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5. Entrepreneurship Education and Innovation Talent

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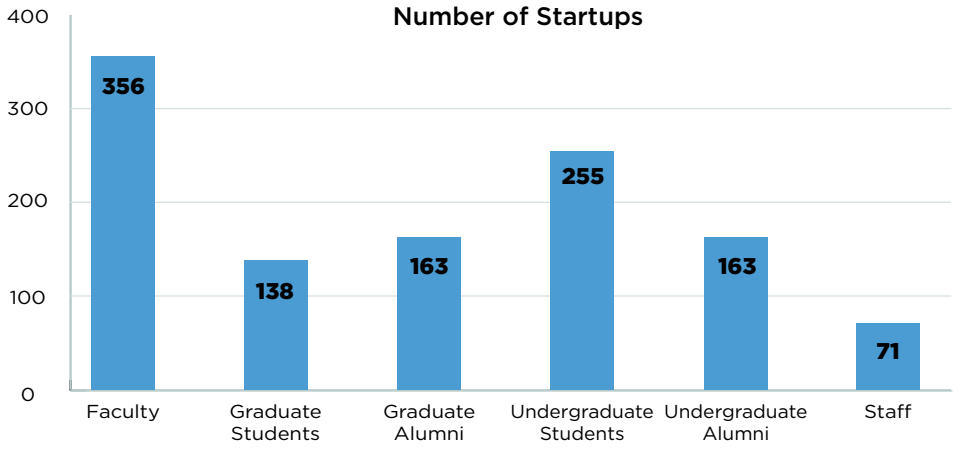
Carolina's campuswide, cross-departmental approach to entrepreneurship education and innovation talent development — an end-to-end model that incorporates a mix of curricular, co-curricular and professional development offerings — helps all types of Tar Heels build entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and practice into their pursuits.

Using the entrepreneurial knowledge and skills they build during their time at Carolina, many faculty, staff and students — and subsequently, alumni — create novel initiatives or products, act as intrapreneurs within existing organizations or launch their own ventures. Some are inspired by single courses or training sessions, while others immerse themselves further into entrepreneurship through internships, fellowships, formal degrees and other curricular pathways. The impact generated by entrepreneurial education and training is also wide-ranging. However, one measure of how people apply the entrepreneurial skills they develop at Carolina is startup creation. On this measure, Carolina's innovation talent pool runs deep. Approximately 356 UNC-affiliated startups had one or more faculty founders. Another 255 ventures had at least one founder who was an undergraduate student, while 138 firms had a graduate student founder. Among Carolina's alumni ventures, 163 had an undergraduate alumni founder, while another 163 were founded by alumni of the University's graduate programs.

FIGURE 13

Innovation Talent: UNC Startup Founder Status at Time of Founding



Note: Founder data will not sum to total number of startups due to some startups having multiple founders.

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

100+
INNOVATION-FOCUSED COURSES

Based on a snapshot of spring and summer 2025 courses, UNC-Chapel Hill offered more than 100 courses that contained content emphasizing innovation and/or entrepreneurship.

4,000+
FACULTY AND STUDENT INNOVATORS TRAINED

At least 4,100 faculty and students have participated in formal innovation and entrepreneurship workshops, training programs, fellowships, and internships all-time, with nearly 650 participating in FY25 alone.*

469
STUDENT PITCH TEAMS SUPPORTED

Since 2017, Innovate Carolina and other campus programs have supported 469 student venture and innovation pitch teams, with 61 teams supported in FY25.**

75+
FACULTY AND STUDENT INNOVATION FELLOWS

Carolina has supported over 75 innovation fellows, including 32 active fellows during FY25.***

This section of the report, while not fully comprehensive, describes many examples of entrepreneurship education and training at Carolina. Evolving and expanding UNC-based learning experiences help inspire and shape the innovative pursuits of the University community.

