



# Bronco Challenge for Sustainable Impact

## Gearing Up for Year 2 Now!

As a successful first year draws to a close, planning for Year 2 of the Bronco Challenge for Sustainable Impact is kicking off. The Challenge is an innovative, experiential learning initiative at Western that engages full-time students from all majors in solving the world's most difficult problems. Students work in self-selected, cross-functional, four-person teams on projects of their choice for a full academic year. Their project result must be a creative and bold idea for a business, a service, a product or a public policy to solve global issues addressed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Participating students compete not for grades but for prize money.

### Recapping Year 1

In the inaugural year (2022-2023), seven generous sponsors each contributed \$5,000 to fund the Challenge in which the prize purse totaled \$19,000. The sponsors included two university units plus Cirba Solutions, Greenlink Engineering, Invenergy, Kalsec and Owens Corning. Six student teams entered the competition. After several mid-point reviews three teams survived as finalists and presented their work to a panel of five judges on May 12, 2023. An interdisciplinary team of Broncos with an urban gardening project, won the \$10,000 first prize. Team member, Will Roosien, said "Because of its nature, this challenge allowed me to evaluate my strengths from an entirely new angle. What started as a side project has now surprisingly and significantly changed the trajectory of my life and the manner by which I view myself."

Other top winners included the teams behind Aquaponics in Education, with a system for promoting interest in sustainability across all majors which earned the \$6,000 second place prize, and Off Grid Stadium Lighting, a system of solar-powered lights for Western's soccer stadium which earned the \$3,000 third place prize.

Said Jim Justice, senior vice president of corporate responsibility and resource management at certified B Corp, Kalsec, "Programs like the Bronco Challenge are one way we can support and encourage sustainable innovation and help find new solutions to big problems."

### Moving on to Year 2

The participation goal for 2023-2024 is to attract 12-15 teams to enter the Challenge and to qualify 4-6 teams for the final round of the competition. The Challenge appeals particularly to students who:

- Crave a sustainability learning experience while in college but who cannot fit a formal course into their schedule.
- Want an authentic opportunity to make an impact on solving a sustainability problem to graduation.
- Desire a problem-solving experience that will differentiate them from other candidates in their job search.

Said Jordan Walker, a member of the stadium lighting team, "My biggest takeaway is that there is a large group of people that are as passionate about sustainability as I am, and there are many ways that we can make a difference. Although we did not win the Challenge, I was inspired by the other projects and the people I met while competing."

"The Bronco Challenge for Sustainable Impact enabled me to identify a place in the professional world by which I can flourish," adds Roosien, who was inspired to change his major from marketing to regulatory law. "As a direct result of this challenge, I reevaluated my career path and gained a new understanding of the sort of professional I aspire to be."

*The funding goal for academic year 2023-2024 is \$50,000 in sponsorships at the level of \$5,000 each. Benefits of sponsorship include mention in Challenge publicity, early connection with students who may be intern or employee prospects, and opportunities to suggest projects that align with sponsor interests. Sponsorship payments are remitted to the WMU Foundation, a 501c(3) organization. The Challenge is an initiative within the WMU Office for Sustainability.*

Learn more at: <https://wmich.edu/sustainability/initiatives/broncochallenge>