

ASU sophomore wins \$100K prize in inaugural Inferno Cup

Student-led ventures from state's universities pitch for startup funding

By Mary Beth Faller, ASU News
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An Arizona State University sophomore won \$100,000 for his venture at the inaugural Inferno Invitational Startup Cup on Monday.

Sandul Gangodagamage, a double major in computer science and business law, won the grand prize for his startup [Legion Platforms](#), a multiplayer gaming platform that can be accessed with slow internet speeds, beating out eight other student-led ventures.

The Inferno Invitational Startup Cup gathered entrepreneurial teams from ASU, Northern Arizona University, the University of Arizona, Grand Canyon University and Estrella Mountain Community College. Each team gave a five-minute pitch to the judges and then answered questions for five minutes.

The event was sponsored by the [J. Orin Edson Entrepreneurship + Innovation Institute](#) and the [Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering](#) at ASU. The \$100,000 in funding was provided through the ASU eSeed Challenge and the Prescott Student Venture Fund.

Gangodagamage's venture is already successful, with 12 million users around the world. He said he'll use the prize money to expand marketing for Legion Platforms.

"We're going to build to the moon," he said, holding the trophy aloft after winning.

"We're going to build a huge gaming company right here in Arizona, and we're going to get it done."

The other ASU venture was ImageAiD, a startup by Joshua Hanson, who graduated with a bachelor's degree in biomedical engineering last week. Hanson created a medical device that uses AI to screen for peripheral artery disease, in which restricted blood flow causes pain, numbness and weakness in the limbs.

Hanson is from Rochester, Minnesota, headquarters of Mayo Clinic, where he had an internship last year and met many patients with the condition. He worked with mentors to create the device, which became his capstone project.

“Part of the reason I came to Arizona State is because I had an idea that I wanted to work in the medical innovation sphere,” he said.

The location of Monday’s pitch event, at the [ASU Health Futures Center](#) next to the Mayo Clinic Hospital in north Phoenix, was “a full-circle moment of that playing out,” Hanson said.

Besides Hanson’s startup, four other student ventures also incorporated AI:

Evly Pacheco, a student at Estrella Mountain Community College, founded Lovdatkat Ai Productions, which harnesses AI to ease caregiving of elderly people.

Kevin Vega (along with Sumon Dangol), Grand Canyon University, founded The Vox Company, which makes the VoxBox, a desktop device for businesses that creates summaries, timelines and other project management tools.

Cathy Ly (along with Aaron Santiago, Devin Jay, Hunter Beach and Sage Tesor), NAU, founded Kingdom of Influence, an online, multiplayer gaming platform for people on the autism spectrum that teaches and incorporates social skills.

Evan Lunceford (along with Marco Castrita), NAU, founded CampusPM, a tool for professors who manage large amounts of student capstone projects.

The other student ventures were: Lucas Patten, GCU, Powder Pal, a collagen supplement company; Tyler Droke (along with Jayden Triplett, Jacob Castillo and Quincy Iverson), U of A, Water on the Run, a hydration-monitoring device for water bottles; and AnaCristina Lopez (along with Maria Paula Rodriguez, Becca Sanders, Erik Eikenmeyer and Kaylynn Maloney), U of A, Kovera, a startup that makes fashion purses that convert to clear bags.

Gangodagamage’s startup was the only one to receive funding, but all the student entrepreneurs who participated will get free mentorship services in marketing, technology and sales from Edson E+I.

Joy Griffin, an assistant teaching professor in the Technological Entrepreneurship Management Program and the faculty director of venture development for the Fulton Schools of Engineering, was one of the judges at Monday’s event.

She told the student entrepreneurs: “Fail fast, fail early and fail well.”

“I learned that failure is the greatest teacher. And if you can get out there and you can fail and then you can pivot, it’s not even a failure; it’s just a process,” she said.

Gangodagamage agreed.

“There have been no days when there wasn’t a setback,” he told ASU News.

“If you spend time thinking about problems and why they’re bad, it won’t help you. If you think of a problem as an opportunity to grow, you can grow.”

Gangodagamage chose ASU because of its strong support for student entrepreneurs. Before he came, he scoured the Edson E+I site.

“I watched all the Demo Day videos, and I watched the introduction to [Venture Devils](#) video,” he said. “And I knew I could grow myself as an entrepreneur here.”

Gangodagamage had already taught himself how to develop games by watching YouTube videos. As a high schooler, his house had slow internet service, so he created a gaming platform that would work for people like him.

Legion Platforms has about a dozen multiplayer games that don’t have to be downloaded.

“A lot of people think that most of our users are from Third World countries, but 70% are from the U.S. and Europe,” he said during his five-minute pitch to the judges, adding that most are male and 18 to 24 years old.

The venture makes money through in-app purchases and advertisers on the platform, which include Amazon and Netflix.

“And the thing is, we have really mastered the art of getting users loving our games,” Gangodagamage said.

“But now we want to focus on generating the maximum amount of revenue from those users through our own ad network subscriptions.”

Legion Platforms has won thousands of dollars in funding previously, but Gangodagamage said that the biggest help to his venture was mentorship and meeting other entrepreneurs through ASU.

“The most important thing is to have the right people around you, and that’s what ASU provides,” he told ASU News.

“The best thing about participating in competitions is learning other people’s perspectives when they ask you questions. You know how they view your company.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Sandul Gangodagamage (left), a sophomore computer science and business law student at ASU, won \$100,000 for his gaming platform venture at the inaugural Inferno Invitational Startup Cup on Monday. His victory was announced by Joy Griffin, faculty director of venture development for the Fulton Schools of Engineering, who was one of the judges at the pitch competition. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News

Gallery



Joshua Hanson — who graduated with a bachelor's degree in biomedical engineering from ASU last week — pitches his startup, ImageAiD, a medical device that screens for peripheral artery disease, at the Inferno Invitational Startup Cup on Monday.



One of the University of Arizona student-led startup teams pitches for the judges. They are, from left: Kaylynn Maloney, Becca Sanders, AnaCristina Lopez and Erik Eikenmeyer, and their venture is Kovera, a fashion purse that converts to a clear bag.



Northern Arizona University students Marco Castrita (left) and Evan Lunceford pitch their venture, Campus PM, a platform for professors to manage student capstone projects.



Evly Pacheco, a psychology student at Estrella Mountain Community College, describes her venture, Lovdatkat Ai Productions, which harnesses AI to ease caregiving of elderly people.



Lucas Patten, a student at Grand Canyon University, describes his startup, Powder Pal, a collagen supplement company.