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Drone Craze Takes First Place at Student Innovation Competition

Winthrop University

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Quick Facts

▪ The first-place winners received $1,500 and a chance to work with the Technology Incubator this summer on bringing the project to life.
▪ Seven teams competed in the competition.

ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA — Crashing a drone several times created an exciting business opportunity for three Winthrop University students.

The entrepreneurial team of **Christian Sanchez, Ryan Laughlin** and **Jake Carr** won first prize at the **Student Innovation Competition** with **"Avis Advantage,"** a service that makes the new drone craze more accessible for everyone by providing the grounds and tools to take flight. This was the third annual business model competition from the Technology Incubator at Knowledge Park.

Sanchez's personal journey to become a drone pilot inspired the idea. A few years ago, Sanchez, a business administration major from Sumter, South Carolina, bought a Cheerson CX-10 drone during an Amazon sale. After crashing it, he began watching Internet drone tutorials, eventually buying an upgraded model.

"I'd fly around the house trying not to smash into anything, and eventually I started to gain interest in buying something bigger," he said. "Considering the price of drones, I made sure to do my research on what to get and it was this that started my passion for flying."

Sanchez investigated cost options, the various applications of drones (photography, commercial applications) and how to build his own version. Once he realized it was about more than just flying, he saw an opportunity: Avis Advantage.

He brought the idea to friends Laughlin, an economics major from Spartanburg, and Carr, a business administration major from Greenville. The team's pitch proposes a learning environment for drone enthusiasts, regardless of skill, with training and resources to help pass the Federal Aviation Administration's Part 107 UAS License test. Participants won't have to invest thousands in buying a drone; rather, Avis Advantage allows them to rent one instead.

The first-place finish means a $1,500 prize in hand and the chance to work with the Technology Incubator over the summer to further research Avis Advantage.

This year's challenge gave participating teams one week to develop a new product, tool or service and pitch that idea to business professionals. Seven teams competed in this year's challenge.

Other teams that placed include:

2nd: ESC, an eSports café and arena from students **Jenny Herrera, Alyssa Lamb** and **Mark Hubbard**
3rd: SKEASE, GPS skiing software from **Augustin Evrard, Gabriel Le Roi** and **Camille Huber**
Audience Pick: ThreadTrend, a men's fashion app by **Antonio Santos, Nolan Gregory** and **Khoi Tran**

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