



University of Alabama student teams on path to start own businesses

By Staff report

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The team has a start-up company called SYNSkin, which has a patented synthetic skin material for use by the health care industry. The initial focus of SYNSkin is to use the product in diabetic pressure ulcer care.

Team members are Arnab Chanda, an aerospace engineering major from Noida, India; Kaitlyn Curry, a chemical and biological engineering major from Louisville, Kentucky; and Christian Callaway, a mechanical engineering major from Tybee Island, Georgia.

Food Drop, an application-based, grocery delivery company targeting college towns, won second. Its team members are Ethan Mergen, a finance and hospitality management major from Birmingham; Ryan Keelin, a finance major from Birmingham; Trey Byers, a finance major from Birmingham; and Jake Jackson, a mathematics and accounting major from Wildwood, Missouri.

Third place was won by BioGram, whose team presented a business proposal to develop a medical device for heart surgery by licensing NASA's panoramic refracting optic camera. Team members are Cory Efir, a mechanical engineering/STEM Path to the MBA student from Chapin, South Carolina; and Ginger Morgan, a neuroscience/STEM Path MBA student from Collierville, Tennessee.

"These students represent the next generation of entrepreneurs that will help create innovative jobs in Alabama," said a statement from Dr. J. Brian Gray, interim dean of the Culverhouse College of Commerce, which hosted the competition. "I am very proud of the high caliber entrepreneurial spirit we have here on campus. I look forward to seeing these students succeed in their business endeavors."

The winning teams were announced April 15 at the grand finale during AIME (Alabama Innovation and Mentoring of Entrepreneurs) Day on UA's campus.

Each team already had received \$2,000 to develop a prototype and specialty advising in developing their pitch, as a result of winning the preliminary round.

In winning the competition's final round, the teams received co-working space at The Edge, the city's downtown business incubator. They will receive specialized consulting in business development to assist in their entry in the Alabama Launchpad Competition, which is sponsored by the Economic Partnership of Alabama and awards seed money to bring winners' business concepts to development.

In the Aldag business plan competition, judges narrowed down the initial pool of submitted business plans for a preliminary round. That was followed by the final round of five pitches to a panel of seven judges that included entrepreneurs, representatives from government agencies and business professionals.