

## Students tackle real-life business issues

Hawaii businesses are the winners as schools and students compete

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**A**nna Karvina Pidong says she doesn't want to be a businesswoman.

The Moanalua High School junior credits her participation in an annual business plan competition for helping her determine a career path, which she instead sees in medicine.

"I don't know about being a businesswoman," said Pidong, 17, who placed first in last year's statewide High School Marketing Plan and Business Plan Competitions. "I like the work, but I'm not sure I'd want to do it for the rest of my life now that I know what it's all about. If I didn't have the opportunity to experience this, I wouldn't be as clear about my career plans."

Pidong is among approximately 150 Moanalua High School students enrolled in business-related elective courses including marketing



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**Nina Duong, left, and Anna Karvina Pidong display a PowerPoint slide from their winning Menehune Mac marketing campaign in last year's competition.**

and entrepreneurship.

The annual competition, launched in 2003 as a collaborative effort between the state Department of Education and the Pacific Asian Center of Entrepreneurship at the Uni-

versity of Hawaii at Manoa, is the culminating event for the business courses.

Student teams from Moanalua have placed first or second the past three years in both the business plan and

marketing plan competitions.

This year, the school will enter two business plans and eight marketing plans in the competition, which will be held

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May 5-6 at the Sheraton Waikiki hotel.

"From the time that we first started to now, the level of what we call rigor and the quality has shot way up — there's no question about it," said Sherilyn Lau, an education specialist for career and technical education with the state D.O.E., who organizes the event. "The plans, especially those that make it into the finals, are excellent. I've had comments from industry judges and coaches who say these high-school student plans are better than some in the university competitions and ones from actual entrepreneurs out there."

Public school students are not required to compete, Lau said, but most business classes do require students to create a business plan as a graded project.

This year, students from 10 schools are participating in the business plan segment and 11 schools in the marketing plan segment. Approximately 150 students compete annually, and about 50 business people participate as mentors and judges.

For the business plans, students create a business from scratch, while the marketing plans are crafted for existing businesses, usually Hawaii-based companies.

Two- or three-member student teams produce written plans and do oral presentations using PowerPoint before a panel of judges, all of whom are experts in their fields of business. Finalists present to a different panel of judges the following day and are grilled in a question-and-answer session.

Pidong's winning plan last year, which she completed with teammate Nina Duong, was a marketing plan for Honolulu-based chocolate manufacturer Menehune Mac.

"It was a really cool experience because it showed me a side of business that students don't normally get to see," she said. "It was my first time talking to business owners and finding out what their businesses are all about. We had to come up with proposals on how Menehune Mac could market their business better. And they're actually starting to use some of our suggestions."

Pidong and Duong's plan called for the company to market its core product — chocolate-covered macadamia nuts — as a high-end product, touting the fact that the candies are hand-made.

"We came up with the idea that they should open kiosks at shopping centers and change their packaging, which is



Nina Duong and Anna Karvina Pidong credit Fred Ito, their business teacher at Moanalua High School, with helping them win last year's marketing plan competition.

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## Competing schools

Hawaii high schools participating in the 2010 High School Marketing Plan and Business Plan Competitions:

- |              |               |
|--------------|---------------|
| ■ Baldwin    | ■ Lahainaluna |
| ■ Farrington | ■ Milliani    |
| ■ Hilo       | ■ Moanalua    |
| ■ Castle     | ■ Pearl City  |
| ■ Kahuku     | ■ Waiakea     |
| ■ Keaau      | ■ Waianae     |
| ■ Kohala     | ■ Waipahu     |

do," Pidong said. "And we suggested they change their name, which they're thinking of doing."

This year, Pidong and Duong plan to compete in the business plan segment with an idea for an etiquette business.

Pidong credits Fred Ito, her business teacher at Moanalua, for helping to craft the plan and presentation.

"I teach my students to think big," said Ito, who previously worked 11 years for The Shidler Group before getting into teaching. "The judges aren't interested in doggie day cares or hand-made dresses that you make from home. I want the students thinking in terms of million-dollar businesses or ones that can at least generate \$100,000 a year."

The winning business plan from Moanalua in last year's competition detailed an ambitious proposal to secure the Hawaii franchise rights for Denver-based fast-casual chain Chipotle Mexican Grill Inc. It outlined a strategy to open restaurants across Hawaii for the publicly traded company, which posted full-year revenue of \$1.52 billion in 2009.

"My students may not know how to create business models from scratch, but they definitely need to understand it," Ito said. "For their plans, they need to identify sources of funding, know the difference between debt financing

their plans toward investors who can put money behind their ideas."

This year's competition offers cash prizes in each category of \$900, \$500 and \$300 for first, second and third places, respectively.

Most of the costs to run the competition — budgeted at \$110,000 this year — are covered by federal funding through the U.S. Department of Education. Local sponsors this year include McDonald's of Hawaii, Hawaii USA Federal Credit Union and the Hawaii Venture Capital Association.

"One thing I've observed is that if high-school students are not motivated by possibilities of interesting job opportunities after school, they might turn to less-productive alternatives," said HVCA president Bill Spencer. "The D.O.E.'s career pathways program through this competition has created opportunities for kids with deep learning curriculums, including entrepreneurship and business. The students learn how to start a business, many of which are geared to the local market. But some of them are thinking big and thinking of the global market. We'd like to see more organizations and other entities in the business community support this."

Lau said that besides the business and marketing plan segments, this year's competition will include seven additional categories: advertising/retail, animation, culinary, education, health service, sustainable crop production, and 3D design and printing.

"The intent of having all of these career pathways represented in the competition is to help build a statewide system to assess student learning," she said. "We've had to add in more programs of study and eventually, hopefully, this will set the model for what schools can do at the school level to assess learning."