Intrepid students who had been planning and preparing the culminating event of their school year refused to let the COVID-19 outbreak cancel their plans. Instead the Covey Leadership Fellows, business-minded Utah State University students from multiple disciplines who make up the Jon M. Huntsman School of Business’s Covey Leadership Center student cohort, found a way to pivot, and turned a much-anticipated case study competition into a virtual event.

“I am proud that the Covey Fellows refused to cancel the competition but rather lobbied to continue in this new format,” said Bret Crane, assistant professor of management at the Huntsman School and associate director of the Stephen R. Covey Leadership Center. “Necessity can be the mother of invention. Our students continue to follow the Huntsman School motto to Dare Mighty Things!”

Creating a new format for the Covey Center Executive Challenge, which had been in the works since December 2018, presented a challenge in and of itself. Student organizers had to rethink the way the event would run, manage logistics of creating virtual rooms, reach out to students and judges who had previously thought the event was cancelled to secure their participation and make sure every participant knew how and when to join.

“I knew that there were technological resources that could be leveraged to move forward with the event if we wanted to,” said McKlayne Marshall (senior), president of the Covey Leadership Fellows majoring in economics, finance and management information systems. “I also thought it would be a unique way to encourage others to be resilient and creative during this stressful and unprecedented time.”

The case study competition included eight teams comprised of four students who evaluated a crisis leadership scenario focused on solutions for an international airline during the COVID-19 pandemic. They presented their ideas virtually to a panel of six judges, which included executives from Electric Power Systems and Malouf, and also two professors. The winning team included Andrew Marino (freshman) majoring in marketing, Justin Evans (senior) majoring in biology, Lizzy Bickmore (junior) majoring in finance and Marshall.

“These students have been away from their classmates and isolated to their own little pockets,” said Weston Hyde, program manager for the Stephen R. Covey Leadership Center. “It was very important to give students the opportunity to
connect with their classmates, build on relationships, and find a way to combat the challenges we’re all facing during this difficult time."

The virtual format for the event was so successful, in fact, that the Huntsman School is considering opening the competition internationally to partner universities in the future.