

# TULANE INNOVATION INSTITUTE

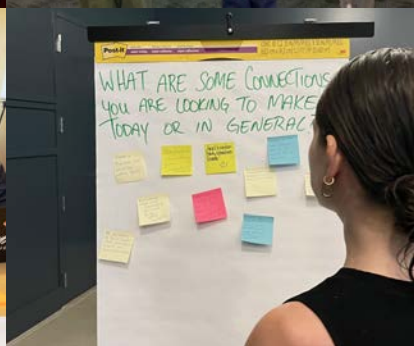
Established 2022

Impact  
Report **EY25**



Building a culture  
of innovation &  
entrepreneurship







# Startup for Startups

How it started. How it's going. Where we're headed!

FY23

## TIME TO LAUNCH!

In the summer of FY23, the doors to the Tulane Innovation Institute in downtown New Orleans opened under the Presidential leadership of Michael A. Fitts and a lead gift from **Robert L. Priddy**, with philanthropic support from the **Tulane Innovation & Entrepreneur (TIE) Council** (pg. 38). **Kimberly Gramm** (pg. 4) was named the inaugural David and Marion Mussafer Chief Innovation and Entrepreneurship Officer, and **our team** began to grow (pg. 5). **The Provost's Proof of Concept (PPOC) Fund** (pg. 18) and **Open Medical Innovation Challenge (OPEN MIC) Night** (pg. 16) were the first programs to launch.

FY24

## CULTURE BUILDING

In FY24, the newly established **Faculty Innovation Council** (pg. 11) and **Community Council** (pg. 37) were created to collaborate with our team to develop a comprehensive strategic plan aimed at building a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship within Tulane and the New Orleans community. The **Green Wave Innovation Network (GWIN)** (pg. 22) was established, and the year-long **Startup Team Mentoring** program launched the first cohort (pg. 20). At the **Tulane Research, Innovation, and Creativity Summit** (pg. 14), new awards were presented to recognize research with commercial and societal impact. This year also marked the first **\$50K Demo Day** (pg. 27).



**"It was an EPIC year!"**  
— Kimberly Gramm

FY25

## IGNITING INNOVATION

In FY25, innovation ignited a spark across New Orleans as our **Faculty engagement** (pg. 12) grew through events, grants, and licensing support. The first investment from **Tulane Ventures** (pg. 34) was announced at the beginning of FY25. New programs, including **Open Season** (pg. 17), the **Startup Clinic** (pg. 30), the **Young Entrepreneurs Academy** (pg. 31), and **Startup Sprint** (pg. 33), expanded entrepreneurial opportunities to the entire community. We energized and celebrated entrepreneurs during the debut of **Tulane Innovation Day** (pg. 25) at New Orleans Entrepreneur Week.

FY26

## READY, SET, SCALE...

In FY26, we plan to implement our new 'Strategy to Scale.' The team conducted extensive stakeholder interviews and focus groups with 200 individuals, including Entrepreneur Support Organizations (ESOs), faculty members, students, investors, and Tulane leadership. The results are in! More, Faster! We plan to expand and enhance our support by leveraging AI tools, utilizing government and industry partnerships, and deepening our efforts to build high-tech startup development through the launch of Founder Lab. **Join us and be a part of this exciting growth.**

# Letter from Kimberly Gramm

Dear friends,

**This year was an epic year of culture building, innovation building, and startup building!** The Tulane Innovation Institute, our startup for startups, began in 2022, under the leadership of President Michael A. Fitts, with a lead gift from Robert L. Priddy, and continues its growth while developing a reputation for being the go-to place for innovators and entrepreneurs.

Our year began with inspiration. The team was honored with the **2024 Outstanding Emerging Entrepreneurship Center Award** by the Global Consortium of Entrepreneurship Centers (GCEC). This award recognizes university-based entrepreneurship centers established within the last five years that demonstrate early success through clear innovation metrics, impact, and community engagement. This peer recognition demonstrates we are on the right path to support the success of local founders and startups. Our 22-member team designed and implemented 14 programs to support and build a strong pipeline of ideas to become partnership opportunities and investment-ready startups.

We also expanded the team to include a business development manager to market Tulane's technologies to industry partners, and a program director to lead the new Founder Lab, which will connect experienced startup CEOs with faculty researchers to accelerate technology commercialization. These additions to the team both deepen our capabilities and accelerate market access and impact.

As you read the FY25 Impact Report, it is undeniable how much our community accomplished. I am excited for you to see how these entrepreneurs are making their mark. Our Tulane leadership, faculty, students, Council, committees, and our partners are contributing to nurturing an environment that helps us all thrive.

I hope you enjoy our FY25 Impact Report, which highlights exciting accomplishments that took place this year. **We look forward to seeing you in FY26!**

With gratitude,



Kimberly Gramm, MBA, PhD  
David & Marion Mussafer Chief Innovation & Entrepreneurship Officer



"This national recognition distinguishes the Tulane Innovation Institute and its novel, groundbreaking approach to transforming major societal challenges into solutions through entrepreneurial-powered discovery. By integrating educational programs, startup funding initiatives, and community-focused efforts, the Institute has rapidly established itself as the source for transformative innovation throughout the Gulf South region and beyond."

— Tulane University President Michael A. Fitts



# Our winning team

**Kimberly Gramm**

David & Marion Mussafer  
Chief Innovation & Entrepreneurship Officer

**Amie Cannon**

Operations Manager and Executive Assistant to CEO

**Claiborne M. Christian**

Executive Director of Commercialization

**Jeanne Exnicios**

Marketing & Communications Director

**Sharon Goldsmith**

Executive Director of Innovation & Entrepreneurship Programs

**Matt Koenig**

Executive Director, Office of Intellectual Property Management

**Matthew Hales**

Entrepreneur-in-Residence

**Jalin Carter**

Community Program Manager

**Scott Clark**

Business Development Manager

**Jillian L. Delos Reyes**

Commercialization Program Director

**Aileen Dingus**

Venture Development Lab Program Director

**Jay England**

Innovation & Entrepreneurship Program Director

**Marco Melero**

Tulane Ventures Analyst

**Rani Brooks**

Alan Colowick Innovation Fellow

**Maryl Wright Ponds**

Innovation Fellow

## Office of Intellectual Property Management

**Casey Candebat**

Interim Executive Director, Industry Partnerships

**Collin Curry**

Administrative Secretary

**Samuel Jativa**

IP Licensing & Portfolio Management Officer

**Tara Richard**

IP Contract Officer

**John Scott**

Associate Director

**Demond P. Smith**

IP Contract Officer

**Nic Van Daalen**

Intellectual Property Coordinator



# FY25 NUMBERS

## ENTREPRENEURIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMS

185

IDEAS  
PROPOSED

1,091

PROGRAM  
PARTICIPANTS

\$417K

PITCH CONTEST &  
GRANT FUNDING  
AWARDED

37

STARTUPS  
SUPPORTED

## PATENTS & LICENSING SUPPORT

67

DISCLOSURES

22% INCREASE YOY

77

NEW PATENT  
APPLICATIONS FILED

20% INCREASE YOY

12

LICENSE & OPTION  
AGREEMENTS

100% INCREASE YOY

6

TULANE SPINOUTS  
CREATED

81% MORE THAN THE  
NATIONAL AVERAGE\*

\*COMPARED TO RESEARCH EXPENDITURE PEER GROUP | ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY TECHNOLOGY MANAGERS (AUTM) 2024

## — TULANE VENTURES —

5 PORTFOLIO INVESTMENTS

\$975K CAPITAL INVESTED

The Tulane Innovation Institute supports startups and early-stage technologies through programs offering mentorship, education, and funding. We help founders assess market potential, build sustainable businesses, and connect with capital and Tulane's network. We also guide faculty innovators through the IP process, including securing patents, exploring licensing opportunities, and launching spin-out companies.



President Michael A. Fitts  
supports Tulane Innovation Day!  
March 26, 2025





# 5 IN FY25 | FISCAL YEAR FUN TAKES

01 Our **team was recognized by the media**, including Kimberly Gramm, who was selected for the Times-Picayune ADORE A-List, City Business Women to Watch, and the Whitney Hancock Bank's "She Is" recognition campaign. Clay Christian was honored as one of Gambit's 40 under 40 recipients.



