

W&M Global Innovation Challenge hosts first hybrid competition with global representation from winning teams

By Elizabeth Marcus '26, Reese O'Brien '24 | April 21, 2023

Two weeks ago, 110 undergraduate students from 21 universities representing 7 countries across the world competed in the seventh annual William & Mary Global Innovation Challenge (WMGIC), a 24-hour case competition aimed at fostering innovative and sustainable solutions to pressing global challenges. This year, WMGIC's case asked students to support internally displaced climate refugees in Bangladesh. Teams developed solutions to this case within Governance, Social Entrepreneurship, and Business Consulting streams, with five winning teams taking home a total of \$2,500 in prizes. Throughout the competition, students had the opportunity to collaborate with industry professionals through their mentoring and judging sessions.

The winners of WMGIC VII represent 4 institutions and 3 countries across North America and Europe.

The *Global Scholars* of William & Mary put forward their Adopt-A-Mangrove Program to combat the deforestation of mangrove trees in Bangladesh while reducing corruption, attracting eco-tourism, and generating carbon credits.

Also from William & Mary, team *NATO Your Business* planned to address food insecurity and create economic opportunities through sustainable aquaculture.

Team *Joe Nye the Soft Power Guy* from Kenyon College in Ohio sought to develop the economies of underutilized regions in Bangladesh through sustainable agriculture and the village-cluster model.

To aid displaced communities, Team *Competence* from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam proposed the use of water purification trucks throughout the areas most affected by climate disasters.

The *Marauders*, representing McMaster University in Canada, proposed to support the growth of the agricultural sector through microfinancing.

Notably, WMGIC VII was the organization's first hybrid event – 9 out of the 30 undergraduate teams competed on Old Campus at William & Mary, while the remaining 21 teams competed virtually via Zoom. This allowed WMGIC to combine the international scope of its previous virtual competitions with the community-based model championed by its founders. And, for the first time since 2019, five industry experts (Catie Lott, Anne Jackson, August Wagner, Elizabeth Miller, and Sarah Jonson) traveled to Williamsburg to volunteer as mentors for the William & Mary streams. Virtual teams also worked with esteemed professionals from organizations like the International Youth Foundation, USAID, Accenture, and the Department of Defense during their judging and mentoring sessions.



Team *Global Scholars* meets with mentor Catie Lott, USAID Innovation Director, in Tucker Hall.

WMGIC competitors were inspired by the competition's unique approach to international development. Tarun Chandrasekar of the *Global Scholars* said, “WMGIC was a great way to bring together people of multiple backgrounds and expertise. The competition provided an opportunity to solve global issues in a truly interdisciplinary manner, and I found the experience rewarding.”

Jonah Sweidan of *NATO Your Business* added that “The case was interesting, and learning how to address real-world issues under time pressure was a great experience. Our mentors were helpful and friendly, and offered useful advice which helped us improve our proposal. We found the competition really fun, and I recommend it to anyone wanting to learn more about policy, innovation, and international development!”



Team *NATO Your Business* brainstorms in James Blair Hall before a mentoring session.

The WMGIC staff congratulates all winners of the WMGIC VII Flagship competition and extends a warm thank you to the competition’s judges, mentors, and core sponsors, including the Institute for Integrative Conservation (IIC), the Global Research Institute (GRI), and the Whole of Government Center of Excellence. Through their support, WMGIC VII was able to provide undergraduate students with an unparalleled opportunity to practice innovation, network with experts and peers, and develop the skills necessary for a successful career in the international sector.

To read more about WMGIC VII and watch the winning presentations, visit the [WMGIC VII Showcase page](#). The WMGIC staff also encourages students interested in topics related to security to register for the upcoming WMGIC x NATO Headquarters challenge, which will be held in Fall 2023.



The WMGIC staff poses in Chancellors Hall after the competition.