a model in which student learning goes hand-in-hand with community revitalization. Guided by this mission-driven approach, ELSEWORKS immerses students in hands-on consulting projects that both build their competencies and address genuine needs in the neighborhood’s economy.

### **A Community-Centered Shared Value Approach**

Building on its mission, the ELSEWORKS program adopts a community-centered shared value approach to neighborhood revitalization. Recent literature on anchor institutions emphasizes the need for strategies that create shared value—yielding socioeconomic benefits for the local community—rather than traditional “place-based” investments that primarily benefit the institution itself. As a small college with relatively limited resources, Millsaps designed ELSEWORKS to leverage what it does have, engaged faculty and talented students, in combination with the community’s own assets. This approach has allowed the program to positively impact both the surrounding Midtown community and the students involved, illustrating a mutually beneficial model of engagement.

Crucially, the ELSEWORKS strategy is grounded in partnership and responsiveness. The program has made a patient investment in building trustful relationships with community leaders and organizations, and it actively involves neighborhood stakeholders in identifying needs and shaping initiatives. Rather than imposing

a top-down plan, ELSEWORKS works with the community: Its efforts are intentionally directed by local input and aligned with the neighborhood’s vision for itself. Over time, this patient, collaborative approach has enabled the college to go beyond the typical anchor institution tactic of using its procurement or real-estate projects to spur growth. Instead, Millsaps’s focus has been on fostering creative entrepreneurship and grassroots urban growth in Midtown, driven by the community’s own creative economy and vision for renewal.

In practice, the program’s strategy can be summarized by three key tactics that operationalize the shared value approach:

1. Leverage the college’s key assets: Deploy faculty expertise and business-trained students to offer local businesses and entrepreneurs professional-quality consulting services (comparable to those of top firms). By acting as pro bono business consultants, the college teams provide support in areas such as business planning, financial forecasting, market research, and marketing strategy—services that small enterprises in the neighborhood might not otherwise afford.
2. Leverage the community’s creative assets: Identify and bolster the creative economy assets already present in the community. This means supporting local entrepreneurs, artists, and makers and helping transform their creativity into sustainable ventures. ELSEWORKS intentionally builds upon Midtown’s existing strengths (e.g., artisan businesses, cultural initiatives) to catalyze growth from within the neighborhood’s own talent base.
3. Engage in deep, sustained collaboration: Form long-term partnerships with key community organizations through sustained relationship-building with neighborhood stakeholders and leaders. Rather than one-off projects, ELSEWORKS commits to ongoing collaboration—meeting regularly with community partners, remaining present over years, and adapting to evolving needs. This deep engagement builds trust and local capacity, making the college a reliable partner in the neighborhood’s development.

One particularly impactful partnership illustrating this third tactic is the collaboration with Midtown Partners, Inc., the

nonprofit community advocacy organization for the Midtown neighborhood. From the early stages of ELSEWORKS, faculty and staff worked hand-in-hand with Midtown Partners on economic development and neighborhood revitalization efforts. A faculty member even serves on the Midtown Partners Board of Directors, ensuring close alignment and communication. This close alliance proved critical in enabling ELSEWORKS student teams and faculty to engage at the grassroots level—an engagement that would have been far more difficult to establish independently. Through Midtown Partners and similar partners (such as the local business association and neighborhood coalition), ELSEWORKS gained the community insight and trust needed to implement projects effectively on the ground. The result has been a stronger, more authentic campus–community partnership where both sides contribute and benefit: Local businesses receive high-quality consulting help, and students gain immersive experience and the reward of seeing their work fuel real community progress.

### **The Midtown Neighborhood**

Midtown is a majority Black, low-income neighborhood located just north of downtown Jackson, Mississippi, encompassing approximately 215 acres of residential, commercial, and light industrial space. It is home to the Midtown Arts District, a nascent artist community of welders, carpenters, painters, sculptors, glass artists, seamstresses, designers, and chefs. The neighborhood includes roughly 900 housing units, primarily single-family homes, and a population of more than 2,000 residents, 89% of whom are Black and 7% White. Like many older urban neighborhoods, Midtown has long faced challenges associated with blight, disinvestment, and population decline. However, committed businesses, residents, and partners have worked together to promote its revitalization. Leading these efforts is Midtown Partners, which was established in 1995 to advance Midtown's social and economic renewal. In 2010, Midtown Partners led a community-based planning process that produced the Midtown master plan, a comprehensive strategy addressing housing, economic development, health, safety, and sustainability. Developed collaboratively with residents, businesses, and stakeholders, the plan aimed to improve quality of life for Midtown residents

and highlighted business planning and entrepreneurship assistance as key priorities: 39% of surveyed residents expressed interest in starting or improving a business, and a 2011 survey found that 93% of existing businesses were interested in receiving assistance or training.

### **The Entrepreneurship Program**

The ELSEWORKS entrepreneurship program was launched in 2010 by a team of four faculty members from accounting, economics, management, and marketing, supported by a newly created staff position, the director of entrepreneurial development. Three of the authors of this article were not outside observers but rather among the founding faculty who conceived, developed, and led the ELSEWORKS program over the entire period described below. Our account of the four phases of the program is therefore drawn from our direct observations and involvement, rather than formal surveys or third-party data collection. This practitioner perspective provides an insider view of the model's evolution, outcomes, and challenges.

Also in 2010, the Mississippi Arts Commission (MAC) and the Mississippi Development Authority (MDA), recognizing the state's rich artistic and literary heritage, commissioned a study of Mississippi's creative economy. The study concluded that these distinctive creative assets could serve as a catalyst for job creation and economic growth across communities and aligned with the Mississippi Economic Council's Blueprint Mississippi, which called for leveraging the state's creative strengths for development. In response, the program's faculty, together with the executive director of Midtown Partners, proposed that Midtown serve as the first pilot site for implementing these recommendations, building on the neighborhood's long-standing ties to the arts and demonstrating a model of creative economy-driven revitalization. The proposal was accepted, and ELSEWORKS's focus was established: to foster growth in Midtown's creative economy. Funding was secured from the Robert M. Hearin Support Foundation, a Mississippi charitable trust dedicated to advancing the state's economic development through grants to higher education. Modest stipends were provided to faculty; however, most grant funding supported graduate scholarships and the director position to coordinate day-to-day work with student analysts.

