1789
Powered by Innovate Carolina

2024-25
1789 Hub Report







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A Letter of Gratitude

Dear Donors,

Our Innovate Carolina team expresses its heartfelt thanks for your generous support of our 1789 Hub, UNC-Chapel Hill's student innovation and entrepreneurship hub. Because of donors like you, our students have access to transformative opportunities that spark creativity, develop leadership, and bring bold ideas to life.

This past year has been one of tremendous growth across our student innovation programs:

Carolina Innovators Connect Summer Internship Program
With your support—and the generosity of the Johnathan and Shannon Robertson —we were able to fund nine student internships, the most in our history. These experiences provided meaningful connections and real-world skills that will shape students' careers for years to come. You can read their inspiring stories throughout this report.

Map the System
Thanks to the commitment of the Robertson family and Chris Hoover, we welcomed our largest cohort ever—with 18 submitted projects and 45 student participants. This program challenges students to analyze and address complex challenges using systems thinking, and its growth speaks to the passion of our students and the enduring commitment of our donors.

Student Venture Fund
Supported by Jim Kitchen through the undergraduate course he teaches in the Kenan-Flagler Business School, the fund awarded $45,000 to 37 student ventures this year. This year, the course reached a remarkable milestone - $1 million in all-time net profits earned by its venture teams - highlighting the real-world success and entrepreneurial spirit of our students.

Joan and Chester Luby Pitch Competition
Now in its second year, this competition awarded $95,000 in funding to five outstanding student ventures. With the steadfast support of Chester Luby, it continues to inspire students to take bold steps toward launching their ideas to market and developing them to new levels that may not otherwise be possible.

Every one of these accomplishments reflects the direct impact of your generosity. You are helping to equip our students with the skills, confidence, and experience they need to lead in an ever-changing world. When you support innovation at UNC, you support breakthroughs that matter. From lifesaving research to new businesses that grow communities, your impact travels far.

Thank you for being an essential partner in this journey. Together, we are building a thriving community of innovators at Carolina—and the best is yet to come.

With sincere gratitude,

Innovate Carolina Student Engagement Team

Meet Our Team



ANISE ROBINSON

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM MANAGER

As the Student Engagement Programs Manager I focus on creating valuable partnerships across campus and in the community to provide UNC students with resources to take their innovations forward. and



GIANNA LOSCHIAVO

1789 INTERN

My name is Gianna, and I'm a junior studying Business with minors in Spanish and Data Science. Outside of class, I intern with 1789 Hub, where I coordinate the Map the System competition.



HANNAH ADAMS

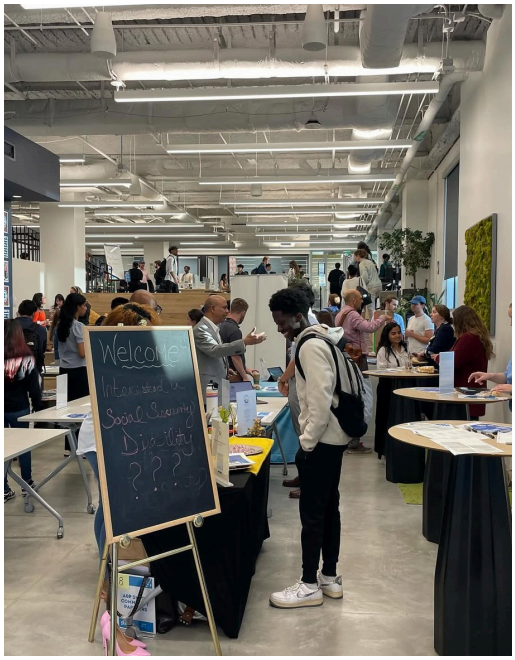
1789 INTERN

At 1789 Hub, I support student and alumni entrepreneurs by creating multimedia stories, managing social media, and producing promotional materials that highlight their ventures. I oversee the content calendar to ensure campaigns are timely and impactful, helping drive engagement across the 1789 Hub community.

Carolina Innovators Connect: Meet and Greet

The Carolina Innovators Connect Meet-and-Greet (formerly the Startup Connect) was hosted in November 2024. This opportunity was focused on connecting UNC students to local startup companies and Carolina innovation and entrepreneurship resources and programs including KickStart Venture Services, The Graduate School, and the Small Business Technology Development Center (SBTDC).