* *Innovation training includes: NSF I-Corps Program; KickStart Startup Bootcamps; Innovate Carolina Faculty Innovation Workshops; Shuford Program required internship/Shuford Away Program; Carolina Innovators Connect Program; Carolina Changemakers Masterclass (Graduate School); Institute for Convergent Science Faculty Fellows and Postdoc Fellows and Scientists; Carolina Angel Network Venture Fellows; Design and Innovation for the Public Good Fellows; School of Law Institute for Innovation students; KickStart Venture Catalysts Fellows; Eshelman Innovation Translational Academy; Student pitch teams supported by Innovate Carolina, the Gillings School of Global Public Health, and Kenan-Flagler Business School.*

** *Student pitch teams supported by Innovate Carolina, the Gillings School of Global Public Health, and Kenan-Flagler Business School.*

*** *Innovation Fellows include: Institute for Convergent Science: Faculty Fellows and Postdoc Innovation Fellows and Scientists; Eshelman Innovation Translational Academy; KickStart Venture Catalyst Fellows; Carolina Angel Network Venture Fellows; Design and Innovation for the Public Good Fellows.*

CURRICULAR PATHWAYS

According to a baseline study conducted by Innovate Carolina in 2019, more than 100 UNC undergraduate and graduate-level courses encompassed content emphasizing innovation and/or entrepreneurship, providing many curricular opportunities for students to build an entrepreneurial mindset and begin practicing corresponding skillsets. An AI-guided analysis performed by Innovate Carolina of courses offered during spring and summer 2025 found a continued emphasis on entrepreneurial teaching and learning, showing approximately 107 courses focused on innovation and entrepreneurship content. While a complete review of individual courses is beyond the scope of this report, below are highlights of several formal curricular pathways focused on innovation and entrepreneurship: the undergraduate minor, plus graduate degrees, concentrations, and certificates.

SHUFORD PROGRAM IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- **Third-largest minor at UNC-Chapel Hill, with 64% of all majors represented.**
- **1,970 Shuford Program graduates (529 declared majors in FY25).**
- **429 students participating in international entrepreneurship experiences.**

The Shuford Program in Entrepreneurship at UNC-Chapel Hill offers an interdisciplinary minor housed in the College of Arts and Sciences' Department of Economics. The program is enriched by partnerships with professional schools, equipping students with practical business skills, an entrepreneurial mindset and the human skills that are essential for effective leadership. Through hands-on learning, mentorship, and a robust professional network, students gain confidence in transforming ideas into action, launching ventures, or driving innovation.

Founded in 2004 with the creation of the entrepreneurship minor and expanded by the transformative Shuford family gift in 2017, the program stands as a national model for undergraduate entrepreneurship education. The Shuford Program engages a growing number of students and is the third largest minor on campus with 64% of UNC majors represented.

Activity and Impact: As of spring 2025, there were 529 declared minors in the Shuford Program. In total, 1,970 students have graduated from the Shuford program since it originated. Of those graduates, 429 students participated in the Shuford Away Program, allowing them to experience entrepreneurship in the U.S. and international settings, including New York City, London, Prague, Manchester and Thailand. During FY24 and FY25, the Shuford Program provided more than $122,000 to support 29 Shuford Away students during their international learning and work experiences.

To complete the minor, students must secure internships, whether at large corporations, small businesses, nonprofits, or in some instances, pursuing their own ventures. The Shuford Program provided a combined $253,000 in funding to support 76 student interns during FY24 and FY25.

KENAN-FLAGLER BUSINESS SCHOOL ENTREPRENEURSHIP COURSES AND MBA CONCENTRATION

- **429 students completed the MBA entrepreneurship concentration (44 in FY25).**
- **$1 million in charitable donations by student ventures in undergraduate entrepreneurship courses.**
- **1,200 students from 120 global universities engaged in the Venture Capital Investment Competition.**

Undergraduate course offerings at Kenan-Flagler Business School foster entrepreneurial thinking across disciplines. Among the school's core set of undergraduate courses are Entrepreneurship Lab and Entrepreneurship and Business Planning, which develop foundational skills for venture creation. In FY25, the new Flash Entrepreneurship course provided students with an opportunity to operate a real pop-up business on Franklin Street. In addition, two undergraduate-level venture capital courses emphasize hands-on learning, team collaboration and practical application.

