Andra Mutu
am1049b@student.american.edu
Reflection and Evidence for Kogod Startup and Standout Pitch Contest + Badge

As a Neuroscience major part of the CAS at AU, I have absolutely no experience in business, including business thinking, planning and pitching. I have been on the Pre-Health track since my sophomore year of high school, after I joined then dropped out of the DECA chapter at my school. DECA is a pre-business club that introduces kids to the business world through training and conferences. I attempted training for and then participating in a conference, and ended up placing close to last despite my effort. I clearly had no aptitude for business thinking and did not really enjoy the experience, so I quickly judged the business pathway as not for me. I focused on STEM until about three weeks ago, when my coworker and friend asked me if I was interested in participating in this contest with her. I will never turn down an opportunity to learn something new, especially if it's free, so I said yes. I'll be honest, the cash prize and Linkedin badge did help. Now, I am indescribably grateful for what I have learned and experienced through this contest. My first takeaway from this experience is that I judged the business world too harshly all those years ago, and that I can in fact "do it". One year, one conference, and one failure as a 13 year old should not have deferred me from an entire field of study. I am not sure if I will switch to a business pathway, but I do regret not attempting to learn more about the field before I counted it out. Next, I never considered how STEM and business overlap. The last set of panelists, especially Irena King, who also studied Neuro at AU, really stuck with me. It was interesting how the two seemingly separate fields interact. Now that I think about it, I can name many startups and business endeavors that are STEM based. Interdisciplinary thinking is a topic I have been developing in myself lately, and this really helped me advance it. Third, the realization of how business skills are related to humanity and societal change was really meaningful to me. Honestly, I had a preconceived notion of businesses. Both of my parents worked for big corporations and often felt drained and exploited rather than passionate and important, leading me to associate business as being capitalistic monsters that created more harm than good in society. I now see that I was wrong, and that business as a field and as a study is so different from that. The entire point of the contest was to use business skills (which I really appreciated learning and applying, as I can see how useful they will be for me regardless of what field I end up entering) to create a positive societal impact. As someone who has always been passionate about social justice, this was very important to me. Many of the skills I learned through the Brainstorming for Business and User Problem workshops are skills that I will definitely continue to develop and apply, like how to market myself and my endeavors to appeal to others.