Evacuation app earns top prize in inaugural Freeman AI Innovation Challenge

September 21, 2026



Max Jacobson (BSM ’29), left, and Max Mansourian (BSM ’29) earned first place in the inaugural Freeman AI Innovation Challenge with BoodleBox with their pitch for Shepherd, an AI hurricane companion that provides customized directions to evacuees.

An AI-powered app that integrates emergency information from multiple sources and provides customized directions for people evacuating from hurricanes won the grand prize of $5,000 in the inaugural Freeman AI Innovation Challenge with BoodleBox.

The 48-hour “venture sprint,” supported by technology partner BoodleBox, was hosted by Tulane University's Freeman School of Business and took place in the Goldring/Woldenberg Business Complex. More than 40 student teams signed up to take part in the competition, which challenged students to develop and present an AI-powered business idea with New Orleans roots and global potential over the

course of two intensive days.

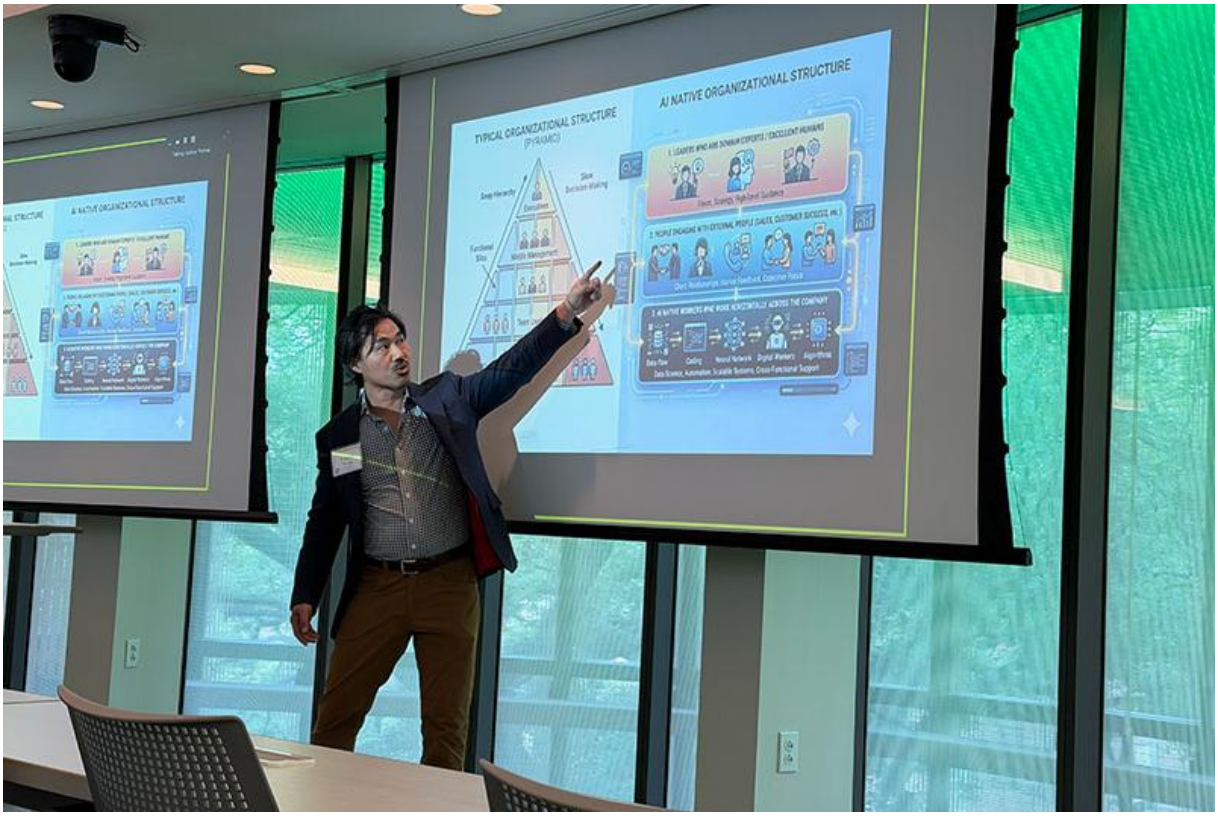
The students were coached in building their pitches by staff from BoodleBox, a collaborative AI platform focused on higher education that offers access to multiple AI models in a unified workspace, enabling users to leverage different AI capabilities and collaborate with both humans and AI assistants. The Freeman School partnered with BoodleBox in 2024 to bring AI-assisted learning into the classroom. Since then, more than 1,800 Freeman students have taken part in AI-based projects across more than 130 courses.

Max Jacobson (BSM ’29) and Max Mansourian (BSM ’29) earned first place in the competition with their pitch for Shepherd, an AI hurricane companion that synthesizes four real-time data streams into a calm voice that tells users when to leave, where to go and what to bring.

“We wanted to solve the problem of disjointed information during disasters by combining all relevant flows of information under an AI wrapper,” Jacobson explained. “Shepherd is less zone-based alert and more of a calm emergency management worker.”

In keeping with the charge of global potential, Jacobson said the app can be adapted to support disaster evacuees across the region and even around the world.

“On the Gulf Coast alone, there are 20 million households with hurricane insurance, which represents a Serviceable Addressable Market of $4.2 billion,” Jacobson said. “Globally, in the market for emergency management and risk mitigation software, our Total Addressable Market is $141 billion.”



France Hoang, CEO of AI company BoodleBox, leads a session for students on the structure of AI-native businesses during the inaugural Freeman AI Innovation Challenge with BoodleBox.

The size of that market appealed to competition judges.

“The product made sense,” said BoodleBox CEO France Hoang, who served as one of the judges. “It’s an urgent problem, it’s an addressable market and they have founder-market fit — they’ve lived through this. They have a story they can tell about it and there’s a reason for them to care.”

In addition to Hoang, final round judges included Michael White, senior talent partner of Copado, and Evie Poitevent Sanders, vice president of innovation & entrepreneurship with GNO Inc.

DeltaPulseAI, an underground leak detection technology company developed Dylan Krypell (BSM ’29) and Pablo Saiso (BSM ’27), won second place and a prize of $2,500, and Krewe, an AI-powered SaaS developed by Miles Gail (BSM ’26, SLA ’26) that enables parading organization to track and manage permit deadlines, budget scenarios, vendor options and other responsibilities, won third place and a prize of $1,500.

The $9,000 in prize money may have been the draw, but student participants said the experience of using AI to bring an idea from conception to pitch in less than 48 hours was a reward in itself.

“I’ve always been really interested in AI and having the business school provide this type of space really incentivized me to want to do something,” said Krypell. “Pablo and I started thinking about different ideas, and that whole process was so exciting.”

Hoang said BoodleBox has collaborated with a number of schools on AI pitch competitions, and he’s been consistently impressed with the results.

“We are always amazed at the innovation and creativity of students,” added Hoang. “AI is about augmenting and unlocking human potential, not replacing it, and events like this showcase that 100%.”

“The role of AI in business is important to keep up with, and rather than complaining about it taking over, people need to embrace it,” added Jacobson. “I feel that events like the AI Innovation Challenge are a great way to get students to learn how to use AI tools, and it gives them real exposure to what applied AI use looks like.”