Each summer, ELSEWORKS recruits student analysts through a rigorous process: Students apply and submit a letter of interest, and select candidates are invited for an interview. Ultimately, we typically select between 10 and 20 students to serve as analysts for the year. Nearly all ELSEWORKS student analysts have degrees in business-related fields, including economics, accounting, business administration, or an MBA, with only a few exceptions from fields such as communications. At the start of each semester, we poll our student analysts about their skills, strengths, and interests to inform project assignments. Students most often work on multiple projects simultaneously, allowing them to gain diverse, hands-on experience while contributing meaningfully to the program's initiatives.

### **Our Long-Term Commitment: The Four Phases of the ELSEWORKS–Midtown Partnership**

The following section highlights the essential work in each of the four phases of the program's evolving strategy in Midtown. For more detailed description of the work in the four phases of the Midtown Project, see the Appendix.

#### *Phase 1, 2012–2015*

In Phase 1 of our partnership, we focused on two main initiatives:

- Developing two creative business incubators to provide business assistance to new and existing businesses in Midtown. In addition to acquiring, renovating, and opening these centers, one 20,000 square feet and the other 11,000 square feet, the ELSEWORKS students developed a brand strategy for businesses to be included in these two spaces, “The Hatch” and “The Hangar.”
- Developing community gathering spaces as requested by residents in the Midtown neighborhood.

While this development was happening, the ELSEWORKS students were meeting with existing and potential businesses to support their entrepreneurial efforts, putting into practice what they had been learning in the Millsaps Else School classrooms. Equally important, the partnership between Midtown and Millsaps grew. For example, ELSEWORKS and Midtown Partners partnered in successfully recruiting Lucky Town

Brewing, Jackson's first microbrewery, to Midtown. Additionally, the faculty chair of ELSEWORKS joined the board of Midtown Partners.

#### *Phase 2, 2015–2018*

In Phase 2, many of the goals established in Phase 1 were operationalized:

- “The Hub Midtown,” which included the Hatch and the Hangar, became fully operational.
- A wave of businesses moved into these and other spaces, with 21 new businesses opening in Midtown. The Hatch was organically developing into a culinary incubator, with various food- and beverage-related businesses, while the Hangar had a range of creative entrepreneurs, including a video production company, an architectural salvage business, and a fashion designer.
- Grant funding was secured to further support ELSEWORKS consulting work.
- ELSEWORKS faculty and students began working with the Business Association of Midtown (BAM) to collaborate on its first business plan; two faculty members joined the BAM board.
- Planning for the community gathering spaces proceeded.
- Midtown opened the state's first K–12 community charter school, and ELSEWORKS offered an after-school E-Club (E for entrepreneurship) to fifth and sixth grade students. In collaboration with neighborhood artists, these students developed a comic book that featured a superhero drone, Midbot.
- The Else School Business Advantage Program (BAP), a 15-week business essentials certificate program (spearheaded by an ELSEWORKS faculty member), included five Midtown artists and eight participants from Midtown nonprofits.

#### *Phase 3, 2018–2021*

As work continued into Phase 3, several significant goals were met:

- A community gathering space,

- Coffee Prose, opened as a coffee shop and bookstore. The presence of Coffee Prose marked significant progress and brought about optimism for other Midtown businesses and residents.
- A second community gathering space, the Midtown Depot Art Park and Beer Garden, an outdoor venue, began with a soft opening, hosting events.
  - ELSEWORKS faculty and staff continued to work with Midtown businesses, including a cold drip coffee and tea company that successfully expanded its sales footprint to the East Coast, a video production company, and a security company operated by a Midtown resident.
  - Student analysts assisted Red Squared Productions, a tenant in the Hangar building, with developing a financial model and helped secure a loan for purchase of the building. This new owner was a resident of Midtown and continues to operate his business as well as provide incubator space to other businesses.
  - Three Midtown artists received full scholarships to the BAP, and 14 participants from nonprofits that provide services to the Midtown community received partial scholarships.

#### *Phase 4, 2021–2024*

Phase 4 has allowed for still further fulfillment of the ELSEWORKS and Midtown collaborative efforts, including the following:

- The video production company mentioned earlier grew into Mississippi’s first industry standard soundstage for film and television.
- A modular housing startup added to the existing businesses in the Hangar.
- Additional businesses moved into Midtown, including a coffee roaster and a proposed rum distillery.
- More traditional funding sources became available for Midtown businesses in light of the growth and increased stability of the neighborhood.

- The Midtown branding project concluded, with successful rebranding of the neighborhood and its businesses.
- Also during this phase, three Midtown artists received full scholarships to the BAP, and 14 participants from nonprofits that provide services to the Midtown community received partial scholarships.

#### **Impact Across Four Phases**

The program’s phased implementation provides clear evidence of the efficacy of its three key tactics. Across all four phases of the initiative (2012–2024), the college consistently leveraged its own key assets—namely, faculty expertise and student talent—to deliver extensive pro bono business support to Midtown. In each phase, faculty-led student teams served as consultants to local entrepreneurs and small businesses, providing high-quality services in business planning, market research, financial modeling, and marketing that these ventures would otherwise struggle to afford. This sustained infusion of the college’s resources is reflected in tangible outcomes: Over the decade, roughly 160 students gained direct experience as business analysts, and dozens of courses (seven graduate and 35 undergraduate classes) incorporated experiential projects assisting Midtown enterprises. Equally important, the phased initiatives leveraged the community’s creative assets at every step. The program deliberately nurtured Midtown’s existing talent and cultural strengths by establishing creative business incubators (the Hatch and the Hangar) that offered affordable space and mentorship to local makers and artists, supporting established creative enterprises (for example, helping an artisan glass studio expand its product line and facilitating the opening of the city’s first craft brewery in Midtown), and launching new community-driven ventures like a combined café and bookstore (Coffee Prose) and an arts-centered public space (the Midtown Depot Art Park and Beer Garden). By building on the neighborhood’s artistic and creative base throughout Phases 1–4, the program catalyzed homegrown entrepreneurship and grassroots urban growth, validating the strategy of spurring renewal from within the community’s own creative economy.

