

Tulane business students excel in entrepreneur week pitch contest

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A team of MBA students from the A.B. Freeman School of Business won first place in the 2018 IDEAcors MBA Consulting Challenge this week. Team members from left to right are, Mairead Coogan, Analisa Leavoy, Vizzit founder Arthur Bart-Williams, Kristina Crouch, Madeline Peters Mesa and Katie Mullins. (Photo from A.B. Freeman School of Business)

The 2018 edition of New Orleans Entrepreneur Week features nearly a dozen different pitch contests for ambitious entrepreneurs, but it was a team of MBA students from Tulane University's A. B. Freeman School of Business who took home the week's first prize.

The Freeman School MBAs edged out peers from five universities to win first place in the IDEAcorns MBA Consulting Challenge, which helped kick off NOEW 2018 on Sunday.

Hosted by Loyola University and the Idea Village, the IDEAcorns Challenge pairs New Orleans startups with MBA teams from across the country for an intensive consulting experience designed to help the businesses solve problems. The teams spent three days working with the startups to scope out issues, validate potential solutions and develop practical plans the entrepreneurs could put into action. A panel of judges then voted on which plan was likely to have the biggest impact on the business.

“It was an exhausting and grueling 72 hours, but it was an overwhelmingly positive experience,” said MBA student Kristina Crouch. “We take classes in finance, consulting and management, but it’s very rare that we get to integrate all of these things in a real-life scenario.”

Crouch and teammates Mairead Coogan, Analisa Leavoy, Madeline Peter Mesa and Kate Mullins earned this year’s top prize for their work on behalf of Vizzit, a mobile-based platform that enables people and organizations to create customized self-guided tours that engage customers and promote brands.

“I was thrilled with what they accomplished,” said Vizzit founder Arthur Bart-Williams. “If they had accomplished any one of the things they did, I would have been happy, but they probably got four or five things done that each exceeded my expectations.”

“It’s very gratifying to connect our students with entrepreneurs in need of support,” said Freeman School Dean Ira Solomon. “It’s even more gratifying to know that those entrepreneurs are using the recommendations of our students to grow and expand their businesses.”

“Even more valuable than this team winning the competition was the tremendous learning opportunity they got out of it,” said Rob Lalka, executive director of the Lepage Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, which sponsored the team. “For me, it underscored the value of extracurricular activities in entrepreneurship. As important as the work we do in the classroom is, there’s no match for the kind of intensive experience students get by working with entrepreneurs like Arthur, so it’s something we hope to do more of in the future.”

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Ira Solomon, A.B. Freeman School of Business dean