

# 8 finalists chosen for CU's Catalyze student business accelerator in Boulder

5 teams female led in program's third year

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This year's new class of startups at CU's catalyze, a business accelerator, is comprised largely of women-led companies, with five of the eight businesses accepted having females as founders and or co-founders. (Cliff Grassmick / Daily Camera)

Eight student businesses have been chosen as finalists in the University of Colorado's Catalyze accelerator , and for the first time in the program's three-year history, five of the eight teams are led by women.

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That wasn't by design, said Managing Director Becky Komarek.

"We really just got the best teams in here we could. While we realized some of them had women founders, it just worked out that the strongest teams also had diversity."

Catalyze is sponsored by the College of Engineering but is open to students and recent grads from any field of study. The accelerator's biggest success story is actually a clothing company: [Shinesty, which last year sold more than \\$5 million of its wacky duds and recently landed a reality show](#) on MTV.

Finn Thye, a mom of two, did her undergraduate, graduate and doctoral work on languages, living with the Northern Arapaho to learn and preserve the endangered tribal language.

Her company, Off the Wall Language, was the first team accepted to this year's program. A learning tool for parents and kids, the app utilizes wall-mounted word and phrase cards with QR codes that can be scanned to hear a native speaker demonstrate pronunciation.

Thye used the system to teach her children Arapaho. The eye contact and interaction improve retention for kids and adults, she said, and the socializing helps establish language learning as a habit.

"It's about not having to take time out of your day to learn," Thye explained. "You can do this while you make breakfast for the kids, they can learn all the food words. It's useful, everyday stuff."

She and co-founder Carl Cortright, a software developer, will this week begin taking pre-orders on their product for English, French and Spanish. An Arapaho version is also being developed, though not commercially: It will be gifted to residents of the Wind River Reservation.

The student entrepreneurs will spend the next eight weeks refining their business models, conducting customer interviews (15 per week) meeting with industry leaders and refining their pitch to investors.

Upon completion, each team will receive \$4,000 in equity-free funding.

"We're investing in them because we believe in the value of supporting their projects," said Tim O'Shea, a mentor-turned-program director. "We've been fortunate to see so much talent that's begun here at CU really take root and build momentum in Boulder and beyond."

O'Shea attributes the strength of this year's team to the pool of local startup talent, which he plugs into in order to provide the Catalyze team with access to mentors in the entrepreneurial world.

It's those relationships that are the most special thing about the program, said recent grad Elizabeth Everbusch, founder of NoEstra, which is working on a filtration system to screen out estrogen and other hormones in the water system.

"I have so much to learn that to even get a couple words in with these people is amazing," Everbusch said. "It's something I never imagined."

"Being able to proclaim that I'm a social entrepreneur in addition to being a woman and being 23? I feel very empowered by that."

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## **Catalyze finalists**

**Hive Tech Solutions** allows beekeepers to apply scientific research to improve the health of their bees and enables growers to vertically integrate pollination into their operations.

**iNFormu** uses IoT technology to help people keep track of their most important things by preventing loss or theft before it happens.

**NoEstra** eliminates estrogen, other hormones and harmful chemicals from drinking water using advanced filtration technology that fits in a simple in-home pitcher.

**Off the Wall Language** creates the opportunity for parents and children to learn a language together with an interactive app and immersive supporting materials.

**Qualify** gamifies the process of online dating in college by requiring people to successfully complete user-created quizzes to view someone's profile.

**Skyive** streamlines the way scholarships are sought, completed and managed through a unified scholarship application platform.

**ShoeSense Running** provides runners with detailed data to know precisely when their shoes are worn out, prompting them to replace their shoes and prevent injuries.

**Stateless** revolutionizes the architecture for IT networks and introduces virtual devices that don't fail and seamlessly scale.