WASHINGTON – Some students graduating from New York colleges and universities this month aren’t waiting for job offers — they’ve already created their own business.

One of those student entrepreneurs is Yve-Car Momperousse, about to graduate from Cornell University with a degree in international development with a focus on agriculture. The Brooklyn-born daughter of Haitian immigrants, she raised $650,000 to launch Kreyol Essence, which sells Haitian black castor oil for treating muscle aches and as a hair and skin moisturizer.

Her capital came from personal savings, grants, three angel investors and $5,000 from winning second place in the social entrepreneurship category of the 2014 New York State Business Plan Competition. Her company is a finalist in Compete Caribbean, which will award $500,000 to each of six winners later this year.

"Castor oil is the miracle oil for us in Haiti," said Momperousse, 31. "If a child is sick, it's the first thing a mother will pull out to wipe on his chest."

Colleges have vastly increased their focus on entrepreneurship during the last decade, said Bruce Kingma, a professor of entrepreneurship at Syracuse University. Part of that increase has been spurred by grants to colleges by the Kansas City-based Kauffman Foundation, which encourages students to become self-sufficient as part of their education.

Students also realize the job market has changed, Kingma said.

"For college students these days it can be more challenging to find a job in traditional employment," he said. "A lot of the smart students realize if they pick up these skills that can start their businesses, they can create their own job and they have another path to go down."

That has helped fuel an increasing interest in entrepreneurship. This year, 560 student teams from 80 colleges and universities around the state entered the New York Business Plan Competition, up from 320 teams from 53 colleges in 2013, the first year the competition accepted statewide entries.

This year's winner, a team made up of students from Albany Law School and the SUNY College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering, created a company called Glauconix centered around a device that screens drugs for treating glaucoma. The team's entry won $50,000 in cash and $50,000 in in-kind services.

"We help determine whether the drugs effectively treat glaucoma," said Colby Creedon, one of the company’s three team members. "It saves time. It saves money."

Creedon, 25, originally from Utica, will receive his master's degree in business administration this month from the University at Albany. In December he will graduate from Albany Law School.
SUNY College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering holds a provisional patent on the screening device. The three students have an exclusive license for the patent that they hope to parlay into a full-time business by selling the device to pharmaceutical companies and biomedical research firms.

Tim Reynolds, 24, of Red Hook, who recently finished his classroom work for a doctorate in physical therapy from Ithaca College, won $10,000 in the products/services category of the state competition.

Reynolds and his partner are owners of KettleShell, which makes a handle-like device that attaches to standard dumbbells so they can be used as kettlebells.

With financial help from his parents, Reynolds recently spent $13,000 to manufacture 250 KettleShells. His company's first sale was completed last week when Reynolds personally dropped off a KettleShell at a customer's home in Seneca Falls on his trip home from school.

KettleShell became a reality in the fall of 2012 when Reynolds created a prototype using a roll of duct tape and a $5 foam ball purchased from a Jo-Ann Fabric and Craft store. The concept won a $5,000 prize at an Ithaca College business competition. Reynolds used the winnings to develop a computerized design and to manufacture a functional prototype. A second prototype followed.

"We switched prototyping companies and came up with a design that was not only functional but also aesthetically pleasing," he said.

The final production model costs $50 to manufacture and retails for $99.95.

Reynolds is expecting approval of his patent application later this month.

"The intellectual property does help if at some point we are approached by a retailer or fitness company," he said. "It allows us to retain a competitive edge."

Meanwhile, Reynolds is pursuing a career as a physical therapist with the hope of someday owning his own clinic and developing new products for fitness and physical rehabilitation.

Some students' business plans have an altruistic element.

Momperousse plans to pay three to five times Haiti's average $2 daily wage to the 150 farmers who supply her with castor oil for Kreyol Essence.

"The underlying problem was economics," she said. "People need a job. People need money. I said, 'Businesses create jobs. They are the economic engine all over the world.'"

Her company has recorded $85,000 in sales since starting in January 2013 in a partnership with her fiancé. Eighty percent of the sales have been online, but the company's product is also available in organic and natural food stores in Ithaca, Brooklyn and Queens.

The largest business plan competition in the country is hosted by Rice University in Houston and draws competitors from around the world. Last month, a team of students from RWTH Aachen University in Germany won the 2014 first prize of $507,500 for a medical adhesive that can be used inside the body. Their firm is named Medical Adhesive Revolution.

Universities are increasingly focusing on entrepreneurship as they work to quantify their role in economic growth. Entrepreneurship also has become an important public policy issue, according to Donald Siegel, who oversees the New York business plan competition and is dean of the University at Albany Business School.
Siegel said universities are partnering with businesses more on technology transfer. And there's an effort to emulate the successes of MIT, Stanford, North Carolina's Research Triangle and the Route 128 region in Massachusetts.

