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Student Startup Wello Garners Another Award :: Video

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Ross students take global health prize at the University of Washington's Global Social Entrepreneurship Competition.

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ANN ARBOR, Mich. — The accolades continue for [Wello](#). In February the social venture startup launched by **Cynthia Koenig, MBA/MS '11**, with **Colm Fay, MBA/MS '11**, won the \$10,000 global health prize and People's Choice Award in the Global Social Entrepreneurship Competition at the University of Washington's Foster School of Business.

"This is a great honor, and the competition has been a wonderful experience," says Koenig, a dual-degree student in the Erb Institute for Global Sustainable Enterprise. Fay also is an Erb student.

Students competed for prizes in the international social venture plan competition, where interdisciplinary student teams from around the world proposed creative, commercially viable businesses designed to reduce poverty in the developing world. The semifinalists were selected from 100 teams in 24 countries.

Wello manufactures and distributes a product called the WaterWheel, a 20-gallon drum that easily transports four to five times the amount possible using traditional methods of water collection. It is designed to ease the burden of carrying water in locations where safe drinking water is not readily available. "The beauty of the technology is how simple it is," says Fay. "But it saves people from having to carry such heavy weight on a daily basis over a distance that can sometimes be several miles."

After graduation this spring, Koenig plans to launch a pilot program in Rajasthan, India, to test the WaterWheel's social impact and health benefits. Her goal is to sell 5,000 wheels in 12 months, positively impacting the lives of 40,000 people. She is working with an Indian company to manufacture the tool.

In addition to receiving a warm welcome in India, Wello's business model also has been well-received. Wello won the 2010 Dow Sustainability Challenge Grant and finished second in the 2010 Princeton Entrepreneur's Network Pitch Competition. The student startup also earned the Social Impact Award at the 2010 Michigan Business Challenge, sponsored by the Zell Lurie Institute for Entrepreneurial Studies. In May 2010, Koenig's work was recognized by President Bill Clinton during the annual meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative University. Additionally, Michael Gordon, Arthur F. Thurnau Professor of Business Information Technology, won first place in last fall's oikos Ashoka Global Case Writing Competition, focused on business cases related to social enterprise. Koenig co-authored the case, which is based on Wello.

Wello also has been selected as one of 45 finalists from more than 300 organizations in 60 different countries to have the opportunity to attend the Unreasonable Institute, an intensive six-week boot camp that helps social entrepreneurs develop their ventures by working with top-notch mentors, funders, and practitioners. The first 25 to raise \$8,000 through donations will earn a spot at the institute. [Vote for Wello.](#)

"The WaterWheel literally lifts a huge burden from the shoulders of women and girls," says Koenig. "It's exciting and rewarding to see the positive impact it is already having on their lives."

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— Maryanne George and Amy Spooner



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