A College of Arts & Letters student and alumna are the driving force behind a new mobile application that connects individuals within a community. The app is being praised as the winner of local and statewide business model competitions.

Professional Writing senior Zoe Zappitell and alumna Brittney Urich, who graduated last December with a BA in Professional Writing, first developed their unique, events-based app, called Conecter, for the MSU community to connect students with each other and with events around campus.

Launched in March at MSU, the free app creates safe, fun connections and serves as a one-stop shop for events. It allows MSU students to interact with one another, making it easier to find people with similar interests, to get involved with new groups, and to connect socially.

“Since launch, we have made major headway with gaining groups, colleges, and students onboard. We are seeing hundreds of events being created and many new relationships formed,” Zappitell said. “Brittney and I are extremely pleased to see the positive impact our mobile application is making on people’s college experience.”

Conecter is the only college-specific social app that creates a safe, platonic, on-the-go place for students to meet. Only those with an msu.edu email address can access the MSU platform. Conecter also is the only mobile app that connects to multiple campus groups, allowing students to follow organizations and get notifications about upcoming events and meetings.

When using the app, students first introduce themselves and state where they like to eat, how they like to exercise, what classes they are taking, their interests, etc. The information is placed in an algorithm to create a more personalized experience for each user. The app then gives students access to real-time events that suit each user’s interests and allows them to create and publicize their own events.

An Idea Becomes Reality

The idea for Conecter first began in January 2015 when Zappitell texted Urich that she wanted to make an app to help improve the lives of college students.

After brainstorming the problems faced by MSU students, Zappitell and Urich focused on the issue of finding friends while staying safe. The two applied and were accepted into
the College of Arts & Letters’ Pathways to Entrepreneurship initiative. They also were accepted at the 2015 Techweek Chicago’s Launch Competition where they pitched their idea to hundreds of attendees.

“We returned to campus from Chicago with a larger, more substantial network as well as an increased drive due to all the positive responses,” Urich said.

To help get their idea off the ground, the Conecter co-founders sought funding and received their first financial backing from the College of Arts & Letters.

“The College of Arts & Letters were the first people who believed in us,” Urich said. “They gave us $6,000 to help build the app and have been with us every step of the way.”

Conecter also received $2,000 from Spartan Innovations, a $1,000 grant from MSU Federal Credit Union, and $500 from Pathways to Entrepreneurship.

With initial funding in place, and after registering as an LLC in the state of Michigan, Zappitell and Urich partnered with Venturit, a development firm in East Lansing, to begin development on the app in September 2015. Six months later, a Conecter launch party was held at the MSU Innovation Center on March 18.

**Expanding Their Product**

The Conecter co-founders are now looking to expand the app for use at other universities and to enterprises and megachurches. This past spring, Conecter was accepted into the inaugural cohort of MSU’s Conquer Accelerator program, a 10-week program designed to help grow businesses and which acts as a final launching platform for startups.

“MSU’s Conquer Accelerator has been a phenomenal experience because it gives us the ability to be surrounded by innovative entrepreneurs as we develop a strategy to grow Conecter on campus,” Zappitell said. “Additionally, there has been a focus on sales during the program, which has lead us to partnering with various entities on campus.”

**Awards and Recognition**

The Conecter team won first place in the undergraduate division as well as the People’s Choice award at the MSU Broad College of Business Model Competition in February, taking home a total of $6,000 in cash prizes.

The app also won first place in the undergraduate category at the GreenLight Business Model Competition in March and received $3,000. Open to all Michigan residents, the competition brought together entrepreneurs and small business supporters from all over the state.

The Conecter co-founders continue to spread the word and seek supporters for their app. They hosted a lab at TEDxMSU in March, participated in Techweek Detroit in May, and returned to Techweek Chicago in June.

For more information, see the Conecter website at conecterapp.com.