At the graduate level, the entrepreneurship concentration offered via the school's full-time MBA program equips students to build, lead and invest in entrepreneurial ventures. Students tailor their education, choosing from 13 electives aligned with three pathways: founder/operator, funder and growth executive/intrapreneur.

Activity and Impact: During 2024-25, the Kenan-Flagler Business School offered five core entrepreneurship-focused undergraduate courses, enrolling approximately 400 students per year.

During FY25, 44 students completed the school's MBA concentration in entrepreneurship, contributing to the 429 total MBA students who have completed the concentration.

In spring 2025, the Entrepreneurship and Business Planning course taught by Jim Kitchen, Professor of the Practice of Strategy and Entrepreneurship, achieved a notable milestone of $1 million in all-time net profits earned by student venture teams. The course, which Kitchen has taught for 15 years, gives students the chance to work in teams: developing business ventures, applying what they've learned in real-world settings and generating real revenue. The class also gives students an avenue to give back by donating profits to the Make-A-Wish Foundation of Eastern North Carolina and the 1789 Student Venture Fund, which provides seed funding to Carolina students interested in launching early-stage startups.

MBA students also immerse themselves in experiential programs like the Venture Capital Investment Competition, founded by the business school and now the world's largest venture capital competition. The competition engages more than 1,200 MBA and undergraduate students from 120 global business schools to evaluate real startup ventures.

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION: MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP (MEITE)

- **134 students graduated from MEITE program (since 2017).**
- **48 students enrolled in FY25 — an all-time record enrollment.**
- **Seven startups launched by MEITE students and alumni.**

The MEITE program in the School of Education equips students to design and lead transformative educational innovations across industries and learning environments. Blending coursework in learning sciences, design thinking, entrepreneurship and educational technology, MEITE prepares graduates to build scalable, research-informed solutions for social good. Students complete 36 credit hours and a required internship. The program has a 100% internship placement rate and has grown steadily over the past several years.

Activity and Impact: During 2024-25, the program reached a record of 48 students enrolled. In total, the MEITE program has graduated 134 students as of summer 2025. MEITE students and alumni have launched seven ventures, including InstructSTEM, an educator platform created by alumna Megan Byers in FY25 to support STEM teachers with evidence-based instructional tools. The program celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2026, a major milestone for a trailblazing, interdisciplinary graduate offering.

CAROLINA GRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN INNOVATION FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD (CIPG)

- **107 students earned the CIPG certificate since 2021 (21 in FY25).**
- **43% increase in students graduated over the past two cohorts.**

The Carolina Graduate Certificate in Innovation for the Public Good (CIPG) offers UNC-Chapel Hill master's and doctoral students a multidisciplinary pathway to learn and apply modern changemaking practices. Sponsored by three academic units — the College of Arts and Sciences (Department of Public Policy), Gillings School of Global Public Health, and the School of Education — the nine-credit certificate emphasizes creative, evidence-based problem solving and community-centered design. Open to graduatestudents across all schools and disciplines, CIPG supports students in translating ideas into real-world impact.

Activity and Impact: By the end of 2025, approximately 107 students will have graduated from the CIPG program (since 2021). Interest has grown significantly since the program graduated its first cohort in 2021, particularly following enrollment by the inaugural Master of Public Policy (MPP) cohort in 2023. Compared to the certificate's first two years (30 total graduates in 2021 and 2022 combined), the program has graduated 43% more students during its most recent two years (43 total graduates in 2024 and 2025).

INNOVATION TALENT PROGRAMS

Innovate Carolina and other programs across campus offer co-curricular and professional development programs that train students, postdoctoral researchers, faculty, and others who want to become successful entrepreneurs, venture founders, or leaders within startups and innovation-focused organizations. Carolina's innovation talent programs help participants build skills, mindsets, and real-world experiences they can use to lead startups and innovative projects.

