University of Michigan Student Startups Excel at World’s Largest Business Plan Competition with Support of Zell Lurie Institute

Over $215,000 in Prize Money Awarded to Concepts in Green and High Technology Sectors

Ann Arbor, Mich. – April 19, 2011 – The Samuel Zell & Robert H. Lurie Institute for Entrepreneurial Studies at the University of Michigan Ross School of Business today announced that several student-run startups have been awarded top prizes at this year’s Rice University Business Plan Competition (RBPC), the world’s largest and richest graduate-level business plan competition. The two winning teams, Regenerate and Are You a Human, both started their business plan competition season the U-M’s Michigan Business Challenge, and together took home $216,000 in total cash prizes and investment dollars at the RBPC, which took place April 14-16, 2011.

Beating out 500+ original business plan submittals and 42 competing teams, Are You A Human took second place in the competition. The company, which has developed a game-based human authentication tool that replaces the distorted text images known as CAPTCHAs, won $15,000 for this achievement and also went on to win the Most Promising Technology Start-Up award, for an additional $100,000 investment. Regenerate, which markets on-site anaerobic digesters to food service operators, was awarded the “Think Green” investment prize. This $100,000 award from Waste Management is one of seven major investment awards at RBPC and is awarded to the best plan in the green technology sector.

“The Rice competition invites 42 very strong teams. Two Michigan teams rising to the top of this very tough field validates the notable talent and skill of our student entrepreneurs,” said Paul Kirsch, associate director, Zell Lurie Institute for Entrepreneurial Studies at the University of Michigan’s Ross School of Business. “I am confident that the funding they received, in addition to the feedback they gathered and the network connections they made, will significantly help both teams significantly advance their businesses.”

In the spirit of the Institute’s action-based approach to learning, intercollegiate competitions provide further opportunities for students to refine their plans, expand their networks, receive funding, or learn about other aspects of their entrepreneurial venture. All teams receive in-depth training and support from the faculty and staff at the Zell Lurie Institute, including business development, refinement and presentation sessions. These ensure all students have the solid business foundation necessary to commercialize a great idea.

“Participating and succeeding at a competition on the scale of Rice was a tremendous achievement, both for the team and for the growth of Are You A Human,” said Tyler Paxton, CEO of Are You A Human and University of Michigan MBA Candidate 2011. “Paul Kirsch and others at the Institute have provided invaluable help since day one. They added tremendous value by coaching us in the intricacies of the business plan competition circuit and guiding us so the judges and potential investors could fully recognize the promise of Are You A Human to remove the significant pains associated with CAPTCHAs.”

Are You A Human and Regenerate are among many successes for U-M teams on this year’s intercollegiate business plan competition circuit. Reveal Design, developer of a formal verification software tool to chip design firms, won first place at Carnegie Mellon University’s McGinnis Venture Competition in March. Further, MEMStim, which sells MEMS electrode leads to medical device companies and took home $27,000 in prizes at the Michigan Business Challenge for several awards, placed second at San Diego State University’s Venture Challenge. With several competitions still outstanding, many of these teams still have the opportunity to secure additional prizes.

For more information on the Michigan Business Challenge or related competitions U-M students will be participating in, please visit www.zli.bus.umich.edu.
About the Samuel Zell & Robert H. Lurie Institute for Entrepreneurial Studies / Center for Venture Capital & Private Equity Finance at the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan

The Institute and its Center for Venture Capital and Private Equity Finance bring together a potent mix of knowledge, experience and opportunities from the front lines of entrepreneurship and alternative investments. The student learning experience is further enhanced through internships, entrepreneurial clubs and events that serve to provide viable networks and engage the business community. The School’s three student-led investment funds, with over $5M under management, immerse students in the business assessment and investment process. Founding Board Members include Samuel Zell, Chairman of Equity Group Investments and Eugene Applebaum, Founder of Arbor Drugs, Inc. For more information, visit the Institute at www.zli.bus.umich.edu.

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