Furthermore, the four phases underscore the

pivotal role of engaging in deep, sustained collaboration—the third key tactic—in achieving these outcomes. From the outset, the college nurtured long-term partnerships with Midtown stakeholders and actively involved community leaders in decision making. This commitment to deep, sustained collaboration is evident throughout the phases: The entrepreneurship program worked together with Midtown Partners (the neighborhood’s lead advocacy organization, with a faculty member even serving on its board) and helped establish and support the Business Association of Midtown, ensuring local businesses had a continual voice and ally. Collaborative planning with residents shaped major projects (for instance, neighborhood listening sessions guided the design of the Midtown Depot concept after community members toured a similar successful space in another city), and the program cosponsored regular Beer and Business workshops for BAM members and even ran youth entrepreneurship clubs at the local charter school—all of which cemented trust and alignment between the college and the community. Over more than a decade, this patient, relationship-driven approach built significant local capacity and buy-in, allowing the program to adapt to Midtown’s evolving needs and to coordinate efforts with broader community initiatives (such as housing renovations that prevented displacement of residents during revitalization). By Phase 4, the college had become an integral, trusted partner in Midtown’s revitalization ecosystem rather than a transient contributor. In sum, the evidence from Phases 1–4 demonstrates that by leveraging institutional and community assets through sustained, collaborative engagement, the program realized a true shared value approach: The Midtown neighborhood experienced tangible socioeconomic gains—from new business launches and expansions to enriched cultural amenities—while the college advanced its educational mission, giving students immersive real-world learning experiences that fueled genuine community progress.

### **Measuring Midtown’s Progress**

The preceding section documents ELSEWORKS’s direct work with individual businesses and entrepreneurs in Midtown, highlighting our support of local enterprises and the number of students who gained valuable business experience through this work. In this section, we step back to present

broader statistics on the revitalization of the neighborhood itself. Although ELSEWORKS cannot claim sole credit for these improvements, we are confident that our long-term presence, partnerships, and interventions have played an influential role in catalyzing aspects of this progress.

Measuring socioeconomic development at the neighborhood scale presents unique challenges, as reliable data are often unavailable at such a granular level (Alghumgham, 2017; Trullén & Galletto, 2018). In their study of neighborhood quality, Cohen and Pettit (2019) identified key indicators, including resident demographics, housing conditions, property vacancy and blight, economic activity, and crime. For this study, we were fortunate that Midtown Partners had commissioned a comprehensive neighborhood analysis in 2010, resulting in a master plan that established a valuable baseline. That plan aimed to identify opportunities and challenges and recommend priority actions for revitalization, drawing on data from resident surveys, a building inventory, and the 2010 Decennial Census.

### **Data Sources and Collection**

For this study, ELSEWORKS collected new data on building conditions to enable direct comparison with the 2010 Midtown master plan. A resident survey was also conducted in 2022, allowing limited comparison with select findings from 2010. In addition, ELSEWORKS compared socioeconomic characteristics from the 2020 Decennial Census to those from 2010. Finally, ELSEWORKS conducted the first comprehensive survey of Midtown businesses. Although no comparable business survey was conducted in 2010, our survey provides a useful baseline for future tracking.

### **Building Conditions**

The 2010 Midtown master plan provided maps that identified the building conditions of all buildings in the neighborhood. This information was converted to a database using information from the Hinds County land roll. The land roll provided information on parcel number, address, listed owner, type of property (commercial, residents, warehouse, etc.), and appraised value. To replicate the building condition information in 2022, the Hinds County tax assessor land roll was used in conjunction with street-level videos. Using a phone camera mounted on a gimbal, videos were filmed

of every street in the neighborhood and included a voice-over for each address, with a description of the building condition.

Buildings in the 2010 master plan were classified as being in one of four categories: in standard or in good condition, in need of minor repair (i.e., cosmetic repairs), in need of major repair (i.e., structural damage or other major damage), or dilapidated or in severe condition. Beyond these labels, however, the 2010 master plan provided no guidance for classifying buildings. Thus, a local architect was consulted for the present study to provide additional description to each category. In addition, two other categories were used, “under construction” and “under renovation.” These descriptions are listed in Table 1, and each building in the database was categorized accordingly in 2022.

### Resident Survey

The resident survey was conducted in 2022 with data collected in two waves. First, a neighborhood event organized by Midtown Partners and ELSEWORKS was held in the summer and included free food and vendors to incentivize resident attendance. ELSEWORKS students asked residents to complete the survey both at this event and in a second wave, including door-to-door campaigning. Whereas the 2010 resident survey focused primarily on the attributes of housing units, the 2022 questionnaire focused primarily on resident sentiment about the neighborhood.

### Census Bureau Data

Statistics were collected from the 2020 Decennial Census for comparison to similar statistics in 2010. These statistics were collected using specific blocks that define the Midtown area, and information was gathered regarding Midtown’s population, households, and housing units.

### Business Survey

A survey of all businesses in Midtown was conducted during winter 2021 through spring 2022. Businesses were defined as all nonhouseholds in the neighborhood, including all for-profit businesses, not-for-profit businesses, and artists. Employing the business directory published by the Business Association of Midtown, efforts were made to contact all 81 establishments either by phone, email, or in person. In this initial contact, the purpose of the survey, as well as a raffle incentive, was described. Following this contact, the questionnaire was emailed, mailed, and/or delivered in person.

## Results

### Building Conditions

Table 2 compares building conditions from the 2010 master plan to those recorded in 2022, showing clear signs of improvement. The number of dilapidated parcels declined by 73% (from 192 to 52), largely reflecting the removal of blighted, substandard structures. Parcels needing major repairs fell by 66% (from 247 to 84), most of them

**Table 1. Building Condition Classification**

Classification	Description
Standard	Structures with no visible cosmetic issues, roofing damage, foundation damage, or obvious disrepair
Minor repair	Structures in need of only cosmetic repair and with no visible structural damage such as roofing or foundation issues
Major repair	Structures with obvious roofing damage or foundation issues or structures that appear to be in a general state of disrepair
Dilapidated	Structures that appear to be uninhabitable, such as structures with broken windows, boarded entryways, collapsed roofs, fire damage, or overtaken by vegetation
Under construction	Structures being demolished for a new structure or empty lots being newly developed
Under renovation	Structures under renovation

**Table 2. Building Condition Comparison**

Building condition	2010 (number)	2022 (number)	% change
Dilapidated	192	52	-73
Major repair	247	84	-66
Minor repair	212	245	+16
Standard	238	491	+106
Under construction	N/A	6	N/A
Under renovation	N/A	37	N/A

*Note.* In 2010, 889 parcels were identified in Midtown. The total number of parcels identified in 2022 was 915. The increase in number of parcels is the result of some lots being split into two.

