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# Student Social Entrepreneurs Grab Opportunities and Run with Knowledge Gained

**Jason Plant '23, Business Administration: Entrepreneurial Studies and Matt Oriente '23, Business Administration: Information Systems and Business Analytics and Sustainability dual major**

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With the 10th anniversary of the [Social Venture Innovation Challenge](#) approaching, the Sustainability Institute recently caught up with two of its participants, Jason Plant '23 and Matt Oriente '23. The pair was part of the 2020 winning SVIC team, where they presented their startup idea, Hydrophos Solutions. Jason and Matt shared their experience building a business, as well as advice for future SVIC competitors.

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## **Why did you enter the SVIC in 2020 and can you talk about that experience?**

Jason: I initially entered the SVIC in 2020 because one of my now-co-founders, Daisy Burns, continued to suggest that we work together on an entry. We decided to build the largest team possible for the competition and I recruited several friends from the Paul Scholars Program, including Derek Long, Matt Oriente, and Katie Remeis. It took about a week or two before we had any idea what we were going to submit, but I happened to be taking an ecology class at the time that sparked an idea. We were discussing eutrophication, and at the same time, I was reviewing previous SVIC entries for inspiration. I noticed that many entries had a circular economy business model, where a waste product is turned into a revenue stream by finding creative ways to recycle the waste product. I got to thinking: "what if we could prevent the nutrients from entering waterways, and sell the nutrients for a profit?" I bugged one of my roommates who is a biochemistry major about the possibility of separating phosphorus, the most economically viable nutrient, from eutrophied bodies of water. After much conversation, he said it was theoretically possible, so I presented the idea to my team. After conducting significant research, talking to others with more expertise, and making many adjustments, we started to come up with a feasible entry. This was when we first met Ian Grant of the UNH ECenter, who took our submission to the next level with his hands-on coaching. He has since become a long-time advisor and has helped us achieve things we never could have dreamed of. When we found out we made the finals, we were extremely excited and nervous, and Matt Oriente and I practiced our pitch for hours on end until we could recite it flawlessly. We were incredibly lucky and grateful to win the Most Impact Potential and 1st Place Audience Choice Awards, but more importantly, we formed lifelong friendships and started a venture that would continue to bring us unimaginable opportunities: HydroPhos Solutions. Since starting HydroPhos Solutions, we have won multiple national entrepreneurship competitions and had the pleasure of attending the Draper University pre-accelerator program in Silicon

Valley, but it all started with the SVIC!



Jason advertises his team's startup, Hydrophos Solutions

Matt: I entered the SVIC in 2020 with a team that Jason set up. I did SVIC the year earlier during my freshman year for a class but didn't make it to finals, so I was eager to try again. When thinking about an idea to submit, Jason recently took a ecology class and he mentioned how often eutrophication was brought up as an environmental issue, so that really directed our attention to a certain problem we could solve. Once our idea was finalized, we just went to work for a couple of weeks. We reached out to industry professionals and tried to talk to as many people in our idea's fields as possible. I still remember working on our video for hours one weekend hoping to perfect it for submission. Additionally, we really sought out a lot of feedback during our coaching sessions from peer mentors and UNH faculty. It's funny how the idea has evolved over time in just 2 years. We currently target a whole different customer base with an entirely new product process, and we recently added members to the team and our advisory board.

**You've been heavily involved in sustainability since you've been at UNH, can you talk about that experience and an "a-ha" moment you've had?**

Jason: My sustainability journey at UNH began with the SVIC. Since high school, I've wanted to be a social entrepreneur, as I loved the idea of creating a positive impact while making a profit. After the SVIC, I realized all the incredible opportunities to learn about sustainable business at UNH. I first got involved with the [Changemaker Fellowship](#), giving me a strong interdisciplinary knowledge of sustainability. I have since become a Lead Changemaker Coach and had the opportunity to participate in UNH's [B Impact Clinic](#), first as a Student Consultant and then as a Peer Mentor. In fact, I still use the skills I learned in the B Impact Clinic in my internship, where I serve as a consultant for our portfolio companies and help them along their journey to achieving B Corp Certification. My 'a-ha' moment was realizing the value of B Corporation Consulting and how specialized a skill it is, and relevant to my career goals. I even was able to name the Venture-RBF's B Corp consulting program: the B-First Program.

