The past academic year was challenging for all of us once again. However, our faculty, staff and students rose again to the test of continuing our active learning and innovating throughout the year. We had some remarkable results that provided an opportunity to highlight the IA program. We built an additional academic track in artificial intelligence and offered our students a premier innovation education experience. Josh Linkner – a UF alum, also featured Innovation Academy in his new book “Big Little Breakthroughs – How Small Everyday Innovations Drive Oversized Results.” This year we continued to deliver all our courses online and; transitioned back to in-person classes toward the end of the summer. We continued to build partnerships with schools and private industry around the state and the country and cultivated another record-setting Gator Giving Day. Additionally, we expanded our total available square footage and completed our state-of-the-art student pitch studio.

Our results this year continue to reflect the growing demand for undergraduate students to enter the workplace with skills such as creativity, problem-solving, verbal communication, & multidisciplinary collaboration. Most notably, our students produced over 54 prototypes focused on creating solutions to support health and wellness for community members in the state of Florida. Our Catalyst program highlighted these student innovations, delivered entirely online over the summer semesters. We sent IA students to competitive online internships all over Florida and around the country. Additionally, we graduated 222 students with the Innovation minor (our largest class ever). Our IA seniors partnered with the Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies to connect teachers and families to use embedded instruction across the school and home environments.

We are excited to expand on the momentum gained this year in anticipation of making the future of the IA program stronger, better and more prominent. I invite you to read more about these accomplishments in the following pages and help us celebrate our students, faculty, and staff. I hope you enjoy learning about our many additions & endeavors over the past year.

“Playing it safe has become the riskiest move of all.”
Josh Linkner – Speaker, Author, Innovator

Go Gators,

Jeff Citty, Ed.D.
Director, Innovation Academy
**IA BY THE NUMBERS**

1,126
IA STUDENTS

1,153
PROTOTYPES BUILT & PITCHED

643
INDIVIDUAL ADVISING SESSIONS

86
STUDENTS PARTICIPATED IN "THE INNOVATION MINDSET" COURSE

212
STUDENTS EARNED THE IA MINOR

360
STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES ATTENDED DISCOVER IA

14
CO-CURRICULAR OPPORTUNITIES/EVENTS FOR IA STUDENTS

64
INDIVIDUAL DONORS FOR THE YEAR

7
PARTICIPATING COLLEGES

28
DIFFERENT MAJORS OFFERED
This year the Innovation Academy celebrated the launch of a new Artificial Intelligence (AI) Track.

The Innovation Academy has offered motivated undergraduates a small-college experience focused on innovation, creativity, entrepreneurship, ethics and leadership on a unique spring-summer schedule since 2013, but Director Dr. Jeff Citty and a dedicated committee knew they could offer students more. “I started thinking through the possibility of having an Artificial Intelligence track as part of the Innovation Minor in January of 2021 as the larger University initiative in AI began to take off,” said Dr. Citty.

Launched in July, this minor track makes AI fundamentals accessible not only to IA students with STEAM majors but IA students majoring in the humanities and social sciences as well.

“It provides both technical and non-technical majors the opportunity to understand the fundamentals of artificial intelligence, its applications to real-world problems in various disciplines and ethical and professional responsibilities of these technologies, not to mention a competitive advantage in the job market,” Dr. Citty said.

The new AI track offers additional courses in AI Fundamentals, Ethics, Data and Technology, and a senior project that will enhance the understanding of AI, its applications to real-world problems in various disciplines, and the ethical and professional responsibilities associated with these technologies while the General Concentration track retains the established Innovation Minor curriculum.

For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to be in the theme park design business. In kindergarten when we had to fill out what we wanted to do when we grew up, I wrote that I wanted to design rollercoasters for Mickey Mouse. While my vision has become a little more refined since then, the idea has always been the same.

In my first year on campus, I formed a great relationship with the professor of my freshman-level IA courses, Charlie Cummings. He has been a great friend and mentor over the course of my entire college career. He was organizing the IA Internship Program, and I decided to apply. This would be the first opportunity I would have to become involved in the theme park industry.

As part of the IA Internship Program, over the course of the fall semester, you develop a project with a team of other students for the organization you are partnered with. Through the IA internship program, I was matched with a company called ThemeWorks, Inc. So, in my freshman year, I was developing a project for a business in my dream industry. It felt unreal. While I was interning through the program, my 3D modeling abilities actually landed me a job working for them outside of the internship.
The IA Catalyst Summer A and Summer B events serve as launching points for students to bring their innovative solutions to the communities they live in, even after the corresponding course – Creativity In Action – ends. This course, which focuses on design thinking, challenges students to develop ideas and solutions to alleviate intricate, real-world problems in a team environment. The resulting prototypes, services, or models are then displayed at the Catalyst events.