02 This year, we published the **Startup Guide**, a step-by-step roadmap to help Tulane innovators and entrepreneurs turn their ideas into partnership-ready technologies and startup opportunities. We also introduced the **Go Green License**—a streamlined agreement that enables University-affiliated startups to license a technology within thirty days.

03 Tulane Ventures and the Tulane Innovation Institute team recently traveled with several Tulane startup teams as part of the **'Innovations & Conversations'** series. The roadshow aimed to introduce founders and startups to Tulane alumni and highlight opportunities for involvement with the Green Wave Innovation Network. Stops included New York City, Chicago, and South Florida, where meaningful connections were made with Tulane alums. #RollWave



04 Kimberly Gramm was featured on Episodes 78 and 79 of the **Bio from the Bayou podcast** with host James Zanewicz, the Chief Strategy Officer at the School of Medicine. In these episodes, the duo discusses how Tulane is shaping the future of innovation and ways to get involved. Tune in at [biofromthebayou.com](http://biofromthebayou.com)



05 The Tulane Innovation Institute was invited to the **NFL Players Association Pitch Day during Super Bowl LIX**, where we brought a few of our startups to connect with athletes, investors, and industry leaders. The exclusive event combines sports, business, and investment, providing a platform for meaningful conversations and new opportunities. A highlight: meeting Saints Super Bowl Champion Malcolm Jenkins!





University partnerships make the  
Tulane Research, Innovation, and  
Creativity Summit a success!

April 9 & 10, 2025





# Faculty Treasure

Lisa Morici is building the next generation of “Rockstar” Scientists

In a sunlit corner of the Morici Lab in the Tulane University School of Medicine, a pink sticky note reads: “My job as a graduate student is to (1) learn something and (2) have fun doing good science. That’s it.” This mantra, shared by PhD student Allyson Hirsch, reflects the advice and philosophy of Lisa Morici, PhD, a microbiologist and immunologist whose influence extends far beyond her own research.

At Tulane, Morici is leading advances in microbiology and vaccine development while cultivating a lab culture built on trust, autonomy, and support. A self-described “hands-off” mentor, Morici refers to her students as “rockstars.” Her approach is to give them room to grow and be there when it matters. “I don’t have time to micromanage,” she says. “But I’m here when you need me.”

That trust builds independence and critical thinking—qualities that draw many PhD students and postdocs to Tulane specifically to work in her lab. It has also helped spark entrepreneurial ventures.

Rani Brooks, founder of BioPhoundry, and Kalen Hall, co-founder of Informuta, both launched their research careers under Morici’s guidance. Through her connections, Brooks was introduced to synthetic biology expert Nicholas Sandoval, and Hall to DNA specialist Zach Purcell. These collaborations laid the groundwork for their startups. “Lisa gave me space and support to start a project unrelated to her research,” said Brooks. “That encouragement made BioPhoundry possible.” He also recalled stories of Morici’s dedication during Hurricane Katrina, when she and her team retrieved lab notebooks to preserve vital research.

Morici’s impact is evident in her current research and in the scientific careers she has helped shape. Supported by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Department of Defense (DOD), her lab is developing a whooping cough vaccine using novel adjuvant technology, now attracting national attention and nearing Phase 1 clinical trials.

Together with her longtime colleague James McLachlan, Morici was recently honored with the **IP Innovator Award at Tulane’s 2024 Research, Scholarship, and Artistic Achievement Awards**. The recognition highlights their contributions to patentable, commercially promising technologies.

However, her true legacy lies in the way she mentors. “We’re not just coworkers; we’re friends and family,” said Hirsch. From celebrating milestones to navigating personal and academic challenges, Morici fosters a tight-knit, supportive lab environment.

She’s also known for opening doors professionally. “Lisa connects me with key people and always introduces me with enthusiasm,” Hirsch said. “Several of those conversations have led to informal job offers.”

Many former students stay in touch, continuing to seek her guidance years later. “I’ve attended their weddings and sent baby gifts,” Morici said. “These are lifelong connections.”

While her motto may be to “do good science,” Morici’s deeper brilliance lies in her ability to help others do the same. Through her work and mentorship, she is shaping a new generation of scientists ready to lead with confidence, creativity, and care.



Lisa Morici and Kimberly Gramm at an OPEN MIC Night event.



From left to right Erin Kuang, Allyson Hirsch, Lisa Morici, Madelyn Kist, and Sofia Santiago Torres.



Nicholas Sandoval, Rani Brooks and Lisa Morici.

My job as a graduate student:  
① learn something  
② have fun doing good science.  
That's it.



Tulane's Faculty Innovation Council consists of expert faculty members who are **passionate about innovation and entrepreneurship**. They represent each of Tulane University's nine schools. Members provide unique perspectives to guide innovation and commercialization at the Institute while acting as champions in their schools to support a culture of innovation.

## Faculty Innovation Council

**Susan Cheng**, Celia Scott Weatherhead School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine

**Sherif Ebrahim**, A. B. Freeman School of Business

**Monica Embers**, School of Medicine (TNPRC)

**Donald Gaver**, School of Science & Engineering

**Kimberly Gramm**, Tulane Innovation Institute (Co-Chair)

**Stefan Grant**, School of Medicine

**Tony Ye Hu**, School of Medicine (Co-Chair)

**Julia Lang**, Taylor Center

**Nicholas Mattei**, School of Science & Engineering

**Michelle Matter**, School of Medicine

**Vicki Mayer**, School of Liberal Arts

**Michael Moore**, School of Science & Engineering

**Michael Naguib**, School of Science & Engineering

**Kim O'Connor**, School of Science & Engineering

**Jay Rappaport**, School of Medicine (TNPRC)

**Chad Roy**, School of Medicine

**Kenneth Schwartz**, School of Architecture and Built Environment and Taylor Center

**Eric Ney Smith**, A. B. Freeman School of Business

**Tihara Richardson Sommers**, School of Professional Advancement

**Cecilia Suarez**, School of Social Work

**Juan Terre**, School of Medicine

**David Thompson**, A. B. Freeman School of Business

**Elizabeth Townsend Gard**, School of Law

Tulane Faculty Innovation Ambassadors help promote the Institute's mission, exposing students to innovation and entrepreneurship.

## Faculty Innovation Ambassadors

**Assaf Abdelghani**, Celia Scott Weatherhead School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine

**Thomas Beller**, School of Liberal Arts

**Gregory Bix**, School of Medicine

**Mahir Bilen Can**, School of Science & Engineering

**Stephanie Cheng**, A. B. Freeman School of Business

**Laura Duval**, School of Liberal Arts

**Charles R. Figley**, School of Social Work

**Tracy Fischer**, School of Medicine (TNPRC)

**Loren Gragert**, School of Medicine

**Cordula Roser Gray**, School of Architecture and Built Environment

**Vijay T. John**, School of Science & Engineering

**Jay Kolls**, School of Medicine

**Rob Lalka**, A. B. Freeman School of Business

**Noshir Pesika**, School of Science & Engineering

**Wayne F. Reed**, School of Science & Engineering

**William Rials**, School of Professional Advancement

**Harish Sujana**, A. B. Freeman School of Business

**Adarsh Vijay**, School of Medicine

**Arthur Wang**, School of Medicine

**Dawn Wesson**, Celia Scott Weatherhead School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine

**William Wimley**, School of Medicine

**Huanbin Xu**, School of Medicine

# Building a campus culture with entrepreneurial thinking

In partnership with Tulane's Center for Engaged Learning & Teaching (CELT), the Tulane Innovation Institute hosted the **Entrepreneur Faculty Development Course (Re)Design Summer Institute**. This event, held May 12 to 15, 2025, supported Tulane faculty in reimagining how entrepreneurship can be integrated into their curriculum.

Faculty members from fields including business, mathematics, biomedical engineering, theater arts, and linguistics explored practical ways to incorporate entrepreneurial thinking into their teaching. Through workshops, peer collaboration, and expert-led sessions, participants acquired new strategies to help their students develop entrepreneurial mindsets for their future careers.

The program was led by Eric Liguori, Professor and Associate Dean at Florida State University's Jim Moran College of Entrepreneurship, and Jessica Vattima, Director of the Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship at Rowan University. Guest speakers included Tim Williamson, founder of the Nieux Society; Evie Poitevent Sanders, Director of Innovation & Entrepreneurship at GNO Inc.; and Claire Smith, Founder & CEO of Hilight.

