Bulldog B.I.T.E.

BUILDING INNOVATION BY TRUMAN ENTREPRENEURS

BULLDOG PITCH DAY

ELEVATOR PITCH COMPETITION

FINALS

Thursday, November 13, 2025
1:00 – 4:00 p.m.

sponsored by

VILLHARD GROWTH PARTNERS
A MIDWEST-BASED GROWTH BUYOUT FUND

On-Campus Support provided by

THE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS & PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

CCE COMMUNITY OF COLLEGE ENTREPRENEURS

THE OFFICE OF ADVANCEMENT

Bulldog Pitch Day Participants

Brunswick R-II High School - Breanne Harmon

Mia Burbank
Edward Uzenski
Nathaniel Sims
Jordan Gauthier

Higbee R-VIII School - Amber Stockhorst

Mya Sears
Zach Roberts and Miles McGuire

Kirksville Area Technical Center - Michele Thurlo

Cloe Magruder, Lea Patterson, Brynn Shahan, and Hope Vice
Varsha Hanikandan
Nurdine Aisha
Cronan Carrier
Carolina Bobzien, Lucia Marques-Ovalle, and Morgan Baird
Nora Seedorf and Lyndi Paige
Havyn Allemang and Drew Brubacker
Alysa Reyes-Hartley
Brantley Kottwitz and Lake Downing
Jesse Bishoff
Will Baker
Mason Cassidy and Joel Feeney
Adetola Atiba and Drussile Tshienda
Kaedyn Hill and Victoria Hennke
Logan Martin, Kyle White, and Ty LaBeth
Blayne Byers
Sean James
Jacques Bulongo

Monroe City High School - Alexandria Crider

Kate Willingham, Madisyn Adams, and Bella Keller
Audrey Rodeghero and Serenity Fishbeck
Paisley Weldon

Paris High School - Amanda Drew

Hadlee Hendren
Elijah Reynolds
Peyton Elliott and Carly Conover

Bulldog B.I.T.E. Finalists

Eyerusalem Mekuria
Senior, Economics
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Saron Gebremichael and Nahom Jember
Saron: Junior, Computer Science, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Nahom: Junior, Business Administration (Finance) and Accounting, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Chase Haustein
Freshman, Business Administration (Management)
Springfield, Missouri

Kenze Prenger and Jessi Nigh
Kenze: Senior, Business Administration (Management), Taos, Missouri
Jessi: Senior, Business Administration (Marketing), Kirksville, Missouri

Aiden Roberts and Jack Weltha
Aiden: Senior, Business Administration (Finance), Ewing, Missouri
Jack: Senior, Business Administration (Management), Bloomington, Illinois

Amine Saoud
Senior, Data Science
Soliman, Tunisia

FINANCIAL AWARDS

Bulldog Pitch Day and Bulldog B.I.T.E. are funded through the generous support of alumni and friends to the following Truman State University Foundation funds:

Villhard Innovation Fund

Lt. Gen. Shien Min Ku and Shih Chin Ku Entrepreneurship Fund

FINAL ROUND JUDGES

Kabir Bansal ('10)

Kabir is from Kirksville, Missouri and is one of five members on the Kirksville City Council. Kabir serves as a Lead Analyst with Mass General Brigham, where he specializes in data analytics and process improvement.

Kabir graduated from Truman State University with a Bachelor of Science in business administration.

Anthony Hill ('18)

Anthony Hill is a Wealth Management Advisor partnering with Tim Hanser at Visionary Wealth Advisors, an independent RIA, where the two manage a practice of more than $200 million in client assets. Together they provide comprehensive, white-glove wealth management as fiduciaries for high-net-worth individuals, families and business owners, offering strategic guidance in portfolio management, estate and retirement planning and complex tax strategies.

Anthony has been involved in investment management since a young age and brings more than a decade of experience to his clients. He earned his Bachelor of Science in Finance and Management from Truman, where he competed in multiple events with the Bulldog Student Investment Fund (BSIF) and founded the Community of College Entrepreneurs (CCE), a nonprofit organization that partnered with the Truman State School of Business to help establish the Bulldog B.I.T.E competition.

Starting his first business at age 12 and earning the rank of Eagle Scout at 13, Anthony is driven by curiosity and ambition. His desire to fully harness artificial intelligence began prior to college and continues today at Visionary, where he is helping implement a measured adoption of AI though private large language model (LLM) designed to enhance many aspects of the advisory business while keeping client data offline and confidential.

Anthony also serves as Vice President and Webmaster of the Fox High School Alumni Association Board, which recognizes distinguished alumni and creates scholarships for students pursuing higher education. He and his wife, Ashley, built their home south of St. Louis in 2021 and enjoy travel, golf, and time with family and friends.

Jason Schmidt ('02)

Jason Schmidt is presently an innovator and entrepreneur seeking to transform the construction industry with cutting-edge solutions. As the co-inventor and co-founder of the LumaNail, he has helped design the world's coolest patent-pending roofing nail, which is shaping up to be a game-changer that enhances durability, visibility, installation efficiency and sustainability in roofing systems.

It has been a circuitous route to get there, though. With scientific training in biology and chemistry at Truman State, a J.D. from Thomas Jefferson in San Diego and his LL.M. in intellectual property and technology from Washington University, Jason pivoted from a litigator to a business owner. He is currently bringing his expertise and knack for creative problem-solving into the construction industry, where he is looking to turn that next bold idea into a real-world solution.

Barbara Witte (’83)

Barbara Witte graduated from Truman with a degree in accounting in 1983. She obtained her MBA from Webster University and holds a CPA certificate in the state of Missouri.