Matt: One of the reasons I came to UNH was for the [Sustainability Dual Major](#). Originally from Bucks County, PA, I discovered UNH when looking at schools that offered both academic and professional experiences with sustainability. This started with the Changemaker Fellowship, where as a freshman I met like-minded interdisciplinary students and was introduced to different opportunities I could pursue as an undergrad. Fast forward to today (my fall senior year), and I've had the opportunity to participate in [Semester in the City](#) working with the [UNH Foundation](#) and their ESG investing initiatives, the [Summer Sustainability Fellowship](#) working with Lonza Biologics and their Corporate Social Responsibility impact, the [Carbon Clinic](#) conducting carbon accounting for the town of Hartford, Vermont, and be a student member on the [UNH Committee for Investor Responsibility](#) – all of which stem from UNH opportunities!

## **Are you currently involved with the SVIC in 2022 and if so, how?**

Both: This year, we are both Changemaker Coaches for the sophomores-seniors cohort of the Changemaker Fellowship, mentoring eight total group entries to SVIC. Participating in the SVIC is a new facet of the program this year and we hope it gives students value in a variety of skillsets: creativity, collaboration, and communication. The focus of the fellowship is to give students resources so they can apply sustainability outside of the classroom, so what better way to do that than to dive right in and come up with entrepreneurial ideas to fix pressing environmental and social issues.

## **What advice would you give to current contestants?**

Jason: Do your research! The more research you do on your idea and feasibility, the more convincing your SVIC submission, and the stronger your performance in Q&A during the finals. Continual research is what made it possible for my team to get a handle on an idea that was truly outside our realm of expertise.

Use your video for providing powerful visuals to create an emotionally compelling case for the business. Use the written submission for the facts, statistics, and logical arguments behind your idea.

Lastly, seek advice from others who have more experience. I always say that my job as an entrepreneur is not to be the smartest person in the room but to listen to the smartest people in the room. I especially recommend reaching out to Ian Grant, the Executive Director of the [ECenter](#). He is a wealth of knowledge and happy to help students. I'm also happy to help contestants as I have a lot of experience pitching for competitions and am passionate about helping others succeed!

Matt: Talk to as many people in your idea's field or industry as possible. Your own research can give great macro insights and trends, but industry professionals can talk about personal experiences, which is huge to fully understand the problem you are tackling. Additionally, try and make your idea understandable on a large-scale. Obviously make

your submission thorough and detailed but being able to make it appealing to all people with different types of backgrounds, experiences, knowledge, etc. is an artform (this is still something Jason and I work on all the time). A tip for this is to describe personal situations or experiences you might have encountered that deal with your addressed problem that could be relatable to many people.

### **What are you looking to do after graduation?**

Jason: After graduation, my plan is to work for Venture-RBF - a venture debt fund dedicated to supporting under-resourced, stakeholder-focused entrepreneurs. I have had the pleasure of completing their due diligence process, running their B-First Program, and building their Investment Capital Accelerator which focuses on helping our portfolio entrepreneurs foster a high-performance, inclusive culture while becoming investor-ready. At Venture-RBF, there are limitless avenues for me to learn about startups and fund management. I also plan to continue working on HydroPhos Solutions as a side project until the day when HydroPhos may be big enough to constitute a full-time job.



Jason (second from left) and Matt (front right) at work with their team in the ECenter

Matt: After graduation, I am currently evaluating some options regarding a career in a finance (specifically either ESG or startup investing roles). I had a great internship in Boston this past summer with Ironwood Investment Management and am leaning on living in the Boston area after May. Of course, I will continue to work on our start-up, HydroPhos Solutions. It is crazy to think that my 4 years of college have already

gone by. If you told me what I'd be doing now 4 years ago, I'm not sure I would've believed you. Looking forward, I am just excited to put forth all the things I've absorbed in college and continue to grow and learn.

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