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Program gives students a taste of the real world

November 17, 2015

by Ric Burrous

Six teams of students guided by faculty members from a number of IUPUI schools are competing in this year's Innovation-to-Enterprise Commercialization program, working on a variety of projects with commercial potential.

The program, known as ITEC, began in spring 2011 as a pilot project and has grown through the years. The students have different skills, interests and backgrounds; they collaborate under a faculty member's guidance to learn about research commercialization and to develop entrepreneurial and business skills. It is part of the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation-to-Enterprise Central.
Kevin Berkopes, standing, the executive director of the Mathematics Assistance Center, outlines the project that he, his collaborators and a team of students have undertaken in the Innovation-to-Enterprise Commercialization program this year. | PHOTO COURTESY OF OFFICE OF VICE CHANCELLOR FOR RESEARCH

Team leader Kevin Berkopes, executive director of the Mathematics Assistance Center and Statistics Assistance Center, believes ITEC is transformative for students, schools and the campus. This is his second ITEC team; his current group includes students from the Herron School of Art and Design, the IU School of Informatics and Computing, and the Purdue School of Science, working together to develop a database-driven, customizable mobile app. Berkopes also teams with faculty members Zeb Wood from informatics and Brad McKinney from Herron.

Patrick Burton works on the design of the mobile app being developed by the ITEC team that includes Burton. | PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MATHEMATICS ASSISTANCE CENTER

The app design focuses on how to improve student, faculty and learning center interactions through the mobile connection. This includes on-demand access to the robust suite of learning resources currently offered by the Mathematics Assistance Center for students, but also communication and analytic devices for the directors of learning centers. The app is intended to continue to innovate toward what learning centers are and what they can accomplish for students at institutions of higher learning.
Berkopes' team includes Luke Brown from informatics, Patrick Burton from the Department of Computer and Information Science, and Levi Hadley and Kelly Nauert from Herron. Hadley and Nauert provide design expertise, while Brown and Burton handle programming of the Web-based interface and the mobile application interface. Berkopes has worked with three of the team members before; Burton, Hadley and Nauert were part of his ITEC team last year.

"A lot of learning in subjects like mathematics occurs outside the classroom, including when students exchange ideas and talk about the subject," Berkopes said. "The ITEC program gives students the educational opportunity to work in their chosen fields and develop their professional skills and expertise while earning a nice stipend at the same time.

"To me, this model can help evolve the post-secondary institution," Berkopes added. "Academics can bring their ideas and products to market through working with students rather than seeking outside vendors, and students get a phenomenal opportunity to apply what they learn in their coursework."

Brown shares Berkopes' enthusiasm.

"ITEC has been an excellent experience for me," Brown said. "It is the first opportunity I have had to apply my skills as a developer within a professional environment. I believe our app will increase student interaction with the MAC, which will increase the center's overall effectiveness."

The team meets each Friday, and members work 10 hours per week on the project. The prototype for the Web-based interface and mobile application is likely to be ready by the end of the spring semester.