



4-10-2023

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Recommended Citation

Soria, MJ, "Titans Grow Startups with Seed Funding from Spring Entrepreneurship Competitions" (2023). *News and Events*. 4279.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/4279>

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Titans Grow Startups with Seed Funding from Spring Entrepreneurship Competitions

April 10, 2023

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — New ideas are blooming this spring at Illinois Wesleyan University. Students with creative ideas were awarded seed grants during the competitive Get Funded event on Feb. 15 and Titan New Venture Challenge on March 22, both organized by The Petrick Idea Center and funded through the generosity of Marc Talluto '94.

The bi-annual [Titan New Venture Challenge](#) allows students to present their innovative ideas to a panel of judges for the chance to receive funding to advance their ventures. Funds are spent on product development, prototyping, marketing and other means for furthering the initiative.

“This program is designed to encourage students from all majors to develop their ideas for new products or services into profitable businesses and nonprofits,” said John Quarton, director of The Petrick Idea Center.

Participating students gave demonstrations of their prototypes and top ventures presented a three-minute pitch followed by questions from the judges.

The grant recipients of the Titan New Venture Challenge together received a total of \$4,400 to use to achieve their next set of milestones. Grant recipients included Marissa Hagler '25, Joshua Sims '24, Clay Goff '24 and Liz Stein '25.

Hagler, an elementary education major, is building a small business focused on raising mental health awareness. Inspired by her podcast “Hurdling Through Hard Times,” Hagler plans to sell clothing and other merchandise across the country.

“The funding I received will go toward launching my mental health line that spreads messages such as ‘you are not alone’ or ‘take care of your mind.’ It is a way for others to start a conversation about mental health as well as put out reminders for those who need them. I am really excited to launch in the next few months and spread awareness,” said Hagler.

Sims, a neuroscience major, in collaboration with local family medicine provider Dr. Daniel Lau '03, is developing Post-Acute at Home Care, an improved telehealth system with at-home care for patients.

“Eventually we want to grow this into a patient care model that hospitals across the country can use to provide in-home medical care to patients and ease the burden on nursing homes that are already suffering from a shortage of available beds as well as staff,” said Sims.

Goff, a finance and economics major, created Sweet Company, a clothing company inspired by personal events that he said spreads the message of thankfulness, enjoying every day and living in the moment.

Stein’s venture of Oak Paw Publishing earned a grant through the Titan New Venture Challenge and, earlier in the semester, [Get Funded](#) — a milestone seed grant program through The Petrick Idea Center. The program provides small seed grants for early-stage student ventures just trying to get their ideas off the ground.

Oak Paw Publishing is focused on providing voices and support for marginalized communities within the publishing industry, said Stein.

“I want to help authors and poets from every marginalized community have the opportunity to have their words seen, with special note to members of the neurodiverse community,” said Stein, an English major.

Students of all majors and interests are welcome to participate in the Titan New Venture Challenge and Get Funded. Both events take place once each semester. Those interested in learning more may contact John Quarton at jquarton@iwu.edu.

Budding entrepreneurs from high schools across the state and nation will also have the opportunity to earn funding and support for their unique ideas during the [Celebrating High School Innovators](#) competition hosted at Illinois Wesleyan on Saturday, April 22. The event is open to the public and will take place in Young Main Lounge and Joslin Atrium at the Memorial Center. The Innovation Showcase will begin at 9 a.m. and the Pitch Competition for the top 10 teams will start at 12:30 p.m.



Liz Stein '25 received a seed grant through the Get Funded program through The Petrick Idea Center for her idea of Oak Paw Publishing.