

Tulane teams win Breast Cancer Startup Challenge

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Two Tulane University teams were top winners in the [Breast Cancer Startup Challenge](#), an international business plan contest to commercialize promising innovations in breast cancer research and treatments.



Parastoo Khoshakhlagh, right, receives an award on behalf of her team from Rosemarie Truman, founder and CEO of the Center for Advancing Innovation, and Marc Hurlbert, executive director of the Avon Foundation for Women. (Photo from the National Cancer Institute)

The interdisciplinary teams from the Tulane School of Medicine and the School of Science and Engineering each won \$5,000, startup support and valuable connections to potential investors in the contest, which is sponsored by the Avon Foundation for Women, the National Institutes of Health and the Center for Advancing Innovation.

Tulane was the only university with two teams among the 10 winners. Approximately 200 teams representing 48 universities applied for the challenge, which was created to solicit the best ideas for furthering 10 technologies developed by the National Cancer Institute and an Avon Foundation-funded university lab.

Third-year medical students Frank Glaser and Brian Hasselfeld and biomedical engineering PhD candidate Parastoo Khoshakhlagh won for their plan to develop a new collagen-based injectable scaffold for breast tissue reconstruction after cancer surgery. The material also contains a cancer-fighting substance that could prevent new tumors from forming.

Medical students Brian Yu and Richard Tang (a 2013 grad of the School of Science and Engineering) and structural and cellular biology postdoctoral fellow Murali Anbalagan won for their proposal to market a diagnostic kit to test breast cancer tumors to determine whether patients will likely respond to taxane-based chemotherapy, a common cancer treatment.

Both teams worked closely with the [New Orleans BioInnovation Center](#) to craft their business plans and development strategies. Khoshakhlagh says interdisciplinary collaboration was key to her team's success.

“As a biomedical engineer, I had an expertise related to how the product was developed and the mechanism behind it,” she says. “My colleagues in the medical school had an understanding of the clinical application, commercial availability and the market size. The philosophy behind this partnership is an example of how biomedical engineers and doctors can work together to improve public health.”