Faculty and Staff Offerings

INSTITUTE FOR CONVERGENT SCIENCE (ICS) FACULTY FELLOWS

- **Two ICS faculty fellows supported with $220,000 since 2023.**
- **Startup company Sorbenta launched, earning $349,000 in early capital.**
- **Faculty co-leading NC Pure Project to create safer drinking water.**

The Institute for Convergent Science (ICS) Faculty Fellows Program supports, attracts and retains top faculty who are committed to both groundbreaking basic research and the translational work needed to move discoveries into the world. ICS Faculty Fellows support faculty-led teams developing technologies or products, provide mentorship to innovation-oriented postdocs, and help build a community of researcher-driven entrepreneurs on campus.

Activity and Impact: Since 2023, ICS has provided $220,000 to support two faculty fellows, including $45,000 in support during FY25. By covering 30% of each fellow's salary, ICS provides critical support for researchers who want to bridge the gap between academia and entrepreneurship — a path historically under-resourced in higher education. The program plays a central role in cultivating a like-minded community of scientist-entrepreneurs who advance translational science and shape a new generation of academic innovation. The first two ICS Faculty Fellows are:

- **Frank Leibfarth, PhD**, Royce Murray Distinguished Term Professor of Chemistry, whose research focuses on recycling plastic waste into useful materials and making PFAS-contaminated water safe to drink.
- **En Yang, PhD**, Assistant Professor in Systems and Computational Neuroscience, whose research focused on unraveling the intricacies of brain function and developing novel approaches that improve cognitive outcomes.

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION (NSF) I-CORPS

- **74 total UNC-supported teams participating in regional and national NSF I-Corps programs (17 in FY25).**
- **$295,923 in non-dilutive funding raised by UNC-Chapel Hill NSF I-Corps teams in FY25.**
- **$7.3 million in non-dilutive funding raised by UNC-Chapel Hill NSF I-Corps teams (cumulative).**

The NSF I-Corps program at UNC-Chapel Hill equips faculty, postdocs and graduate students with entrepreneurial and commercialization training to help them explore the translational potential of their research-driven inventions. As part of the NSF effort to scale the National Innovation Network, Carolina's I-Corps program is locally administered by Innovate Carolina's KickStart Venture Services team. Carolina is a core partner in the I-Corps Mid-Atlantic Hub, alongside 11 other institutions such as the University of Maryland, NC State University, UNC-Charlotte, Johns Hopkins University, Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pennsylvania.

Activity and Impact:

- **Regional I-Corps (UNC-led).** KickStart delivers the regional I-Corps short course at UNC-Chapel Hill, sometimes in collaboration with hub partners like the University of Maryland. The two-to-four-week program introduces Lean Startup principles, emphasizing customer discovery, problem-solution fit, and critical thinking around user needs rather than technology features. Taught by experienced instructors, the program primarily serves graduate students, postdocs and Venture Catalyst Fellows. Since its inception, 67 UNC-Chapel Hill teams have participated regionally, including 14 in FY25.
- **National I-Corps (NSF-led).** Eligible UNC-Chapel Hill teams that complete the regional program can apply to the highly competitive national I-Corps program. Selected teams receive a $50,000 NSF grant awarded to the lab of the UNC-Chapel Hill principal investigator. Teams participate in a seven-week intensive course to build a full business model and conduct advanced customer discovery. Seven UNC-affiliated teams have participated nationally to date, including three in 2025.
- **Total teams and funding.** 74 total UNC-supported teams have participated in regional and national NSF I-Corps programs since the University joined the National Innovation Network in 2022. Collectively, UNC-affiliated I-Corps teams have raised approximately $7.3 million in non-dilutive funding. Programs like I-Corps are increasingly critical for teams seeking SBIR/STTR grants.

STARTUP BOOTCAMPS

- **101 faculty and researchers trained at startup bootcamps (68 in FY25).**
- **Two FY25 bootcamps: therapeutics/devices and non-regulated products.**

Startup Bootcamps are intensive, hands-on programs designed for faculty and researchers who are new to entrepreneurship. They take place via a partnership among UNC-Chapel Hill (Innovate Carolina's KickStart Venture Services team), Duke University and NC State University. Participants work with investors, entrepreneurs-in-residence and other experts to prepare their ideas for the market. They gain practical experience in early-stage venture development and a deeper understanding of the commercialization process.