This experience will impact hundreds of Tulane students, as their professors now have the tools to prepare them with the skills and adaptability to lead in any field.

32

Energetic faculty members

4

Action-packed days



*"By integrating entrepreneurial frameworks into their courses, faculty can create dynamic learning environments and develop students' creative problem-solving skills. This approach helps our students succeed, whether they join established organizations or launch their own ventures."*  
— Kimberly Gramm





# Faculty Excellence

The Tulane Innovation Institute collaborated with the Tulane University Office of Research for the 2024 Research, Scholarship, and Artistic Achievement Awards on November 1 to honor three faculty members for their significant contributions to research and entrepreneurship.

Kimberly Gramm presented two awards emphasizing the Institute's dedication to fostering innovative solutions for global challenges. The IP Innovator Award went to Lisa Morici and James McLachlan for their work in vaccine development, including a biodefense vaccine in phase 1 clinical trials and the T-vant adjuvant technology targeting whooping cough. They are currently pursuing commercialization opportunities for their innovations.

Tony Hu received the Entrepreneurship Award for converting scientific discoveries into real-world applications. His internationally known research in diagnostics and public health, supported by organizations like the U.S. Department of Defense and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, highlights his commitment to societal service. In five years at Tulane, he has trained 82 fellows from 21 countries, published over 150 papers, and filed 25 patent applications, with 14 licensed.



Lisa Morici, Kimberly Gramm, and James McLachlan.



Tony Hu and Kimberly Gramm.

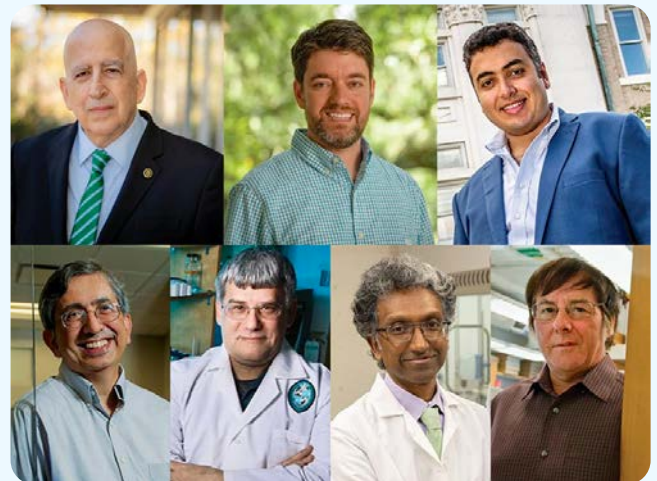
## 7 Researchers named Senior Members by the National Academy of Inventors (NAI)

Jay Rappaport, Matthew Escarra, and Michael Naguib (top, left to right); Vijay John, William Wimley, Janarthanan Jayawickramarajah, and Wayne Reed (bottom, left to right) were recognized as rising stars who promote innovation within their communities and institutions while educating and mentoring the next generation of inventors. NAI Senior Members are active faculty, scientists, and administrators with achievements in patents, licensing, and commercialization. They have developed technologies that have made, or aim to make, a significant impact on society's welfare.



*"These seven researchers embody our mission to transform groundbreaking discoveries into solutions that improve lives. Their work — spanning renewable energy, advanced materials, drug delivery, infectious disease treatment, and environmental remediation — holds immense potential for meaningful societal impact."*

— Tulane University President Michael A. Fitts



# Innovation Building at the 2025 Tulane Research Innovation and Creativity Summit

Supported by the  
**Robert L. Priddy  
Innovation Lab**



Brigham Walker, Assistant Professor, Celia Scott Weatherhead School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, presenting a lightning talk on telehealth utilization patterns among people with multiple chronic conditions.

594

Event  
Attendees

301

Researchers  
submitted to  
present  
posters

130

Posters  
demonstrated  
societal or  
commercial  
impact

Once home to vaudeville, musicals, and disco, the historic Civic Theater—built in 1906—became the 2025 stage for bold ideas, breakthrough research, and emerging technologies from Tulane University. Students, faculty, and staff from across Tulane's schools gathered here for the third *Tulane Research, Innovation, and Creativity Summit (TRICS)*, hosted by the Tulane Innovation Institute and the Office of Research on April 9-10, 2025.

The Tulane Innovation Institute's prizes recognized projects that demonstrate societal impact or commercial potential through technology development. The program highlights the importance of translating research into solutions for today's most urgent challenges.

For the first time, industry executives, State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI) venture fund leaders, and angel investors were invited to serve as judges, offering entrepreneurial ecosystem leaders a firsthand look at Tulane's growing innovation and commercialization efforts.

This year's winning projects addressed issues such as improving prenatal care, developing alternative antibiotic treatments, and protecting coastal regions from harmful algal blooms.



*"For us to move forward and accelerate research into technologies that help the people who need them most, we must continue connecting people, making investments, and providing mentorship to maximize impact."*  
— Kimberly Gramm.





# The 2025 Tulane Research, Innovation, and Creativity Summit (TRICS) poster award winners

## **Miller Dickerson, PhD Student | School of Science and Engineering**

Innovation Prize for Societal Impact | \$1,000

*"Development of a Portable Photoacoustic Device for Placental Imaging"*

Carolyn Bayer, Biomedical Functional Imaging Lab

## **Philip Kucher, MD/PhD Student | School of Medicine; School of Science and Engineering**

Innovation Prize for Societal Impact Honorable Mention | \$500

*"Massively Parallel Data Processing of Pathogenic Klebsiella Strains to Characterize Prophage Presence and Predict Infectivity"*

Advised by Lisa Morici and Nicholas Sandoval

## **Pedram Azizi-Hariri, Graduate Student | School of Science and Engineering**

Innovation Prize for Technology Development | \$1,000

*"Sprayable Foams with Algaecides and Flocculants for Harmful Algal Blooms Mitigation"*

Vijay John Lab

## **SAVE THE DATE!**

TRICS 2026

April 14-16

Tulane University  
Devlin Fieldhouse  
(Uptown)

Participating in events like TRICS strengthens communication and presentation skills essential for career success and opens doors to valuable networking opportunities with peers, faculty, and future collaborators. As the event expands, it is anticipated to draw industry leaders, investors, and innovators who are interested in supporting emerging research from Tulane University.

# Open MIC Nights

Supported by the  
**Robert L. Priddy  
Innovation Lab**



October 24, 2024 | April 9, 2025

**50+** Tulanians have taken the stage since the event launched in Spring '23

**55** BIG ideas were submitted in FY25 to compete for **20** live pitch spots

A record-setting **160** people attended the Spring'25 competition— the **5<sup>th</sup> edition** of this biannual event

*Open Medical Innovation Challenge (Open MIC) Nights* are presented by the Tulane Innovation Institute, in partnership with the Tulane School of Medicine John W. Deming Department of Medicine. These energetic events provide a platform for Tulane faculty, staff, students, PhD candidates, postdoctoral researchers, residents, fellows, and recent alumni to present innovative solutions to health and wellness challenges.

A panel of industry judges evaluates each pitch based on feasibility and potential impact, as a live audience cheers the competitors on. New this year, in addition to prize money and one-on-one mentorship to refine their ideas, participants received access to National Science Foundation (NSF) I-Corps programming. This series of customer discovery courses, in partnership with MIT, helps innovators evaluate and strengthen the commercial potential of their research or inventions.

Winners of OPEN MIC Night earn \$750 with the potential to receive up to \$5,750 total after completing the initial NSF I-Corps training program.

The Fall 2024 Open MIC event was held at The Shop at the CAC, followed by the Spring 2025 edition at the NOLA.com | Times-Picayune headquarters. The spring event was also organized in partnership with Startup NOLA NOW, a monthly meetup of startups, investors, and ecosystem leaders hosted by GNO Inc.

As one of the Institute's flagship programs, Open MIC Nights continue to showcase healthcare innovations emerging from the Tulane community.



Watch this video, and join us at the next Open MIC Night!

*An enormous shout-out to Nassir F. Marrouche, Director of the Tulane Research Innovation for Arrhythmia Discoveries (TRIAD), and co-founder of Open MIC Night, pictured left with Kimberly Gramm.*





# 1st Open Season event sparked ideas across campus

Supported by the  
**Robert L. Priddy Innovation Lab**



The Tulane Innovation Institute launched *Open Season*, a new pitch competition aimed at sparking creativity and entrepreneurship across the Tulane community. Following the success of four previous *Open Medical Innovation Challenge (OPEN MIC) Nights*, there was a clear opportunity to expand the competition's scope to welcome a wider range of ideas.