A signature part of this event is the panel discussion. This year our panel consisted of Kenyetta Hall, CEO and founder of Katalyst HQ, Andrew McKinnon, CTO at Acta Solutions, Oliver Pau, Owner of Dojo Fresh, and Mary Laci Motley, EATS2SEATS (E2S).



847 Students Connected to 191 Startups All Time

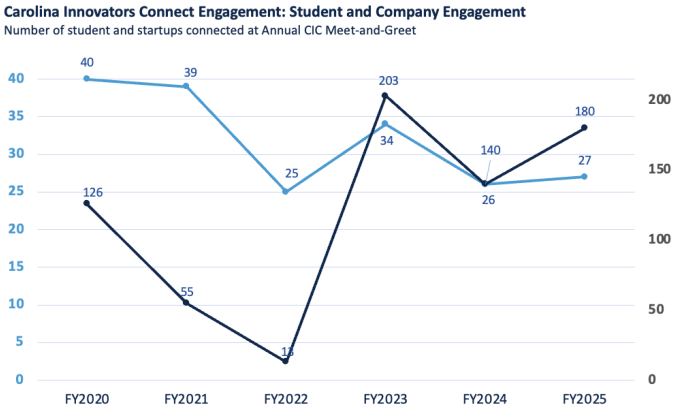
180 Students Connected to 27 Startups in FY25

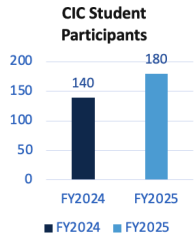
29%

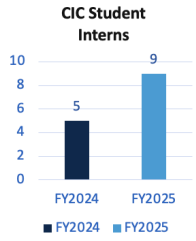
Increase in Students Participating in CIC Annual Meet and Greet in FY25 (v. FY24)

80%

Increase in Number of Student Interns Funded in FY25 (v. FY24)





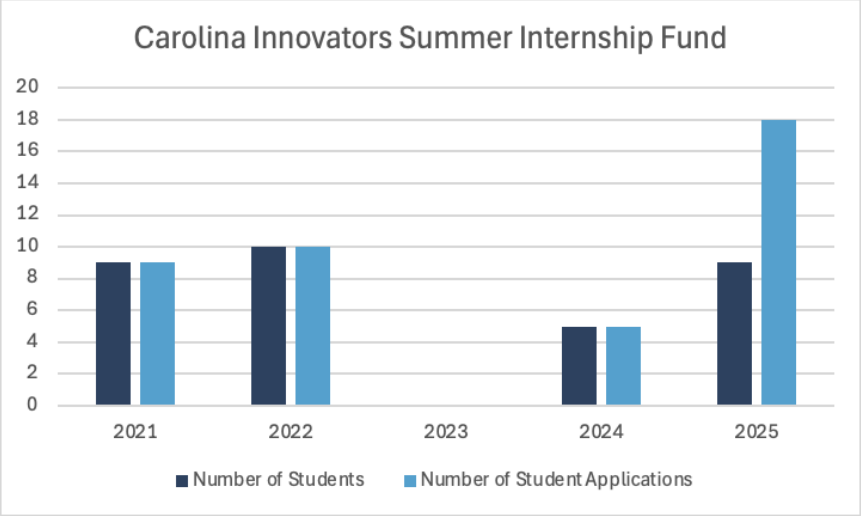


Andrew and Mary Laci are two alumni of 1789 Hub. Both panelists were recipients of the Student Venture Fund and represented UNC at the ACC Inventure Prize. Acta Solutions is a GovTech startup powering better customer service for government. Their mission is to make government more accessible to everyday folks who don't have the time or resources to deal with bloated bureaucracies. E2S is a premium service solution operating in venues across nine states with thousands of All-Star servers. They are excellent examples of how 1789 Hub propels student ventures forward.