Activity and Impact: During FY25, 68 people attended startup bootcamps and received training in core entrepreneurial pathways for therapeutics, devices, software and other technologies. Over the past two fiscal years, a total of 101 people participated. Bootcamps held in FY25 focused on two topics: therapeutic/device ventures (33 participants) and non-regulated products like software and materials science (28 participants). Each bootcamp featured expert-led lectures (e.g. regulatory pathways, pre-clinical work, clinical trials, company launch, etc.) and interactive exercises that helped teams develop commercialization plans for their technologies.

FACULTY INNOVATION WORKSHOPS

- **307 faculty trained at innovation workshops (17 in FY25).**
- **Seven new potential startup founders engaged (FY25).**
- **84% workshop satisfaction rate, with 100% participants engaged in innovation post-event.**

Led by Innovate Carolina's Design and Innovation for the Public Good (DIPG) team, faculty innovation workshops cultivate early-stage faculty with commercial potential. Designed with a low barrier to entry and open to all disciplines, the workshops target faculty who are new to UNC-Chapel Hill, unfamiliar with commercialization pathways, or work in fields historically underrepresented in innovation, such as the social sciences. The workshops are part of a broader effort to build a more robust pipeline of faculty innovators.

Each in-person session provides an overview of commercialization pathways, peer storytelling from experienced faculty entrepreneurs, and a hands-on breakout activity that guides participants in mapping their own innovation journey and identifying next steps.

Activity and Impact: In FY25, Innovate Carolina conducted two workshops. The first, held in September, focused on general outreach to faculty across campus with emerging entrepreneurial interest. The second, in April, was hosted in the health sciences campus corridor and was tailored for faculty from the School of Medicine, Gillings School of Global Public Health, and School of Social Work — groups located in close proximity but often new to innovation and commercialization resources.

Across both sessions, 17 faculty from six academic units participated. Satisfaction was high, with 84% of attendees expressing positive feedback and 100% making follow-up connections with Innovate Carolina's technology transfer team and other staff, laying the foundation for future commercialization. Seven new potential startup founders established personal follow-up conversations with Innovate Carolina following the workshops. Since 2009, the workshop has provided innovation training for 307 total Carolina faculty.

Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Offerings

INSTITUTE FOR CONVERGENT SCIENCE (ICS) INNOVATION POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWS AND SCIENTISTS

- **Nine translational research projects supported by ICS postdoctoral fellows and scientists.**
- **$501,000 in talent funding support (since 2022).**
- **Top professional skills developed: finance/budget and communication/presentation.**

Innovate Carolina's ICS Innovation Postdoctoral Fellows and Scientists Program plays a pivotal role in advancing AGILE innovation projects, which are faculty-led, pre-commercial development projects sponsored by ICS. The program embeds highly trained researchers into translation-oriented teams. These postdocs and scientists gain hands-on experience in commercialization and contribute in numerous areas: technical expertise, customer discovery, market research, regulatory strategy, communication and funding development. Such experiences align with their academic expertise and expand their capacity for entrepreneurial execution, preparing them for future roles as startup founders or chief scientific officers.

Activity and Impact: In FY25, ICS provided $244,000 of support and mentorship to nine postdoctoral fellows and scientists, contributing to a total of $501,000 in cumulative support since 2022. This investment strengthens the University's innovation pipeline, while addressing a regional talent gap in North Carolina's startup ecosystem: an insufficient number of commercialization-ready scientists and startup executives. During the program, postdoctoral researchers learned from a range of professional development experiences: 45% in funding skills; 16% in communication skills; 13% in finance, customer discovery and intellectual property. Beyond the fellows program, during summer 2025 ICS launched its inaugural internship pilot with Kenan-Flagler Business School to connect MBA talent with faculty-led innovations.

