

**Economic Fuel Begins Second Year of Competition**  
**by Courtney Hunt, The Eureka Reporter**  
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The second annual Humboldt County Student Business Challenge will kick off Wednesday evening with an official launch and winners forum event at Humboldt State University's Kate Buchanan Room.

From 6:30 to 8 p.m., students interested in entering the competition can pick up registration packets and pose questions to the Economic Fuel coordinators. In addition, winners from last year's competition will be on hand to discuss their experiences, from building a business plan from scratch to attending weekly lecture series events and presenting proposals to a panel of judges.

The contest, which was designed to give young entrepreneurs an opportunity to learn about building a business and potentially win seed capital and professional services for their business ventures, culminated last April with monetary prizes totaling \$117,000 distributed to a handful of collegiate entrepreneurs.

Four teams took home top prizes at the awards ceremony on April 30: Brooks Call and Thomas Carter for their Brain Grooves, an online academic resource for university students and professors; Dana Boudreau and Nicholas River Hume for Integral Energy Solutions, a worker-owned cooperative designed to provide affordable and reliable energy solutions for the community; Alia Bhimani for Kombucha Kulture, a unique beverage company; and Paul Burgess and Ken Owens for Cognisense Labs, which creates land mine-mapping software. Each won \$25,000 as start-up capital for their business plans.

Several other teams walked away with smaller cash prizes, including Chris and Nick Kieselhorst, who were awarded \$10,000 for their business, Ironside Metal Works. HSU student Ciaran McCarthy won \$5,000 for his enterprise, Freshwater Micropropagation, and Penny Schafer and James Wright won honorable mention prizes of \$1,000 each for their proposed businesses, Taraluna and Wright Automotive.

After a successful first year, Economic Fuel coordinators are anticipating another exciting competition in 2007 and have joined with HSU and College of the Redwoods to present a full lineup of entrepreneurial events through the fall 2006 and spring 2007 semesters.

Chris Gaines, assistant professor of business at CR, is collaborating with HSU business professor Nancy Vizenor in a series of "Entrepreneurial Tuesday" lectures in support of the competition, and has also debuted small business and marketing courses at CR to help participants with their plans. This spring, Gaines will continue to offer business plan writing and marketing courses, and, along with other CR faculty, will launch the school's Center for Entrepreneurial Studies—a new academic program in support of entrepreneurship and economic development for students.

"I think we need to continue to develop curriculum so that academic courses are aligned to support students," Gaines said. He also noted that a "nice cycle" is beginning, with former Economic Fuel participants returning to his classes to work on revising their business plans.

HSU's School of Business has also introduced several courses in small business and is developing an entrepreneurship emphasis in its graduate program. Vizenor said next spring's Entrepreneurial Tuesday lectures will focus on different areas many competitors struggled with last year, including emphasis on business plan financial sections and presentations.

"We haven't started working on the curriculum yet, but one area that we intend to have a greater focus is the area of the presentations," Vizenor said. "All competitors who turned in a business plan had to do a brief elevator pitch and then from there, eight or so gave longer presentations. The elevator pitches and presentations could have used a lot more work, and this is a great opportunity to provide additional training, education and support."

Entrepreneurial Tuesday events will be open to the community. Though the competition requires teams to create in-depth business plans and present them in a professional manner, Economic Fuel is also open to students in all fields of study.

"We're making a big push here at CR to branch out to non-biz majors, to make sure that people know that this is a contest for students, not just biz students," Gaines added.

The challenge will allow any student enrolled at HSU or CR, or Humboldt County residents from any university who graduated after Jan. 1, 2005 to participate. Students will be able to work in teams of

up to five other students, and are encouraged to build their teams with a variety of different people with different abilities.

Several rules have been modified from last year to better clarify who is eligible and what is required. For one, HSU and CR professors will no longer be able to participate in the competition other than serving as advisers to competitors. Also, honorable mention winners from last year and non-cash prize winning teams will be allowed to re-submit business plans into the 2007 contest.

A series of October entrepreneurial events are currently under way at HSU and more will continue through the spring semester. Registration forms for the competition are due on Feb. 2, 2007, and final business plan submissions are due March 19. Elevator pitches will take place on March 21, after which a panel of judges will select eight finalists to move on to a series of presentations on April 24 and 25. The awards ceremony will take place on Friday, April 27.