The event featured 10 finalists, representing multiple schools, including students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Each finalist had just three minutes to pitch their idea, followed by a Q&A with a panel of expert judges.

With sophomores pitching alongside tenured professors, *Open Season* captured the energy and ambition of Tulane's entrepreneurial spirit. Further, it expanded the Institute's growing slate of programs that support innovators at Tulane and throughout New Orleans.



*"Open Season marks an important step in our commitment to creating new ventures at Tulane University. Building on the success of Open MIC Night, we wanted a platform for all ideas at Tulane—regardless of field or interest—to inspire more entrepreneurs to be enthusiastic to “start” in New Orleans."*  
— Kimberly Gramm

**170**

Event attendees joined us  
at Oak & Ale in Uptown  
New Orleans

**28**

Creative Tulanians from  
across the university  
applied to pitch!

# The Provost's Proof of Concept fund

Accelerates discoveries to real-world solutions

Supported by the

**Robert L. Priddy Innovation Lab**

TULANE  
INNOVATION  
INSTITUTE

**PROVOST'S  
PROOF OF  
CONCEPT**

**FUND | \$50,000 GRANT**



***"Tulane was built to make the world a better place!"***

*— Provost Robin Forman, at the Fall announcement of the Provost's Proof of Concept (PPOC) Fund honorees.*

Since its founding in 1834 to confront urgent health crises like yellow fever and cholera in New Orleans, Tulane has remained committed to addressing the world's most pressing challenges.

That spirit continues today through initiatives like the Provost's Proof of Concept Fund, which helps Tulane innovators translate academic research into market-ready, real-world solutions.



Chandler Monk and Faculty Advisor Kevin Zvezdaryk.



Kimberly Gramm and Matthew Montemore.

## PPOC BY THE NUMBERS FY23-25

5

Award  
cycles

\$800K

Awards  
distributed

17

Researcher  
project awards

\$4M

Funding  
requests



# Projects Funded in FY25

The PPOC Fund has now completed five funding cycles and continues to support faculty, staff, and graduate students in developing technologies with clear commercial potential. This year's awardees span health, environment, data science, and engineering, showcasing the breadth of innovation at Tulane.

**Mahir Bilen Can | School of Science and Engineering**, enhanced error-correcting codes with new mathematical metrics to strengthen digital communication and data resilience.

**Margaret Mary Downey | School of Social Work**, created The Journey App, a digital platform that integrates reproductive health tools tailored to individual needs.

**Vijay John | School of Science and Engineering** created foams that deliver algacides to combat harmful algal blooms and restore aquatic ecosystems.

**Chandler Monk | School of Medicine** developed a CRISPR-based test for cytomegalovirus that offers rapid, low-cost detection for global use.

**Matthew Montemore | School of Science and Engineering** leads a project that converts CO<sub>2</sub> into ethanol using a new nanoparticle catalyst, transforming emissions into a clean fuel.

**Wayne Reed and Curtis Jarand | School of Science and Engineering** advanced a spectroscopic device that improves the formulation and shelf life of biologic medicines.



Learn more about the Provost's Proof of Concept Fund

6

Researchers

\$300K

Awards distributed

Vijay John with his lab members, Borui Wang and Pedram Azizi Hariri.



# Meet our Startups

Startups from Tulane and the greater New Orleans community apply to join a year-long program to be paired with 3-5 dedicated **Green Wave Innovation Network (GWIN) mentors** to help them navigate early-stage development to become investment-ready. Now in its second cohort, the program supports ventures with strong potential to benefit New Orleans and beyond by building a solid foundation for growth and scalability.

## 16

Startup  
Mentor  
Teams

## 57

out of 100

GWIN Mentors are  
matched with a  
Startup Mentor Team



Dawn Siegall, Kiera Stocks, Eleanor Grace Probst, Envy Skin.



Chandler Monk, Cleaved Diagnostics.



Caitlin Knoepp & Chase Mattison, FEELS.



Isabella Kulstad, Cloud IX.



*"We're honored to be mentored by industry professionals with experience in B2B SaaS, enterprise sales, and capital raising, allowing us to optimize our approach and establish long-term sustainability. Jonathan Rich, Dan Engel, Jeffrey Eckerling, Kim Tuleu, and Jennifer Jeansonne are not only incredible mentors but professionals with a genuine interest and care in Cloud IX's mission."*  
— Isabella Kulstad





A SaaS platform for the rental world.

## AITRIA

AI-driven ECG tool to help clinicians evaluate treatment effects risks in arrhythmia patients.

## ATLAS

A comprehensive solution for managing an online fitness training business.



Utilizes CRISPR-Cas12a for cost-effective, rapid point-of-care detection of deafness-related diseases.

## CLOUD IX

An AI-powered encrypted support platform for sexual violence survivors.



Cost-effective methods for remote coastal monitoring, providing quantitative and calibrated wave height spectra.



A gamified platform connects Discord and existing tools, transforming music-making into an engaging multiplayer game.

## DREAMAVERSITY

A mentorship platform linking young student-athletes with college and professional athletes for tailored, one-on-one support.

ES

## ENVY SKIN

A simple liquid blemish patch with natural ingredients for smoother makeup application.

## feels

Connects local businesses with local nonprofits, allowing visitors to easily donate with a scan.



An SMS marketing platform for nightlife, using text messages to boost deals, events, and revenue.



A platform for estate planning professionals' to provide personalized, and efficient client services through AI technology.



Redefining care and mobility through an AR-based tele-health platform for movement disorder patients and providers



Patented device caps IV push injection flow rates for safe medication delivery.

## SCHOOLS

Innovative ed-tech that unites test prep, workforce development, and college readiness for future career success.



An app that shows real-time grocery pricing for better shopping choices and savings.



Tonia Aiken and Jim Aiken, Safe Push.



Chanho Lim, AITRIA.

# GWIN Mentor Spotlight

Once a student founder, now a star mentor!



*"Andy's willingness to share his time and expertise highlights the strength of relationships and the passion that Tulane alumni have for their university. Andrew has provided over 75 hours of pro bono mentorship to the Green Wave Innovation Network, hosted 'Innovations & Conversations' in South Florida, and regularly serves as an ambassador for the Tulane Innovation Institute."*  
— Kimberly Gramm

## **Green Wave Innovation Network Mentor**

Andrew Wetzler, President,  
Co-founder, MoreVisibility





## Q&A with Andrew Wetzler

**We recently interviewed Andrew Wetzler (A&S '85) about being a student entrepreneur while attending Tulane and the highlights of now being a GWIN mentor. Here are excerpts from the conversation.**

For the full interview, visit [innovation.tulane.edu/stories](https://innovation.tulane.edu/stories)

**Q – What motivated you to become one of the original Green Wave Innovation Network (GWIN) mentors and support the Tulane Innovation Institute?**

A – MoreVisibility was one of the original sponsors of Florida Atlantic University's (FAU) Tech Runway, a start-up incubator in Boca Raton. We worked closely with Kimberly Gramm, who launched that initiative at FAU 16 years ago. When she arrived at Tulane, I immediately reached out to work with her again!

**Q – While you were a student at Tulane, you launched "The Coupon Connection." What inspired you to start that business?**

A – I grew up in Baltimore and spent a summer working for a company that targeted businesses around Johns Hopkins and other local colleges to reach students with a coupon book program. I did it myself when I returned to New Orleans in the Fall. It was a character-building experience, including becoming comfortable walking into a local business cold and asking to speak with the owner. That approach was much more viable then. Tulane was very supportive of my business. They allowed me to set up a booth during student class registration to distribute the coupon books. This sparked the entrepreneur within.

**Q – What have you enjoyed most about the GWIN mentoring experience?**

A – I've enjoyed several aspects. I've met an incredible group of mentors with tremendous backgrounds and success stories, enthused entrepreneurs, and the crazy-great (internal) team that Tulane has built. The initial (in-person) MIT-led training the mentors received was very insightful and set the table for what was to follow.