KICKSTART VENTURE CATALYST FELLOWS

- **42 venture fellows trained in research commercialization since 2021 (five in FY25).**
- **5,590 hours of fellow support for innovation projects — providing a fivefold ROI on funding provided.**

The Venture Catalyst Fellows Program, led by Innovate Carolina's KickStart Venture Services team, provides graduate students and postdoctoral researchers at UNC-Chapel Hill with experiential training in research commercialization by embedding them in active faculty-led innovation projects. The program pairs each fellow with a faculty member who is developing a promising technology, typically with intellectual property (IP) or an emerging startup. Fellows work on a clearly defined project over a six-month period. Most projects are in life sciences, med-tech or therapeutics, though participation has grown to include fellows from fields such as computer science and information science.

Fellows commit an average of five hours per week through the fall and spring semesters. They receive direct mentorship from KickStart's entrepreneurs-in-residence (EIRs), who help shape project goals and guide fellows through commercialization strategies. Fellows complete two graduate-level courses, which cover IP, licensing, regulatory pathways, market

research, startup formation, funding and team development. Fellows also complete a regional NSF I-Corps short course to learn customer discovery and lean startup principles.

Activity and Impact: As of mid-2025, 42 fellows have participated as Venture Catalyst Fellows, including five in FY25 (approximately 5,590 hours of training total; 650 hours in FY25). Beginning in 2022, fellows received a $1,000 award upon successful completion (not a paid internship). With approximately $32,000 awarded to fellows since the program began in 2020, Venture Catalyst Fellows have provided nearly $164,000 in estimated workforce value to faculty innovation projects — a fivefold return on investment.*

A standout feature of the program is the opportunity for select fellows to continue training through paid summer internships with the North Carolina Small Business and Technology Development Center (SBTDC). These fellows work 20 hours per week with startups — often UNC-affiliated ventures — gaining practical experience in business development and commercialization. KickStart covers $6,000 of the $12,000 stipend for each intern. These internships provide an intensive, real-world complement to the academic commercialization training, further strengthening the region's pipeline of innovation-ready talent.

* *Value based on minimum postdoctoral salary for UNC-Chapel Hill converted to hourly wage ($29.33) multiplied by five hours at a 26-week duration (six-month fellowship).*



Leah Gallant, PhD, a former KickStart Venture Catalyst Fellow, makes a pitch and earns a first-place finish at the Joan and Chester Luby Pitch Competition.

ESHELMAN INNOVATION TRANSLATIONAL ACADEMY

- **Funding and mentorship for an early-career scientist developing an innovative therapeutics platform.**
- **Forbes 30 Under 30 List: North America Science 2025**

The Eshelman Innovation Translational Academy at the Eshelman School of Pharmacy provides entrepreneurial education and support for innovative early-career faculty. The Translational Academy began as a way to keep innovative drug-discovery platforms from failing when they spin out of the University too early as well as to promote postdoctoral researchers and provide young scientists with a unique training opportunity.

Activity and Impact: The Academy surrounds its members with translational expertise and dedicated support. For example, after graduating with a PhD in chemistry, Brianna Vickerman, now a research assistant professor at the Eshelman School of Pharmacy, received funding from Eshelman Innovation as a postdoctoral researcher to build her innovative therapeutic platform. Instead of leaving the University early to spin out the technology, Vickerman was promoted to an early-career faculty position within the Translational Academy. The program paired her with a senior leadership mentor and provided training in commercial and translational science. The experience allowed her to recruit an advisory board of drug development and industry experts, who counsel her on technology, commercial considerations and regulatory pathways. In 2025, Vickerman was honored on the Forbes list of North America's 30 most accomplished scientists under the age of 30 for her promising research into light-activated therapeutics.

SCHOOL OF LAW INSTITUTE FOR INNOVATION

- **259 law students trained, serving 325 entrepreneurial clients since 2020 (44 students, 71 clients in FY25).**
- **Nine legal innovation work placements for student grant recipients (FY25).**

The School of Law Institute for Innovation gives law students real-world learning and skill-development experience through opportunities to provide legal counsel to early-stage startup businesses and nonprofits across North Carolina. By enrolling in the Institute's three faculty-led clinics, students gain hands-on practice advising clients, drafting legal documents, protecting intellectual property and working on a wide range of other legal matters. This practical training develops innovation-focused legal talent prepared to serve communities across North Carolina, while contributing to the state's growing innovation economy.