**Table 3. Resident Survey Sentiment Analysis (Percent Responding)**

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Neighborhood	16.39	36.07	22.95	16.39	8.20
Sidewalks	15.00	31.67	23.33	23.33	6.67
Streets	6.56	18.03	21.31	18.03	36.07
Livingston Park <sup>a</sup>	9.84	19.67	44.26	13.11	13.11
Grocery stores <sup>a</sup>	14.75	37.70	27.87	13.11	6.56
“Things to do”	11.48	19.67	26.23	24.59	18.03
Safety	9.84	24.59	27.87	16.39	21.31

<sup>a</sup>Percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

residential properties, indicating significant investment in the neighborhood’s housing stock. Parcels requiring only minor repairs rose modestly by 16%, suggesting many structures are transitioning toward better condition. Notably, parcels in standard condition more than doubled, increasing by 106% (from 238 to 491). Collectively, these changes represent substantial progress in improving Midtown’s physical environment—a key indicator of revitalization.

### Resident Sentiment

As noted above, resident surveys were conducted in both 2010 and 2022. The 2010 survey focused primarily on household characteristics such as the number of bedrooms, bathrooms, and vehicles, whereas the 2022 survey emphasized resident sentiment about the neighborhood. As a result, this section

primarily presents findings from the 2022 survey, with limited comparisons to 2010 where relevant.

According to the 2020 Census, Midtown included 696 households. The 2022 resident survey received responses from 64 households, yielding an estimated 9.2% response rate. Among respondents, 76% were female and 95% identified as African American, with an average age of 60 (ranging from 22 to 97). Homeownership was reported by 61% of respondents, and 85% indicated plans to remain in Midtown over the next 3 years. Just over half (54%) were employed, and of those, 81% commuted to jobs outside Midtown, though typically within 15 miles.

The 2022 survey included questions about residents’ perceptions of Midtown, summarized in Table 3. Overall, 52% of respondents

reported being very satisfied or satisfied with the neighborhood, 23% were neutral, and 25% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Sidewalks received relatively positive ratings, with 47% satisfied or very satisfied, whereas streets drew more concern, with 54% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Perceptions of safety were mixed, with 38% expressing dissatisfaction. A majority (52%) were satisfied or very satisfied with the selection of local grocery stores, though interpretations of “local” varied—many respondents mentioned shopping at Corner Market, located just outside Midtown’s boundaries. On recreational opportunities, 26% were neutral and 43% were dissatisfied with the availability of “things to do” in Midtown. When asked for suggestions to improve the neighborhood, the top priorities cited were safety, crime reduction, street conditions, and beautification.

Many of the concerns expressed in 2022 also appeared in the 2010 resident survey, though the earlier survey collected responses through an open-ended question rather than a 5-point Likert scale. In 2010, when asked, “How would you like your neighborhood to be improved?” residents most frequently cited improved streets (24.8%), enhanced safety (22.8%), and more stores, parks, or community activities (24.8%).

### Demographic Trends

Table 4 presents Midtown neighborhood statistics from the 2010 and 2020 Decennial Census. Midtown’s population declined by 371 individuals (19.05%), a steeper drop than Jackson’s overall 12.01% decline during the same period (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Despite this decrease, the neighborhood’s demographic composition remained relatively stable: The Black or African American population declined from 93.74% to 88.52% (a reduction of approximately 430 individuals), while the White population increased from 5.08% to 7.42% (a gain of 18 individuals). There was also a slight increase in residents categorized as “other,” primarily reflecting growth in multiracial residents. Overall, these changes show that while Midtown experienced population loss, its racial composition remained largely unchanged.

Since 2010, there has been a very slight uptick in the percentage of the Midtown population that is female, from 50.56% in 2010 to 52.38% in 2020. Additionally, the neighborhood’s age distribution has shifted

slightly, with a lower percentage of individuals in 2020 who are under 21 (27.58%) relative to 2010 (32.80%). The number of residents in the 40- to 64-year-old age range increased by 1.33 percentage points, and there was a larger gain of 3.92 percentage points in the 65 and older category.

In terms of total households, the Census Bureau data indicates there were 26 fewer households in Midtown in 2020 than in 2010. Additionally, there were more 1-person households in 2020 (45.40%) compared to 2010 (37.53%), with corresponding decreases in households with two or more individuals (62.47% in 2010 and 54.60% in 2020). The number of housing units has increased slightly, with a drop of 5.05 percentage points in owner-occupied housing, a gain of 1.35 percentage points in rental-occupied housing, and an uptick of 3.71 percentage points in vacant housing.

### Business Sentiment

Of the 81 Midtown businesses, 30 unique businesses participated in the survey, for a response rate of 37.01%. The sample was comprised of the following types of businesses: 10 services, seven artistic, six manufacturing, six retail, four nonprofits, two churches, two restaurants, and two auto/car related. Because some respondents checked more than one category, the total summed to more than 30. The oldest business that responded to the survey was founded in 1909, with the newest founded in 2021. Thirteen percent were founded before 1950, and 63% indicated that their business was founded after 2000. Forty-three percent were founded in the last 10 years, indicating that Midtown has seen substantial development in its business environment.

Regarding property ownership, 57% of respondents indicated they owned their property, and 43% reported renting their space. Regarding business investments, 79% reported investments into property, plant, and equipment (PPE) since founding. The average investment in PPE was \$204,000, with the median investment at \$50,000. One business reported investments that were double the next-highest investment, upwardly skewing the average investment. However, a median investment of \$50,000 represents substantial investments into property, plant, and equipment, especially given the diverse mix of businesses in the neighborhood and that almost half rent space. Further, 69% reported undertak-

**Table 4. Population, Household, and Housing Unit Statistics**

Population	2010		2020	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	1,948	100.00	1,577	100.00
White	99	5.08	117	7.42
Black	1,826	93.74	1,396	88.52
Other	23	1.18	64	4.06
Male	963	49.44	751	47.62
Female	985	50.56	826	52.38
0–20 years	639	32.80	435	27.58
21–39 years	512	26.28	414	26.25
40–64 years	651	33.42	548	34.75
65 or older	146	7.49	180	11.41
<b>Households</b>				
Total	722	100.00	696	100.00
1 person	271	37.53	316	45.40
2 or more	451	62.47	380	54.60
Average family size	2.35		2.03	
<b>Housing units<sup>a</sup></b>				
Total	872	100.00	880	100.00
Owner occupied	270	30.96	228	25.91
Rental occupied	452	51.83	468	53.18
Vacant	150	17.20	184	20.91