IA student teams presented 54 prototypes at this year’s ninth annual Catalyst events, which due to Covid-19 precautions were fully online. These innovative prototypes tackled the question: “How might we support health and wellness for community members in the state of Florida?” and included innovative solutions such as a phone case that doubles as a pill case, a water filter to combat toxic algae blooms, and sports cleats with interchangeable soles to combat sports equipment costs. Students shared these innovative solutions with the community, friends, family, faculty, and fellow innovators in attendance.

This year’s winners of the Judge’s Award from the Summer A cohort were Jonathan Rabinovich, James Lifrage, Raghava Akkinepally, Valerie Merchan and Aaron Curlee with “Perfect Pair.” While Mariana Rivera, Calum Clark, Ilyssa Mann and Loren Odoardo with “Food Locker” brought home the award in Summer B. The Best Prototype Award sponsored by our partner AutoDesk went to Olivia Haut, Nick Spurlin, Sammy Caccamise, Pranav Venu and Josh Nordaas with “Vantage Vest” at the Summer A event, and Gianna DiDomenico, Nigel Goldberg, Gage Simon, Carly Terry and Merrick Graham with “AuxLux” in Summer B.

Missed these events? Visit our YouTube channel to view full recordings of the Catalyst Summer A and B events and award ceremonies.
Q: You graduated with your minor in Innovation—in what major did you receive your undergraduate degree? Did you complete any additional minors or certificates?

- MA in International Business
- BA in Business Management
- BS in Information System and Operation Management

Q: Where are you currently or where are you going in your professional life?

I started my role in Citi’s Quantitative Risk and Stress Testing – Model Governance team in March 2020. This role is a breakthrough for my career at Citi. I had left a great legacy in Supply Chain Management in several organizations and was ready for a change. This new role definitely broadens my horizon and adds a new layer of diversity to my skillset.

Q: What was the most beneficial element of the Innovation minor coursework for you?

The Innovation minor comes with a new mindset on problem-solving and a new perception of this world. I am able to always think about the issues at hand from different angles and find innovative solutions to them. Therefore, in time, I developed the confidence that helps me to take on any challenges that come my way.

Q: How did Innovation Academy prepare you for your professional life? (internships, job interviews, entry-level positions, graduate school, etc.)

When I was in IA, I was part of the inaugural class. Challenges come with being the first in anything. But thanks to that, I was trained to work effectively in any ambiguous environment with minimal direction – I can always figure out a way to accomplish my goal. This ability has helped me excel in internships, job interviews, graduate school, and career beyond school.

Q: Why have you decided to “come back to IA” and support the program as an alumna?

I appreciated the unique competitive advantage IA has given me. IA had shaped me to be a confident, pragmatic, and innovative professional in Corporate America. I have been able to impress my leaders and excel in all roles I worked in. The “IA-ness” in me has made me fluid in my skillsets and open to new growth opportunities more than my competitors and colleagues. I would like to see more unique talents come out of IA and can’t wait to see what this program can accomplish. As a member of Citigroup, I would like to help my corporation acquire IA’s unique talents and introduce a new innovative energy into our workforce.
Big Little Breakthroughs
*IA in the Media*

In April, New York Times Bestselling Author, UF Alum and 2019 IA Keynote Speaker, Josh Linker, launched his new book “Big Little Breakthroughs” featuring the UF Innovation Academy.

Linker has been the founder and CEO of five tech companies, which sold for a combined value of over $200 million and is the author of four books including the New York Times Bestsellers, Disciplined Dreaming and The Road to Reinvention. He has invested in and/or mentored over 100 startups and is the Founding Partner of Detroit Venture Partners. Today, Linker serves as Chairman and co-founder of Platypus Labs, an innovation research, training, and consulting firm. He has twice been named the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year and is the recipient of the United States Presidential Champion of Change Award.

“Big Little Breakthroughs provides an insightful framework for innovation and creativity by demonstrating how small is big and humble is bold,” said UF President, Dr. Kent Fuchs.

**Pitch Studio**

*Gator Giving Day*

The Gator Nation Giving Day is a full 24-hour fundraising event galvanizing UF alumni, students, faculty, staff, families, and friends to come together and support UF and all of its areas of positive impact in our state, nation, and world.

Last year, 98 supporters fundraised $13,033 to directly impact IA students. But, where did the money go? With your support, we built the IA Pitch Studio for students to practice their pitches during our summer Catalyst competition.

Check out the new IA Pitch Studio!
Special Thanks

Our accomplishments this year would not have been possible without the generous support of our partners, and all of the Innovation Academy students and their families.

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IA Curriculum & Advisory Committees

For more information on giving to IA, please contact:

Dr. Jeff Citty
Director, UF Innovation Academy
jcitty@aa.ufl.edu

Matthew Fiore
Assistant Director of Development, University Initiatives
mfiore@ufl.edu

@ufinnovationacademy
@University of Florida Innovation Academy
@UF_IA