Software engineering class creates map for blind students

A s part of a growing trend in the University of Oregon Department of Computer and Information Science, associate professor Michael Young ’81 has taken on a problem of assistive technology. In spring term of 2007, Michal taught the second term of Software Modeling in conjunction with a graduate seminar in geography led by assistant professor Amy Lobben of the geography department. The combined classes created a web-based haptic soundscape campus map for blind students.

Haptics is the study of devices that provide touch feedback to the user. In this case, the class used low-cost gaming mice with vibration feedback. The device was chosen to be affordable to potential users of the system, but its limitations required the team also to use sound to convey information. “Haptic soundsmaps are really in their infancy, with just a handful of experts world-wide,” says Michal. “There is lots of opportunity for innovation and progress.”

“The computer science students and the geography students each have expertise to contribute,” Michal explains. “Together we were able to accomplish more than either group could have alone.” The computer science course included twelve undergraduate and five graduate students who studied large-scale application development and the issues that arise when working with domain experts on an interdisciplinary team.

In addition to collaboration with Michal’s class, Amy is coprincipal investigator with professor Steve Fickas on a $300,000 National Science Foundation grant, Tactile Mapping Software for Blind and Visually Impaired Navigation and Science Education. Steve is interested in ubiquitous computing and currently has a number of grants, along with faculty members in psychology, geography, and special education, to explore engineering of accessibility software for blind and cognitively disabled people. Associate professor Anthony Hormof has also done work with accessibility software using eye-tracking that was reported in the summer 2006 @UOregen.

Jan Cuny honored by CRA

Professor Jan Cuny is the winner of the 2007 Computing Research Association (CRA) A. Nico Habermann Award. The CRA board selected Jan to receive the award for “her dedication, effectiveness, national scope, breadth of impact, vision, and leadership in broadening the participation of all underrepresented groups in computing.”

Jan cofounded the CRA Grad and the Associate Professor cohort programs, coauthored the influential report, “Best Practices in the Recruitment and Retention of Women Graduate Students in Computer Science and Engineering,” and frequently mentors in the CRA-W Distributed Mentor Program. In addition, she has been active in the leadership of the Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing Conference. At the UO, Jan is known for challenging undergrads to participate in research, and working to encourage a climate that is conducive to recruitment and retention of a diverse student population.

The mother of three grown children and grandmother of two, Jan sends her free time as a court appointed special advocate for children in the foster care system.

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- check up on your friends from the good old days
- post your website
- leave a message for your classmates

Jun Li’s sword kills worms

Ever since the computer worm was invented in 1988, it has plagued all connected computers and wreaked untold economic damage through lost time and data. Once a worm is released, it can quickly bring down whole sections of the Internet. While antivirus software designers race to divine the byte configuration of the offending malware, the worm is busy destroying data. With this in mind, assistant professor Jun Li is among the elite group of researchers who have focused on quickly identifying worm-infected subnets through the behavior pattern of the traffic, rather than any specific knowledge about what information is being exchanged. His research proposes the design, development, and evaluation of a framework called SWORD to study the similarity of worm connections, their destination visiting patterns as compared to normal connections, and their continual as a worm spreads. What makes this difficult is that certain legitimate connections may appear worm-like and smart worms can attempt to hide themselves in other noise.

Jun’s network security research is being funded by a $400,000 National Science Foundation CAREER grant titled A Behavior-Based Framework for Detecting Internet Worms. The Faculty Early Career Development (CAREER) Program offers NSF’s most prestigious awards in support of the early-career development activities of those teacher-scholars who most effectively integrate research and education within the context of the mission of their organization.

Unlike other types of grants, CAREER grant requests must be justified in terms not only of the research goals of the professor, but also the educational and research goals of the department. Jun’s research team includes Ph.D. student Shah Stafford, and master’s degree students Toby Ewenkratz and Cameron Hertel. Jun will be looking to bring at least one undergraduate on board in the fall.

Jun has strong opinions about what it takes to be a good teacher.