Carolina Innovators Connect: Summer Internship

Every summer, driven and talented UNC students seek meaningful internships to launch their careers. At the same time, early-stage startups across North Carolina are eager for skilled, motivated team members to help accelerate their growth. The Carolina Startup Connect Internship Funding Program bridges this gap–ensuring students gain career-shaping experiences while startups access the talent they need to thrive.

The Carolina Startup Connect Internship Funding Program solves this problem by providing stipends to help students accept internships with startups regardless of financial need. In return, startups gain access to emerging leaders equipped with fresh perspectives, strong work ethics, and a passion for innovation. The program goes beyond financial support–it includes structured programming, mentorship, and peer engagement to ensure students receive a high-impact, professionally enriching experience.



In summer 2025, the Summer Internship program grew in popularity and saw a steep rise in applications. This type of program growth indicates that 1789 Hub powered by Innovate Carolina is providing a much need resource to local startups. The nine students who received funding focused on developing skills in UI Design, Visual Story telling, UX Research, Data Collection, Software development, Systems Analysis, Machine Learning, MLOps and Cloud Architecture, and market analysis. After their internships concluded they provided a testimonial about their experience at their internship as well as the support of Innovate Carolina - two of those testimonials are featured on the next page.

Carolina Innovators Connect: Summer Internship

“Working at NeoMana Labs this summer as a Growth & Strategy Intern has been a great learning experience because it has been a big shift from the structure I’m used to at an established small business. It definitely took some time to find my footing, but I’ve been able to contribute by bringing in a merchant’s perspective as we prepare for rollout and build out partnerships.

We’ve received great feedback from merchants so far and even some early validation from angel investors and VCs, which has been exciting. I’m also figuring out how to use more of my finance and accounting skills to help on the internal side. There is lots to learn, but I’ve been enjoying the challenge.

The mentorship from Innovate Carolina has been very helpful. It’s been great having a space to connect with others doing similar work, and the funding support made it possible for me to say yes to the internship without worrying about covering costs.”



Joshua R., Kenan Flagler Business School

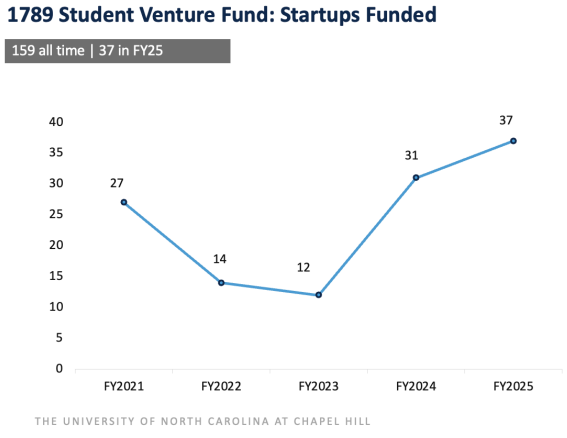


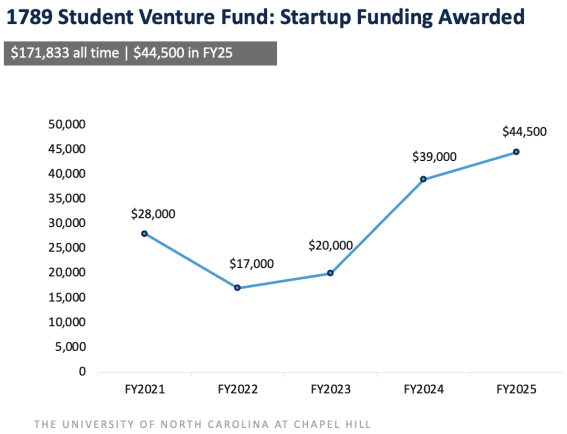
Bevin A., College of Arts and Sciences

“This summer, I am interning with Empact Global, whose goal is to make a global impact through the lens of empathy and expert problem solving. We provide digital products, advisory and consulting services to organizations that contribute to bettering the world. I am working as a Social Impact and Innovation intern, where my studies in Sociology, research skills, and past experiences working with the U.S. State Department are put to the test to look at pressing problems pertaining to society. For our client NASA, I have spent the summer researching the Future of Community. Looking at the past, present, and future of what community is, we are identifying signals and trends that might affect community in the next 50 years to better develop NASA’s technology through a human-centered design approach. This experience has allowed me to gain hands-on experience in research, interviewing, and synthesizing data to create a published report. This would not have been possible without the support of Innovate Carolina. “