**Q – Are there any recent moments that stand out?**

A – I thought the \$50K Demo Day pitch competition held at the A.B. Freeman Business School during New Orleans Entrepreneur Week was an awesome event. It showcased the breadth of businesses that Tulane supports and the momentum the Innovation Institute has garnered so quickly at Tulane. Companies that impressed me included Chandler Monk's Cleaved Diagnostics, which won the \$50K Demo Day competition. She also participated in a South Florida 'Innovations & Conversations' cocktail reception that we hosted at our office for the Tulane Innovation Institute.

**Q—Do you have any other advice for aspiring Tulane entrepreneurs when starting a business?**

A – Everything takes longer and is harder than it ought to be. Make sure that your idea is something people need or want, and then use the available tools to explain your value proposition. Also, make sure that the market size for your offering is large enough to make the business concept worthwhile. Don't be afraid to follow your instincts and modify fundamental aspects of your business plan as you learn over time. If you have confidence in your product/service, don't be afraid to promote it enthusiastically.

Become a mentor, visit [innovation.tulane.edu/gwin](https://innovation.tulane.edu/gwin)

# Green Wave Innovation Network Mentors

Ken Arnold  
Salmeron Barnes  
Stacey Berger  
Blake Bertuccelli  
Sergio Blanco  
Tad Bogdan  
Ali Boolani  
Andrew Brain  
Kevin Bratcher  
Doug Brien  
Zachary Brooks  
Matt Candler  
Lee Chedister  
Kelly Culbertson Cahn  
Paul Daitz  
Jacqueline Daspit  
Lara Decaro  
Alan DeCorte  
Dain DeGroff  
Justin Dagna  
Jeff Eckerling  
Jeff Emery

Dan Engel  
Larry England  
Leslie Evans  
Roberto Facundus  
Erin Firreno  
Kevin Francis  
Grant David Gillham  
Jeffrey Goldman  
Monique Goodwin  
Allen Graber  
Terrance Henderson  
Elisabeth Hirschbichler  
Peter Hitt  
Malliron Hodge  
Harris Howard  
Lin Hymel  
Scott Intagliata  
Jennifer Jeansonne  
Daphne Johnson  
Harris Jones III  
Shyam Kakar  
Joel Kanter

Liam Kelly  
Sarah Kerin  
Debra Kissen  
David Kronlage  
Thomas Lee  
Michael Lisse  
Jameson MacDonnell  
Allyson Mackay Dombey  
Liz Martin-Malikian  
Jesse McClure  
Charles McFadden Ellison  
Camilla Medeiros  
Christopher Millan  
Margaret Molloy  
Tara Monistere  
Guillermo Morales  
Neal Muni  
Evan Nicoll  
Ken Odom  
Sam Olmsted  
Gary Owens  
Bill Palumbo

Sindhu Pandit  
John Paolini  
Nicki Parr  
Michael Pollack  
David Pruner  
Steven Ralff  
Megan Reamer  
Scott Reamer  
Jeremy Reimann  
Blake Restel  
Jonathan Rich  
Anthony Robins  
Mike Rosenthall  
J.R. Ross  
Alan Rottman  
Andrew Schneider  
Michael Schornstein  
Soumitra Sengupta  
Viqar Shariff  
Joshua Sock  
Jerome Stewart  
Dean Teffer

Rodrigo Troni Pena  
Kim Tuleu  
David Tulman  
Maartje van Krieken  
Richard Vaughn  
Kelly Venable Carroll  
James Vitrano  
Mei Wang  
Giffen Weinmann  
Andrew Wetzler  
Dave White  
Jura Zibas

100

GWIN  
mentors

1600

Volunteer  
hours

\$480K

Value  
of volunteer hours



Located across the United States, Green Wave Innovation Network (GWIN) members generously provide essential resources and mentorship to our entrepreneurial community, helping turn ideas into successful businesses. We are grateful to the Tulane alumni, parents, and community members who volunteer their time to support aspiring entrepreneurs.



# Tulane Innovation Day— a new campus celebration!



In 2025, New Orleans Entrepreneur Week (NOEW) expanded onto university campuses, creating new opportunities for students and early-stage entrepreneurs to connect with industry leaders and investors.

Tulane University played a key role in this regional economic development event through the collaboration of the Tulane Innovation Institute, the Albert LePage Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, and the Phyllis M. Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking. Together, they hosted speakers, startup showcases, and pitch competitions that elevated the innovation scene.

On Wednesday, March 26, the Tulane Innovation Institute hosted Tulane Innovation Day, a dynamic and high-energy event featuring Brett Hurt, a renowned entrepreneur and author of *Entrepreneur Essentials*, alongside Tulane Ventures investees and leading venture investors.

The day's highlight was the \$50K Demo Day Pitch Competition, which showcased ten ventures: five connected to Tulane and five from the broader New Orleans community. The event provided aspiring entrepreneurs with the resources, exposure, and connections needed to bring their ideas to life.



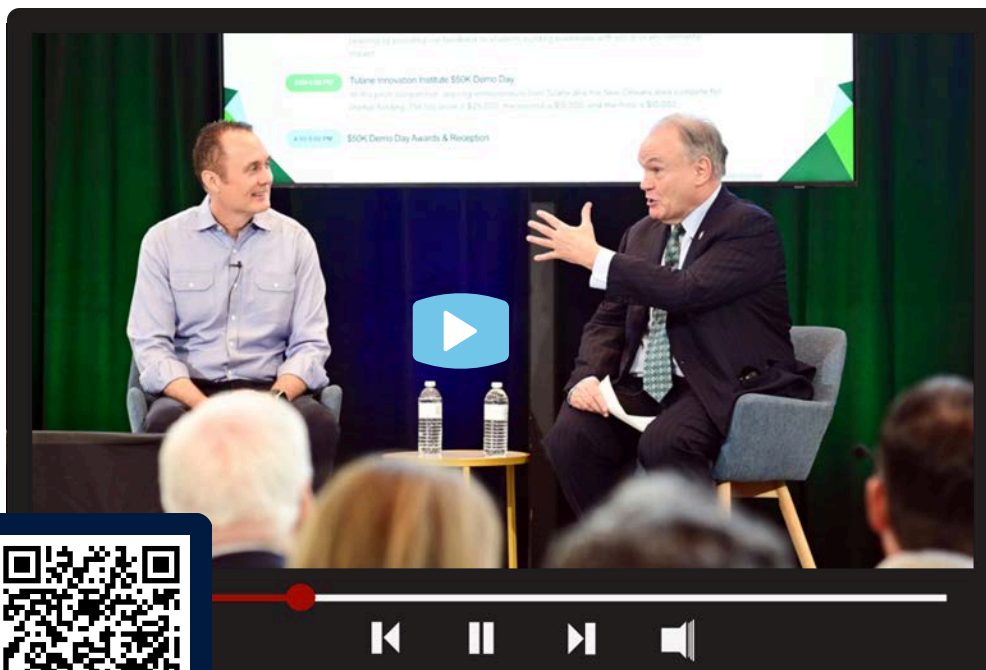
Kimberly Gramm revving up the excitement at Tulane Innovation Day!



President Michael A. Fitts with Rachel Hurt and keynote speaker Brett Hurt.



Watch our Tulane Innovation Day recap video!



Watch the Tulane Innovation Day keynote.