“An excellent teacher must be able to select what to teach and then decide how to teach, depending on the subject and kind of student,” he says. “Beyond the subject matter, students should also acquire important learning tools and skills from the teacher; with these, they can conduct independent research and solve new problems. At a comprehensive research university like the UO, a large part of the teaching happens outside the classroom.”

In support of this belief, Jun has an open door policy with his lab meetings. As director of the Network Security Research Laboratory (NetSecLab), he publicizes the meeting times to allow prospective undergraduate and graduate students to just come and get a feeling for the environment. If the drop-in feel inspired to join in the research, they are more than welcome.
Hello again, alumni and friends! As another academic year begins and I am fresh from my daughter's wedding on the East Coast, it is time for me to look back at the more professional side of last year's events.

Alumni It is always a pleasure to reconnect with you and to quote the adage "The mark of a good teacher is students who exceed the teacher's successes." At a recent ceremony, the College of Arts and Sciences honored Gurdeep Singh Pall with the Profiles in Achievement Award. Gurdeep was named a corporate vice president of Microsoft in 2005. The Order of the Emerald Abacas, established last year to honor our longstanding alumni, has taken off with aplomb. Last year's graduation hosted ten alumni from 1966 to 1975, who attended commencement, chatted with students and faculty members, and toured Deschutes Hall.

Students This year brought a large number of doctoral studies to completion as seven students flew the coop and got launched into the world as fresh Ph.D.s. The honor list can be found elsewhere in this issue. I congratulate the new doctors and their advisers and wish them the best in their future endeavors.

Several computer science undergraduate students have been recognized by the university. Alex McCullough was one of the Oregon Six, the most outstanding students in the UO chapter of the Phi Beta Kappa honor society. Edward West has been chosen to receive the George and Susan Fugelsang Scholarship from the College of Arts and Sciences. Of the department awards, the Hubbard Family Award went to Aaron Parech, the Jeffreyr Wright Award went to Willow Bauman, and the Julfs Award went to Jimmy Hastings and Scott Brooks.

Faculty Outstanding contributions to the computer science research community brought national recognition to a long-time member of our faculty, professor Jan Cuny. Jan was honored with the A. Nico Habermann Award by the Computing Research Association.

A prestigious five-year National Science Foundation Early CAREER award has been granted to assistant professor Jun Li in support of his computer network security research. He is one of only fifteen computer science researchers nationwide who won the award this year. Incidentally, this brings us to six of the number of current CIS faculty members who have received this award, or its equivalent: Zena Ariola, Jun Li, Al Malony, René Reisjé, Yannis Smaragdakis, and Michal Young.

A number of research grants exceeding $3 million, from both federal and private agencies, have been awarded to CIS faculty members in the past year—and several outstanding grant proposals have a good chance to be funded.

Projects In last year's newsletter, I mentioned the remodelling project of the undergraduate computing lab in Room 100. I am happy to report that the room has acquired new hues with a new carpet, colorful walls, and new furniture. New computers with twenty-four-inch monitors joined the ambiance as well.

The visualization lab funded by Professor Al Malony's grants has become a reality. Students involved in the projects are visualizing performance of parallel and distributed systems. Faculty members and students in the scientific visualization seminar view the structure of connections in the peer-to-peer systems, the bottlenecks in large-scale multicore systems, and the structure of the scientific study itself (such as brain scans). We expect the lab to be utilized by the entire department and also by our collaborators in other departments and colleges.

I hope you will contact us and let us know where you are and what you are doing. We have added a feature to the alumni section of the website that lets you enter the link to your webpage and also a short message to your classmates. If you ever are back in the Eugene area, let us know. We would like you to come and visit and share your experiences with us and with our current students at the career mentorship colloquium or in a more informal setting.

