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**Message from
Theresa M. Welbourne, PhD**

*Executive Director, Alabama
Entrepreneurship Institute and The
EDGE, Will and Maggie Brooke
Professor in Entrepreneurship*

The Spring semester for us is what we call competition season. We host three different competitions, one for UA students, another with UA faculty and staff, and the third is for our local community where we open this competition up to students from other universities and also to our non-UA community members. We are pleased to see that each competition has grown over the years, and we have some great successes to showcase from the work being done.

We cannot do this work without all the volunteers who help coach the entrepreneurs, judge, facilitate sessions, and then work with those who win. Our volunteers also spend a lot of time with the competitors who did not win and who come back for additional coaching and learning. I recently featured observations about our student teams in an Alabama Inno article titled "[Hope and Entrepreneurship](#)." Many of our winners in 2024 were teams that competed and did not win in prior years; we all applaud their tenacity and focus on moving their ideas forward.

Please take a look at the winners from two of our most recent competitions (see below), the Edward K. Aldag, Jr. Student Business Plan competition and The University of Alabama Faculty and Staff Innovation Pitch competition. Join us in congratulating them on their successes.

Sincerely,

Theresa M. Welbourne



EDWARD K. ALDAG, JR. STUDENT BUSINESS PLAN COMPETITION

About the Competition

This year's competition was hybrid with day one being virtual and day two in-person. Competitors uploaded a 10-minute video presentations of their business plans that judges reviewed prior to the competition. On day one, judges held 15-minute Q&A sessions with participants. Afterwards, judges deliberated as to which ideas were the best and should move on to the next round. On day two, teams presented in-person to a panel of judges.

OVER \$100,000 IN CASH AND OTHER PRIZES WON

2024 WINNERS

GRAND PRIZE WINNER

- **\$50,000 - NephsoI**
 - Olivia Bruno - Manderson Graduate School of Business
 - Sydney Ringold - Manderson Graduate School of Business



Others Awards in the Grand Prize Group

- **First Prize \$5,000 - Microtype Technologies**
 - Lukas Baltzer - College of Engineering
 - Andrew Jones - College of Engineering
- **Second Prize \$3,000 - TappedIn**
 - Lars Griffin - Culverhouse College of Business
 - Julian Woods - Culverhouse College of Business
- **Third Prize - \$2,000 - Panoptes**
 - Joseph Gourlay - College of Engineering
 - Gabrielle Mathis - College of Engineering
 - Victoria O'Tool - Culverhouse College of Business

Established Concept Group

- **First Prize \$5,000 - Crimson Clean**
 - Worth Hewitt - Culverhouse College of Business
 - Layla Khan Hickman - College of Communication and Information Sciences
 - Ruby Tilghman - College of Arts & Sciences
 - James White - College of Engineering

- **Second Prize \$3,000 - Pyne Camping**
 - Tommy Orchanian - Culverhouse College of Business
- **Third Prize - \$2,000 - Shan Latris**
 - Shannon Warren - College of Communication and Information Sciences

Best New Idea - Room 1

- **First Prize \$2,500 - Insight Indoors**
 - Zachary Gattrell - Culverhouse College of Business
- **Second Prize \$1,500 - Spottr**
 - Sam Barskiy - College of Engineering
 - Dexter Gard - College of Engineering
 - Noah Moyer - Culverhouse College of Business
 - Jesse Park - College of Engineering
 - Joscelyn Peterson - Manderson Graduate School of Business
- **Third Prize - \$1,000 - Red's Helpers**
 - Hannah Adams - College of Arts & Sciences
 - Aydan Graham - College of Arts & Sciences
 - Anna Beth Icke - College of Engineering

Best New Idea - Room 2

- **First Prize \$2,500 - QuikSand**
 - Nicholas Perera - Manderson Graduate School of Business
 - Grace Schneider - Manderson Graduate School of Business
- **Second Prize \$1,500 - Altitude Cheer**
 - Gary Gray - College of Human Environmental Sciences
 - Jay Kendrick - Culverhouse College of Business

