

For Immediate Release



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Startups win \$45,000 at the AUB President's Innovation Challenge

Ten participants with innovative ideas competed on stage at the AUB President's Innovation Challenge Final Pitching and Awards Ceremony on October 28. Two startup ideas were selected by a jury of industry leaders to receive a total of \$45,000 in cash prizes, in addition to full incubation and mentorship support at the Talal and Madiha Zein AUB Innovation Park.

The AUB President's Innovation Challenge is a yearly competition for entrepreneurs from the American University of Beirut (AUB) community—including students, staff, faculty members, and alumni—who have viable and scalable innovation ideas, which can improve the well-being of people living in the current context of environmental hazards and economic challenges by helping create an inclusive and human-centered future.

“I sincerely believe that innovation and entrepreneurship are major keys to a better economy in Lebanon, and that supporting them can give a real chance for the people of this country to come up with solutions for issues that they have to deal with on a daily basis,” said AUB President Fadlo Khuri in his opening remarks.

Beirut Digital District CEO and representative of the Zein family Mouhamad Rabah said that this challenge as well as the Talal and Madiha Zein AUB Innovation Park provide AUB students, faculty, and staff with “hope to create the next big breakthrough idea, hope to innovate to be able to overcome the increasing daily challenges,” and “hope for building a better tomorrow to hopefully be able to help your country, or even better, stay in your country Lebanon.”

The event

Chief Innovation and Transformation Officer at AUB Yousif Asfour explained that the 10 semifinalists presented during the event were selected out of 114 applicants and reached the finals after two rounds of screening, having been selected by a group of leading national and

international experts. “Over the past few months these semifinalist teams have all made substantial progress towards developing actionable and high-impact social ventures. They have reviewed the multiple rounds of feedback, gone through “mock jury” recommendations, and worked with professional mentors to help them refine and improve their ideas.”

This year, applicants submitted their innovative ideas in the themes of future of health, data-driven technology for agriculture, alternate and circular economy, environmental conservation and cleantech, and anywhere operations. Ten finalists were then selected to compete at the pitching and award ceremony.

Prior to the event, the challenge judges received short videos of the finalists’ detailed pitches. Each finalist spent six minutes on stage during the event, presenting their ideas to the judges and responding to questions.

The judges included AUB President Fadlo Khuri, Beirut Digital District CEO and representative of the Zein family Mouhamad Rabah, Asfari Foundation CEO Saba Al Mubaslat, and AUB Trustee Salwa F. Darraj.

A panel discussion about the future of entrepreneurship in Lebanon was also held during the event.

The startups

Finalists Daniel Masri and Chaza Rammal, won the first prize for their startup Poseidon Hydro, which is creating an energy efficient machine for massive cost savings in energy expenditure. The second prize went to entrepreneurs Yara Haidar, Sarah El Harouny, and Lina Hammoud, for their startup Cloud, which works on producing affordable, hypo-allergenic, organic, and biodegradable sanitary pads made from banana fibers to combat period poverty.

“I would like to congratulate the winners and to let them know that this is the beginning of a new journey of commitment. I also would like to congratulate all the finalists on the great work and promising future,” said Asfour.

In addition to the two winners, the startups that made it to the finalists were B-Eating Disorders, that works on spreading awareness on eating disorders, helping people with their recovery, and increasing accessibility to the medical and paramedical fields; Bye Bye Monthly Injections, a startup that works on treating blinding macular degeneration with a one-time five-minute laser procedure in people who refuse or cannot afford the monthly, costly eye injections; and ICreaT, which works on testing creatinine instantaneously using radio frequency sensors. By rapid and accurate creatinine evaluation, ICreaT can save the lives of millions by early detection of illnesses such as chronic kidney disease.

Other startups that were pitched at the event were NeuroNap, which is designing a device that evaluates sleep efficiency and assesses stress levels for the purpose of enhancing the overall customers' lifestyle; AgSat, which calculates irrigation requirements for crops anywhere, anytime using remote sensing and weather data in near-real time; Green Soap, which collects used cooked oil and transforms it into soaps; El Bostapp, a startup that is mixing technology with the informal bus sector of Lebanon to restructure it and open it to all the citizens especially in the current difficult times; and Sila, which connects slides to students' devices, allowing for seamless collaboration, posting questions and answers, or displaying their work.

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 140 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 365-bed hospital.

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