<sup>a</sup>Includes apartments.

ing renovations since founding. The average renovation was \$103,000, whereas the median investment was \$75,000. These investments represent substantial improvements to the physical location and offerings of the businesses in Midtown. Also indicative of progress, respondents indicated increases in both full- and part-time labor, and one third of respondents thought they would outgrow their space in the next 3 years. Seventy-six percent of businesses reported revenue growth since establishment, as opposed to 24% reporting no revenue growth. Excluding nonprofits and churches, however, over 80% of businesses reported revenue growth since establishment. Of the businesses that reported no revenue growth, two of them were founded in the last year. Fifty-two percent of businesses reported

breakeven-level profits, 31% reported positive profit levels, and 17% reported negative profit levels. Excluding nonprofits and churches, however, the number of businesses reporting negative profit levels decreased to 13%. Several businesses reported that positive profit levels were negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Last, 79% of businesses reported that business was better than around the time of founding. The remaining businesses reported that business was “about the same” as the time of founding. No business reported that business was worse than around the time of founding.

Business sentiment analysis, reported in Table 5, indicated positive trends about the future direction of businesses and the

**Table 5. Business Survey Sentiment Analysis (Percent Responding)**

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
I am optimistic about the future of my business <sup>a</sup>	58.33	33.33	8.33	0.00	0.00
I am satisfied with the current business climate in Midtown <sup>a</sup>	29.17	25.00	37.50	8.33	0.00
Over the next 3 years, I am optimistic about the business climate in Midtown <sup>a</sup>	29.17	50.00	16.67	4.17	0.00
I am satisfied with the location of my business	34.48	41.38	17.24	3.45	3.45
My coworkers and I feel safe working in Midtown	13.79	41.38	27.59	17.24	0.00
I think my customers feel safe shopping in Midtown [if applicable]	3.85	11.54	57.69	15.38	11.45
Crime in the neighborhood has affected my business	3.45	27.59	31.03	20.69	17.24

<sup>a</sup>Percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

neighborhood. Fifty-eight percent strongly agreed, and 33% agreed that they were optimistic about the future of their business. Satisfaction with the current business climate in Midtown, however, received slightly lower ratings, with 54% either strongly agreeing or agreeing and 46% either neutral or disagreeing when asked, “Currently I am satisfied with the business climate in Midtown.” Regarding the future, nearly 80% of businesses indicated that they either strongly agreed or agreed when asked, “Over the next three years, I am optimistic about the business climate in Midtown.” Only one business signaled pessimism about the future of the business climate in Midtown. Perceptions were somewhat concerning related to safety and crime but were no surprise, given the crime issues Jackson has experienced, particularly during the pandemic. When asked whether coworkers felt safe working in Midtown, 55.17% either strongly agreed or agreed, yet 44.83% were

either neutral or disagreed. Concerns were even greater when asked about customer safety, with 58% neutral and 27% either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement “I think my customers feel safe shopping in Midtown.” Nearly a third of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that crime has affected their business. Yet another 31% were neutral, and 38% did not agree that crime had affected their business. The most common examples of crime given were break-ins and theft of equipment.

Finally, businesses were asked about neighborhood improvements and business needs. When asked, “Name three things you would like to be improved in Midtown,” 30% indicated roads and streets in Midtown, and 26% listed crime. The next most common response was more businesses in the neighborhood (19%), a stronger police presence (19%), and water and sewer improvements (15%). These responses mirror concerns with infrastructure issues at the city level.

Together, these findings reflect meaningful progress in Midtown over the past decade, consistent with the kinds of improvements our anchor strategy aimed at encouraging. Although many forces have shaped the neighborhood's trajectory, and ELSEWORKS does not claim sole credit, the results align with the goals of our three key tactics: leveraging the college's assets, supporting the community's creative strengths, and fostering sustained collaboration. Just as important, this analysis now establishes a baseline for tracking Midtown's future progress. Moving forward, ELSEWORKS's contribution will extend beyond direct engagement to include leading efforts to monitor and report on key indicators of neighborhood health. Revitalization depends not only on partnerships and action but also on knowing where things stand and how they are changing over time.

### Discussion

ELSEWORKS demonstrates a coherent model of entrepreneurship-driven community revitalization that holds promise for other institutions. This shared value model offers a potential blueprint for replication by other colleges and universities—especially smaller institutions—located near under-resourced neighborhoods. As outlined in the preceding Impact Across Four Phases section, the program achieved meaningful impact through three key best practices: (1) leveraging college assets, including faculty expertise and student talent, to deliver pro bono business services; (2) fostering entrepreneurship rooted in the neighborhood's existing creative economy; and (3) cultivating deep, sustained collaboration with community leaders and organizations.

The result of this multiphase approach has been measurable growth in Midtown's creative economy, including new businesses, business expansions, physical improvements to the neighborhood, and enhanced cultural amenities—all while avoiding displacement or significant demographic shifts. Local entrepreneurs and organizations in Midtown have gained business knowledge, resources, and momentum that might otherwise have been out of reach, contributing to gradual economic revitalization of the area. Simultaneously, Millsaps students have acquired invaluable hands-on experience, increased confidence, and a deeper understanding of social entrepreneurship—outcomes directly tied to the

program's learning goals. In essence, the college and community are creating shared value: The neighborhood experiences renewed economic activity and hope, and the institution fulfills its educational mission in a way that also advances the public good.

ELSEWORKS has offered a viable framework for replication; however, several lessons pointing to room for improvement have emerged. The program's organic evolution meant that measurement practices were not consistently rigorous during early phases. We lacked regular data collection intervals and did not measure student attitudes toward entrepreneurship in a pre-post design with a control group. We now seek to correct these critical shortcomings: The program is instituting annual monitoring protocols, as well as repeat resident and business surveys at 5-year intervals, and implementing a pre-post assessment of student learning outcomes. Together, these enhancements will strengthen the model's evaluability and provide a clearer framework for adaptation by other institutions.

