

Turning Trash Into Treasure

How ThriftJam is Revolutionizing Fashion and Sustainability



From finishing last in a local school competition to becoming finalists in a global competition, Logan James, Finance, '24, and Ellie Cram, Marketing, '24, are on their way to changing the world of sustainability and fashion.

The Center for Entrepreneurship at the Jon M. Huntsman School of Business at Utah State University has helped launch over 300 student-run companies. The Center offers mentoring and additional resources to help student entrepreneurs take their business to the next level. At the end of the year, the Center hosts a Shark Tank competition, judged by entrepreneurs and Huntsman faculty, where established student businesses that already have customers and revenue compete for cash prizes and the opportunity to receive ongoing mentorship from the judges.

James and Cram started selling vintage clothing in 2020 to help pay for college. Their business, ThriftJam, finished last in the Center's Shark Tank competition, but the discussion with the panel of judges helped them revise their business model and transform ThriftJam into a viable company with significant revenue.



“The fashion industry generates enormous waste, with 85% of all textiles made each year ending up in the dump that same year. The solution is to reuse items,” says James. But only about 1% of donated textiles in the US are sold as used. The rest are shipped overseas, where they flood the economies of developing countries and create difficulty for local merchants trying to sell their own goods. Many of these textiles end up in overburdened landfills and rivers. ThriftJam purchases these discarded textiles, then cleans and repurposes them into unique unisex designs for sale in one of the three school buses they converted into vintage clothing stores on wheels.

“Finishing last in the Shark Tank pitch was really motivating for me. When I saw that they weren’t buying into my idea, I was even more determined to succeed,” says James. “The judges took a risk on us [in their mentoring efforts], and that gave us the confidence to take a risk on us, too.

“Russell Fisher, the associate director of the Center, was instrumental in helping them develop creative solutions to their problems. “Russell probably thought about ThriftJam every single day for the last three years,” laughs James. “He genuinely cares about his students. He’d often show up to class with ideas and suggestions for us. To have a professor spend his free time thinking about us and our business had a significant impact on us. He was truly invested in our success and our growth, and that was an awesome feeling.”



With help from faculty and staff, ThriftJam entered the Global Student Entrepreneur Awards (GSEA) Competition hosted by The Entrepreneurs Organization, a global network with nearly 20,000 members in 86 countries. Their second time competing in the GSEA, they won the state, regional, national, and North American competitions before heading to Cape Town, South Africa as one of six finalists. They felt honored to share an international stage with promising young entrepreneurs involved in environmental, medical, and technological advancements aimed at improving quality of life on a global scale. Although they did not win, the experience exposed them to other entrepreneurs from around the world and introduced them to a global network of investors.

"The accolades received by this and other organizations validate the ingenuity, commitment, boldness, and foresight of these two individuals," Fisher said. "Sometimes our incredible programs and students are overlooked up in Logan, UT, so the truth is, I was much less surprised than they were that they and their business has been deemed among the best in the world. These two have always been world class students, mentors and collaborators. We just had to let the world meet them."

