

UCI Paul Merage School of Business Hosts 21st Stella Zhang New Venture Competition

IRVINE, CA, UNITED STATES, May 28, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The grand finale of the 21st Stella Zhang New Venture Competition took place on Thursday, May 22, at the UCI Paul Merage School of Business.

A total of \$100,000 in prize money was distributed that night thanks to the sponsorship of Stella Zhang, who received her master's degree from the UCI business school. This is the fourth year Zhang has sponsored the competition. She recently renewed her 5-year contract with UCI, extending her sponsorship through 2031.



Group Photo Taken at the Stella Zhang New Venture Competition Grand Finale

Zhang is the co-founder and Chief Operating Officer of [American Lending Center \(ALC\)](#) in Irvine as well as a partner in [Sunstone Management Inc.](#) She and partner John Shen founded the [Sunstone Community Fund](#), a nonprofit donor-advised fund that promotes entrepreneurship, particularly at universities and colleges.

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Stella Zhang

The New Venture Competition (NVC) pits teams of students against one another for the best business concept in five tracks. The top two teams in each track make presentations at the grand finale, competing for a \$20,000 grand prize (on top of prizes awarded in each track).

This year's grand prize winner was Grad2Go, a sustainable student storage and resale service, reducing waste and lowering costs through reselling used furniture and essentials. GlowGuard, a retainer case with Bluetooth connectivity and UV-C sanitation, was runner-up.

“This is all about how you work as a team,” Zhang told the students, coaches, and judges before

the prizes were awarded. "It's how to find a partner, how to work with yourself, and how to develop your leadership."

ALC and Sunstone remain committed to supporting early-stage entrepreneurs from their university career to starting their own businesses. This is done through support for accelerators, annual student fellowships, and sponsorship of other university-level pitch contests.

Much of that support goes through the Sunstone Community Fund, which accepts donations from the public here.

More recently, Sunstone Investors and American Lending Center have partnered on a weekly series of education and awareness sessions called Sunstone Connects on the Sunstone Stage at Airport Tower in Irvine, where both companies have their headquarters. Founders of startup companies present their operation to an audience of investors and supporters, and educational sessions on aspects of the entrepreneurial community are offered.

To learn more about ALC, please visit usa-rc.com.

About American Lending Center:

American Lending Center Holdings (ALCH) manages 14 EB-5 regional centers sponsoring projects across the United States. Since 2009, ALCH has raised EB-5 capital for over 100 projects in 31 states including I-956F approvals from USCIS of 29 projects. ALCH has been featured on the Inc. 5000 list of "Fastest-Growing Private Companies in America" for five consecutive years (2020–2024) and was also ranked among "America's Fastest Growing Companies" by Financial Times in 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2025.

American Lending Center LLC (ALC), a mission-driven California-regulated lender, is a licensed SBA 7(a) and SSBCI lender. Together, ALCH and ALC have supported the creation or retention of over 140,000 jobs in the U.S. economy, underwriting impactful projects that foster economic growth.

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