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University entrepreneurs win business competition

After winning the New Venture Championship in Portland, the team traveled to Hong Kong

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University law student Bill Sedlak is flying high.

Over the weekend he led the first team from the University to ever win the grand prize at the New Venture Championship, or NVC, in Portland, where the team was named co-champion with a Brigham Young University group. Both schools received a \$30,000 prize. And on Tuesday the University's team landed in Hong Kong to compete in another in a series of university-level entrepreneurship competitions.

The year-long trip from University classrooms to sipping Tsingtao beer around a roof-top swimming pool at a Hong Kong hotel hasn't been easy for the second-year MBA students. But it has been worth it. At least, Sedlak said, "it beats going to class."

The process taking Sedlak and fellow team members Peter Vomocil, Andrew Earle and Cody Stavig to Hong Kong started in the classroom. As students in the MBA program concentrating in entrepreneurship they entered a track of courses which led them to summer fellowships. As fellows, they worked with scientists and researchers throughout the Northwest to try to find a new technology they could turn into a profitable business. What they found was a piece of U.S. Department of Defense technology that Sedlak said looks like "a small elevator/large phone booth with a 7-foot arm that rotates around you while you stand still."

Originally designed for airport scanning, the machine uses Doppler radar to make a 3-D map of the body "that will be able to provide all the information our customers need (body fat percentage, hip-to-waist ratio, length and height measurements and more) without requiring them to take off their clothes, wear spandex, or be poked & prodded by a personal trainer," Sedlak said. It sees through hair and clothes, is "completely safe" and the scan takes only eight seconds to complete.

The team developed a business plan to sell the BodyMap last fall and honed it during winter term in series of national competitions. The path these students walked constitutes what entrepreneurship coordinator Dick Sloan called "the flagship program" of the business school. Beginning in February they traveled to the University of Cincinnati, where they placed fourth overall and "won a little cash," Sedlak said. They later went to Carnegie Mellon University where they "didn't even make the second day of competition." Going into the NVC "it seemed unlikely that we'd come away with \$30,000 and become the first UO team in the 17-year history of the competition to finish first."

Unlikely perhaps, but not impossible - all it took was convincing representatives from technology companies and investment firms that theirs was the best plan. Their plan envisions selling the BodyMap machine to sports teams first and later health and fitness clubs. The company they've created, TakeShape, Inc., has already made agreements for test usage of the equipment with the New York Giants, the University of Texas Longhorns football team and the Oregon Ducks football team.

As for the immediate future, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology competition is center stage now, and the oldest and most prestigious international tournament, Moot Corp at the University of Texas at Austin, is two weeks away and getting closer.

But winning on home turf in Portland, Sloan said, was "the top prize they could have aspired to," giving them prestige

both nationally and regionally "from Seattle to the bottom of Oregon."

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