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Aiming for the Final 12, in Biz Plans

Students from all over JHU take Their best shot

By Greg Rienzi

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Ateret Haselkorn wants to bring the examination room to the patient, and the MPH/MBA student at the [School of Public Health](#) has a plan to do just that — and maybe land herself \$5,000 and some prestige in the process.

Last fall, Haselkorn's faculty adviser told her about the annual Johns Hopkins University Business Plan Competition, an event hosted by the [Center for Leadership Education](#) and now in its 10th year.

In previous years, the competition was open only to full-time undergraduates in the schools of Engineering and Arts and Sciences, but for 2009 organizers opened it up to graduate and part-time students from all the university's academic divisions.

Haselkorn, who once worked for a company that tracked hospital-based technology trends, hatched the concept for Care-Ease, a private telemedicine company that could provide affordable health care services to customers in convenient locations. All they would need is a high-speed Internet connection and a webcam.

Care-Ease would specialize in disease management and preventive health services for both employers and individuals. So, for example, a mother of two in upstate New York could get nutritional advice at home from a clinician in Pennsylvania, or a diabetic employee at Wal-Mart could step into a side office for guidance about his insulin regimen from a physician elsewhere. Care-Ease would use existing medical networks and secure its own physicians and clinicians, who would be provided with the necessary licensing and insurance to deliver such services across state lines.

Haselkorn's idea earned her a spot in the semifinals, which were held after press time on Friday. If the judges deemed her worthy, she and 11 other teams will compete in the finals, to be held from 3 to 4:30 p.m. on Friday, April 3, at Charles Commons. The event is open to the entire Johns Hopkins community.

The JHU Business Plan Competition provides students like Haselkorn with an opportunity to test their entrepreneurial ideas. The contest was launched in 1998 by the [Whiting School of Engineering's W.P. Carey Program in Entrepreneurship and Management](#) and has grown significantly since its inception.

Haselkorn said that the competition seemed like a perfect fit for someone like her who plans on a career on the business side of health care.

"It sounded like an exciting opportunity, and a teacher here told me that grad school is the best time to try new things," she said, "because the risk is lower than otherwise."

She said she thinks her plan also has merit and marketability.

"Businesses are losing tons of money on health care, both directly and indirectly," she said. "If they have unhealthy employees, they pay through the nose for benefits, and when an employee has to leave the office for care, that represents a loss of productivity."

The 2009 JHU Business Plan Competition attracted 42 team entries in two categories: general business, and biotechnology/medical devices and technology.

Stacy Hernandez, senior academic program coordinator for the Center for Leadership Education, said that the center was thrilled with the level of participation in this year's competition, which attracted undergraduate, graduate student, postdoctoral fellow and medical resident teams.

"This is what we were hoping for," she said. "And it's wonderful that we received submissions from so many schools."

Larry Aronhime, a senior faculty member in the Entrepreneurship and Management Program, said that the competition gives students a taste of what it takes to start a business.

"A business is much, much more than a great idea," Aronhime said. "The competition forces students to turn their great ideas into plans for great businesses. It forces them to think through a business rationally, and then sell their idea to others."

For the semifinals, organizers whittled down the 42 entries to 24, 14 in the general business category and 11 in biotechnology/medical devices and technology. The teams represent the Carey Business School, SAIS and the schools of Arts and Sciences, Engineering, Medicine and Public Health.

On Friday, each participant was to give a five-minute PowerPoint presentation of his or her plan to a judging panel of high-ranking industry professionals, many of whom are alumni or friends of the university. The judges were to pick six plans from each category to compete in the finals.

The first-place winner in each category will receive \$5,000 and access to professional services to assist in launching his or her business. The second-place winner will be handed \$3,000 and the third-place winner, \$2,000. Teams that finish fourth to sixth will receive \$250.

Sean Hennessey, a junior political science major, said he hopes he is one of those who finish in the money.

Hennessey's entry is a plan for a company called Student Solutions Technologies, which would help college students organize and plan nearly all aspects of their life from a central, easy-to-use online location.

The site would compile the student's class schedule, homework assignments, test schedule, activities calendar and other important dates. The user would be reminded, for example, about an upcoming team practice, exam or paper that is due. The site also could serve as an academic major and minor tracker, Hennessey said, offering a list of requirements that need to be fulfilled.

Hennessey started work on the concept more than a year ago.

"There were a couple of times I was personally ambushed by assignments and thought it would be nice to have a single place that organized all this information," said Hennessey, who proposes to pilot the service at Johns Hopkins and, if successful, license the technology to other schools.

Hennessey said he valued the business plan competition because it offered good motivation to put his ideas in motion and would help him understand if he can make his business idea a reality.

"I learned how to put together a formal business proposal, and hopefully this will get the ball rolling for me," he said. "It will be nice to win, but I'm also just curious to see what other people think of it."

Other proposals include an on-campus bike rental company, a business application that helps entrepreneurs keep track from their cell phone of their sales and expenses, and a device for hands-free automation and high-throughput DNA extraction from gels.

This year's competition is sponsored by the Center for Leadership Education, the [Carey Business School](#), New Enterprise Associates, Medtronic Foundation and the Hopkins Medical Device Network.

Speaking before the semifinals, Haselkorn said she was cautiously optimistic about her chances but plans to follow through with her idea even if she doesn't win.

"I definitely want to pursue this further," she said. "I think there is a market for this type of service, and it can improve public health. The big issue is to figure out the funding."

She said \$5,000 would be a good start.

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