Student Venture Fund

The 1789 Student Venture Fund offers Carolina students essential seed funding to explore, test, and launch commercial startups or social ventures in their initial stages. This fund enables students to dedicate themselves entirely to developing their ideas and maximizing their venture's human, social, or economic impact. This initiative is supported by Professor Jim Kitchen and his BUSI:500 course that is focused on doing good while doing well through the development of entrepreneurial hard skills. In 2025, the course reached a significant milestone. They generated over $1 million in net profits that support 1789 Hub and Make-A-Wish Foundation.





This academic year, the student venture fund received 68 applications. 37 of those teams were awarded seed funding to carry out the next step of their ventures. A few notable ventures from this year include:

- MedFam**:** Partners with hospitals and hotels to provide discounted lodging for families facing emergency medical situations.
- SeCURE Technologies**:** Designing medical devices that automate the extra-occular muscle function test (eye movement tests), improving diagnostic efficiency.
- Pathstitch**:** Retains teachers by assessing their most challenging needs and providing school leaders with the right tools to build scalable support solutions.
- Yoomi Health**:** A digital practice management solution for physical therapists to streamline operations, support rehab and boost reimbursement.

ACC InVenture Prize

The Atlantic Coast Conference InVenture Prize is a joint initiative by the leadership of the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC). It aims to boost undergraduate entrepreneurship, enhance student-faculty interaction, celebrate students' outstanding creativity and ingenuity, and foster a stronger sense of unity across the conference.

In this innovation competition, undergraduate teams from each ACC university present their inventions or business ideas to a live audience and a panel of judges. Competing teams vie for $30,000 in prizes and the title of ACC InVenture Prize winner.



in 2025, 1789 Hub powered by Innovate Carolina was represented by Scyntek, a team of four senior biomedical engineering students focused on the early detection of deep vein thrombosis. To help prepare these innovative students, we developed a team of expert mentors focused on pitch deck presentation and development, market research, and previous ACC InVenture prize winners. Scyntek continues to grow their venture through their presentation at the National Academy of Inventors in June 2024, their participation in accelerator programs, and continued engagement with Innovate Carolina resources.

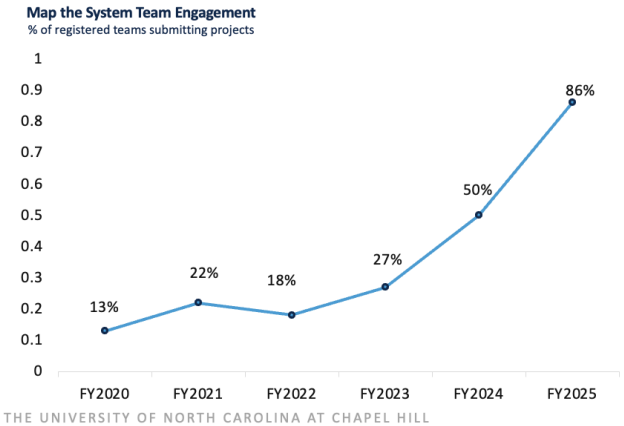
Map the System



Map the System (MTS) is a four month program for students to solve complex social and environmental challenges using systems thinking methodology. This program is a partnership between Innovate Carolina, The Gillings School of Global Public Health, Honors Carolina, and the University of Oxford. In our fifth year leading MTS at UNC, we have built a new partnership with Shimul Melwani, a professor in Kenan-Flagler Business School, who incorporated the MTS project into her course, Leadership for Wicked Problems. This new relationship lead to an increase in project submissions and a wider breath in project topics. An additional component of the program is a six week learning module developed by the University of Oxford to help support students to learn how to research and diagram their complex problems using systems thinking.

This year's MTS @ UNC Finals, Isolation to Collaboration, was lead by Rukayat and Ogugua, two graduate students in the the MEITE program. They attended the University of Oxford to present their research on teacher burnout and turnover.

