

## **NEXT Design Competition Sparks New Ideas**

Caleb Amundson, Kansas State masters student, remembers what it felt like when he won the [Steelcase Design Alliances NEXT Student Design Competition](#). The competition challenges undergraduate students to create a space of the future to win a chance to be selected as a semi-finalist to visit Steelcase, present to professional judges and ultimately compete for prizes.

“I was in a room with four of the most talented human beings I’d ever met in my life,” Amundson recounted. “I was completely awestruck when I found out I’d won. It was really humbling to get to be a part of this team of people.”

### **HOT CONCEPT**

Using the concept of a forge and hearth, Amundson was honored for focusing [his design](#) concept on how occupants of his coworking space can take raw business and project ideas, refine them, and then refuel before starting the cycle over again. His project also recognized the strength in fostering collaboration to ignite ideas that aren’t possible in isolation.

This year, the [Steelcase Design Alliances NEXT Student Design Competition](#) is challenging future designers to create the design studio of the future. Melissa Hanley, principal and co-founder of Blitz Architecture and Interiors, is one of the expert judges looking for this year’s winning design.

“I will be looking for clarity in concept,” Hanley said. “It’s very important that the students focus their efforts and provide a clear vision for their design.”

### **IT’S NOT ALL ABOUT WINNING**

Now in his final year at Kansas State, Amundson says it wasn’t winning that meant the most to him. It was going through the competition’s process. By developing, producing and presenting a strong concept, he gained skills and confidence.

In fact, just one week after he won the competition, Amundson’s friend approached him with a business idea. He wanted to open a coworking space in Manhattan, Kansas and he needed help. In just 13 short weeks, the friends went from idea to reality and opened their new business venture called [The Fellow](#).

“I don’t think I would be in this position had I not had the opportunity. It wasn’t the success that came from the project. It was working on something of this quality — quality research-based design really pushed my ability to apply it to a real-life situation,” said Amundson.

### **COMPETITION ADVICE**

Amundson has some advice for this year’s crop of students. He highly encourages students to visit at least one space that is a relevant precedent study for the project.

“Seeing something in operation will drastically change your perception of designing for people, instead of just focusing on the logical decisions that can be made from researching,” Amundson suggested.

He stresses the importance of having a really strong concept and practicing your presentation to peers and professors who will give you honest critique. He also says it's a great idea to reach out to professionals you know in the industry to help with feedback and to push the design further.

Hanley has some advice as well. She knows narrowing down a number of iterations to one good idea is challenging. "Edit," she said simply. "It is the hardest thing to do, even as seasoned practitioners, but it is vital to a project's clarity and, often, beauty to be as reductionist as possible in the process to ensure all of the design moves are supporting the project concept."

For more information on the Steelcase Design Alliances NEXT Student Design Competition including frequently asked questions and official rules, [click here](#). Submissions are due December 9.

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Caleb Amundson is working on his thesis program at Kansas State for his masters program in interior architecture and product design. He previously won the Steelcase Design Alliances NEXT Student Design Competition and he co-owns The Fellow, a coworking space in Manhattan, Kansas.

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Melissa is the principal and co-founder of Blitz, an architecture and design practice based in San Francisco. She is one of the judges for the upcoming cycle of the Steelcase Design Alliances NEXT Student Design Competition.

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## **Rebecca Charbauski** **Senior Communications Specialist**

Rebecca, an Emmy-winning journalist, reports on global research impacting the places where people work, learn and heal. Over her career, Rebecca spent 17 years covering local and national news events on television and a variety of digital platforms. She directed a digital news group in Kansas City for three years before becoming news director in Grand Rapids, Michigan for more than five years. Prior to Steelcase, Rebecca worked with one of the four largest media groups in the United States to coordinate news coverage among 48 newsrooms from the east to west coast.

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