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Florida State University Team Wins Statewide “Hackathon” Competition to Help Modernize Municipal Government

Tallahassee students defeat teams from other Florida universities

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ORLANDO, FL – The team from Florida State University representing “SocialSafe” took first place in the MuniMod competition in Orlando this past weekend. Coming in second place was Florida A&M University. Hosted by the Florida League of Cities, in partnership with Tallahassee’s Domi Station, MuniMod is the state’s largest civic tech competition in Florida.

The weekend event brought together 11 teams from universities across Florida to showcase student-developed technological solutions to common problems affecting communities. Students, ranging from freshmen to Ph.D. candidates, tackled tough issues such as public safety, emergency response, first-responder training and improving customer service. In addition to marketing advice and access to numerous networks across the state, the winning team from Florida State University took home a \$10,000 prize. A second-place prize in the amount of \$5,000 was also awarded to the team representing Florida A&M University.

“Many cities tend to look at the way we deliver services the same way we have for some time,” said FLC President and Tallahassee City Commissioner Gil Ziffer. “But when we have fresh eyes – which is what all of these students are – coming up with new ideas, we realize there are things we simply have not thought of. These competitors are creating things to change the way government operates for the next 20 years.”

The teams were selected by their individual educational institutions. They participated in webinars, conference calls and one-on-one meetings with civic leaders to gain an understanding of municipal government and learn what civic problems currently challenge Florida cities. Applying this knowledge, the competitors worked through the weeks leading up to the final 24-hour experience to craft innovative solutions to those problems.

At the event itself, students were given the final opportunity to work with advisers and mentors through the night to perfect the demo and pitch for their technology. Competition was fierce as the teams presented their solutions to a panel of six judges.

Five of the 11 teams passed to the second round: Florida A&M University, Florida Gulf Coast University, Florida International University, Florida State University, and the University of Miami. The winning team, Florida State University, pitched “SocialSafe” – a GPS-enabled safety app designed to reduce intimate partner violence by empowering potential victims to reach out to friends and family in a safe, discreet way before a situation escalates. However, when it does, the app has built-in mechanisms to alert law enforcement, provide critical data via text message to assist in locating a victim, and produce audio and visual evidence of an incident.

“It was such an inspiring event to be around so many innovative people and entrepreneurs,” said this year’s winner, Molly Cloonan of Florida State University. “Going forward with this funding, I am going to work on marketing my app to reach as many people as possible and change as many lives as possible.”

The second-place team from Florida A&M University developed a solution to managing and marketing municipally owned event venues such as park pavilions and splash pads to community centers and amphitheaters. The team’s solution, Quisha – a blend of the entrepreneurs’ names – utilizes 360-degree video, mobile-friendly forms and process automation to make the resident experience more customer-focused and efficient.

Background

The MuniMod competition has three primary focus areas: civic services, civic analytics, and civic engagement. This includes aspects such as utilities, infrastructure, big data analytics, public outreach, and public participation. These factors have been identified as areas in need of improvement in recent years, and the competition provides a platform for students to bring a fresh perspective on how to enhance the current municipal government system.

The 11 universities that participated this year were:

- Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University
- Florida Atlantic University
- Florida A&M University
- Florida Gulf Coast University
- Florida International University
- Florida State University
- University of Florida
- University of South Florida
- University of Central Florida
- University of Miami
- University of West Florida

MuniMod lays the foundation for a new generation of civic problem solvers by giving students a way to apply their skills to real-world issues. By working to bridge the gap between technology and cities, the students will help cities throughout Florida, and potentially nationwide.

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Founded in 1922, the Florida League of Cities is the united voice for Florida’s municipal governments. Its goals are to promote local self-government and serve the needs of Florida’s cities. Florida’s cities are formed by their citizens and governed by their citizens. The League is founded on the belief that local self-government is the keystone of American democracy. For more information, visit www.floridaleagueofcities.com.