Program Description

The MESA Idea Accelerator program engages undergraduate students in addressing community and societal challenges through the lens of the Human-Centered Design (HCD) process and entrepreneurship. During the program, students are guided through the three phases of HCD: inspiration, ideation, and implementation. Working in teams, they will develop a solution and produce a marketable prototype pitch to present to a panel of judges that includes industry, corporate partners, and MESA supporters. Monetary prizes will be awarded to the top three teams.

MESA undergraduate students from our University and Community College programs are invited to apply, and a final cohort of 30 students are selected to participate.

Phase 1:
The first phase is an in-person, 3-5 day intensive week where students are guided through the fundamental concepts of Human-Centered Design. By the end of the week, students have formed teams and developed a plan of action for their final project and proposed solution. Embedded throughout the week are professional development workshops that are facilitated by the host company, such as networking, resume building, and career exploration.

Phase 2:
In the second phase, teams will work remotely to research, collect data, build a prototype for their solution and will prepare a final pitch to make before a panel of industry judges. This phase is perhaps the most challenging, as it requires students to figure out a virtual working schedule while balancing other personal responsibilities and the start of their Fall school semesters/quarters. The MESA facilitators schedule 2-3 checkpoints with all teams during this time to ensure teams are making progress and help them address any challenges along the way.

Phase 3:
Finally, in the third phase, teams will reconvene in person one day prior to the annual MESA Student Leadership Conference (SLC). This is when teams will make their final pitch presentations to the judges and will be evaluated against a rigorous rubric developed by the MESA team. Additionally, all IA students will serve attend the SLC as student captains, a role in which they'll serve as leaders and guide other student teams through their team challenge. Winners will be announced during the closing ceremony of the SLC.

Prizes: 1st - $3000 2nd - $2000 3rd - $1000 (divided among the winners)

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