



12-21-2022

## Four Students Receive Grants for Ideas through Titan New Venture Challenge

MJ Soria  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news>

---

### Recommended Citation

Soria, MJ, "Four Students Receive Grants for Ideas through Titan New Venture Challenge" (2022). *News and Events*. 4249.

<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/4249>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@iwu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@iwu.edu).

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.



# Four Students Receive Grants for Ideas through Titan New Venture Challenge

December 21, 2022

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — In pursuit of expanding their ventures, four Illinois Wesleyan University students received grants after presenting original ideas at the [Titan New Venture Challenge](#) on Nov. 30.

The Titan New Venture Challenge is designed to encourage students from any major to develop their ideas for new products or services into profitable businesses and nonprofits with help from seed grants.

Seven students participated and the four grant recipients were Elliott Notrica '26, Logan Akre '23, Marissa Hagler '24 and Celina El Ghossaini '26. These innovative Titans will receive grants ranging from \$200 to \$3,100 to use for their ventures to achieve their next milestones.

Formerly known as the Entrepreneurship Fellowship program, the Titan New Venture Challenge includes a demonstration showcase, uses experienced alumni and community members as evaluators and awards grants to several recipients, according to director of The Petrick Idea Center John Quarton.



Four students (to the left) received grants after presenting original ideas at the Titan New Venture Challenge on Nov. 30 at Hansen Student Center.

"I was very pleased to see the ventures in this fall's Titan New Venture Challenge led by seven students representing nine majors," said Quarton. "It was also encouraging to see first-year students and sophomores participating."

Previous recipient of an Entrepreneurship Fellowship grant, [Cam Loyet '18 of Honeymoon Chocolates](#) was an evaluator at the event; alongside Paul Ritter, biology/ecology/earth science teacher at Pontiac Township High School and co-founder/director of the annual Celebrating High School Innovators competition; and David Burroughs, a former director of consumer research and marketing at Country Financial and founder and former CEO of Bloomington Gold.

The ventures receiving grants are creating solutions in a variety of subject areas that include health, sustainability and art.

Notrica, a biochemistry major, formed the idea to create Symbio Bioculinary after witnessing large amounts of food waste while working in the food service industry, adding that "over 35% of food in the U.S. is wasted, largely due to its perishable nature, making it subject to rot."

Symbio Bioculinary focuses on microbial intervention in food systems. Notrica said the venture projects center around fermentation and include vinegars, misos, preserves, and fermented hot sauces, beverages and pickles.

"I use fermentation to reduce waste and add value by applying age-old microbes in innovative ways. Fermented food production is unique in its ability to truly transform products on a molecular level to create incredibly delicious results. Symbio leverages this natural decomposition to transform food waste into innovative new products that are good for people, profit and the planet," said Notrica, who plans to pursue graduate studies in food science after IWU.

Akre's venture of LittlePeace.Collectives – fractionalized art as digital collectibles – was inspired by research in cryptocurrency and non-fungible tokens (NFTs).

"People who purchase the fractionalized art, or little pieces, from the physical paintings are able to receive royalties, if the physical painting that little piece is derived from sells," said Akre, a nursing and health major.

Additionally, LittlePeace.Collectives brings attention to ZeruZeru, a nonprofit organization dedicated to saving the lives of children with albinism in Tanzania. A portion of the profits from LittlePeace.Collectives will go to ZeruZeru.

Akre and the co-founding artist hope to take this idea beyond Illinois Wesleyan's campus and participate in other entrepreneurial ventures.

Hagler's Hurdling Through Hard Times Podcast Products plans to grow and sell products online such as hats, shirts, stickers and more to spread awareness for mental health.

These products are in connection to Hagler's podcast, *Hurdling Through Hard Times*. With a growing listener base, "it has expanded and is in the prototype stage of creating merchandise, growing its audience/customer base and creating designs," said Hagler.

Inspired by her own mental health journey, Hagler created this podcast to spread awareness and offer insight on mental health to listeners. Hagler is an elementary education major and she plans to continue this venture as a side business after graduation.

El Ghossaini set out to create the product LyberHealth after learning about the struggles faced by a friend with Type 1 Diabetes. The product aims to ease the lives of people who use insulin pumps.

"Seeing (my friend) feeling constrained by a medical condition beyond his control was disheartening. I know what it is like, myself, so I developed a great passion for bringing freedom back into the lives of those who have been affected by medical conditions," she said.

El Ghossaini, who is majoring in English writing and philosophy, hopes to finalize the product prototype with help from the IDEA Center, obtain intellectual property protection and sell the product online.

The next Titan New Venture Challenge will take place on March 22, 2023. All students are invited to present their own ideas for the chance to earn a grant. Those interested in participating may contact John Quarton at [jquarton@iwu.edu](mailto:jquarton@iwu.edu).

By MJ Soria '25