21 Student Team Registrations| 18 Project Submissions in FY25

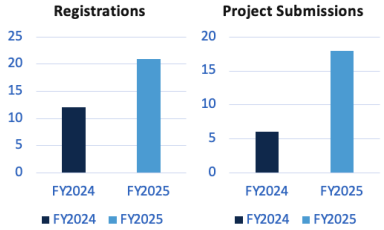


75%

Increase in Map the System Team Registrations in FY25 (vs. FY24)

86%

Of Registered Student Teams Submitted Projects in FY25 (vs. 50% in FY24)



Innovation and Education Grants

The Innovation and Education Grants is a program focused on supporting students in diving deeper into their learning in the innovation space. These grants are provided to students after an interview and application process where students share their plans for moving innovation at UNC forward. Different from the student venture fund, these grants support students in travel to conferences and pitch competitions and hosting events for creative and new campus experiences.

In the fall semester, Art and the Brain hosted a seminar featuring guest artist Kiley Haberkorn and a discussion centered on neurological diseases in famous artists. Together with faculty and students, they explored how an artist's physical and mental conditions influence their work, fostering a deeper understanding of the intersection between art and neuroscience.

In December, Art and the Brain hosted a special screening event at Varsity Theatre, featuring the work of filmmaker Suki Chan. Rebecca Savidge from The Daily Tarheel wrote, "Chan's films artfully depict experiences related to hallucinations, memory challenges, and neurological conditions such as dementia. Through Chan's unique perspective, they were able to provide UNC students with a powerful experience, highlighting how visual storytelling can deepen scientific exploration and raise awareness about neurological conditions. The event demonstrated the profound connections between art and science, leaving a lasting impact on all who attended."

For a final event in the spring semester, Art and the Brain hosted "Threads of the Mind" with a partner organization, Coulture Magazine, and several local up-and-coming designers to showcase mental health disorders through fashion, illustrating that these issues can be multi-faceted.



Joan and Chester Luby Pitch Competition

In year two of the Joan and Chester Luby Pitch Competition, we had 18 teams register to compete for $95,000 in award funding. Each team submitted a pitch deck and a recorded video pitch to be reviewed by competition judges Alex Brandwein, Melissa Carrier, and Bernard Bell. Judges reviewed team materials and selected 10 teams to move forward to the live competition. Our top five teams took home five cash prizes to grow their ventures. These student teams will return to Innovate Carolina to present on their ventures in November and May.

In July 2025, Chester Luby passed away. His generosity and support of student innovators at UNC will always be remembered. We are thankful for his contributions to 1789 Hub.



Scyntek aims to bridge the gap between the hospital and the home through our solution. With our device, we aim to detect DVT within the patient's home in a quick and convenient manner. After lower-limb surgery, patients face a heightened risk of Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT), a clot that can form in the lower leg. If left untreated, this clot can travel to the lungs and block airflow, killing the patient. While patients are informed of the post-surgical risks by caretakers and physicians as well as being placed on blood thinners, DVT can still develop silently after discharge, leaving patients unaware until severe complications arise.



Chapel Chill Tub Club offers a unique and accessible wellness experience centered around community, recovery, and mindfulness. We provide access to three cold plunges and a sauna, creating spaces for people to gather and test their comfort zones, building resilience, both physically and mentally. Our approach combines contrast therapy practices and mindfulness with a modern social twist, transforming individual recovery into a shared community experience. We believe that our blend of physical health benefits and social connection is what makes us unique. We are creating a supportive environment for those seeking something beyond traditional wellness routines, while encouraging participants to embrace challenges, celebrate progress, and leave feeling stronger and more connected!

Joan and Chester Luby Pitch Competition



STEM PLUG addresses the lack of engaging, real-world STEM education for underrepresented youth, particularly in underserved communities. Many students struggle to see the relevance of STEM in their everyday lives, leading to a lack of interest and confidence in pursuing STEM careers. Our solution integrates storytelling, hands-on robotics, and learning experiences to make STEM education more accessible, relatable, and fun.



BuckIt is redefining personal finance for college students by transforming money management into an engaging daily experience. Built specifically for students juggling unpredictable income, tuition payments, and financial stress, BuckIt offers a gamified platform where users complete small daily quests to strengthen savings habits, reduce debt, and build confidence with money. Instead of rigid budgets and intimidating dashboards, BuckIt uses positive psychology, adaptive AI, and a customizable mascot named Bucky to create a personalized financial journey that feels intuitive, not overwhelming.



