Cornell Tech is building a diverse environment of academics and practitioners who excel at imagining, researching and building digitally-enabled products and services to directly address societal and commercial needs.

Cornell Tech’s Studio program is comprised of intensely immersive, multidisciplinary team experiences that provide all of our Master’s students with hands-on, real-world skills that challenge and expand their roles in their chosen fields.

Product Challenges

Every fall in the Studio, leading startups, companies, and organizations pose product challenges to Cornell Tech students. These challenges, in the form of a “How might we...?” question, go beyond a problem to solve or work to be done. Students across seven Master’s programs work in cross-disciplinary teams, conduct user research, create a product strategy, and develop and test prototypes of a new product or service that responds to the challenge.
How it Works

1. Companies submit a "How might we..?" challenge and identify a Company Advisor to work with the student team to ensure they have whatever access or information is required to respond to the challenge.

2. The Studio team reviews all challenges and works with companies to refine the challenge if needed.

3. DreamTeam, a matching algorithm created at Cornell Tech, is used to form student teams and connect them to challenges, optimizing for student interests and cross-disciplinary skills.

4. The student teams conduct user research and develop and test prototypes of a new product, meeting with the Company Advisor at least three times during the semester.

5. Teams deliver a final presentation and demo to their companies.

Organizations that engaged with student teams last year include:
Companies who participate in Product Challenge have the opportunity to connect with talented students to explore solutions to challenges that are relevant to their businesses or represent new focus areas they are looking to explore.

Oscar Insurance

How might we help individuals understand their health journey and adhere to recommended behavior?

The Oscar Insurance team built an app with an initial focus on delivering high-quality, contextualized health information straight to users’ mobile devices. The application uses personal attributes to select the most appropriate information from a peer-reviewed content database and pushes it to users.

Adobe • Amazon • Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
Bloomberg L.P. • Citi • eBay • Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center • Microsoft • Pfizer • Roku • Samsung
Snap Inc. • The New York Times • Verizon
FAQs

Q: What types of companies can submit challenges?
A: We encourage all leading startups, companies, and organizations from across the globe to submit a challenge. However, the selected Company Advisor should have enough bandwidth to engage with the students on a monthly basis.

Q: How many challenges can a company submit?
A: We generally limit submissions to one per company. Large corporations can submit one challenge per business unit. Each submission must have a distinct Company Advisor.

Q: Are challenges guaranteed to be selected?
A: No. After the submission deadline, each challenge is reviewed internally. Some challenges will not move past this review stage. Once all challenges are reviewed, a matching algorithm will connect students with challenges, optimizing for student interests. About 40% of final challenges will match with student teams.

Q: Is there any cost to participate?
A: We ask companies who match for a $5,000 donation to partially support the cost of operating Cornell Tech’s unconventional Studio, which includes professional teamwork coaching support for students, new materials for projects such as the latest digital devices, training for practitioner teachers, events such as monthly Sprints and practitioner Crits, and more. For nonprofits and early-stage startups, this fee may be waived.

Q: Are there more examples of “How might we...?” challenges that matched with student teams from previous semesters?
A: Yes! To view examples of previous challenges, take a look at our Buildboard here: http://buildboard-10044.cornelltech.io/fall-2018/

Q: What is the relationship between the companies and student teams?
A: Product Challenges are not work for hire or internships, but real-world learning opportunities for academic credit. Through iterative product development, student teams may pivot from an original idea to best address the challenge, or even reframe the challenge itself. The Company Advisors are not meant to influence product development, but rather serve as domain experts and mentors.

Q: A Note on Intellectual Property (IP)
A: The primary purpose of the project is the education of the student. Organizations and students should define projects that are learning experiences and expose students to real-world challenges and opportunities within the organization.

The ownership of any intellectual property (IP) that may be created during the project is public domain. The project is for educational purposes and any resulting intellectual property is openly shared for public benefit. IP, along with other legal matters, including confidentiality, pertaining to the project, are agreed upon at the outset of the project using the Cornell Standard Project (CSP) agreement. Please review this document prior to submitting a challenge. Companies that are matched with a team agree to use the CSP without modifications or revisions.

For more information please contact
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Visit https://tech.cornell.edu/studio/curriculum/product-studio/
How to craft the right ‘How Might We...?’ challenge.

Here are 6 tips to keep in mind

1. **Use the “How might we” design challenge format**
   Challenges not in this format will not be accepted. Submissions are limited to 300 characters.

2. **Avoid challenges that are too specific or address your company’s specific business goals**
   If it is pre-defined work that an intern could do, it isn’t a good challenge.
   
   **Bad Examples:**
   
   “How might we consolidate our databases and create reporting around institutional metrics?”
   
   “How might we engage with new customers between the ages of 18-24 to sign up for our platform?”
   
   “How might we apply [company x]’s award-winning solution to reduce the number of fraudulent bank transactions?”
   
   “How might we use AI to increase [company x]’s customer loyalty?”

3. **Avoid challenges that are too broad**
   If it requires months of research or has too many unknowns, it isn’t a good challenge; it should take no more than the first month of the semester for the team to come up with a product idea so they can spend the rest of the semester building and validating.

   **Bad Examples:**
   
   “How might we solve world hunger?”
   
   “How might we improve user experience by predicting their needs?”
   
   “How might we help people live longer?”
   
   “How might we eliminate fake news?”
4 Address a specific audience
Teenagers, low-income wage earners, software developers, small businesses, sales teams, etc.

Good Examples:
“How might we better prepare workers in low and middle-skilled jobs for changes to their occupations, to ensure that they have the necessary skills to continue working in the workplace of the future?”

“How might we enable pharmacists to better manage the health of patients?”

“How might we help journalists detect “deep fakes” and other false information?”

5 Frame the potential impact
What is the value to the audience.

Good Example:
“How might we create tools or services to support likely and actual targets of cyberhate and cyberharassment?”

“How might we use ergonomics solutions to help digital screen users improve their posture?”

“How might we use technology to help people with disabilities with everyday tasks?”

6 Limit dependencies
Confidential datasets, access to internal company systems, etc., and if there are dependencies, they must be readily supplied.

To submit a Product Challenge visit: cornelltech.io/pc19