Student programmers compete at Hackathon

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

For students interested in technology and computer programming, the University of Iowa Hackathon offers many levels of experience: collaboration, innovation, and learning.

Now in its third year, students collaborated in teams of four from the morning of Oct. 21 to Sunday morning. They chose to focus on original computer programming projects in the hopes of winning one of 25 award categories.

"We want to create community, we want to be welcoming to hackathons and other events and help them to learn new skills and build meaningful relationships," said Assistant Professor and hackathon founder Zehra Demir.

The students at the event catered to a variety of topics, Demir said, from consumer wellness to health to biotechnology. They also have projects related to the environment, city data sets, and manufacturing.

UI graduate student Aalis Senoz said her team's project involved using Microsoft HoloLens, a type of smart glasses that render images virtually with reality for faster testing. Her team won first place last year for their project involving their virtual reality system (Eggbox).

"The idea is that you would be able to wear the hololens, look at something hungerly in the room, and the ability to essentially have the device to see that at the same time," Senoz said. "Then you could, for example, control it and run it.

"The hackathon faculty were available throughout the event to instill knowledge and help students through any programming issues they may have.

The UI Hackathon also partners with the Piquasso Entrepreneurship Center. Demir said the center provides tools and knowledge students will use in their own entrepreneurial projects.

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

In addition to working, students also used this new skills to perform professionally.

"We also gathered students (and faculty) to learn about new technology and hack technology," Demir said. "Ideally, they work on their own projects, they take it back for 4:20 hours and make it a product.

Demir said they expected about 250 participants this year from a variety of regions and academic fields.

To accommodate students outside Iowa, Hackathon provided a remote for travel expenses so students could make their way to Iowa City for the competition.

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"In the last two years, when we had fewer than 35 percent from the UI and more than 50 percent coming from D.C. offices and universities outside of Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and here in other nearby states," Demir said.

Although the competition is for everyone, it only has one final prize, an $800 Microsoft Surface Book, that doesn't mean they don't feel the need to have this event, Demir said.

"It has been outreach, we have been teaching the UI hackathon to community committee," Demir said. "We're looking at our projects, students participate in such activities as robotics, coding and video games, including Webman.

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