Activity and Impact: During the 2024-25 year, 44 law students received training and experiential learning via the clinics, while providing legal services to 71 clients in more than 100 legal matters — ultimately serving 581 unique individuals in North Carolina. This adds to the cumulative total of approximately 259 students who have been trained through the Institute and who have furnished legal services to 325 clients on 477 legal matters since the Institute opened in 2020.

Supported by the Kenan Charitable Trust, the Institute also offers a grant program for law students who may wish to pursue careers in entrepreneurship and innovation. During 2024-25, the program provided over $39,000 in innovation grants to nine students. Their work placements and experiences ranged from in-state organizations like the North Carolina Department of Justice and Legal Aid of North Carolina to the U.S. Copyright Office and the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

DESIGN AND INNOVATION FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD (DIPG) FELLOWS

- **111 student workshop registrations in inaugural year.**
- **Nine design thinking and innovation fellows since 2022 (two in FY25).**
- **Real-world application of design thinking skills to support University and non-UNC clients.**

A select number of students pursuing the Carolina Graduate Certificate in Innovation for the Public Good (CIPG) program have opportunities to work with Innovate Carolina as DIPG fellows. These fellows work with Innovate Carolina's DIPG team to lead and support design thinking and innovation projects from University and external clients. Fellows receive training in human-centered design. This opportunity allows them to apply knowledge and skills gained through the CIPG program to real-world clients and situations, helping innovation-oriented teams at the University and beyond create better and more usable products, services and outcomes.

CAROLINA ANGEL NETWORK VENTURE FELLOWS

- **13 fellows engaged in practical, real-world venture capital matters (FY25).**

The Carolina Angel Network Venture Fellows Program engages students — including undergraduate, MBA, PhD and PharmD candidates — in real-world venture capital experiences. The program prepares students for careers in venture investing and entrepreneurship.

Activity and Impact: In 2024–2025, 13 fellows contributed to due diligence, company research and startup screening. The program is expanding with increased programming, lunch-and-learn sessions with alumni venture capitalists and broader recruitment across the University network.

CAROLINA CHANGEMAKER MASTERCLASS

- **47 student workshop attendees in inaugural year.**
- **Expanded pipeline for campus commercialization.**

Launched in 2025, the Carolina Changemaker Masterclass is a new graduate-level workshop series designed to introduce students to innovation methods, design thinking and startup frameworks. Co-organized by the Graduate School and Innovate Carolina's KickStart Venture Services, Design and Innovation for the Public Good, and 1789 student innovation teams, the workshops identify and support graduate students with entrepreneurial potential.

Activity and Impact: In its inaugural year, the three-part workshop series drew 47 student participants, expanding the pipeline of students primed for commercialization.

Undergraduate and Graduate Students Offerings

1789 STUDENT INNOVATION INCUBATOR AND COMMUNITY

- **78 student pitch teams supported (29 teamsin FY25).**
- **850 students connected to startups or career development (cumulative).**

In FY25, Innovate Carolina's 1789 Student Innovation Incubator included 507 active student members, contributing to a cumulative membership of more than 1,394 students. The program immerses students in a variety of co-curricular learning experiences. These include startup career networking and internships (Carolina Innovators Connect program), connections with entrepreneurial mentors, pitch competitions and exploring ideas through early-stage venture funding (1789 Student Venture Fund).