- **Third Prize - \$1,000 - Neurovantage**

- Fatema Dhondia - College of Engineering + College of Arts & Sciences
- Mollie Isbell - College of Engineering
- Riley Marchand - College of Engineering
- Sydney Sachs - College of Engineering
- Tyler Theakston - College of Engineering

Alabama Power Foundation – Innovative Technology Award

- **First Prize \$5,000 - Microtype Technologies**

- Lukas Baltzer - College of Engineering
- Andrew Jones - College of Engineering

- **Second Prize \$3,000 - Nephso**

- Olivia Bruno - Manderson Graduate School of Business
- Sydney Ringold - Manderson Graduate School of Business

- **Third Prize - \$2,000 - GenHome Hub**

- Andres Aguilar - College of Engineering
- Sonam Lama - College of Engineering
- Deep Singh - Manderson Graduate School of Business
- Uyen Truong - Culverhouse College of Business

Best NASA Patent Award

- **First Prize \$3,000 - Neurovantage**

- Fatema Dhondia - College of Engineering + College of Arts & Sciences
- Mollie Isbell - College of Engineering
- Riley Marchand - College of Engineering
- Sydney Sachs - College of Engineering
- Tyler Theakston - College of Engineering

- **Second Prize \$2,000 - PressiFRID**

- Megan Costic - College of Engineering
- Andrew Grewette - College of Engineering

- Emily Peyton - College of Engineering
- Matthew Willits - College of Engineering

Additional Awards

- Best Teamwork \$500 - myPTjourney
- Best New Idea \$500 - BOOST
- Crowd Favorite \$500 - QuikSand
- Social Entrepreneurship \$500 - Passion Project



FACULTY & STAFF INNOVATION PITCH COMPETITION



About the Competition

The Faculty and Staff Innovation Pitch Competition offers the University of Alabama's faculty and staff the opportunity to win cash resources for an original business idea. competitors recorded a 3-minute pitch and then did a 15-minute question and answer session with the judges.

\$45,000 IN PRIZE MONEY

2024 WINNERS

Alabama Power Foundation – Innovative Technology Prize

- **GRAND PRIZE WINNER: \$15,000 – Novel Direct Air Capture**
 - Shahriar Amini - Associate Professor, College of Engineering



Culverhouse College of Business – Entrepreneurial Growth Business Award

- **\$10,000 – The Caregiver Connect App**
 - Nicole Ruggiano - Associate Dean of Research & Professor, School of Social Work

Office of Research and Economic Development Awards – \$10,000

- **First Prize: \$5,000 – A New Drug for Prolonged Sensory Selective Nerve Block**
 - Chao Zhao - Assistant Professor, College of Engineering
- **Second Prize: \$3,000 – Manufacturing of Perovskite Tandem Solar Cells**
 - Dawen Li - Professor, College of Engineering
- **Third Prize: \$2,000 – Smart Hand**
 - Hongsheng He - Associate Professor, College of Engineering

Division of Finance and Operations: Staff Innovation Pitch Awards – \$10,000

- **First Prize: \$5,000 – Hypogenica: Carbon-Negative CaCO_3**
 - Reilly Blackwell - Laboratory Technician & Research Support, College of Arts & Sciences
- **Second Prize: \$3,000 – Up & Under Rugby Academy**
 - Stefanie Buckner - Associate Director of Academic Development and Engagement, Culverhouse College of Business
- **Third Prize: \$2,000 – [LEADingWell](#)**
 - Demitrius Barksdale - Program Manager, Culverhouse College of Business

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The Alabama Entrepreneurship Institute is housed at **The EDGE**, Tuscaloosa's home for startups. The EDGE is a partnership between The University of Alabama, the West Alabama Chamber of Commerce, and the City of Tuscaloosa. Resources from all three groups come together to help grow a vibrant ecosystem that supports entrepreneurship, business growth, and personal enterprise. The Alabama Entrepreneurship Institute is a campus-wide initiative powering the programs that are offered at The EDGE.

