# The Computerworld Honors Program

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## Final Copy of Case Study

**Status:**
Laureate

**Year:**
2013

**Organization Name:**
University of California Merced

**Organization URL:**
http://www.ucmerced.edu/

**Project Name:**
UC Merced Mobile App Challenge

**Please select the category in which you are submitting your entry:**
Innovation

**Please provide an overview of the nominated project. Describe the problem it was intended to solve, the technology or approach used, how it was innovative and any technical or other challenges that had to be overcome for successful implementation and adoption. (In 300 words or less.)**

As the first University of California campus in the San Joaquin Valley, UC Merced has a special responsibility to advance the education levels of the Valley's traditionally underserved population. In fact, there is no majority ethnicity on campus, and year by year, the institution has grown increasingly effective in attracting underrepresented students. UC Merced is a student centered research university. Graduates are expected not simply to find jobs, but to become the thinkers and professionals that will create career opportunities for others and advance the status of the region. In light of this vision, it is essential to do all that we can to promote student success. In April 2011, a group of university officials met with a Silicon Valley executive to discuss how we prepare tomorrow's

workforce to be entrepreneurial and creative? What are the technical skill gaps that need to be filled? How do we inspire university students to become entrepreneurs who are able to tackle real-world problems? We realized we had the chance to create an innovative entrepreneurial competition and the UC Merced Mobile App Challenge was born. While other universities sponsor similar contests, UC Merced's competition is unique because it only involves undergraduate students. Other universities also define the problem for students to solve. At UC Merced, we've allowed them to come up with their own problem. With student success at the forefront of higher education's priorities across the country, along with the widespread problem of lack of career preparedness, this project piloted strategies for retaining high-risk students that will become a national model for change. In its second year, UC Merced students again have the opportunity to develop apps that could launch a new business idea or an emerging technology and help people now and in the future.

**When was this project implemented or last updated? (Please specify month and year.) Has it incorporated new technologies and/or other innovations since its initial deployment? (In 300 words or less.)**

The UC Merced Mobile App Challenge was piloted in October 2011-April 2012. In the first year, seven teams totaling twenty-six undergraduates developed mobile applications that would be used as a solution to a problem that they picked. We did not have corporate sponsors and the University self-funded much of the program costs. The App Challenge continues to be a catalyst that helps make great ideas a reality at UC Merced by connecting our student innovators to the app development process and technology community. This year the number of teams has more than doubled to fifteen with more the fifty-five students. We received scholarship and program funding from 5 corporate sponsors and foundations, including AT&T and IBM. Additional innovations this year includes: -providing workshops, hack-a-thons, networking opportunities, and other events that support student entrepreneurship and innovation; -assembling a team of successful entrepreneurs, angel investors, and venture capitalists to provide feedback and support to the teams at all stages; -navigating the intellectual property processes with the law firm Womble Carlyle's Silicon Valley office (and a sponsor of the App Challenge); -helping with business plans, storyboards, elevator pitches, and stage-gate development.

**Is implementation of the project complete? If no, please describe the project's phases and which phase the project is now in. (In 300 words or less.)**

The 2012-13 UC Merced Mobile App Challenge is in progress. Phases & Milestones: -Challenge began on November 1, 2012. -Hack-a-thons: November 2012 and April 2013. Teams engage in both virtual and hands-on, interactive

training sessions with representatives from the mobile and technology through a series of "hack-a-thon" sessions. These sessions provide a comprehensive overview of wireless technology, programming languages and application development tools that will guide each team through fundamental, back-end mobile application development, testing, and deployment. -Deadline for submission of Executive Summary, App Screen Shots and Posted Video: April 5, 2013 -Voting Competition Period: April 10, 2013 through April 19, 2013. Voting is open to all UC Merced students, faculty and staff. Voting will determine the 4 category winners. -The Grand Prize will be awarded at the App Challenge Showcase on April 26, 2013. See Appendix 1 for image of last year's Showcase winners. Final judging will be by a panel of venture capitalists and technology industry representatives. Teams will pitch their app to a panel of angel investors, venture capitalist and technology industry professionals. Each team is required to present a business plans, storyboards and make an elevator pitch. The prizes include thousands of dollars in scholarship money.

**Please provide at least one example of how the technology project has benefited a specific individual or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work. (In 300 words or less.)**

Andy Luhrs, Computer Science major & 2011-12 App Challenge team leader. After the challenge Andy said, "App Challenge was a great experience. This is probably the first thing the university has offered that has given me insight in to what working in the real world will be like after I graduate. The experience I've gotten has been more useful than entire classes I've taken." After completing the challenge, Andy secured an internship as an App Developer with Apple in Cupertino, CA and starting a business venture called Radiafy.com. Seena Zandipour, senior majoring in management said of the challenge, "being able to transfer the skills I learned from the competition into my career was the biggest reason I wanted to participate. This is a learning experience and not just a developing experience." After his team created the winning app from the 2011-12 Challenge (an app that streamlines how students register for classes), their app is being used on 3 campuses including UC Merced. Seena has been accepted into HAXLR8R (Hack-Cellerator) with a focus on hardware startups located in Shenzhen, China. Siddharth Zaveri, App Challenge alumni and team won "Most Popular App" award in 2011-12. "The Challenge lets me see entrepreneurs succeed who were once in my shoes." Currently working as Web Developer with Gray Cloud Technology and Co-Founder of Kafoodle, a social food library. Wendy Murphy, from IBM Global University Programs: "IBM decided to support UC Merced's Mobile App Challenge because our goals very much align. We want to encourage new entrepreneurs, plus promote innovation and creativity for solving real-world problems. Entering this challenge helps to prepare students to

enter the workforce and helps them grow their skills in several areas, not only technical."

**Would this project be considered an innovation, a best practice or other notable advancement that could be adopted by or tailored for other organizations and uses? If yes, please describe that here. (In 300 words or less.)**

UC Merced has created an exceptional learning and professional growth experience for students. Benefits of starting or adopting a similar program at institutions of higher education are as follows: Positively impacting student experiences, student enrollment, engagement and retention; Increasing economic development and growing jobs for college graduates; Creating a nurturing environment around campus for students that increases innovative ideas and leads to commercialization opportunities; Attracting higher caliber and more diverse students to your campus; Providing revenue for departments, to students and faculty, and to the University through public and private partnerships; Advancing further the stature of your company or university

**If there are any other details that the judges should know about this project, please note them here. (In 300 words or less.)**

UC Merced's Mobile App Challenge - Overview (YouTube clip)http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ULTmMl2iNFY&list=UUa2yTIkw-eJlBlypLsUSgQA&index=10 2. UC Merced Mobile App Challenge website - http://mobileappchallenge.ucmerced.edu/