

Tulane Innovation Institute launches Founder Lab to turn faculty research into investor-ready startups

August 20, 2025 8:00 AM Keith Brannon
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J. Quincy Brown, associate professor of biomedical engineering, is among four Tulane faculty working with Entrepreneurs-in-Residence in Founder Lab, a new Innovation Institute program to speed university research and technologies to market. (Photo by Kenny Lass)

The [Tulane Innovation Institute](#) has launched [Founder Lab](#), a new initiative to accelerate the commercialization of Tulane University research by recruiting

experienced entrepreneurs to lead ventures with promising Tulane-created technologies that can make a positive societal impact.

The Founder Lab positions Tulane as a national leader in academic innovation with fewer than 10 universities nationwide having developed such an effort.

“Founder Lab represents an innovative and strategic approach to how research universities can contribute to economic development,” said Tulane President Michael A. Fitts. “By aligning Tulane’s deep technology and scientific expertise with experienced executives, we’re building ventures with strong potential to create long-term regional growth and expand our commitment to make downtown New Orleans a national hub of innovation and biomedical science.”

Led by [Kimberly Gramm](#), the David & Marion Mussafer Chief Innovation & Entrepreneurship Officer, the Founder Lab was created after months of work designing a unique Tulane model, securing support, identifying experienced entrepreneurs to lead and aligning it with Tulane’s research strengths.

“This is an exciting new model for academic commercialization at Tulane,” Gramm said. “By connecting talented faculty members with entrepreneurial expertise and providing early seed funding, we’re building a comprehensive support system to help university research and technologies reach the market faster than before.”

The Founder Lab enables researchers, students, and high-impact operators to:

- Translate technology discoveries into impact-driven startups.
- Navigate the early stages of entrepreneurship business model development in a compressed 6-month period.
- Access institutional resources to de-risk commercialization efforts.
- Access an on-ramp for funding from Tulane Ventures.

The first cohort will consist of four Entrepreneurs-in-Residence paired with four Tulane University faculty researchers. Ariel Johnson, a health care strategist with experience in innovation and commercialization, who helped lead Endotronix to a \$675 million acquisition, will be paired with Chad Roy on commercializing a novel antimicrobial molecule to create a surgical irrigation solution to maintain sterility during hospital procedures. Roy is a professor of medicine and vice chair of research at Tulane’s Deming Department of Medicine, as well as associate dean for research at Tulane’s School of Medicine

Jeff Myers, a biopharma executive and former pediatric heart surgeon with expertise in regulatory and clinical development, was matched with James E. Zadina, Tulane professor of medicine, pharmacology and neuroscience who has developed a new class of peptide-based drugs that target the mu opioid receptor (MOR) with reduced side effects for treating acute and chronic pain.

Alexei Mlodinow, a medical technology entrepreneur and founder of Surgical Innovation Associates and holder of multiple patents, will work with J. Quincy Brown, associate professor of biomedical engineering at Tulane's School of Science and Engineering on an automated positioning system for an advanced structured illumination microscopy (SIM) system to maximize prostatectomy surgical margins in prostate cancer patients.

Moe Wehbe, is a scientist and entrepreneur specializing in lipid-based drug delivery systems, such as lipid nanoparticles and liposomes. His work has spanned cancer, vaccines, gene editing, diabetes and obesity. Wehbe is collaborating with Vijay T. John, the Leo S. Weil Professor in Engineering at the School of Science and Engineering, to evaluate a new way of making multilayered vesicles—tiny, layered spheres that can carry medicines. This approach may allow more drugs to be packed inside, combine multiple medicines in one carrier and improve stability, with potential applications in both pharmaceuticals and cosmetics.

Aileen Dingus was hired as the Venture Lab Program Director to support the Founder Lab as the teams validate market opportunities, build business models, navigate regulatory and intellectual property issues and prepare for their first external funding round.

The Founder Lab Teams will also gain access to extended mentorship through the Green Wave Innovation Network, guidance from Tulane's Office of Intellectual Property Management and broader connections within Louisiana's innovation and investment ecosystem. Applications for founders for the second cohort are currently open, with technologies being sourced through OIPM. For more information, visit innovation.tulane.edu/founderlab.



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