



FOR YOUR TEAM · STARTUP FORGE



## Startup Forge

Entrepreneurship & Startup

A startup is a search for a business model: find the customers who will pay, earn real traction, and win the class's one fund at Demo Day.



### Learning objectives

- ✓ Treat a startup as a search for a business model: find the customers with urgent pain and a budget before building for them (Blank).
- ✓ Ask about past behavior, not hypotheticals, and tell evidence from compliments (Fitzpatrick, The Mom Test).
- ✓ Spend runway on experiments that test the riskiest assumption first (Ries; Bland & Osterwalder).
- ✓ Pivot when evidence demands it, and know the difference between a pivot and a panic.
- ✓ Read a term sheet: SAFE vs. priced round, the option pool, a 1x liquidation preference, and when to counter or walk away (Feld & Mendelson).
- ✓ Judge survival the way investors do: default alive or default dead (Graham).



### How it runs

1

#### Stage opens

New stage = new deliverable to produce (problem brief, discovery synthesis, MVP plan, pivot decision, pitch deck), with a briefing that uses the team's real cash and month.

2

#### Interviews

At Stage 2, teams interview AI customers, each from one of the industry's customer segments. Facts customers state count as evidence; warm answers to hypothetical questions are false positives.

3

#### Experiments

At Stages 2-4, teams spend cash and a slot (two a stage, plus one per hire) on interviews, landing pages, pricing tests, concierge MVPs and paid pilots that return noisy readings of the real market.

4

#### Build the deliverable

Team writes the actual artifact in-app, naming the segment it targets. The AI Critic scores it against a rubric, with the team's own evidence in view, up to three times per stage.

5

#### Stage 4 crisis

Each team is dealt one industry crisis that changes the market. Persevere keeps burn flat, zoom-in cuts it, pivot costs a one-time bill; the decision pays off when the new target fits the team's evidence.

6

#### Stage close

The class moves on: deliverables lock, months of burn come out of cash, and from Stage 4 each month earns the customers and revenue the team's target segment really gives it.

7

#### Demo Day (Stage 5)

Three AI investors vote on a deck whose traction the sim verified. Two yes votes make the class's one fund an offer; after the partner meeting and the term-sheet decision, the fund backs only the best two or three teams.



## Pillars & scoring

### PRODUCT INNOVATION

Half evidence quality (the customer facts and experiments a team gathered, how it asked, whether it tested pain and budget before building, whether its evidence backs its target) and half the AI Critic across all five stages.

### PIVOT SPEED

How fast the team reached the customer segment its own evidence supports (month 2, 4 or 6), and whether it kept it after the Stage 4 crisis.

### INVESTOR CONFIDENCE

The Demo Day outcome: funded by the class's fund, an offer the fund was too full to back, a memo or a pass, spread by evidence and traction.

### RUNWAY

Whether the company is default alive at the end: at its current growth, does revenue cover burn before the cash runs out?



## Key features

A hidden market

AI customer interviews

Experiments that cost runway

Demo Day with one fund

AI Critic

5 business types

Light founder roles



## Fit & format

### PACING

Five stages, one a week, in any format (5-week intensive · 8-week standard · 14-week semester); to give a stage more time, move its deadline.

### COHORT SHAPE

Designed for ~15-30 students in teams of 4-5, one founder role each (one student can hold two on a small team). The professor gives every team the same business type or assigns types from a pool. Teams compete for the same Demo Day fund.

### BEST FOR

MBA entrepreneurship, undergraduate startup courses, executive education in venture/early-stage.

### WHAT SETS IT APART

The only sim where teams search a hidden market with AI customer interviews and paid experiments, earn their traction, and compete for one fund at Demo Day.

### LMS

Canvas, Blackboard, Brightspace, Moodle via LTI 1.3. Students launch from your LMS with single sign-on; one-click grade publish posts scores back with the rubric breakdown as the comment.

### PRICING

#### **\$20 / student**

\$10 / student for Founding Faculty, locked 2 years

Per semester. No platform fee, no per-section charge, no seat minimums. Institutional invoicing available.