Freeman students take top prizes in AMA competition

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Sibria Adams, Oreen Cohen and Jonathan Daubenspeck (left to right) present their winning growth plan for Gro Enterprises during the American Marketing Association's 2024 Case Competition.

Freeman students not only helped a local green business grow but also cultivated their marketing skills, capturing the top two prizes at the New Orleans Chapter of the American Marketing Association’s 2024 Marketing Case Competition.

Jonathan Daubenspeck (BSM ’25), Sibria Adams (SOPA ’28) and Oreen Cohen (SSE ’25) took home the competition’s top prize and were awarded $500, while Jessie Chen (BSM ’25), Daniel Largacha Urrutia (BSM ’25) and Sarah Silbert (BSM ’25) placed second and received $250. The winners were announced on Nov. 14 at The Shop at the New Orleans Contemporary Arts Center.

The competition, now in its third year, provides undergraduate students with the opportunity to gain real-world experience by developing a marketing plan for a local company. This year, teams created a strategic growth plan for Gro Enterprises, a New Orleans-based manufacturer of sustainable, plant-based construction materials. Founded in 2022 by Joel Holton, the company provides low- to middle-income households access to green building materials, like hempcrete, at an affordable price.

Seven teams representing four universities — Tulane, Nicholls State, University of New Orleans and Southeastern Louisiana — took the stage, with each given seven minutes to pitch its plan for Gro Enterprises to Holton and a panel of five marketing experts.

Daubenspeck, Adams and Cohen came out on top by offering insights for how Gro Enterprises could meet its business goals by engaging with city officials and low-income New Orleans residents. The team also devised a rebranding strategy and a workable budget for the company. In crafting its plan, the winning team paid careful attention to Gro Enterprises’ goal of uplifting underserved communities. “I think our plan was successful because it addressed the community’s need for affordable, sustainable housing while staying true to Gro Enterprises’ mission of making a positive impact,” said Cohen.

Adams, a New Orleans native, said that being able to assist a small business in her hometown made winning first place even more gratifying.

“As someone born and raised in New Orleans, I deeply understand the challenges faced by many citizens in our community,” said Adams. “Helping businesses like Gro Enterprises not only supports the local economy but also provides innovative, sustainable solutions to the residents who need it most.”

Largacha Urrutia, who together with Chen and Silbert came in second place, was equally glad to have a chance to make a difference in the New Orleans community.

“Gro Enterprises has an amazing product that can help thousands of families save money and protect their homes,” he said. “The world is a better place if a company like this one thrives.”



Jessie Chen, Daniel Largacha Urrutia, Jeff Salyers and Sarah Silbert (left to right) attend the 2024 American Marketing Association's 2024 Case Competition.

Jeff Salyers, professor of practice in marketing and faculty advisor for the Tulane Chapter of the American Marketing Association, said that the competition’s

experiential learning component made it especially valuable for students looking to launch a marketing career. “These types of opportunities facilitate hands-on, practical marketing experiences and the luxury of feedback from the business owner.”

Silbert said that the competition allowed her to put the theories she learned in her marketing classes to use in the real world. “In our Freeman classes, we do a lot of projects where we present hypothetical marketing ideas and campaigns,” she said. “Having a real-life client pushed us to think more deeply about the ways our ideas would actually be implemented.”

For Chen, the competition also clarified her own career ambitions. “I learned I enjoy B2C Marketing more than B2B Marketing,” Chen said. “This competition was a great opportunity to learn about New Orleans, learn about myself and help a startup company.”

While all the teams had strong showings, Salyers said he was particularly impressed with the quality of the work the Tulane teams produced. “Our undergraduate students regularly wow me,” he said. “I was proud to see two Tulane teams finish at the top.”