In her 40-year career, Barb began as an auditor in the Big 4 and progressed to Health Plan CEO where daily responsibilities involved membership growth, plan profitability and insuring operational efficiencies. The last 10 years of work experience focused on problem solving within Health Insurance plans, fixing weak/problematic areas and restoring profitability.

Barb retired two years ago and has been active with Truman for many years.

Recently, Barb was the 2023 Business School Alumni Fellow. She has participated in the Chuck and Sherri Woods TRU-Biz Forum and is an active participant and is an active participant in the Growing Connections Alumni event held annually in St. Louis.

Barb resides in St. Louis with her husband, Jack, and has two adult sons.

QUALIFYING ROUND JUDGES

Amy Gryder ('97)

Amy is an enterprise product executive with more than 15 years of experience driving revenue growth and customer engagement though strategic product management and digital transformation. She specializes in crafting digital acquisition and retention solutions, cloud and AI-driven implementations and agile operating models. A passionate advocate for inclusion and access, Amy is also a Lean Six Sigma Green Belt and a Certified Usability Analyst.

Deeply invested in her community, Amy serves as the Vice President of the Francis Howell School Board in Saint Charles County, Missouri. She holds an M.A. in leadership and organizational development from Saint Louis University and a B.A. in psychology from Truman State University.

Amy lives in Saint Charles, Missouri with her husband, three kids and two dogs. She has been serving as a qualifying round judge for the Bulldog B.I.T.E. Elevator Pitch Competition since 2018.

Dane Stangler ('01)

Dane is the vice president of strategic initiatives at the Bipartisan Policy Center. He is also a senior advisor at the Global Entrepreneurship Network. Previously, he was president and chief policy officer of Startup Genome and vice president of research and policy at the Kauffman Foundation. He graduated with a B.A. in English from Truman State and J.D. from University of Wisconsin.

PRACTICE ROUND JUDGES

Laci Cook ('03)

Laci Cook is a dynamic entrepreneur and community leader known for more than 20 years of business ownership, innovation and unwavering commitment to her community. As the Executive Director of Main Street Kirksville and owner of Sip Downtown, she plays a key role in driving downtown revitalization and fostering local business growth.

Through hosting events, sponsoring community initiatives and volunteering her time, Laci remains deeply committed to making a positive impact on the lives of those around her. Her leadership and entrepreneurial spirit have earned her numerous honors, including Kirksville's "5 Under 40" Award, the Kirksville Daily Express "Person of the Year" and most recently the Kirksville Area Chamber of Commerce "Entrepreneur of the Year."

Laci also serves on the City of Kirksville's Tourism Board and supports many other organizations throughout the community. Driven by a passion for both business and community service, she continues to inspire others with her dedication, creativity and enthusiasm for growth and collaboration. Laci graduated from Truman State University with a Bachelor of Science in agriculture science.

Bryce Cardwell

Bryce Cardwell is a small business counselor at the Northeast Missouri Small Business Development Center and Missouri Rural Enterprise and Innovation Center. He received his master's in business administration from Northwest Missouri State University. He was formerly employed at Truman as a career counselor and at Northwest Missouri State University as a financial aid counselor. He is also a licensed real estate agent.

Tarasa Gardner

Tarasa Gardner is a professor and distinguished educator at Moberly Area Community College (MACC), where she has taught English and literature courses since 2008. With a Bachelor of Arts from Graceland University and a Master of Arts in English from Northwest Missouri State University, Tarasa has focused much of her work at MACC in restructuring the developmental English program, including placement, course offerings, curriculum and assessment. For her work and its results, she has been awarded the Mel Aytes Faculty Innovation Award, the MACC Innovation Award and is a two-time recipient of the PTK Glaux Award for Faculty.

Additionally, Tarasa is an AP English language and composition reader for CollegeBoard, has served as an HLC assurance argument co-chair and strategic planning work group co-chair, has contributed to the Missouri co-requisite at Scale Taskforce, and served on the executive council of the Missouri Developmental Education Consortium.

Beyond her work at MACC, Tarasa is an entrepreneur as a certified yoga instructor and studio owner. She is a 500 E-RYT with Yoga Alliance, owning and operating two yoga studios: the online Yoga with TG studio and Kirksville's first yoga studio, the You, Yourself and Yoga studio located at 915 E. Jefferson St.

About Bulldog B.I.T.E. and Bulldog Pitch Day

With the financial and professional support of Doug ('94) and Diane ('95) Villhard, Truman State University is proud to present the finals for both Bulldog B.I.T.E. and Bulldog Pitch Day. Both competitions follow an elevator pitch format. Bulldog Pitch Day is for high school students, and Bulldog B.I.T.E. is for college students.

In an elevator pitch competition, presenters outline a concept or idea for a product, service, or project in a short period of time, typically from 30 seconds to three minutes. The length of the pitch mirrors the time spent waiting for and riding an elevator in a high-rise building. The purpose of the pitch is to spur the interest of a potential investor or financial backer.

About the Sponsor

Villhard Growth Partners is a St. Louis-based growth buyout firm that invests in, partners with and grows strong, tech-enabled businesses and healthcare services companies. They focus on lower market transactions in which they can invest alongside aggressive, entrepreneurial teams that share their passion for growing and building great businesses.

About the Community of College Entrepreneurs (CCE)

The Community of College Entrepreneurs at Truman State University is a student group that fosters the spirit of entrepreneurship on campus by promoting a network of innovative mindsets from various backgrounds. They promote entrepreneurial endeavors that lead to building wealth at a young age and advance new ideas that benefit the community. They also host campus-wide events featuring notable entrepreneurs to demystify what it takes to begin a successful business.

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