

Syracuse University Student Entrepreneurs Win Big at New York Business Plan Competition

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Syracuse University student entrepreneurship teams dominated the eighth annual New York Business Plan Competition (NYBPC), which took place on Friday, April 28, at SUNY Poly's NanoTech Complex in Albany. Syracuse teams captured the \$100,000 grand prize and took first-place honors in four out of the six main categories. No institution in the competition's history has achieved this level of success at a single event.



More than 400 student-led teams applied for the statewide competition. Friday's final featured 103 teams that advanced through regional semifinal rounds held across the state.

The statewide NYBPC offers the largest prizes of any student business competition in the world—a total of \$160,000 was awarded at this year’s competition. Syracuse student teams came home with \$140,000 of the prize money, competing against teams from 60 colleges and universities representing the 10 Regional Economic Development Council zones (Capital Region, Central New York, North Country, Mohawk Valley, Finger Lakes, Western New York, Southern Tier, Mid-Hudson, New York City, and Long Island). Winners were selected by expert judges that included venture capitalists, angel investors, investment bankers, public and private investors, and seasoned entrepreneurs.

The Syracuse prize winners:

- **\$100,000 Grand Prize:** Spark Charge—Josh Aviv, Jaydeep Sathe, Bryan Christopher Morris; portable, fast-charging battery unit for electric vehicles; spcev.com.
- **\$10,000 First Place, Clean Technology:** Spark Charge, spcev.com.
- **\$10,000 First Place, Social Entrepreneurship/Non-profit:** Thrive Project—Ryan Brinkerhoff, Brian Kam, Josh Moon, Khalid Bin Ayaz Khan, Amanda Chou; empowering underserved communities through education and skills training for sustainability; org.
- **\$10,000 First Place, Service:** IID—Jack Phillips; 3D printed architectural elements for the historic preservation industry.
- **\$10,000 First Place, Software/IT:** Power Spike—**AJ Damiano**; influencer marketplace for live streamers; power-spike.com.

Syracuse teams also won the following prestigious NYBPC awards:

- **Undergraduate Excellence Award:** Busie—Seth Samowitz, Louis Bookoff, Joshua Bain; quoting and booking app for charter bus operators.
- **People’s Choice Award:** Shine the Magazine—Michaela Anne Quigley; online publication for teenagers and young adults with disabilities.
- **Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprise Awards:** Origin Story—Analise Sesay; subscription service of artist/maker products for niche consumer market; Modo Script—David Zuleta; smart pill device integrated with technology platform to combat prescription drug abuse.

Compete CNY, the NYBPC qualifying competition for the Central New York region, was held in March and was organized by the Syracuse University Libraries’ Blackstone LaunchPad, whose staff also accompanied the teams to Albany last week. “The Blackstone LaunchPad has provided business planning expertise, mentorship, collaboration space and presentation guidance to teams across Syracuse University,” says Dean of Libraries David Seaman, “and we are delighted at the impact this new library service has had in its first year of operation.”

As an incentive for Syracuse University teams to participate in the qualifying competition, the School of Information Studies (iSchool) offered \$40,000 in prize money from the Raymond von Dran Fund for Student Entrepreneurship (RvD iPrize). RvD iPrize award winners who went on to success in the statewide competition included IID (\$6,000), PowerSpike (\$5,000), Spark Charge (\$4,500), Modo Script (\$3,500), Thrive Project (\$3,000), Busie (\$3,000), Shine the Magazine (\$1,500) and Origin Story (\$1,000).

“I am pleased to see our iPrize winners continuing on to sweep so many of the top spots at the statewide competition,” says iSchool Dean Elizabeth Liddy. “Many of these students were participants in our *Information Technology, Design, and Startups* minor or spent summers at the *Syracuse Student Sandbox* working on their companies,. I am proud to see their efforts and hard work being so handsomely rewarded.”

Spark Charge also won \$10,000 in the Whitman School’s recent Panasci Business Plan Competition— \$2,500 as the third-place overall winner; \$5,000 for the Fetner Prize for Sustainable Enterprise; and \$2,500 for the Goldberg Prize for Technology & Innovation.

“We are extremely proud of our student entrepreneurs and what they have accomplished together,” says Alexander McKelvie, chair of the Department of Entrepreneurship & Emerging Enterprises in the Whitman School. “I believe that this truly is a result of bringing together educational resources, funding and mentors from across the entire SU campus. The diversity in ideas and industries is impressive and underscores the idea that entrepreneurship is a viable path forward for students from every background and school. SU clearly is leading the charge in entrepreneurship education across the state.”