In summary, the ELSEWORKS program at Millsaps College represents a "project with promise" in the realm of university-community engagement. It provides a viable and transferable model for how a small anchor institution can catalyze neighborhood revitalization through entrepreneurship education. By aligning its mission and student learning objectives with community-defined goals, and by employing strategic tactics grounded in collaboration and mutual benefit, the program charts a path that other institutions can adapt to their own settings. This case demonstrates that even with limited resources, an anchor institution can strategically deploy its human capital and knowledge to foster inclusive economic growth—offering lessons and inspiration for any college or university seeking to make a meaningful impact in its community.

### Limitations and Future Plans

This study acknowledges limitations related to data collection, specifically with the resident and business surveys. Regarding the resident survey, only 64 residents from a population of 696 (or 9.2%) responded. The small sample size limitation is further compounded by the fact that many of the residents responded to the survey at a neighborhood event rather than having been selected through random sampling techniques. Thus, any interpretation of the

findings must recognize that the resident survey was largely derived from a convenience sample. It is also important to note that the 2010 resident survey focused primarily on physical aspects of homes rather than sentiment related to the neighborhood. These differences in the instruments limit comparisons. Because no business survey was conducted in 2010, there is no comparison of business sentiment across the 10-year period. In the future, both the resident and business surveys will be conducted in 5-year increments and will include questions from the previous surveys.

Assessment of student impact was through participation in the entrepreneurship program, thus it was not possible to glean whether the program developed student skills or impacted student attitudes. Future plans include a pre- and postassessment of student attitudes toward entrepreneurship as well pre- and postassessment of the development of key skills, such as communication and collaboration.

### Conclusion

In partnership with residents, community stakeholders, business leaders, and industry experts, the Millsaps entrepreneurship program has provided an increasingly deep level of support to an increasingly wide number of projects—including the recruitment and cultivation of new businesses and entrepreneurs—all while shaping students as they acquire real-world business experience and learn how to impact their surrounding communities. A socioeconomic impact study documented positive changes to the Midtown community, including its physical attributes, business sentiment, and resident sentiment over the period of a decade. As one example, the number of assets in the

neighborhood, consisting of houses, businesses, and properties in habitable condition, increased by 74% over a 10-year time frame. Midtown is now experiencing business creation and improvement in the community’s housing stock—while avoiding displacement—with improvements occurring such that conventional investment is beginning to resurface.

In addition to positively impacting the community around it, the entrepreneurship program has also provided an experiential opportunity for its students to work with faculty, alumni, and other experts the way they might in a prestigious consultancy firm. Student analysts assist in the planning, development, implementation, and management of businesses as a part of a larger project to grow the creative economy in Jackson’s Midtown neighborhood. The students are intimately involved with and witness firsthand the successes and failures of businesses. In the process, students learn not only leadership, collaboration, and reasoning skills, but also entrepreneurial expertise, including the linkage between economic development and community engagement at a grassroots level. Because we believe in placing students in a position to have meaningful input into high-level decisions that have very real and potentially transformative impact, they learn to embrace diversity, risk, and challenges: In short, they learn how to be leaders. In conclusion, this shared value model utilized by a small anchor institution with limited resources has achieved, with its partners, significant socioeconomic outcomes for the adjacent local community. Further, this model not only achieves this socioeconomic impact, but positively impacts students as well.



### About the Authors

*Penelope J. Prenshaw is a professor of marketing in the Else School of Management at Millsaps College. Her teaching interests include marketing strategy, innovation, and entrepreneurship, with research interests focused on business education. She received her PhD in marketing from the University of Houston.*

*David H. Culpepper is a professor of accounting and entrepreneurship in the Else School of Management and chair of the ELSEWORKS entrepreneurship program at Millsaps College. His teaching focus is in entrepreneurship, and he has expertise in private equity evaluation, litigation support, and valuation of closely held businesses. Dr. Culpepper received his PhD in accounting from the University of Alabama.*

**Blakely F. Fender** is a professor of economics, the J. Armistead Brown Chair of Business Administration, and associate dean of the Else School of Management at Millsaps College. Her teaching and research areas include microeconomics, labor economics, and econometrics. She received her PhD in economics from the University of Texas.

**Paul S. Thomas** was the director of business analysts in the ELSEWORKS entrepreneurship program at Millsaps College. He received his bachelor's degree in economics and business administration from Millsaps College. He is currently pursuing his MBA from Columbia Business School.

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## Appendix: Detailed Narration of the Four Phases of the Midtown Project

The following is a detailed description of the four phases of the ELSEWORKS Midtown project.

### Phase 1, 2012–2015

The goals for “Building the Creative Economy in Midtown” focused on two central initiatives. First, attention was directed to the development of a creative business incubator and development center providing business assistance to new and existing businesses. Named the Hatch, this 11,000-square-foot warehouse, located within the heart of the Midtown Arts District, had been vacant and dilapidated but was acquired by Midtown Partners, which then renovated it for its current use. While business planning and renovations were ongoing for the Hatch, Midtown Partners acquired a second facility. Named the Hangar, this facility required only minor renovations and consisted of 20,000 square feet of warehouse space and 3,000 square feet of office space. The Hangar opened in 2013 and was soon fully occupied with eight budding businesses, all with access to consultation from ELSEWORKS. Tenants included a center for book and paper arts, along with a graphic designer, a community-engaged artist and writer, and even an entrepreneur who recycled shipping pallets into home furniture, to name a few.

As plans continued for the buildout of the Hatch, a significant amount of knowledge and experience was gained from operating the Hangar, including confirmation of demand, as it served as an important beta site. The buildout of the Hatch was phased in with a gallery space opening first in summer 2014. The gallery space was partially funded by a crowdfunding campaign, which gave students their first opportunity to raise funds in this manner.

As part of the business planning for these creative incubators, a branding strategy was developed that consisted of an umbrella brand, the Hub Midtown, to identify the cluster of creative businesses that included the two subbrands, the Hatch and the Hangar. Brand elements were chosen to be descriptive of both location and purpose. The colors were chosen to reflect the industrial history of the neighborhood. Similarly, the overall design, including style and font, supported an industrial appeal. The two slogans, “Where Creatives Connect”

and “Work, Share, Teach, Show and Live,” further reflected the mission of the Hub Midtown.

