

FROSTBURG
STATE UNIVERSITY

From the Desk of the
President

A Message from Interim President Darlene Brannigan Smith, PhD



The Entrepreneurship and Innovation HUB at FSU

While many of you may have already seen the public announcement, we wanted to share this news directly with our campus community, because the excitement surrounding this initiative deserves to be felt here at home. And we want you to be a part of the continued momentum.

As you know, Frostburg State University is proud to serve as an anchor institution for our region and a catalyst for economic growth, workforce development and long-term community resilience across Western Maryland and the tri-state area. Our commitment extends beyond education; we are deeply invested in strengthening the economic vitality of the communities we serve.

Our region faces complex challenges that require coordinated, strategic solutions. We educate talented students, yet too many leave the area in search of opportunity. We have remarkable natural assets and entrepreneurial spirit but need stronger

infrastructure to transform ideas into thriving businesses. As industries evolve, we must prepare our workforce for emerging opportunities.

With that in mind, FSU has formed the **Entrepreneurship and Innovation HUB**. Through an integrated entrepreneurial ecosystem, the HUB will align academic expertise, applied research and industry partnerships to support entrepreneurs, small businesses and emerging industries—providing coordinated support from ideation to market expansion.

The 5 Pillars of the HUB

The HUB is organized around five interconnected pillars. Each is strong on its own, but together form a cohesive, end-to-end pipeline designed to reduce barriers to entrepreneurship and accelerate regional economic impact. These five pillars are outlined in greater detail below.

#1 The Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (CEI)

The **Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (CEI)**, formerly known as Summit Station, serves as the educational and experiential heart of the ecosystem. Through applied learning, interdisciplinary collaboration, mentorship and venture-building activities, the Center cultivates an entrepreneurial mindset among students, faculty and community partners. It prepares people not just to launch businesses, but to think creatively, act strategically and adapt in a rapidly changing economy.

The CEI is also proud to introduce the launch of the FSU Accelerator. The Accelerator is a unique, three-month “test flight” for FSU students and local entrepreneurs to help turn ideas into business startups across any industry.

Dr. Stacy Wassell is the Director of the CEI.



#2 The Western Region Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

The **Western Region Small Business Development Center (SBDC)** provides no-cost, confidential consulting and training to entrepreneurs and small businesses throughout Western Maryland. From business planning and

financial management to marketing and access to capital, the SBDC supports both startups and established firms—driving job creation and long-term economic impact across the region.

Jodi Broadwater leads the Western Region SBDC.

#3 The Frostburg Outdoor Recreation Economy Institute (FOREI)

The **Frostburg Outdoor Recreation Economy Institute (FOREI)** advances innovation in our region's defining strength. By integrating research, workforce training, education, and business support, FOREI helps communities activate natural assets sustainably -- strengthening quality of place while creating new economic opportunities.



Jeff Simcoe is the Director of FOREI.

#4 The Appalachian Innovation Institute (AI²)

The **Appalachian Innovation Institute**, funded by the National Science Foundation, serves as our centralized platform for use-inspired research in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, cybersecurity and advanced manufacturing. The Institute connects faculty expertise, student talent industry partners to solve real-world technical challenges and ensure our region is prepared for the industries of the future.

Dr. Pan, Dean Sudhir Singh and Sara Wilhelm oversee the AI².



#5 The Center for Product Design and Advanced Manufacturing (CPDAM)

The **Center for Product Design and Advanced Manufacturing** supports the critical transition from concept to commercialization. By

providing access to advanced design tools, prototyping capabilities, and manufacturing technologies—it lowers barriers to market entry, strengthens local supply chains, and grows regional manufacturing capacity.

Dr. Jamil Abdo leads the CPDAM.

Why Does This Matter to Our Region?

Together, these five pillars form an integrated system that allows entrepreneurs to move from idea development to education, business formation, product design, production, and growth—without leaving Western Maryland and the tri-state region. This approach accelerates economic diversification, supports job creation and retention, strengthens rural and underserved communities, and positions our region not just to compete—but to lead.

A Partnership-Driven Model

None of this work happens in isolation. Regions like ours succeed when universities, entrepreneurs, industry, policymakers and communities align around shared goals. We do not have the resources to duplicate efforts – but we can create synergy through constructive collaboration.

The Entrepreneurship and Innovation HUB at Frostburg State University is a partnership-driven model which is strengthened by academic collaborators, state partners, federal agencies and programs, regional economic development organizations, industry and private-sector partners and philanthropic and community-based funders.

Through collaboration comes expertise, investment, facilities, and policy alignment—and ensures that our work is grounded in regional needs and real opportunities.

In closing, the Entrepreneurship and Innovation HUB represents Frostburg State University's commitment to work alongside our partners to align education, research and economic development in service of a stronger, more resilient regional economy. This HUB is not a campus initiative, but rather is a regional asset - one step forward in building the ecosystem our region deserves.

With FSU pride,

Darlene Brannigan Smith, PhD
Interim President



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