At the federal level, the National Science Foundation offers grants for commercializing research. The Small Business Innovation Research program requires 11 federal agencies to spend 2.8 percent of their research budgets on new small companies. SBIR grants start at $150,000, enough for a college entrepreneur to get started.

As a result, some colleges are expanding their entrepreneurship programs to include campus incubators, a technology transfer office, and faculty members serving as mentors, according to Kingma.

And it's paying off.

James Arama, 22, a National Science Foundation scholar about to graduate from Marist College with a bachelor's degree in computer science, plans to work from home in Rochester, Minn. for two businesses, one of which he co-owns.

A native of Kenya who immigrated to the U.S. at 14 when his father took a job at the Mayo Clinic, Arama became interested in computer programming during high school because of a mentor who worked for IBM.

That former mentor is now one of Arama's two partners at Memorial Labs, which offers a software application for designing inscriptions and artwork on headstones. Memorial Labs is marketed by Funeral Innovations, the other company Arama works for, which provides computer services to funeral homes.

"I definitely see myself digging deeper into the funeral services industry and seeing what products I can develop," Arama said, noting that many funeral home operators are conservative business people who have yet to embrace new technology.

Some student entrepreneurs graduating from college this month are reluctantly taking traditional jobs because their businesses haven't yet developed a revenue stream.

Dan O'Connor, 22, of the Riverdale section of the Bronx, who is graduating from Binghamton University with a bachelor's degree in computer science, is taking a job in the San Francisco so he can pay the bills while developing his website, BeatStrap.

BeatStrap can duplicate Twitter comments on a blog. O'Connor developed the software for his college newspaper, where he worked as the web developer, so a reporter covering the 2008 Democratic National Convention wouldn't have to duplicate his reporting on both Twitter and a news blog.

O'Connor developed his first web business — www.whattotaketocollege.com — during the summer between his graduation from Fordham Prep and freshman year at Binghamton.

"I made over $1,000 in the summer and thought I'd be a multimillionaire by now," he said. "I actually received an offer to buy the website for $2,500."

The person who made that offer started a competing website. That led O'Connor to launch a second version of his site — http://taketocollege.com — that's more interactive.

O'Connor also started a club at college called HackBU that serves as a meeting place for entrepreneurial computer students.

"I think we live in a time when if you do fail, there's huge safety net," he said. "Another job is just right around the corner."
Technology with a bachelor's degree in computer engineering and another degree in economics, but still has some coursework and cooperative internship requirements to satisfy over the summer.

Mistretta may have to temporarily find a job while getting his company, Tyger Industries, off the ground.

Tyger offers a data-sharing protocol initially designed to aid deployed military units. The data sharing operates more like a social network, such as Facebook or Twitter, than an end-to-end communication system such as email.

The company has no customers, but Mistretta has pitched his idea to the Defense Department and made other business presentations.

Mistretta and his two partners have found it difficult to get people to understand their concept, so they are thinking of producing a small-scale commercial version for demonstrations. But they will need to raise some capital first, perhaps through an investor web site such as Kickstarter.

"We are searching for the regular day jobs so we can support ourselves in the meantime," he said.

Twitter: @NYinDC

A look at five student entrepreneurs from the class of 2014

**Dan O'Connor**

College: Binghamton University

Degree: Bachelor's in computer science

Hometown: Riverdale section of the Bronx.

Age: 22

Business: BeatStrap ([http://beatstrap.me](http://beatstrap.me)). Allows live bloggers to send material simultaneously to Twitter and a blog.

Quote: "I think we live in a time when you do fail, there's huge safety net. Another job is just right around the corner."

**Tim Reynolds**

College: Ithaca College

Degree: Doctorate in physical therapy

Hometown: Red Hook, N.Y.

Age: 24

Business: KettleShell ([www.thekettleshell.com](http://www.thekettleshell.com)). Sells an adjustable handle-like device that attaches to dumbbells so they can used as kettlebells.

Quote: "At this point it's something I've been able to see grow from a Styrofoam ball in 2012 to a business that is selling an actual product."

**James Arama**

College: Marist College

Degree: Bachelor's in computer science
Age: 22


Quote: "It's still a work in progress but we do have the product out and we are licensing it through Funeral Innovations."

Yve-Car Momperousse

College: Cornell University

Degree: Master’s in international development with a focus on agriculture

Hometown: Brooklyn, N.Y.

Age: 31

Business: Kreyol Essence (www.kreyolessence.com). Sells Haitian black castor oil as a hair and skin moisturizer and as a body oil.

Quote: "The underlying problem was economics. People need a job. People need money. I said, 'Businesses create jobs. They are the economic engine all over the world.'"

Jared Mistretta

College: Rochester Institute of Technology

Degree: Bachelor's in computer engineering and a bachelor's in economics.

Hometown: Owego, N.Y.

Age: 32

Business: Tyger Industries, a data-sharing protocol.

Quote: "I basically always wanted to be an entrepreneur."