Tulane teams win big in neuroscience startup competition

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Two teams led by current Tulane students or graduates were among the winners of the Neuro Startup Challenge, an international competition designed to bring National Institutes of Health medical inventions to market.



Tulane-based ventures Estia Pharmaceuticals and Vascular Therapeutics were among 13 teams selected as winners of the Neuro Startup Challenge.

The A. B. Freeman School of Business, School of Science and Engineering, School of Medicine, School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, and the Office of Technology Transfer at Tulane, along with the New Orleans Bioinnovation Center, were among the units that played major roles in mentoring and supporting the winning teams.

“This was truly an interdisciplinary effort among faculty, students and graduates that leverages our university's collective strengths and contributes on a national level,” said Sherif Ebrahim, director of entrepreneurship and innovation education at the Freeman School.

This year’s winning Tulane teams, Estia Pharmaceuticals and Vascular Therapeutics, were among only 13 teams selected as winners of the challenge, which attracted

more than 70 teams.

Estia Pharmaceuticals will seek to develop a new, commercially successful formulation of the drug Modafinil, which has shown promising results in treating ADHD. Estia Pharmaceuticals is a start-up founded by Lowry Curley, a graduate of the Tulane School of Science and Engineering, along with Nick Fears, a Tulane psychology graduate student, and Mitchell Fullerton, a Tulane biomedical engineer and doctoral student.

Vascular Therapeutics, which includes Tulane engineering and medical students Kevin Chiu, Kim Lee, Michelle McCarthy, Jason Ryans and Ashwin Sivakumar, will work to commercialize a therapeutic that seeks to increase the treatment window for stroke patients.

This was the second year in a row that two teams from Tulane were among the competition's winners.

"It is completely amazing that two years in a row two teams from Tulane have won; statistically the odds of this are very low," said Rosemarie Truman, founder and CEO of the Center for Advancing Innovation, which coordinated the competition. "Obviously, you have some very bright and talented people there."