



ENGAGED STUDENTS

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E-mail this release

Calling all TerrAPPins: University of Maryland Contest seeks student-developed mobile apps

By Priya Kumar

Last semester, University of Maryland students received academic credit for creating iPhone apps. Now any tech-savvy team of students that wants to get in on the app market can get something better: cash.

In its latest effort to examine the intersection of mobile technology and education, the university is launching a contest for students to design an app that "supports campus life." The first-place team wins \$3,000, two runner-ups get \$2,000 and \$1,000, respectively, and all winners have a chance to market their apps.

The contest represents a way to "harness our campus community's broad creativity," says Ben Bederson, contest chair and associate professor of computer science. He served as director for the [Human Computer Interaction Lab](#) on campus from 2000-2006.

The contest is part of a mobility initiative the university launched in Fall 2008 to explore the impact of handheld wireless devices on education. Through the program, the university has given pilot groups of freshmen an iPod Touch, iPhone or iPad and helped develop a new cell phone emergency alert system.

Last semester's iPhone programming course required a high level of technical skill, limiting the number of students who could participate. But the contest, open to undergraduate and graduate students from any major, aims to infuse an interdisciplinary twist into information technology and show students the value of collaboration, Bederson says.

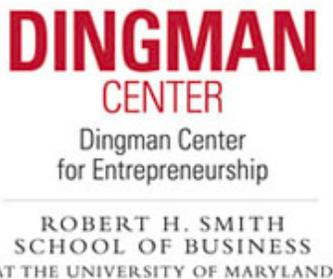
The best team will combine technical expertise, business savvy and an eye for design to create a product that is easy to use, useful, efficient and appealing, he says.

Asher Epstein, managing director of the [Dingman Center for Entrepreneurship](#), joins Bederson on the judging committee. The Dingman Center is co-sponsoring the contest, representing the natural fit between entrepreneurship and cutting-edge technology.

"We wanted to encourage the development and support of the mobile platform because that's the wave of the computing future," Epstein says.

"Are people really going to use it more than once?," he offered as one

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criterion to measuring the impact an app has on campus life.

Teams can create a native app tailored to a specific platform (including Apple iOS, Microsoft Windows Phone 7 or Google Android), a mobile website or a combination of both.

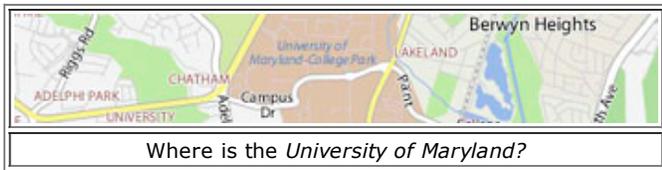
The **Office of Information Technology** will provide datasets such as event schedules, book lists, course catalogs or search directories to aid in app development. And for any aspiring botanists, the university even has a database of every tree on campus, down to its species and GPS location, Bederson says.

"I think mobile tech is so big it's going to affect all parts of college experience," Bederson says, mentioning things like content consumption, e-textbooks, podcasts, video lectures, data collection, writing books, dating, finding a party, political organization and personal finance.

At least three university-related apps appear in Apple's App Store: ELMS mobile, UMD information and the Maryland Gridiron Network, but OIT says more are in the works.

The Dingman Center and OIT will offer business and integration advice to winning teams, depending on what students want to do with their apps. Possible paths include launching a business to sell the app or giving the app to the university

The mobility contest officially kicks off Oct. 19 with a pizza party and brainstorming session at 4:30 p.m. in the Dingman office, 2517 Van Munching Hall. Those planning to attend must **register**. Final apps are due March 18, and the judges will determine the winners one month later. True to the contest's interdisciplinary nature, the judging panel also includes members of the Department of English, the Philip Merrill College of Journalism and the College of Information Studies.



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