VCIC, the world’s largest venture capital competition with over 100 universities participating, has awarded Cornell first place for MBA teams in the Northeast Regionals held at Yale. This honor comes with a $1000 prize and an invitation to the Global Finals in April. As befits a Cornell one-two punch that beat out Duke, Carnegie Mellon, Columbia, and NYU, this winning interdisciplinary team is made up of an interesting mix of business and technical talents.

Rick Wang is a PhD candidate in Biomedical Engineering (and a fund manager for the BR Venture Fund) and Anita Xu is a Master’s student in Computing and Information Sciences. MBA candidates Wenni Cai (in Fintech), and Brian Guo (also a Roy H. Park Leadership Fellow) are fund managers for Big Red Ventures, and Rahul Kumar also hosts the Founder Fundamentals podcast. Their team advisor is Tom Schryver, an experienced entrepreneur himself, currently Executive Director of Cornell’s Center for Regional Economic Advancement (CREA) and Visiting Lecturer at the Johnson Graduate School of Management.

The Cornell team will go on to pitch against regional 1st place teams from Canada, Europe and SE Asia (still to be held), as well as winners from ISB Hyderabad, UCLA, Georgetown, UNC, Vanderbilt, Dartmouth and Brigham Young.
Advisor Zach Shulman, Director of Entrepreneurship at Cornell, has also coached an undergraduate team to 1st place in this year’s New England competition. The team is made up of Claire Pan (Applied Economics and Management), Jeff Liu (Computer Science and Government), Nick DeFrancisco (Engineering and Information Science), Levy Agaronnik (Applied Economics and Management) and Olivia Qiu (Biological Sciences).

The Venture Capital Investment Competition is unique in its learning environment where student entrepreneurs pitch to student judges who assess the investment opportunities to invest their mock $100M in real startups. The entrepreneurs get feedback from these judges, many of whom run venture funds at their home institutions, who in turn pitch their investment strategy to established venture capital investors. These VC professionals get the opportunity to reconnect with their alma maters and get a peek at some early stage startups as they make their final decisions. The regional and global events are supported by innovative corporations.

Cornell has had a strong showing in these competitions, with Mezmeriz being selected for the Global Finals in 2007, a Startup Success Story founded by Shahyaan Desai and Brad Treat who is now an Entrepreneur in Residence and Program Lead for the Southern Tier Startup Alliance. Since that spectacular start, an MBA team was selected in 2012 for the Global Finals (Aaron Holiday, Anya Chang, Bryan McGowan, CJ Halabi, Arthur Soroken). Additional MBA teams competed in the Northeast Regionals in 2017 (Ahmed AlJabreen, Maximillain Kaye, Gerald Mason, Joseph Nellis, Siddharth Kannan) and in 2016 (Adam Kirsch, Alexandra Jostrom, Srikar Nadiparam, Rahul Shahani, Jason Hershman). In 2015 an MBA team won 2nd place at the New England regional finals (Alexander Paranicas, Sumved Sharma, Richmond Holden, Joel Schrock, Hemant Bhardwaj).

Several undergraduate teams in the past have made their distinction in the New England Regionals (2nd place in 2018: Daniel Solinsky, David Larar, Nikhil Dhawan, Jay Chia, Joshua Chin), the Northeast Regionals (2nd place in 2017: Stephen Jacobs, Matti Thurston, Fred Kauber, Malav Majithia, Archana Choudhary) and Global Finals (competing in 2017: Stephen Jacobs, Matti Thurston, Shreya Jain, Fred Kauber, Malav Majithia).

Rick Wang is a BEST Advisory Board Member. He is a PhD candidate at Cornell in Biomedical Engineering as well as a fund manager for Big Red Ventures. In David Erickson’s lab he is developing a rapid diagnostic platform for colorimetric differential detection of dengue and chikungunya viral infections.