



BLAZE

UIC Blaze Venture Challenge Official Participant Guidelines



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the UIC Blaze Venture Challenge, a student entrepreneurial program run by UIC Innovation in partnership with UIC Business. Our goal is to build an inclusive entrepreneurial community where all students have access to the support and resources they need to succeed as entrepreneurs.

ABOUT THE CHALLENGE

The UIC Blaze Venture Challenge is a semester long program designed to help students accelerate their ideas through mentoring, resources, and the chance to win cash prizes. It consists of a series of workshops followed by a semi-final virtual presentation where teams pitch their ideas to judges to earn a spot in the final event.

As part of the Blaze Venture Challenge, we host a series of workshops designed



to help students prepare to pitch in April. Spark Series programming is here to help you every step of the way. Workshops are held on Wednesday evenings on Zoom from 5:00-6:00PM CT. Visit our [website](#) to see details and register for our weekly workshops.

We encourage **all UIC students** to participate; we welcome both **part-time** and **full-time, undergraduate**, and **graduate** students of all backgrounds and interests. Participants will learn valuable entrepreneurial skills while connecting to the growing community of UIC student-entrepreneurs.

This document outlines guidelines for the UIC Blaze Venture Challenge. For specific information regarding the schedule and deadlines, please refer to the UIC Blaze Venture Challenge [website](#). For further questions, please contact the UIC Innovation team at innovation@uic.edu.



RULES AND GUIDELINES

CHALLENGE COMMITMENT

Each participant should adhere to the UIC Blaze Venture Challenge Guidelines and the UIC Community Standards throughout the Challenge, which are available at <https://dos.uic.edu/community-standards/>. Each participant is expected to follow these guidelines, and exemplify the community standard values of integrity, accountability, and respect.

NON-CONFIDENTIALITY

All events and presentations are accessible to the public, and some presentations may be recorded. Information or data presented during events by participants may be made public. Participants should not share proprietary information; they should identify a problem and present an idea that addresses the problem using knowledge and experience gained over the course of the semester.

COPYRIGHTS & PERMISSIONS

Participants must obtain permission or authorization in advance from the owners of any copyrighted materials and/or images used in presentation materials and cite this information. Learn more about citation resources by clicking [here](#).

REGISTRATION

All teams must include a **team name** during registration that will be used for semifinal and finalist rounds. The registration deadline is **February 21 at 11:59pm.**



ELIGIBILITY

UIC BLAZE VENTURE CHALLENGE ELIGIBILITY

The UIC Blaze Venture Challenge is for new, independent ventures in the pre-seed through early growth stages. Any UIC student can present an idea and is welcome to participate in the challenge. Eligibility for participation may be impacted by levels of revenue and/or capital raised. If students have established concepts and already have revenues exceeding \$50,000 in a prior academic year (excluding Phase I SBIR/STTR grants) or have raised equity capital above \$50,000 from individuals other than team members or family/friends, please let the UIC Innovation team know as soon as possible.

TEAM MEMBER/INDIVIDUAL ELIGIBILITY & PARTICIPATION

All UIC students are eligible to participate as a member of a team for the UIC Blaze Venture Challenge.

- Students may participate as a member of a team or as an individual
There is no maximum or minimum number of people who may be on a team
- Teams may include non-UIC students, but at least 50% of the team must be current UIC students
- Students may be on more than one team, however if both teams should be selected for the Final event, that student can only present in one team's pitch
- Students participating as an individual may only register with one pitch idea



PRESENTATION RULES

- Only UIC students may pitch to judges in the semi-finals and finals
- All team members (including non-UIC members) who are listed on the team roster can answer questions from the judges during the final presentation
- Students are expected to use verifiable data and customer discovery insights.

SEMI-FINALS

- Participants will record a **5-minute** pitch virtually, using a system like Zoom or Microsoft Teams
 - *(Reminder: students have access to free [UIC Zoom](#) accounts)*
- Recorded pitch videos are due by 11:59pm on **Wednesday, April 9**
 - Students will use Blackboard to upload presentations ahead of the due date
- Participants will receive judging criteria after registration closes, February, 21.
- Every participant will receive feedback from the judges who scored their pitches
- Finalists will be announced on **Friday, April 11**
- Semi-finalist teams that do not make it to the finals are invited to the finals to participate in a 1 minute elevator pitch challenge to win \$500.

FINALS

- Participants will have **10 minutes** total to present to judges at the final in-person event
 - Max of **5-minutes** for the presentation of the pitch, followed by **5-minutes** for Q&A
 - The Blaze Venture Challenge planning team will be in communication with finalists about final pitch decks
- Awardees will be announced at the end of the event



JUDGING

The Blaze Venture Challenge is designed to help students learn entrepreneurial skills and reflect the real-world process of developing and pitching a concept to seek resources and funding to help the idea grow. Students will prepare a pitch to present to a panel of judges who will act as potential investors deciding on which business concept they envision having the potential for most success. Our goal is to support students in their entrepreneurial efforts beyond the Blaze Venture Challenge. Judges will provide feedback to help participants continue to develop their skills.

Judges will be recruited by the UIC Blaze Venture Challenge Planning Team from across campus for the semi-final round and by reaching out to alumni and successful entrepreneurs in the community for the final judges. Participants are expected to abide by the UIC Community Standards in their pitches and, in the finals event, in responding to questions from the judges. This includes the expectation that data presented within the pitch (e.g., to provide evidence for idea validation) are real and verifiable

FUNDING, PRIZES, AND AWARDS

Participants are eligible to receive cash prizes for first, second, and third places, as well as a crowd favorite prize. The crowd favorite prize money is for semi-finalists who participate in the elevator pitch portion of the finals.

FIRST PLACE: \$5,000

SECOND PLACE: \$ 3,500

THIRD PLACE: \$1,500

CROWD FAVORITE: \$500



MENTORS

Mentors play an integral part in the entrepreneurial process by providing advice to help participants explore and refine their business idea. Mentors are from the UIC alumni community and the greater Chicago entrepreneurship ecosystem. Mentoring is set up using a pool system where students will review mentors' areas of expertise and schedule time during their identified office hours.

Mentor reservations are first come first serve! It is important to do your due diligence and research mentors that are of interest to you and reserve time in advance. The mentor bios and office hours will be uploaded to the Blaze Venture Challenge Blackboard site. The pool system allows participants to decide whether they want to meet regularly with a mentor or just need occasional technical assistance or specific questions answered.

Students should plan on mentoring sessions that are up to 30 minutes in length. As a reminder, it is important to keep appointments that are scheduled with mentors. If students must cancel their mentoring session, please alert the mentor as soon as possible. If students encounter issues scheduling with mentors, please let the UIC Innovation team know. We recognize and appreciate the time and effort that both students and mentors are dedicating to the UIC Blaze Venture Challenge.

Note: The UIC Innovation team reserves the right to grant exceptions on a case-by-case basis and discretion to modify the Rules and Regulations document as needed.

Questions? Please contact the UIC Innovation Team at innovation@uic.edu or visit our website:

