

Student programmers compete at Hackathon

The annual UI Hackathon brought together student computer programmers from across the Midwest for a nonstop two-day competition.



Katina Zentz

Participants prepare for the third Annual Hackathon awards ceremony on Sunday, Oct. 7, 2018. Computer programmers worked to create a successful computer programming project.

Julia DiGiacomo, News Reporter
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For students interested in technology and computer programming, the University of Iowa Hackathon offered nearly two full days of experience of collaboration, innovation, and learning.

Now in its third year, students collaborated in teams of four from the morning of Oct. 6 to Sunday evening. They created entire original computer programming projects in the hopes of winning one of 20 award categories.

"We want to create community, we want to welcome newcomers to these domains and help them to learn new skills and build meaningful relationships," UI Assistant Professor and Hackathon head Ibrahim Demir said.

The students specialize in a range of topics, Demir said, from computer science to health to bioinformatics. He said there are projects related to the environment, city data sets, and manufacturing.

UI graduate student Alic Szecsei said his team's project involved using Microsoft HoloLens, a type of smart glasses that merges virtual reality with reality, for image text processing. His team won first place last year for its project involving the virtual reality system Oculus Rift.

"The idea is that you would be able to wear the HoloLens, look at some handwriting or a sign, and be able to essentially have the device turn that into machine texts," Szecsei said. "Then we could, for example, translate it on the fly."

UI faculty mentors were available throughout the event to extend knowledge and help students through any programming barriers they may reach.

The UI Hackathon also partners with the Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center. Demir said the center provides talks and advises students who are interested in commercializing their projects.

The Hackathon is often the origin of new startups, he said.

In addition to working, students can also learn new skills from professionals.

"We have optional talks where [students] can learn about new techniques and new technology," Demir said. "At the same time, they work on their projects, they can take a break for 45 minutes and learn about a specific new skill."

Demir said they expected around 200 participants this year from a variety of regions and universities. To accommodate students outside Iowa, Hackathon provided support for travel expenses so students could make their way to Iowa City for the competition.

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"In the last two years, we've had fewer than 50 percent from the UI and more than 50 percent coming from 15 different Midwest universities from Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and many other nearby states," Demir said.

Although the students program for nearly two full days, that doesn't mean they don't find time to have fun. UI graduate student and Hackathon committee member Yusuf Sermet said that between collaborating on their projects, students participate in such activities as karaoke, cup stacking, and role-playing games, including Werewolf.

"It has been a rush. It has been exciting for all of us I think," Sermet said. "While we are organizing this, while we are seeing people have fun, it's fun for us as well."

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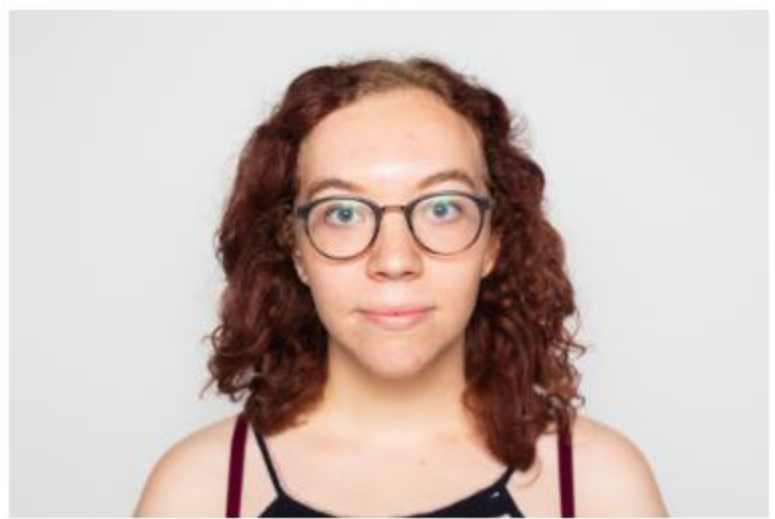


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