

## **2008 Chicago Innovation Chase Brings Together Midwest Schools**

It's Friday, April 11, and I am at the IIT Institute of Design's downtown campus. The room is full of energy. 60 students and their faculty advisors from eight different schools are gathered here for a competition that is still largely a mystery to them. All they know is that they are about to embark on an adventure that will take them through the streets of downtown Chicago as they test their entrepreneurial skills in the real world.

This is the 2008 Chicago Innovation Chase, an annual competition that is best described as one part scavenger hunt and one part "The Apprentice." This event, the flagship event of the Entrepreneurship Program at IIT, is a one-day product design and business challenge. Teams of five students are given a product to design – such as a cell phone – and then a single clue. This clue leads the team through downtown Chicago, to a dozen attractions and noteworthy organizations, where judges evaluate the teams on their performance of tasks such as an elevator pitch, media interview, ethnographic study, rapid prototype, and opportunity assessment.

This year, teams were challenged to design the future of financial transactions: the next generation of credit cards. Students met with influential business and social leaders from World Business Chicago, the Chicagoland Entrepreneurial Center, Garmin International, and the Coleman Foundation.

IIT's team was chosen in a series of tryouts in January and February of this year. Chosen for the Chicago Chase team were: Leo Bassett (3rd, Business), Sara Sustersic (3rd, Business), Ryan Witthans (4th, Chemistry), Namrata Hegde (1st, Architecture), and Tony Saracino (3rd, Architectural Engineering).

Competitors for the Chicago Innovation Chase came from across the Midwest. Eight universities competed in the event, representing five states from Missouri to Michigan.

At the end of the day, St. Louis University took the first place winnings of \$2,500, followed by UIC and Valparaiso, who won \$1,250 and \$500 respectively. IIT's team took fifth place in a very close match between third, fourth, and fifth.

The teams had a great time at the Chicago Innovation Chase. One student, an Entrepreneurship major from UIC, was enthused by "the intensity of a raw entrepreneurial experience." Another Entrepreneurship student from St. Louis University enjoyed "the many learning opportunities forcing us to think on our feet and innovate." But one team member from Lawrence Technological University summed it up best: "Great learning experience, great networking. I love Chicago!"

Participating Schools:

- DePaul University (Chicago, IL)
- Illinois Institute of Technology (Chicago, IL)
- Kettering University (Flint, MI)
- Lawrence Technological University (Southfield, MI)

- Milwaukee School of Engineering (Milwaukee, WI)
- Saint Louis University (St. Louis, MO)
- University of Illinois at Chicago (Chicago, IL)
- Valparaiso University (Valparaiso, IN)

Top Three Teams:

1. Saint Louis University
2. University of Illinois at Chicago
3. Valparaiso University