The second piece of Phase 1 was development of community gathering spaces. This need was supported by 80% of the residents during the master planning process. A feasibility study was completed and a building with potential identified, despite being vacant for many decades. A local chain of coffee shops and other similar businesses expressed interest; however, two concerns were voiced. One was the state of the adjacent buildings, which were dilapidated, mostly vacant, and in need of major repair. The second was access to Millsaps College, which was surrounded by fencing with no pedestrian or vehicle access from campus. Progress was made on both fronts. Midtown Partners and Gulf Coast Housing Corporation were awarded \$7 million in LIHTC (low-income housing tax credits) to fund renovations of 20 properties surrounding the potential location. Importantly, these LIHTC housing developments, along with the many new Habitat for Humanity houses, are income capped, which played a key role in avoiding displacement. In addition, plans for connecting the college’s western border and Midtown were incorporated into the college’s campus master plan.

Concurrent with the creative business incubator and community gathering space developments, various business assistance activities were implemented. First, a series of workshops was offered to residents and businesses, with participation totaling 58. Eight workshop participants continued engagement with one-on-one consulting with faculty and student analysts. Once the Hatch was completed, ELSEWORKS began holding office hours to provide business assistance, not only for incubator tenants, but for residents and existing businesses. In 2012, the Business Association of Midtown (BAM) was formed, and ELSEWORKS began working closely with its membership. Transitioning from workshops to quarterly presentations to community members, Beer and Business is sponsored by both ELSEWORKS and BAM. The membership is surveyed to identify topics of interest. These presentations are provided by local experts and include, for example, topics such as Taxes and Your Business; Licenses, Permits, and Zoning; and Finding Sources of Capital. Lastly, a 15-week certificate program offered by

Millsaps College’s business school, which teaches the essentials of business, provided nine Midtown artists full scholarships and nine other participants—from nonprofits that provide services to the Midtown community—partial scholarships.

Although the incubators were important for new startups, ELSEWORKS’s efforts also targeted existing creative businesses and attracted new developments. The oldest artistic business in Midtown, Pearl River Glass Studio, has been in existence since 1976, which preceded much of the decline and migration out of the community in the late 1980s and 1990s. The program assisted the owner and designer with business planning that resulted in a \$1 million expansion from boutique stained-glass windows to a wider range of consumer specialty glass products. Explained the owner,

My craft is a thousand years old, but when I needed to develop new methods to address market challenges, I turned to ELSEWORKS. The market was tough; there was not a lot of work. We had to survive, and we had to move forward. The business plan I had at the time was not going to do that. We had to think strategically; ELSEWORKS was helpful, including in fostering connections with local funders. They helped me move professionally and quickly through the planning process.

In terms of attracting new business, ELSEWORKS was actively involved in recruiting Lucky Town Brewing to Midtown. ELSEWORKS assisted Jackson’s first craft microbrewery with site selection, intern assistance, and securing bank financing. Additionally, the ELSEWORKS Entrepreneurial Investment Fund invested in Lucky Town.

In 2012, the faculty chair of ELSEWORKS joined the board of Midtown Partners, and in 2013, the director of entrepreneurial development joined the BAM board as vice president. In 2012, Millsaps College’s strategic plan prioritized programs that engage students in the broader Jackson community and invest resources in growing community partnerships. ELSEWORKS’s partnership with the Midtown community thus became an essential part of the college’s identity.

## Phase 2, 2015–2018

The Hub Midtown, composed of the two buildings the Hatch and the Hangar, offering affordable space, customized business consultation, opportunities for outreach, and exposure to creative entrepreneurs, became operational. In May 2015, the first tenant in the Hatch, a coffee and tea company, began operations. With funding having been renewed by the Hearin Foundation, the primary focus of Phase 2 was to increase tenant occupancy at the Hub Midtown and new startups in Midtown and to build community ownership and pride by supporting the development of gathering spaces. The number of graduate student scholarships was expanded, and an undergraduate creative economy internship program was started.

With full occupancy in the Hangar and a steady stream of inquiries about space in the Hatch, the creative economy in Midtown was growing. Plans for community gathering spaces were also moving forward. What began as a sketch by an analyst in the first cohort was gaining momentum; the concept was finalized for an art park, beer garden, outdoor retail, and music space known collectively as the Depot to be located next to Lucky Town Brewery. Members of the neighborhood association joined staff from Midtown Partners to tour a similar business in Memphis, Tennessee. Upon returning, the program conducted a listening session, which found significant support from the residents for such a facility in Midtown. With the rehabilitation of surrounding properties and movement on campus for better access to the Midtown community, a second initiative—composed of a coffee shop, used bookstore, and studio loft complex—was also progressing.

During this phase, faculty and analysts began working more closely with BAM. The program assisted BAM with producing its first business plan in 2016 and implementing that plan in 2017. Two faculty joined and continue to serve on the board. An analyst team created the first BAM business directory, listing all 67 artists, businesses, and nonprofits in the neighborhood. The team also revamped the BAM website, adding a “Featured BAM Member” section with analysts conducting the interviews for content. A student team continues to maintain the website, and ELSEWORKS continues to host Beer and Business sessions.

During this phase, and after many years of concerns and struggles with its K-12 education opportunities, the first community charter school in the state opened in Midtown. In spring 2016, and for the next 2 years, ELSEWORKS participated in the after-school programs of Midtown Public Charter School by offering an E-Club (E for entrepreneurship) to fifth- and sixth-grade students. In the first club, E-Club students, in addition to touring and meeting entrepreneurs from the neighborhood, developed a comic book that featured a superhero drone, Midbot. Students celebrated with a launch party at a Midtown business selling graphic novels, comics, and records. Two more E-Clubs were offered in 2017 and 2018, but these followed a more Shark Tank–like model, with student teams pitching their ideas to local celebrities.

ELSEWORKS contributed to a wave of business expansion in Midtown—both directly, supporting nine businesses housed in the Hub Midtown, and indirectly, with support for an additional 21 new businesses that opened in Midtown. Interestingly, whereas the Hangar had a range of creative entrepreneurs, including a video production company, an architectural salvage business, and a fashion designer, the Hatch was organically developing into a culinary incubator. Joining the coffee and tea company was a gourmet food delivery business, a fermented food and beverage business, and a specialty tea business. Attendance in the 15-week business essentials certificate program included five Midtown artists receiving full scholarships and eight participants from nonprofits that provide services to the Midtown community receiving partial scholarships.

