

Media Relations

September 30, 2013

UNH Announces Winners of First Statewide Social Business Innovation Challenge



The winning student team PLAN: The Post-Landfill Action Network receives its award from Muhammad Yunus. Pictured from left to right are Fiona Wilson, assistant professor of strategy, social entrepreneurship, and sustainability; Michael Merenda, professor of strategic management and entrepreneurship; junior Sophie Rathjen of Sanbornton; Muhammad Yunus; Alex Freid '13 of Lee; and Dan Innis, dean of the Peter T. Paul College of Business and Economics. Credit: Lisa Nugent/UNH Photographic Services

DURHAM, N.H. – A team of University of New Hampshire students who proposed to reduce the amount of reusable items that end up in landfills and a team of community members from Durham who aim to help one billion people who struggle every day without access to clean water have won the first statewide Social Business Innovation Challenge.

The winners were announced today, Monday, Sept. 30, 2013, and were presented their awards by Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Laureate and pioneer of the microfinance industry. The challenge asked college students and community members from across the state to propose innovative, market-based solutions to pressing social and environmental issues at the state, national or global level.

Social businesses create innovative solutions to difficult problems such as poverty and climate change. Unlike traditional nonprofit organizations, social businesses aim to be market-based and to fund their operations and growth through earned revenues rather than donations. Like for-profits, social businesses harness the best

of market-based approaches, but have a primary social, rather than financial, objective. Social business provides a necessary framework for tackling social issues by combining business know-how with the desire to improve quality of life.

“Innovation is the engine of our economy both here in New Hampshire and across the country, and challenges like today’s are important for incentivizing students and members of the community to identify pressing social and/or environmental issues and to encourage innovative business-oriented approaches to find solutions,” New Hampshire Gov. Maggie Hassan said in a statement.

Following the awards presentation, Yunus gave the keynote address at the statewide New Hampshire Social Business and Microfinance Forum. The events were hosted by UNH and organized by the [Peter T. Paul College of Business and Economics](#) and the [Carsey Institute](#), both at UNH, and the [New Hampshire Community Loan Fund](#).

“When business gets involved with solving problems, no problem will remain unsolved. The distance between the possible and the impossible is shrinking. It’s just a matter of our imagination. Let’s imagine a world where there is no poverty. Let’s imagine a world where there is no unemployment,” Yunus said.

In the student track, 39 teams representing the following New Hampshire colleges and universities competed: Antioch University, Franklin Pierce University, Southern N.H. University, UNH, and UNH Manchester. In the community track, 26 teams submitted materials, including a team consisting of a teacher and five middle-school students from Northwood School in Northwood. [Sixteen teams](#) were chosen to compete in Monday’s finals of the statewide Social Business Innovation Challenge.

The winning student team, [PLAN: The Post-Landfill Action Network](#), proposed a membership organization that provides student groups on college campuses with the tools to reduce the amount of reusable items that end up in landfills through self-sustaining move-out waste reduction programs. PLAN's income is generated through membership fees, paid by campuses for access to planning assistance and discounted services. The UNH team members are Alex Freid '13 of Lee, junior Tyler Loranger of Concord, and junior Sophie Rathjen of Sanbornton.

The team received a cash prize of \$4,200. The cash prize was made possible by the Paul College of Business and Economics, the Bud Albin Fund, and donations to a crowd-funding campaign.

The second and third-place student winners are [HYdration for Dominican Republic with Agua TEam \(HYDRATE\)](#), a team of UNH students who propose helping communities build water treatment systems and find financing for the projects, and [ThoughtSoko](#), a team of UNH students who propose a micro-employment system to leverage the role of mobile phones in developing countries. They received prizes of \$2,000 and \$1,000 respectively.

The winning community team, [Agua Inc.](#) of Durham, has worked with experts around the world to create a proprietary system where contaminated water enters into treatment ponds. Specialized floating plants create micro-ecosystems where pathogens and contaminants are removed. The goal is to help the one billion people globally who struggle each day without access to clean water. Team members are Bret Steiman, Kris Roller and Pedro Thomas Delgado Ortiz.

The community team received a first-place cash prize of \$4,200, which was made possible, in part, by a grant from the Transformation and Innovation Fund of the [New Hampshire Charitable Foundation](#), as well as the generosity of the donors in a crowd-funding campaign. In addition, the first-place winners will receive 100 hours of consulting generously donated by [PixelMEDIA](#), a leading New Hampshire-based web strategy, design and development firm; and six months of complimentary participation in the New Hampshire Innovation and Commercialization Center ([NH-ICC](#))'s Accelerator Company Program. In partnership with the University of New Hampshire, the NH-ICC is dedicated to accelerating business and innovation in New Hampshire.

The second and third-place winners are [Senergy Solar](#) of Portsmouth, and [Nearby Registry](#) of Concord. They received cash prizes of \$2,000 and \$1,000 respectively.

All six finalists also will receive scholarships to the next [Stonyfield Entrepreneurship Institute](#) courtesy of New Hampshire Social Innovation Challenge judge Gary Hirshberg. Cash prizes are intended to provide investment to a social business, to help fund its establishment and/or growth, or to help winning students further their education around concepts related to social business.

Following the competition, Yunus addressed attendees about the benefits of social businesses in helping address the world's most pressing social and environmental problems. Only the seventh person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize (2006), the Presidential Medal of Freedom (2009), and the Congressional Gold Medal (2013), Yunus is best known for his pioneering work as the founder of the Grameen Bank, as the "father of microcredit," and more broadly for the movement to create social businesses.

"With Muhammad Yunus's vision and world-changing achievements to inspire us, the New Hampshire community embraces its commitment to innovation and progress in social business and celebrates the promise of the collaborations that we imagine, build and strengthen through today's forum," UNH President Mark Huddleston said.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

PHOTOS

http://www.unh.edu/news/img/challenge_student.jpg

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Credit: Lisa Nugent/UNH Photographic Services

http://www.unh.edu/news/img/challenge_community.jpg

The winning community team, Agua Inc. of Durham receives its award from Muhammad Yunus. Pictured from left to right are Fiona Wilson, assistant professor of strategy, social entrepreneurship, and sustainability; Michael Merenda, professor of strategic management and entrepreneurship; team member Kris Roller; team member Bret Steiman; Muhammad Yunus; and Dan Innis, dean of the Peter T. Paul College of Business and Economics.

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