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Office of Communications & Marketing

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Photo 1 The team representing Ouachita at the 2023 Governor's Cup Competition included (from left) visiting professor Johan Eriksson, Madison Melcher, Jillian Woodruff, Dr. Chris Brune, Connor Bjerke, Emma Bynum, Kaitlyn Montgomery, and Dr. Nathan Reyna.

For immediate release

Ouachita students earn top honors in Governor's Cup competition

By Addie Woods

May 5, 2023

For more information, contact Ouachita's Office of Communications & Marketing at comm-mark@obu.edu or (870) 245-5206.

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. — Students from Ouachita Baptist University's Hickingbotham School of Business placed first and second in the small business division and first in the elevator pitch competition during the 23rd annual Arkansas Governor's Cup Collegiate Business Plan Competition on April 7 in Fayetteville, Ark.

Jillian Woodruff, a senior business administration/management major from Hope, Ark., placed first overall in the Winrock Automotive Small Business Division and won a \$10,000 cash prize with Waderbuddy, a product designed to help users remove duck hunting waders quickly and safely. She was advised by Dr. Chris Brune, professor of finance and George Young Chair of Business at Ouachita.

Woodruff also placed first and won \$1,000 in the elevator pitch competition with a 90-second product pitch for Waderbuddy.

"I got the chance to meet some amazing people and learned a lot of business skills along the way," Woodruff said. "Dr. Brune and I worked tirelessly on the project for two semesters, and we're both very happy with the outcome."

“I’m so proud of Jillian and the work she has done,” Brune said. “I’ve been particularly impressed with her resilience, poise and business savvy, and I can’t wait to see where she takes the Waderbuddy from here.”

Placing second overall in the Winrock Automotive Small Business Division was Madison Melcher, a senior business administration/entrepreneurship major from Rockwall, Texas, with Covered by Grace which merges the physical and digital formats of the Bible to provide a personalized user experience. She was advised by Johan Eriksson, visiting instructor of business administration and director of entrepreneurship programs, and was awarded \$7,500.

“It was an incredible experience to pitch my company, Covered by Grace, to an audience of entrepreneurs alongside some of the state’s most innovative companies,” Melcher said. “I’m grateful to my advisors for their hard work and dedication.”

“To say that I’m proud of Madison is an understatement. Madison stood on the stage with all the competitors and in front of the judges and laid out the Gospel that represented her business and her heart,” said Eriksson. “I’ve had the opportunity to learn so much from her.”

Microcures, a supplemental therapy for non-small-cell lung cancer patients to be used alongside the standard course of treatment, secured a third-place win in the High-Growth/Technology Division for a team made up of Connor Bjerke, a senior accounting and finance double major from Oak Leaf, Texas; and four students from Ouachita’s Patterson School of Natural Sciences: Jade Dorman, a senior biology and Spanish double major from Benton, Ark.; Keren Fernandez, a senior nutrition & dietetics and biology double major from San Pedro Sula, Honduras; Kaitlyn Montgomery, a senior biology major from Montgomery, Texas; and Emma Bynum, a senior biology major from Troup, Texas. The team was advised by Dr. Nathan Reyna, professor of biology, and was awarded \$7,500.

Since the first Governor’s Cup in 2001, more than 3,000 college and university students have competed, submitting 977 business ideas. For 2023, 23 teams comprising 78 students and representing nine Arkansas universities entered the competition.

For more information about Ouachita’s [Hickingbotham School of Business](#), contact Bryan McKinney at mckinneyb@obu.edu or at (870) 245-5513. To find out more about Microcures or about the [Patterson School of Natural Sciences](#) at Ouachita, contact Dr. Nathan Reyna at reynan@obu.edu or at (870) 245-5240.