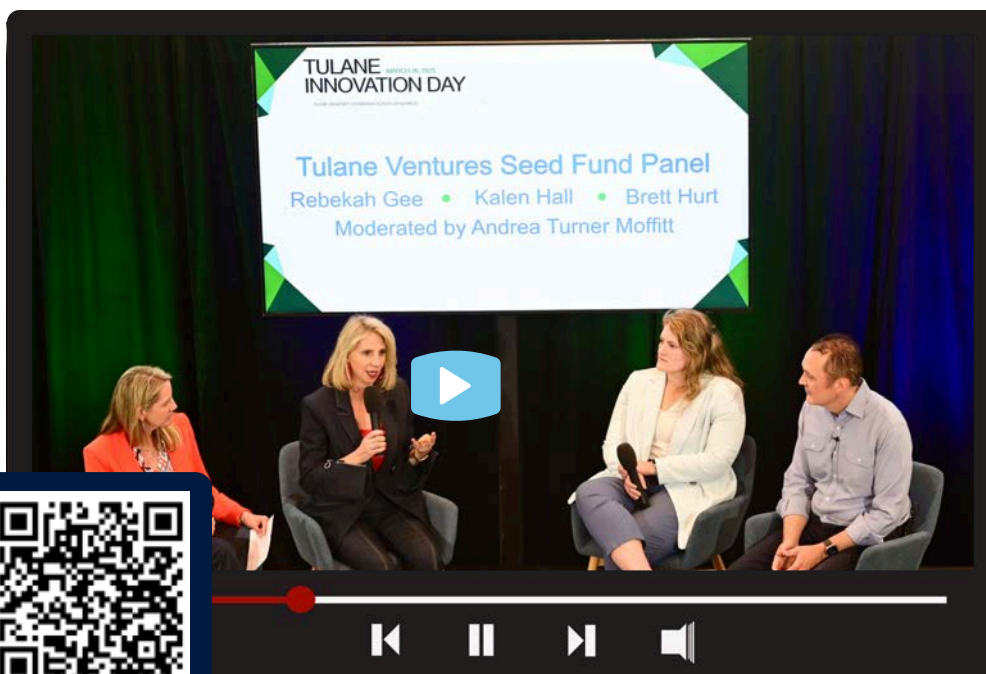
## Tulane Innovation Day brings together bold thinkers, leaders, and innovators.

During a fireside conversation with Tulane University President Michael A. Fitts, Brett Hurt, CEO and co-founder of data.world and Bazaarvoice, shared insights from his entrepreneurial journey and investment philosophy. He emphasized that today's students have unprecedented access to knowledge and tools that enable them to build businesses with a social impact. Among the audience was his daughter, Rachel Hurt, a sophomore at Tulane and an entrepreneur herself. Hurt described artificial intelligence as a powerful force that is dismantling traditional barriers for emerging entrepreneurs.

Following their discussion, Kimberly Gramm, who also serves as the Managing Director of Tulane Ventures, announced a \$125,000 investment in Informuta to co-founder and CEO Kalen Hall. This Tulane spinout is using AI-driven technology to combat antibiotic resistance and was the inaugural winner of the \$50K Demo Day Pitch Competition in Spring 2024, where they were awarded the \$25,000 first-place prize.

Hall later joined a panel conversation with Andrea Turner Moffitt, founder of Future Heights Ventures and a member of the Tulane Ventures Investment Committee; Rebekah Gee from Nest Health (another Tulane Ventures investee); and Hurt.

The panel explored Louisiana's evolving venture funding landscape and emphasized the role of venture capital in strengthening the region's innovation ecosystem.



Watch the Tulane Ventures panel.



\$50K awarded to fuel  
the startups of tomorrow  
— the grand finale of  
Tulane Innovation Day!



The 2025 **\$50K Demo Day pitch competition** showcased the work of 10 local innovative startups. The event was held during New Orleans Entrepreneur Week (NOEW). The Tulane Innovation Institute supported these startups through various programs, including mentorship, educational webinars, and pitch competitions. Before the contest, the ten finalists received guidance from accomplished entrepreneur Aaron Foss. This event is a testament to Tulane's commitment to cultivating an ecosystem of access and resources to boost entrepreneurship in the region.

#### 1st Place \$25,000 | Cleaved Diagnostics

Specializes in rapid, accessible molecular diagnostics, starting with newborn screening for Cytomegalovirus. Chandler H. Monk, [cleaveddx.com](http://cleaveddx.com) (Tulane PhD Candidate)

#### 2nd Place \$15,000 | Safe Push

A patented syringe device that caps IV push injection flow rates for safe, controlled medication delivery. Tonia Aiken and Jim Aiken, [safepushmed.com](http://safepushmed.com) (Tulane Alumnus)

#### 3rd Place \$10,000 | Cloud IX

An AI-powered chatbot offering confidential, encrypted support for sexual violence survivors on college campuses. Isabella Kulstad, [cloud-ix.com](http://cloud-ix.com) (Tulane Student)

#### People's Choice Award | Envy Skin

Revolutionizes blemish treatment with an invisible pimple patch designed to work under makeup with natural ingredients. Eleanor Grace Probst, Kiera Stocks, and Dawn Siegall, [envyskinco.com](http://envyskinco.com) (Tulane Students)

1st



2nd



3rd



People's  
Choice



The stage was set with inspiring startups and expert judges.

**AIDIA** | Provides a pre-trained AI model supporting the development of digital health algorithms for commercial healthcare. (Chanh Lim, Tulane Alumni & Staff)

**FEELS** | An online marketplace that connects local non-profits to new donors. (Caitlin Knoepp, Chase Mattison)

**FLY FAST** | An innovative device automating the transfer of Drosophila flies between vials, boosting lab efficiency. (Caique Costa, Tulane PhD Candidate)

**GRO ENTERPRISES** | Manufactures and installs climate-smart construction materials to improve sustainability and energy efficiency. (Joel B. Holton)

**MILESTONE MATE** | Tech platform helping parents track milestones and support their child's development. (Shay Claiborne)

**RITUALLI** | A platform connecting wellness users with vetted holistic health practitioners through personalized matching. (Brenna Kane)



Dawn Siegall, Envy Skin



Shay Claiborne, Milestone Mate



Joel B. Holton, Gro Enterprises

## \$50K DEMO DAY JUDGES

**Brett Hurt**  
CEO, Co-founder, data.world  
*Tulane Parent*

**Jeff Eckerling**  
Advisor, Former Chief Growth Officer, SP Plus  
*Tulane A.B Freeman School, BSM ('97)*

**Jonathan Kil**  
CEO and Chief Medical Officer, Sound Pharmaceuticals, Inc.  
*Tulane Parent*

**Kalen Hall**  
Co-Founder & CEO, Informuta  
*Tulane School of Medicine, PhD, Biomedical Sciences ('24)*

**Michelle Jackson**  
Founder & CEO, PR Solutions  
*Adjunct Professor, Tulane University*

**Susan Altschuller**  
Independent Director, Vestaron Corporation  
*Tulane School of Science and Engineering, BSE Bioengineering ('03)*



# Startup Founder Journey | Chandler Monk

While working on a PhD in Bioinnovation at Tulane, **Chandler Monk** launched Cleaved Diagnostics to develop more effective diagnostic methods for detecting congenital cytomegalovirus (CMV) in newborns. Early detection of this condition is essential, as undiagnosed CMV can lead to lifelong hearing loss and developmental delays. Her innovative diagnostic test based on CRISPR-Cas12a aims to help families access early intervention services that can significantly improve outcomes for affected children. While completing her dissertation, the Tulane Innovation Institute team has supported Chandler in starting her company with education, mentorship, and funding.



## Chandler's path to becoming a founder!

### An idea is born

**Spring 2023** | Chandler participates as a top 10 finalist in her first Open MIC Night with an earlier version of her platform, RapidDX.

### Early-stage support

**Fall 2024** | Chandler returns to the stage with a more developed product and pitch, winning Open MIC Night in October! She also applies for the Fall round of PPOC and wins \$50K to support her research in November.

### Startup Building

**Spring 2025** | Chandler wins 1st place at \$50K Demo Day, earning a \$25K non-dilutive investment. During this period, Chandler also completed the NSF I-Corps Spark Customer Discovery Program in partnership with the Tulane Innovation Institute and MIT, and she presented her company to the Tulane Board at a pitch showcase. Additionally, she was a finalist at the TechConnect Critical Technology Innovation Challenge.

### Full-scale Launch!

**Summer 2025** | Chandler has graduated and is now the full-time Founder and CEO of Cleaved Diagnostics, which has established lab space at the New Orleans BioInnovation Center. She is working with the Institute's Startup Team Mentoring program to develop expertise in manufacturing scale-up and distribution strategies. Chandler was also honored as one of *Gambit's 40 under 40* honorees for 2025!



To read more Startup Stories, visit [tulane.innovation.edu/stories](https://tulane.innovation.edu/stories)

# Connecting local startups with entrepreneurial minded-students



Launched October 2024 in partnership with the School of Liberal Arts and the A.B. Freeman School of Business, the Startup Clinic was designed to support entrepreneurs in New Orleans by connecting them with talented, entrepreneurial Tulane students.

This new program offers pro bono assistance to local businesses seeking to refine their business models, enhance marketing efforts, and address financial or operational challenges. It places students directly within small companies and startups, where they provide customized support.

This arrangement benefits both parties—business owners receive fresh insights and complimentary services, while students gain valuable work experience working with active ventures.

