

Pioneering Leadership in Entrepreneurship: Lessons from Harris-Stowe State University



“Serving as the Inaugural Executive Director of the CIE at Harris-Stowe State University, the Center Leader Academy Certification helped me develop new skills, connections, and confidence to take my leadership to the next level. It’s not just a program—it’s a community of powerhouse leaders that I am extremely proud to be a part of.”

*Kristy Daniels Jackson
Executive Director – Center of Innovation & Entrepreneurship
Harris-Stowe State University*

Background:

Kristy serves as the inaugural Executive Director of the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CIE) at Harris-Stowe State University. With no existing blueprint to guide her in this role, Kristy was eager to expand her leadership skills and connect with other center leaders through the Center Leader Academy. *“I know that strong leadership isn’t just about having a title—it’s about constantly growing, learning, and surrounding yourself with people who challenge and uplift you,”* Kristy says, explaining her motivation for joining the program.

Why Join the Program:

Kristy was drawn to the program because of her commitment to continuous growth and her mission to create more access for women and minority founders. *“I was seeking a program that allowed me to sharpen my skills, learn from other center leaders, and bring back strategies that would make a real difference for the team I lead and the entrepreneurs we serve.”* The opportunity to elevate her leadership style and bring new strategies to her center was key to her decision to participate.

Key Learnings:

Kristy gained invaluable insights from the program, ranging from creating key performance indicators (KPIs) to budgeting for program sustainability. *“One of the biggest takeaways for me was learning how to effectively track and measure impact—because it’s one thing to do great work, but it’s another to show the real results and long-term effects,”* she notes. In

addition to strategic planning and partnership building, Kristy learned about creating more inclusive entrepreneurial spaces. These insights have helped her drive impactful change at CIE.

Impact on Career:

The program had a transformative impact on Kristy's career, reinforcing her confidence in her leadership style and the vision she holds for CIE. *"This program reinforced my confidence in my leadership style and the vision I have for the work I do at CIE,"* she reflects. Kristy values the strategic partnerships she's developed even more now and remains grounded in her mission. The program also expanded her network, connecting her with center leaders worldwide. She was recently recognized as one of St. Louis' Top 100 Leaders to Know in Business, and the CLA credential has helped her stand out among her peers in the entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Looking Ahead:

Kristy recognizes the ongoing value of the relationships formed through the CLA. *"Being connected to a network like this is invaluable now and in the future—it's not just about what you learn in the sessions, but how you continue to grow and use these new skills over time."*

To anyone considering the program, Kristy offers this advice: *"Do it. No hesitation. If you're leading an entrepreneurship center for the first time, you need to be in spaces where people understand what you're navigating and can offer resources that help you lead with clarity and confidence. This program doesn't just give you tools—it gives you a community of people who want to see you win and hold you accountable."*

Standout Moment:

One of Kristy's standout moments was attending the GCEC national conference and meeting her cohort in person. *"I learned so much from the conference sessions, and hearing the other center leaders talk openly about their challenges reminded me that no matter how successful an entrepreneurship center looks from the outside, we all deal with similar struggles."*