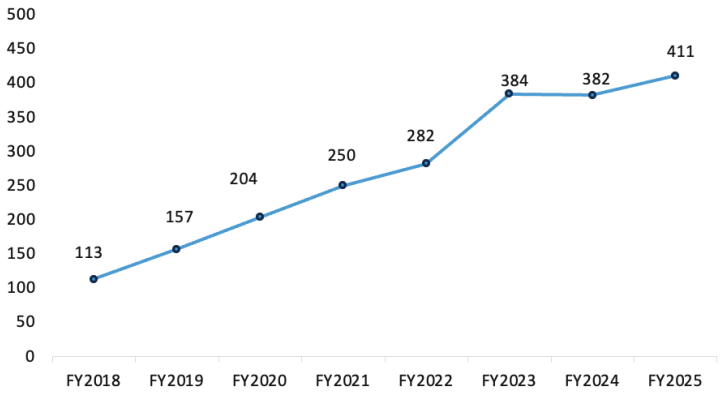
DeAP learning is developing an AI co-pilot for classrooms, designed to address the problem of overworked and exhausted teachers who spend hours on repetitive tasks. The high workload leaves teachers with little time to reflect on teaching methods and understand student progress. Ember offers a solution by automating repetitive tasks such as streamlining the design of engaging assignments, hosting interactive activities for students, and providing feedback on behalf of the teacher. By doing so, Ember aims to save teachers hours in grading and provide them with an instant, clear picture of their class's progress.

1789 Hub by Numbers

1789 Hub has continued to grow! Our student membership rose to 411 by the end of Spring 2025. We also experienced fantastic growth for Map the System with a total of 45 students registered on 21 teams. Out of those 21 teams, 18 teams submitted projects! This waS monumentous growth for this program and demonstrates the strong desire students have for researching their passions and diving into systems thinking. The Carolina Innovators Connect Summer Internship program had 9 summer interns receive funding, the most we ever had for this program.

1789 Student Innovation Community: Active Members

1,194 all time | 411 in FY25



8%
increase in active student members since FY2024

101%
increase in active student members since FY2020

$140,000 in Student Venture Support

45 (75% increase) Students Participating in MTS

$30,100 in Summer Internships for 9 students to work 2700 hours

What's Next: 2025-26

1789 Hub is excited for 2025-2026! We are planning to focus on creating more campus partnerships to engage more students in the valuable innovation work at Innovate Carolina, raising the stakes for our pitch competitors, expanding the learning program, and supporting more innovators who are not yet entrepreneurs.

Innovate Carolina has set a lofty goal of engaging 10,000 UNC students in innovation and entrepreneurship by 2034. A huge step in achieving this goal is to work with all campus departments. While we have a long-standing relationship with several campus communities, we are looking to extend into new territories and develop a Student Innovation Council that can help bridge the divide between innovation programming and the wider student body.

In 2024-25, the Map the System team at the University of Oxford delivered a six week module course to help support students learning about systems thinking methodology. We offered this course to all students who registered for the competition. Next year, we are excitedly planning to offer this systems thinking module to a wider student audience and having more faculty integrate Map the System into their courses.

We are raising the stakes for our Joan and Luby Pitch Competition competitors. During the live pitch, we will be extending the Q&A portion so we can dive deep into each venture. The extended Q&A will be the final hurdle for the students after they register, submit their slide decks and pitch videos for pre-judging.

We are invested in supporting student innovators on campus who are working on missions that are focused on creating change for good, but are not a traditional venture through our Innovation & Education Grants. Supporting groups like Art and the Brain in delivering valuable and creative events that focus on changing the world allows 1789 Hub to broaden our reach and include more students in the innovation mindset.

Thank you for your continued support in helping student innovators and entrepreneurs thrive at UNC. Your generosity is creating an environment where students can explore levers of change, challenge current methodologies, and have the tools to create the world of tomorrow for the greater good. We are excited to have you on this journey with us!

Anise Robinson