

UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

By Michelle Franklin

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Triton Entrepreneur Night brings investors, mentors and community members to campus to learn about student startups. Photos by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Publications

Triton Entrepreneur Night Helps Students Promote Their Startups

What happens to an idea? It's an interesting philosophical question, but from a practical standpoint, how do you take an idea and turn it into something tangible? A product, a process, a company? For students at the University of California San Diego, ideas are nurtured through the campus-wide innovation ecosystem. Ideas turn into products, products turn into startups and startups take the stage at pitch competitions like the upcoming Triton Entrepreneur Night (TEN).

TEN takes place on May 16 at Atkinson Hall and is sponsored by The Basement. A part of UC San Diego's Office of Innovation and Commercialization, The Basement provides innovation space, mentorship and entrepreneurship programming to the campus community.

Now in its fourth year, TEN allows students to showcase their companies to investors, potential customers and future employees. This year's showcase will feature about 25 student startups, including Sally STEM (STEM-based toys and learning tools), Swing (an app that improves your golf swing) and FreeGen Technologies (cleaning up ocean litter).

A select group of startups will have the opportunity to participate in the pitch competition. Teams will have three minutes to convince a panel of judges that their company is worth investing in. The top three teams will win cash prizes and services valued at over \$40,000.

Executive Vice Chancellor Elizabeth Simmons will deliver opening remarks and is proud that so many of our students and faculty members are working together in experiential learning. "Events like Triton Entrepreneur Night align to our mission as a university to prepare global citizens of tomorrow by bridging the classroom and community, and enabling our students to apply what they are learning to real-world situations. It is exciting to see so many of our students engaging in different ways of learning and making an impact in their field."

Students Take The Lead

For the first time, TEN will be emceed by student entrepreneurs instead of staff. This year's two emcees are Adriana Guetter and Austin Fennacy, '18. As student entrepreneurs themselves, they understand what it feels like to stand in front of others trying to speak passionately and succinctly about your startup.

In fact, Fennacy who earned a B.S. in bioengineering, says he was terrified of speaking in public before TEN. The experience he gained talking to attendees about his company, GLXY Analytics, helped him overcome his fear. GLXY, which placed in the top three at last year's TEN, captures motion data during strength-training sessions at the gym. That data helps coaches and athletes refine training programs and optimize workouts. Still in beta mode, they plan to launch this summer.

Guetter is a fourth-year bioengineering major who caught the entrepreneurial bug by accident, after getting involved in a friend's startup. After attending some events at The Basement, she became a student innovation ambassador. This is when she began developing Lumnus Consulting, a student-

WHAT: Triton Entrepreneur Night

WHEN: Thursday, May 16, 2019, 5:30-8:30 p.m.

WHERE: Qualcomm Institute, Atkinson Hall

WEBSITE:

<http://www.ucsdbasement.com/>

REGISTER:

<http://bit.ly/TEN2019RSVP>

HASHTAGS: #TEN19

#TritonChangemakers



Alex Ruber (R) talking with attendees about his startup.

operated consulting firm that helps companies with everything from business strategies to software development.

She loves the close-knit community feel that exists at The Basement and looks forward to seeing her peers showcase their startups at TEN: “I’m really going to enjoy seeing everyone again. I love watching the community become stronger and more collaborative.”

Some projects don’t develop along a straight line, but instead pivot to something entirely different. This is what happened with Waitz, which took second place in the pitch competition in 2017. Waitz started as an app that told users how crowded certain places on campus were (think Geisel Library during finals week). The founders, including Max Topolsky, ’17, thought Waitz could grow beyond campus and help customers figure out when their favorite coffee shop or taco spot was busy.

Turns out businesses weren’t interested in the app, but rather than throw in the towel, Topolsky and team re-envisioned. They realized the data they were collecting were more useful to businesses than to customers. Now called OccuSpace, the company provides data to help with smarter space allocation during office construction, optimizing HVAC use depending on occupancy, and providing a more enjoyable experience for occupants.

Topolsky, who has a B.A. in international studies, offers advice to this year’s TEN participants: “The most helpful people are the ones who offer the bluntest criticism. Seek out constructive feedback. It’s the only way to get better.”



Kristine Khieu pitching her startup SoleMate.

That’s advice Julie Kring may want to take to heart. This will be the first year her company, Khepra, participates in TEN. Kring is a fourth-year biochemistry and cell biology major. She’s been passionate about saving the planet from fossil fuels ever since her dad took her to see *An Inconvenient Truth* when she was 6 years old.

Khepra, named after the Egyptian god of the rising sun and wisdom, makes biofuel using renewable energy and plant-based oils using ultrasonic waves. Khepra has only been around for about a year, and Kring says they’re currently focusing on pitching design services to energy companies.



Brandon Magpayo (R) discussing his dating app, Yomp.

Her excitement in participating in TEN is that it's unpredictable. "You never know what the most valuable part will be—talking to a future mentor or collaborator, learning how to talk about your company to the public, or even winning the pitch competition. I'm open to the possibilities," she states.

Gloria Negrete, director of The Basement, says companies like Khepra show how the focus of innovation on campus is changing. "We're not just nurturing entrepreneurs. We want our students to really consider the social impact of

what they're doing, and we want them to see that aspect as just as valuable as funding or revenue. We support our students to be successful entrepreneurs, and we also support them to go out in to the world and do good work."

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