Projects are matched to align student skills with each company's specific needs. Participants represent a cross-section of New Orleans' entrepreneurial scene, including food businesses, creative startups, and emerging tech firms. The Startup Clinic is part of a broader effort to strengthen ties between Tulane and the local business community.

12

Student interns

9

Businesses supported



*"It's really cool that Tulane has this—it can be inspiring for young people to work hands-on and get this experience. You see how every little thing matters for a small-business owner, and it's been great to see that from an inside perspective."*  
— Claudia Epsha, Tulane '25, Startup Clinic Intern, Fall Semester

LIVING

NOLA.COM

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2024

10



Amina McCutchen, owner of Holistic Herb Bae, talks with Tulane Innovation Institute Startup Clinic intern Claudia Epsha in New Orleans. STAFF PHOTO BY BRETT DUNE

## Supporting success

New businesses get expert help at Tulane Innovation Institute Startup Clinic pilot program

BY RACHEL MIPRO  
Contributing writer

As the college semester wraps up, the Tulane Innovation Institute Startup Clinic's first run is also drawing to a close. During the pilot program, six students worked with four local businesses, offering a range of analytical, accounting and marketing services. "We have a really great startup culture here in the area, and we really wanted to provide an opportunity for our students to directly support the startups and innovators in our city," said Sharon Goldsmith, executive director of innovation and entrepreneurship programs at the Tulane University Innovation Institute. Students spent the first few weeks of the semester developing the program before working with businesses selected from a pool of

19 applicants.

"We want to see a ton of economic development in our city," Goldsmith added. "We want to see the creation of more companies. We want more of our Tulane graduates to launch businesses or join local companies and stay here. We want to see the creation of new jobs, and we want to do everything we can to support everybody here who has been doing this before we got here."

A wellness journey

Entrepreneur Amina McCutchen has paired up to collaborate with student Claudia Epsha. McCutchen launched her wellness brand, Holistic Herb Bae, in 2021. Inspired by her own health journey, McCutchen's goal is to provide natural wellness products that strengthen mind, body and spirit. "I started researching plant-based medicine and I was able to heal myself from utilizing that as

well as other holistic wellness modalities," McCutchen said. "I feel inspired to help other people, that's why I started my business."

She describes one of her featured products: pink-tinged sea moss from east Africa, which she blends into a gel. Some of her other products, herbal teas and tinctures, use home-grown materials. McCutchen raises melon leaf, lavender and rosemary, among other herbs. She also has a small vegetable garden, complete with okra, tomatoes and a hibiscus tree.

"Whatever gravitates to my soul, honestly," McCutchen said. "I just grow different things. Things that I love or my family will eat, that's what I try to grow."

A mother of three, McCutchen works around her children's schedule, including homeschooling her 4-year-old, to grow her business. "It's not easy, but it's definitely

➔ See INNOVATION, page 20

**"If there's any time to start a business in New Orleans, it's now."**

JEANNE EXNICKIOS, Tulane Innovation Institute director of marketing and communications







"The **Young Entrepreneurs Academy** aligns perfectly with our mission to promote entrepreneurship in the New Orleans region, starting with the youngest members of our community. We are excited to see the brilliant ideas from local high-school students and arm them with mentors and know-how that could create generational wealth for them in the future."

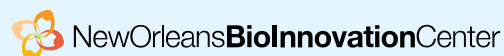
— Kimberly Gramm



5 amazing sponsors provided student scholarships!



**The Miller Family Foundation**



# It's never too early to become an entrepreneur!

Launched Fall of 2024, the Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!) is designed to turn student ideas into real businesses. The students received weekly guidance from Jalin Carter, Community Program Manager at the Tulane Innovation Institute, along with two instructors—Norman Barnum, Managing Partner of Barnum Group LLC, and Michelle Jackson, Founder & CEO of PR Solutions, and a Tulane Adjunct Professor. Guest speakers and mentors also presented topics on marketing, finance, PR, social impact, and legal strategy to the students.

Meeting once a week for two hours a night, students arrived with curiosity, grit, and ambition—and left equipped with skills, confidence, and ventures ready to launch. These high school students learned to network, pitch, budget, and fundraise.

Collectively, the students secured a total of \$9,950 in startup funding from YEA!, along with an additional \$4,000 through external competitions and donations.

Highlights from the year include Hayden Le (Benjamin Franklin High School), the first-place pitch winner, advancing to the YEA! National Semi-Finals. Hayden is developing a facial sheet mask designed to heal scars and is working on this project with the assistance of her AP Chemistry teacher. Shaylor King (New Orleans Charter Science and Mathematics High School) and Rylie Lawrence (Warren Easton High School) won top prizes at the New Growth Pitch Competition. In addition, two students, Zahir Guillouete (Morris Jeff Community School) and Cherish Sentmore (Sophie B. Wright High School), secured funding through the I.Invest National Youth Business Competition.

Outside the classroom, students took field trips to the Dew Drop Inn, Chapter IV Restaurant, and the Super Bowl Experience—learning about careers in entertainment, culinary arts, and sports from founders and executives. With community support, these young innovators now have the mindset, tools, and mentorship to shape what comes next.



30

High School  
students

15

Local  
schools

30

Week  
curriculum

22

Guest speakers  
and mentors

15

Businesses  
started

\$14K

Startup funding  
awarded



# How to launch a company in one weekend—building more startups



62

Registered attendees from across the community!

3

Day crash course in entrepreneurship

8

New business ideas created

The Tulane University Lavin-Bernick Center was bustling with customer discovery interviews, prototyping, and ideating during Startup SPRINT 2025, which provided networking, collaboration, and business development education to Tulanians and members of the New Orleans community.

This exciting winter weekend began with a rapid-fire **"Pitch-O-Rama"**, where attendees shared startup ideas, voted on favorites, and formed teams around the most compelling concepts. Workshops on value propositions and customer discovery were then led by Brent McCrossen of Revelry and Tulane's Sharon Goldsmith and Jay England.

Throughout the weekend, teams worked closely with volunteer mentors to refine their business models. On the final day, Aaron Foss, serial entrepreneur and renowned startup consultant, coached teams on pitch delivery before the live competition.

Cookie Kitchen won first place (\$1,000) for its customizable baked goods concept. The team included high school students Sadie Bruno (Willow High School) and Makeda Butler (Benjamin Franklin High School), as well as Kristen and Denise Woltering.

Second place (\$750) went to One Loop, an AI-powered email management tool. Third place (\$500) was awarded to Market In, a platform connecting local businesses with college students.

The judges included Tim Williamson (Nieux Society), Kimberly Gramm (Tulane Innovation Institute), Amina McCutchen (Holistic Herb Bae), and Karen DeBlieux (Capital One).

Startup SPRINT sparked fresh connections and delivered real-world entrepreneurial skills to a new wave of local startups.



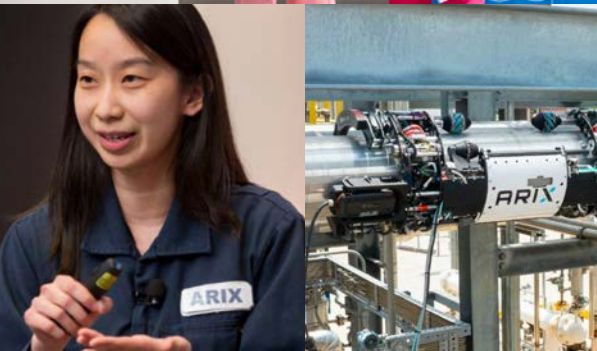
Sadie Bruno and Makeda Butler (Cookie Kitchen).



Tulane students Ben Williams, Adam Rubin, and Loyola University student Tristan Sario (Market In).



Watch Sharon Goldsmith talk about Startup SPRINT on Fox 8



# TULANE VENTURES

## Tulane Ventures portfolio companies

Nest Health, ARIX Technologies, Hello Gravel, Informuta and Hilight (pictured from top to bottom)

Tulane Ventures has invested \$975,000 in five early-stage startups across multiple technology sectors. Since launching, the fund has completed due diligence on 35 companies, hosted 11 investment committee meetings, and added five new members to the investment committee.

