

Student entrepreneurs: Campus Pursuit founders visit SUNY Broome

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In their Binghamton University dorm room, Scott Witsotsky and Shachar Avraham tossed out ideas.

It was a common enough pastime for the friends from Fairlawn, New Jersey, who were juniors at the time. The two came up with one hunger-satisfying idea: a smartphone application, or app, to connect students with late-night food options.

That idea didn't pan out, but another did: a treasure hunt app that would link college students with prizes from local businesses. It was October 2013 and the next month found them hard at work, using free tools to make [Campus Pursuit](#) a reality.

"We just thought we had something students would really want to tune into," said Wisotsky, a political science major. "Age is just a number; don't let age hold you back. If it's in your heart and soul, just do it."

The two seniors recently visited Laura Knochen-Davis' entrepreneurship class to speak about their experiences.

The app – currently available at SUNY Broome, Binghamton University, SUNY Albany, Cornell University and Ithaca College – sends students hints on their smartphone about the locations of prizes, which they then redeem at local businesses. While Scott and Shachar are the founders, they also have paid employees: three student managers who hide the prizes and send out clues. These managers extensively trained using a six-page manual Scott and Shachar created – designed to make them the best in the business at hiding prizes, they said.

But that's only one end of the operation. Scott and Shachar have to solicit businesses to sign on with the marketing program, offering a variety of pricing plans. The businesses are, in short, the true customers of Campus Pursuit, with the prizes drawing new clientele to their doors. The pair came up with their pricing plan by asking the advice of a deli owner in their hometown and spent the summer in different college towns, selling their concept door to door.

Initially, the app took four months to design – and that was "nonstop, 24 hours, six days a week," Wisotsky said. They used free tools and services such as WordPress.com to craft the app, using their own money and savings, and then hit downtown Binghamton to speak to business owners. Soon after their launch at BU, they racked up 300 downloads.

As the app proved successful, they then hired a developer in New York City at [theymakeapps.com](#) to take their

product to the next level. And they've also used social media to keep interest high.

"You need to create a product that's going to go viral," said Avraham, an integrated media communications major.

The app will be at 15 universities in the Northeast by August, continuing its expansion. Scott and Shachar ultimately hope to work with larger brands such as McDonalds or Nike, which have proved popular with students they have surveyed.

Knochen-Davis' students asked the entrepreneurs a range of questions, from how they set up the app to the reasons behind their business decisions.

Among them was student Hamza Syed of Schenectady, who is working on an app himself with two other partners. While he is taking courses in entrepreneurship and programming at SUNY Broome, his partners are students at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and Binghamton University.

They started work on the app in October and hope to start testing within a year, Syed said. He couldn't offer many details – the partners had to sign a non-disclosure agreement – but said they hoped to have college students beta-test the app.

Laura Holmes of Binghamton University's Office of Entrepreneurship and Innovation Partnerships noted that youth is a good time for entrepreneurs, since young people usually lack the kind of personal commitments that can inhibit risk-taking.

Knochen-Davis, however, noted that her class attracts many non-traditional students. She recently met with a retiree in his 60s who wants to start a business.

"It's great being at the community college level because what we're seeing is people who are working at inventing themselves," she said.

**Campus Pursuit founders Scott Witsotsky and
Shachar Avraham visit Laura Knochen-Davis'
entrepreneurship class.**

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