Andrzej Proskurowki
Professor and Head, Computer and Information Science

David Atkins
In an exciting pedagogical experiment, adjunct associate professor David Atkins restructured CIS 210, the first course in the introductory sequence for undergraduate majors, to use pair programming for the lab work. Pair programming, a hot topic in the software engineering blogosphere, was introduced to education at the University of California, Santa Cruz, as an attempt to retain more women and minority students. Despite its initial success, colleges have been slow to adopt the methodology. Professor Jan Cuny has advocated for the switch for several years. "We lose alot of women in the first courses because they perceive that the boys have an advantage," said Jan. "Pair programming shows the women that they are just as capable, and more interesting, it has been shown to help the boys at the same time." The experiment paid off for David; he increased the usual student retention rate by 15 percent. "It took a fair amount of planning," said David, "to strike the correct balance between students teaching each other while still being able to measure individual progress. I think it was very successful as a first trial. Collaboration is a skill that employers value, so it makes sense to start them in the program this way.

Jane Ritter
Senior instructor Jane Ritter has created several series of podcasts for her 100-level courses. Jane began looking at the idea of podcasting to address the needs of students who don't have the proper prerequisites for her courses. The problem arises when students have taken prerequisite courses, but have forgotten some of the necessary information in them, or when transfer students have taken a community college course that doesn't provide all the information or skill development that we expect in our courses. Jane developed a series of podcasts to bring those students up to speed.

Jane now uses podcasts as a value-added feature of her Multimedia on the Web website. "We have no textbooks for the course. Rather than requiring the students to buy six or seven $100 books, I decided to make my own materials," she said. Jane uses a combination of screencasts (sequences of screen animations of her using an application, with a voice-over explaining what she is doing), audio podcasts, and enhanced audio podcasts (audio with still images and a voice-over). Jane's materials are so admired that in May she was asked to give a presentation through the Teaching Effectiveness Program called "Podcasting for Individualized Instruction.

Silas Snider
For the past academic year, undergraduate Silas Snider held workshops in various programming languages every Saturday in the CIS lab. The sessions were open to students at all levels and provided a basic degree of literacy in each language. The typical session was attended by about a dozen students from the introductory CIS sequence up to seniors in the program. "Whether a student is going on to further academic work or out into the job market, one thing that is definitely useful is confidence about learning new systems," said Silas. "Working in the lab, we all try to teach each other, so I decided to formalize that into Saturday workshops." Professor Zena Ariola, who oversees the student lab and is active in the programming language community, said, "I think it's wonderful when students do these things for themselves. I just hope someone steps forward to keep it going when Silas graduates."

Peter Booth and Jon Lidbeck
For the first time in the department programming content's eleven-year history, a graduate student team managed to solve all five problems. Peter Booth is a fifth-year Ph.D. student and five-time returning winner in the contest. Jon Lidbeck is a second-year Ph.D. student, but first-time participant in the contest. Jon studies neuromaging with professor Al Malony and Peter studies networks and graph theory with professor Andrzej Proskurowki.

KUDOS!

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Wyatt Baldwin wanders the map on bike

For Wyatt Baldwin ’03, his life before graduation from the UO reads like a map: As a younger, his family followed his stepfather in the U.S. Air Force from Florida to Germany to New Hampshire to Oklahoma, spending the summers with his father in Florida or Tennessee. Out of high school, Wyatt first attended Florida State University briefly as a philosophy major. He changed to a community college to study filmmaking, then took a break for several years to move around the Midwest and the South, even spending some time in San Francisco before deciding that Portland was the place to be. From there, he headed down to Eugene to enroll in the University of Oregon where he graduated with a 3.57 G.P.A. in computer and information science.

Since moving to Oregon, Wyatt is right in. He enjoys the vegan lifestyle, strict land use laws, and liberal public transport policies in urban Oregon. In fact, he enjoys Oregon so much that he doesn’t want to wander the U.S. map anymore. Instead, he wanders the Portland maps, electronically speaking. He and his girlfriend, Lauren, created byCycle.org, a website for bikers in Portland, Oregon, and Milwaukee. Wyatt has done all of the programming, mostly building on data and machines donated by the Portland Metro government, while Lauren, a master’s degree student in art, assists with the graphic design. In addition to the data supplied by Metro, the byCycle project has added their own information about which streets are fundamentally unsafe for cyclists. The website accepts donations and also generates support revenue through advertising. The couple also does other website development projects, mostly for nonprofits, to support themselves and the byCycle site.