Activity and Impact: Through its Carolina Innovators Connect program, Innovate Carolina has introduced 850 students to startups for career networking, development and internship opportunities, including 180 students in FY25. Innovate Carolina also helps students hone their entrepreneurial ideas and presentation skills, supporting 29 student pitch teams in FY25 (78 teams all-time). Through this learning process, students can work with Innovate Carolina to prepare for and participate in three pitch competitions:

- **Joan and Chester Luby Pitch Competition.** This competition supports student innovation across all disciplines at Carolina, awarding $187,000 in total funding to 16 student startup teams during its first two years. Beyond critical early-stage funding, the competition introduces students to entrepreneurial skill building, live pitch experiences and follow-up support that helps high-potential teams build real startups.
- **ACC InVenture Prize.** The ACC InVenture Prize gives Carolina students a prestigious national stage for pitching their ventures alongside top student innovators from other Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) universities, enhancing their presentation skills and strategic thinking. After winning the Luby Pitch Competition in 2025, student venture Scyntek, which is developing a method for early detection of deep vein thrombosis, represented UNC-Chapel Hill at the ACC InVenture Prize. This team of biomedical engineering students gained valuable exposure and mentorship during the ACC InVenture Prize live finals at the University of Notre Dame and the National Academy of Inventors Student Showcase in Atlanta.
- **Map the System Competition.** Map the System helps students investigate complex social and environmental challenges through a systems thinking lens. In FY25, 18 student teams submitted projects, with one top team from Carolina — whose project focused on an implementation science approach to reducing teacher burnout — advanced to the global finals at Oxford University. Supported by Innovate Carolina, students on this team participated in immersive learning with global systems-thinking leaders, further preparing them to turn research into real-world impact.

KENAN-FLAGLER BUSINESS SCHOOL PITCH FEST AND ENTREPRENEUR ORGANIZATIONS

- **$25,000 in Carolina Pitch Fest prizes awarded to four top student venture teams in FY25.**
- **350 student pitch teams supported all-time.**
- **Three student-led entrepreneurship organizations for entrepreneurial practice.**

The Kenan-Flagler Business School supports students with a range of co-curricular entrepreneurship offerings that foster community, career readiness and professional connections. On the career side, the Undergraduate Business Program (UBP) career team expanded partnerships with startups to create new job opportunities for entrepreneurship-focused students.

Activity and Impact: In 2024–25, Carolina Pitch Fest — a revived campus-wide pitch competition previously named the Carolina Challenge — featured more than 20 student teams and awarded $25,000 in prizes, with the top prize going to a team named DeAP Learning, which builds advanced placement (AP) exam prep tools for high school students. More than 350 student teams have pitched in the competition since 2017.* UBP also supports vibrant student-led entrepreneurship organizations, including the co-ed entrepreneurship fraternity Sigma Eta Pi (over 50 student members in FY25), the Social Entrepreneurship Club and the Venture Capital Club. These organizations provide ongoing programming, peer collaboration and exposure to entrepreneurial ecosystems.

* *Carolina Pitch Fest was launched by the Kenan-Flagler Business School in FY25 as a re-imagined edition of a previous competition (called the Carolina Challenge in pre-pandemic years). The number of cumulative teams reflects student venture teams from the prior Carolina Challenge event dating back to 2017. Records preceding 2017 are not available.*

GILLINGS SCHOOL PITCH COMPETITION

- **12 student venture teams comprised of 42 students in FY25.**
- **Three FY25 awardees: noninvasive cervical cancer screening, medical emergency lodging and AI-powered health care access.**
- **100% of participants report learning outcomes that advanced ventures.**

Launched in 2020, the bi-annual Gillings Student Pitch Competition helps students develop entrepreneurial solutions to public health challenges. The competition matches each team with a coach from the Gillings School's alumni and advisory network.

Activity and Impact: In FY25, 12 teams and 42 students participated, with six teams (20 students) advancing to the finals. Winning ventures included Sensible (first place), a low-cost, noninvasive diagnostic for cervical cancer screening; Olea Health (second place and people's choice winner), an AI-powered SMS platform that improves health care access for underserved populations; and MedFam (third place), a lodging support service for families in medical emergencies. Prizes totaled $5,250 in cash awards, plus an additional $5,000 in consulting services for the first-place winner. Notably, 100% of students who completed the post-evaluation survey reported learning something new to advance their venture ideas. Forty-one student teams have participated in the competition since its launch.