Informuta, a biotech startup, is the first spinout from Tulane University to receive funding from Tulane Ventures. The company was awarded first place in the Institute's inaugural Open Medical Innovation Challenge Night (Spring 2023), received the inaugural Provost's Proof of Concept Grant (Spring 2023), and won the \$50K Demo Day competition (Spring 2024). To date, Informuta has raised nearly \$2 million in funding.

Other portfolio investments include Nest Health, a tech-enabled in-home family care platform; ARIX Technologies, which utilizes robotics and data analytics for industrial inspections; Hello Gravel, a logistics marketplace for gravel and aggregates; and Hilight, a digital platform addressing faculty and staff retention in schools.

Tulane Ventures is a \$10 million seed fund supporting early-stage companies in Louisiana. The fund targets high-growth ventures in health and medicine, climate and energy, and artificial intelligence and technology. Selected companies benefit from tailored consulting, mentorship, and access to the Innovation Institute's network, designed to help them grow and scale within the state.

TULANE  
VENTURES  
1st year results

**\$105M**

Portfolio valuation at time  
of investment

**\$14M**

Portfolio cumulative raise  
FY25

**67**

Number of employees  
retained at time of  
investment



## Launch event — the 1<sup>st</sup> investment

On Wednesday, August 7, 2024, Tulane Ventures co-hosted a screening of the award-winning documentary **'Show Her the Money'**. The film documented the challenges that women founders face when raising venture capital funding in the U.S. and Europe. The entire community was invited to watch the film that followed several female entrepreneurs as they tried to secure funding, alongside women investors searching for their next significant opportunity.

At the event, Tulane Ventures announced its first investment— \$250,000 in Nest Health, led by former Louisiana Department of Health Secretary Rebekah Gee, who is working to expand healthcare to families across the country through virtual and at-home care.

The event began with a networking reception, where guests connected with local organizations that champion entrepreneurship. Proceeds from ticket sales supported Dress for Success New Orleans.

11 community and media partners

202 attendees



"Nest Health is honored to be Tulane Venture Fund's first investment. We are a female-founded company transforming health care in New Orleans and beyond by supporting children and their parents. Nest identifies families who cannot access care and then provides concierge care to them. We are proud of our partnership with Tulane and excited about the future."

— Rebekah Gee, CEO of Nest Health

## Tulane VC Course

Tulane's new course, **FINE 4410 | Venture Capital and Angel Investing**, provides students with hands-on experience in managing real startup investments through the Tulane Ventures Seed Fund. Created by the Innovation Institute and A.B. Freeman School of Business, the class connects students to Louisiana's startup ecosystem and teaches them how to evaluate deals, conduct due diligence, and make investment decisions. The 2024/2025 academic year classes were taught by Professor David Thompson, Jeffrey Silverman (Laconia Capital), and Peter Liu (Revelry Venture Partners) and supported by the Tulane Ventures team. The course is gaining popularity among Tulane students. Enrollment tripled in its second semester with a waitlist, reflecting growing student demand for entrepreneurial finance and venture capital experience.

32 A.B Freeman School Students



# Our gratitude and appreciation extend far beyond the words on these pages...

## Heartfelt thank you to the Miller Family!

Tulane received a \$1 million gift from Jeffrey and Tina Miller to support the Tulane Innovation Institute and the Young Entrepreneurs Academy program. Their generous gift supports the mission of the Miller Family Endowed Fund and will also fund programming, pitch competitions, proof-of-concept awards, and more.

"Tulane is an institution bursting with creativity and entrepreneurial spirit," said Jeffrey Miller, managing partner of Krillion Ventures, a venture capital firm in Miami specializing in early-stage companies in health care, financial services, and real estate. "We're thrilled to invest in the future of the university and the unique city that it calls home and excited to see how our gift will help the institute nurture the ideas of its students, faculty, alumni, and local entrepreneurs into inventions that can change the world."

The Miller family's philanthropic commitment reflects their belief in the power of education and entrepreneurship to drive meaningful change. They are also Tulane's Family Leadership Council members and repeat sponsors of the Tipping Point, the university's annual scholarship fundraising concert held during Wave Weekend.



"We are **profoundly grateful** to Jeffrey and Tina for their extraordinary generosity. Their endowment will allow us to build on our early successes, accelerate the transformation of Tulane research into groundbreaking technologies, and expand our efforts to create and support local startups. The Millers' gift strengthens every facet of our work."  
— Kimberly Gramm



**Give a gift that may launch the next BIG tech startup in New Orleans or bring a medical innovation to market that will save lives!**

The Tulane Innovation Institute is building a culture of entrepreneurship in our community—helping researchers, students, and local innovators launch startups and make their discoveries accessible to the world.

Your gift will expand access to funding, mentorship, educational programs, and commercialization expertise, giving even more aspiring entrepreneurs the tools they need to succeed. Together, we can improve the future of tomorrow at Tulane, today.

**To learn how your gift can make a lasting impact, contact Ginny Wise, Senior Vice President of Advancement, [gwise@tulane.edu](mailto:gwise@tulane.edu).**



# Our Community Council

The Community Council provides strategic input to elevate our ecosystem, as well as business expertise to support community-building entrepreneurship, to include all businesses and people in the greater New Orleans area.

**Kornelius Bankston**, Techplug

**Aaron Bloch**, Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans

**Elton Bradley**, Allied Universal Security Services

**Jonathan Everett**, Rock of Ages Baptist Church

**Julia Lang**, Tulane Taylor Center

**Lyle Leblanc**, Scale New Orleans

**Agnieszka Nance**, Tulane Center for Public Service

**Lindsey Navarro**, El Centro

**Nyree Ramsey**, Ujamaa Economic Development Corporation



Community Council member Pastor Jonathan Everett, MC at the Young Entrepreneurs Academy Pitch Competition.

## Our Partners

Tulane Innovation Institute's local and national partners make a collective impact. We believe strategically aligned partners build an ecosystem to help our innovators & entrepreneurs thrive!



# Meaningful IMPACT starts and ends with visionary leadership!

## Tulane Innovation Entrepreneurship (TIE) Council

The TIE Council is a group of inspiring, generous leaders who support the Tulane Innovation Institute through significant financial contributions and by sharing their entrepreneurial insight. Their leadership brings BIG ideas to life!



**"A very special thanks** to the Priddy Family for your generous lead gift to the Tulane Innovation Institute!"  
— Kimberly Gramm



Robert Priddy,  
Priddy Family Foundation



Shannon Priddy Acks,  
Priddy Family Foundation



Michael Acks  
RMC Capital, LLC



John David Barksdale,  
Alluvian Capital



Stephanie Bosse Barksdale,  
Tulane University



Carol Lavin Bernick,  
Polished Nickel Capital



Alan Colowick,  
Matrix Capital



Michelle Diener,  
Former CEO, Hotels.com, Inc.



Robert Diener,  
Co-Founder, Hotels.com, Inc.



Robert Hinckley,  
Tulane President's Council



Cathy Isaacson,  
Middle East Investment Initiative



Walter Isaacson,  
Tulane University



Joel Kanter,  
Windy City, Inc.



Andrea Turner Moffitt,  
Future Heights Ventures



David Mussafer,  
Advent International



Charles (Rusty) Pickering,  
Ingo Money, Inc.



Terryl Propper,  
Endodontic Practice Partners



Jeffrey Silverman,  
Laconia Capital Group



Tony Suber,  
SDG Impact Fund



Our engaged council makes a difference...



Andrea Turner Moffitt, Michael Acks, Shannon Priddy Acks, and Rusty Pickering at the Startup Speed Mentoring reception.



Kalen Hall (Informuta), Andrea Turner Moffitt, and Brett Hurt, following a panel on Venture Funding in Louisiana on Tulane Innovation Day.



Joel Kanter at the Taylor Changemaker Institute Showcase on Tulane Innovation Day.



Robert Priddy with Walter Isaacson at the Fall 2024 Tulane Innovation Entrepreneur Council Meeting.



Joel Kanter with Chanhho Lim and Matthew Hales (AITRIA) on Tulane Innovation Day.



David Mussafer in conversation with Walter Isaacson at the Fall 2024 Tulane Innovation Entrepreneur Council Meeting.



Terry Propper and Rusty Pickering with President Michael A. Fitts at the Fall 2024 Tulane Innovation Entrepreneur Council Meeting.

Building a culture of innovation & entrepreneurship



1315 Gravier St. | New Orleans, LA 70112

[innovation.tulane.edu](http://innovation.tulane.edu)