BROOK T. SMITH LAUNCHPAD

HIGH SCHOOL ENTREPRENEURSHIP SUMMER CAMP

2026

Igniting Young Innovators

High School Entrepreneurs Thrive at Clemson University's Brook T. Smith Launchpad Summer Camp

Clemson University became a hub of entrepreneurial energy as high school students from across the state gathered for an immersive summer camp hosted by the Brook T. Smith Launchpad. Designed to equip the next generation of innovators with the tools, mindeset, and mentorship they need to succeed, the program offered a packed schedule of interactive sessions, workshops, and networking oppotunities.

Sessions began with learning about concept and journey, where campers explored the fundamentals of turning an idea into a viable business. The momentum built with sessions that included: customers, competitors, and competence, focusing on customer discovery, market analysis, and personal entrepreneurial strengths. By mid-week, participants dug deeper into real world startup concerns. Sessions such as cash, value proposition, leadership, and teams challenged students to understand financial literacy and team dynamics, essential skills for any startup founder.

The week ended on a high-stakes finale where students presented their business ideas in a formal pitch competition. This simulated pitch environment allowed campers to apply all they've learned, showcasing both creativity as well as business acumen.

CLEMSON UNIVERSITY

LAUNCHPAD STAFF

From Left to Right: Michele Navis (Project Manager), Mary Gildersleeve (Operations Manager), Maggie Guerra Ayala (Operations Manager), Ariel Smith (Community Outreach Coordinator), Susan Sorohan (Office Manager), and Dr. John Hannon (Founding Director)

SUMMER CAMP STAFF

Day Counselors
Marguerite Bryan
Addie Carroll
Joy Clark
Jacob Gardner
Camila Guillén
Pop Popovich
Luke Shannon
Brian Weaver
Amy Welch
Lucy Williams

Olivia Boice **(Nurse)**
Megan Pate **(Nurse)**
Mariah Sloan **(Digital Media)**

Evening Counselors
Lauren Adams
Aidan Barfield
Ellie Bedard
Grayson Bowman
RJ Brown
Savannah Brown
Claire Fulton
Rollins McClure
Brown Muindi
Daniel Ocampo-Villagran
Karsen Sturkey

Malia Garcia **(Camp Manager)**
Bryce Ravenell **(Camp Manager)**

GUEST SPEAKERS

JIM BAKER

CEO,
SUMUS DEVELOPMENT GROUP

RICK BARTH

DIRECTOR,
CLEMSON ADMISSIONS

DAVID BEDARD

RETIRED,
INVESTMENT BANKER (JP MORGAN)

KERRY BEDARD

CO-FOUNDER,
CHARTER SCHOOL

DR. KIMBERLY BYARS

FOUNDER,
AFFLUENT AFFAIRS

LEIGHTON CUBBAGE

FOUNDER,
LAKESIDE LODGE

LUKAS GARCIA

FOUNDER,
CRYSTAL-XG

RASHARD HALL

FOUNDER & CEO,
SCHOLAR-ATHELITE

KEITH HUDGINS

RETIRED,
SUPER MENTOR & ENCOURAGER

JESSICA LALLEY

FOUNDER,
JESSICA LALLEY INTERNATIONAL

DR. RICK RICHARDS

CEO,
IMPACT CONSULTING LLC.

RICHARD YEARGIN

DIRECTOR,
CLEMSON FOOTBALL ENGAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT

81 Students

38 High Schools

14 Counties

16 GROUPS

6 MINUTES TO PITCH

INNOVATIVE IDEAS

PITCH WINNERS

1 SwitchStep

SwitchStep created a modular athletic shoe with interchangeable soles, enabling athletes to switch sports in under 10 seconds while maintaining stability and performance.

- Members: Chastity Isaac, A'miya Jackson, Isaiah Liu, William Rhodes, Jae'Dayn Seward, Isayjah Todman, and Amy Welch (Counselor)

2 Drip 'n Grip

Drip n' Grip offers fully customized athletic tape and grips that allow athletes to personalize equipment with logos, names, numbers, Bible verses and other custom designs.

- Members: Manav Bajaj, Reghan Bartrug, Jerry Gan, Kendra Hardee, Timothy Power, and Pop Popovich (Counselor)

3 Turf Cure

Turf Cure proposed acrylic-coated sand instead of rubber infill to cool synthetic fields and reduce heat-related injuries.

- Members: Miojare Cruz, Deriyan Heat, James Russell, Miguel Silva, and Camila Guillén (Counselor)

TESTIMONIALS

"Every startup dreams of doubling in size every year. Thanks to our amazing team, this camp did just that, and we'll double again in 2027. Our mission to win the state when it comes to entrepreneurship continues to be accomplished."
John Hannon Ph.D. (Founding Director)

"Entrepreneurship State gave me more than just business knowledge. It gave me lifelong connections, valuable lessons I can carry into my future and the opportunity to experience the independence of college life. It challenged me to grow, step outside my comfort zone, and left me feeling more confident and excited about my future."
Surhei Brown (High School Student and Camper)

"In just a few days, the students developed ideas that felt genuinely refreshing, many of them centering on healthy habits and strengthening their own communities...What struck me most was how they backed each other up while the teams prepared, during the pitches, and when the awards were handed out. The affection and respect they showed the counselors and staff make me confident that many of them will return to Clemson, for camp and for college. I left more optimistic about the next generation of founders than I have ever been."
Andrew Schiff (Pitch Competition Judge)

"My favorite part of the camp was meeting people. I spoke to a lot of new people and met a lot of new people. I loved my group, I liked how everyone was so funny and willing to work together and joke around. I also really loved my day counselor Cami, she was so sweet. I loved the experience I had here!"
Deriyan Heath (High School Student and Camper)

SPECIAL THANK YOU TO

Dr. Rick Richards

Dr. Richards, we cannot thank you enough for your care and generosity. It is because of your passion that you have helped the Clemson University Brook T. Smith Launchpad carry out our goals, ambitions, and dreams to change these students' lives forever. We remain fiercely grateful for your steadfast support.

Entrepreneurship State @ Clemson
Founded by and ongoing support from John W. Richards, Jr. '72

Thank you to our major sponsors, Milliken and Jim Baker (right) for their significant support of this collaborative opportunity.

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