### Phase 3, 2018–2021

Phase 3 of building Midtown’s creative economy centered on community gathering, and one project with this focus came to fruition. Coffee Prose, a coffee shop and used bookstore, opened in 2018 across the street from Millsaps College. A team of analysts researched the viability of and worked with community members in support of the launch of Coffee Prose and assisted with its ramp-up. The development and opening dovetailed with the college’s fundraising campaign in which proceeds totaled over \$20 million. This campaign served to reclaim the campus’s west-facing entrance as the primary entrance to the college and thereby open Millsaps’s symbolic front door

to the Midtown community, creating ease of access for pedestrian traffic to and from campus. The other major community gathering project was the Midtown Depot Art Park and Beer Garden. Having received the endorsement of the neighborhood, development and construction moved forward, with the Depot hosting soft events in 2021.

While significant effort was dedicated to the two new gathering places, work also included continued business assistance to existing and newly recruited Midtown businesses. Analysts worked with the owner of Red Squared Productions, a tenant in the Hub Midtown Hangar building, to develop a financial model that helped secure a loan for purchase of the building, as well as serving as a template for financing future buildout of the space. It is noteworthy that this new owner was also a resident of the community. Located in the Hub Midtown Hatch building, Mississippi Cold Drip Coffee & Tea Co. received support to expand to a larger space in the Hatch. Business analysts provided research that led to a supply chain management plan recommendation. As a result, Cold Drip expanded sales into Louisiana, as well as the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida. One undergraduate student served as an intern with the company, continued working while pursuing his MBA, and became a partner in the business upon graduation. Two more businesses in the Hatch, the gourmet food delivery business and a new tenant, a baker, were both provided with digital marketing plans, including video production and website development.

On the nonprofit side, analysts assisted the owner of Pearl River Glass Studio in executing his vision of an educational foundation centered around glass, clay, and the arts. These efforts included research to establish a 501(c)(3) organization and fundraising with the creation of a GoFundMe campaign. Perhaps the most meaningful project for the team was their role in establishing a new business in Midtown—Nearview Security. The owner grew up in Midtown and serves on the security staff at the College. The analyst team’s work resulted in a business plan and agreement for Nearview to provide a patrol and other security services in Midtown. When patrolling began, it soon became apparent that use of the owner’s personal car was not suitable. Analysts pivoted to the successful execution of a GoFundMe campaign to raise money for a patrol truck.

Throughout this phase, ELSEWORKS continued ongoing service to BAM, which included an updated digital and printed business directory. Support also continued for Beer and Business, with presentations from the City of Jackson’s Community Improvement Department, Community Bank on small business loans, and a local accountant talking about nonprofit status, to name a few. As with other colleges and universities, the pandemic caused Millsaps College to go remote after spring break in 2020, and project work went virtual. Although pivoted, project work was not significantly delayed. Campus reopened in fall 2020, and all projects were back up and moving forward, albeit with masks and physical distancing. During this phase, stakeholders in Midtown continued to participate in the 15-week business essentials certificate program. Three Midtown artists received full scholarships, and 14 participants from nonprofits that provide services to the Midtown community received partial scholarships.

#### **Phase 4, 2021–2024**

Helping to position the Hub Midtown as the state’s premier creative center, the Hangar’s former tenant, now owner, Red Squared Productions is developing Mississippi’s first industry standard soundstage for film and TV production. With growing demand for high-quality, affordable creative infrastructure, the Hangar will also offer equipment rentals, music, podcast and photography studios, and coworking offices. Analysts have researched and developed the business plan and associated pitch deck for investors and other stakeholders. A new Hangar tenant, Butterfly Dwellings, is a modular housing startup that has created a foldable, stackable, and shippable modular home that can be used for single-family homes or apartments and hotels. A project team worked with the owners to create an industry database for investors and clients, a pitch deck for the company, marketing videos, and naming and branding concepts.

The Hub Midtown expanded with the sale of a 10,000-square-foot building to Northshore Specialty Coffee. Located next to the Hatch, this building has been vacant and is now renovated and housing a coffee-roasting operation, linking with the culinary focus of its neighbor. A project team is helping with the next phase for this space, Jackson’s first craft rum distillery, named BRIX. In addition, ELSEWORKS is supporting

Northshore Specialty Coffee with the beta test on campus of a robotic coffee machine. The building that was purchased by Northshore Specialty Coffee was owned by Midtown Partners, who originally had plans to develop a nonprofit culinary center in the space, named Preserve. In fact, a project team was responsible for research and development of the business plan that, along with initial proformas and associated presentation material, secured a \$100,000 grant to be used as seed capital for leveraging other funding opportunities. Preserve has now pivoted to Farm 2 Community (F2C), which has a narrower mission to transform vacant lots into learning gardens and community farms across the Midtown neighborhood. And ELSEWORKS is on the front line participating in visioning charrettes and currently serving as point on development of the art park and skate garden piece of this F2C initiative.

The loss of Jackson’s first craft brewery, located in Midtown, was jolting for the newly opened Midtown Depot, which was next door. Excitement, however, is back with the F2C initiative. As noted above, ELSEWORKS is lead on the art park and skate garden development, which will be located two blocks from the Midtown Depot. This new development, a community space blending public art, recreation, and green design, will play well with the Depot—both spaces integrate art installations and green spaces, promote active lifestyles, and support creative expression. Lastly, a chief aim of Phase 4 is the development of a branding strategy for the Midtown neighborhood. This branding project kicked off when a graduate brand management class conducted a neighborhood audit that produced an initial round of brand concepts that were presented to members of the community. Feedback from this initial set of concepts is being assessed, with a final brand concept to be developed, along with brand elements including colors, style, and fonts. Once finalized, a brand concept will be presented to the Midtown community.

On campus, completion of a new west-facing gate and the location of a new Visual Arts Center at this new college entrance opens the door to our Midtown neighbors across the street—a clear operationalization of the college’s strategic plan. Now students can walk to Coffee Prose, and the Midtown Depot and Midtown residents can walk across the street to college events. A

project team continues to support Coffee Prose, having completed a competitive report that recommended a strategy shift. Recommendations being implemented include website redesign and increased digital presences, price increases, and, most significantly, a café featuring breakfast and lunch cuisine. During this phase in the 15-week business essentials certificate program, three Midtown artists received full scholarships, and 14 participants from nonprofits that provide services to the Midtown community received partial scholarships and completed the program.