In addition to his work on byCycle, Wyatt is active in other ways in Oregon’s cycling community. “The Portland cycling crowd is more progressive than any other community I have been a part of,” he says. “I don’t own a car. I don’t even have a license to drive. I do think cars have their place in society, but I don’t see why we need them in our cities.”

Wyatt’s favorite leisure-time activity is hiking through Portland’s Forest Park, the world’s largest contiguous urban park. Besides using bike and foot powered transportation in town, Wyatt has participated in several long cycling journeys, including a three-day, 300-mile trip from Tallahassee, Florida, to Biloxi, Mississippi, and a 2,000-mile trip from Seattle to Rochester, New York. His other hobbies include playing the drums and guitar with his friends and raising his two cats with Lauren.

2006-7 a record year for PhD students

During the 2006-7 school year, the department bestowed thirteen doctoral degrees, a record number. The following list shows the students who received Ph.D.s along with the titles of their dissertations and current plans.

Nathan Quin, A Novel Neural Network Analysis Method Applied to Biological Neural Networks. Nathan is currently working as a software engineer on the Zebrafish Infrastructure Networks.

John Flasik-Lasseter, Specification and Evaluation of Multisource Data Flow Problems. John has a position as a visiting assistant professor at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon.

Charles Gauthier-Dickey, Chest-Plate Event Ordering For Large-Scale Distributed Multiplayer Games. Chris is now an assistant professor at the University of Denver.

Bryan Kolakowksi, Deconstructing Phylogenetic Reconstruction: Effects of Assumption Violations on Evolutionary Inference. Bryan is continuing his work as a postdoc; researcher with Joe Thornton at the EmDevo Lab in the biology department.

Kai Li, Neuroanatomical Segmentation in MR Exploiting A Priori Knowledge. Kai is doing postdoc research on medical image analysis at the UO Neuroinformatics Center.

U.M. Model-Based Automatic Performance Diagnosis of Parallel Computations. U is currently working as a postdoc research fellow at Argonne National Laboratory.

Den Stottrup, Measuring and Characterizing Properties of Peer-to-Peer Systems. Dan is president of Stottrup Enterprises, LLC, a consulting firm in Dallas, Texas.

Order of the Emerald Abacus

In 2006, the department established the Order of the Emerald Abacus for alumni of more than thirty years. The society meets every year at graduation.

2006 Inductees

Kirk Tipton (class of 1975 or before)
Raymond H. J. Voc (class of 1975 or before)
Kenneth A. Wandelman (class of 1975 or before)

2007 Inductees

J. Daniel Boomer (class of 1975 or before)
Larry Templeton (class of 1975 or before)
Diana Templeton Kilian (class of 1975 or before)

Tim Kirk ’68 on the front lines of patient-managed mobile medical records

In 1970 with his degree in the new field of computer science and a stint teaching computing in the military, Tim Kirk walked down the street from the UO and got a job as systems manager at Sacred Heart Medical Center. Little did he know that he would spend the rest of his career bringing computer science methods to health care.

Tim attended the computer and information science commencement ceremony this year as part of the Order of the Emerald Abacus. After listening to the keynote speaker, Mohan Nair, tell the new graduates to find a cause to be passionate about, Tim remarked, “I hadn’t thought of my life in those terms, but the message was really true.” Health care is a cause that I have taken up. In the coming years, the health care field will require many computer science people, and it is a very rewarding industry to be in. It is one of the most important fields to us as a society.” Like Mohan, Tim is one of the few CIO’s in health care who has a degree in computer science, rather than business. “I think my degree gave me the proper framework on which to build,” he said. “My work at the UO showed me what computer science can bring to health care.”

As CIO for Providence Health System’s Southern California region, Tim is working on developing an e-record system for patients. “The field of computer science is changing every six months, and the health care industry is also changing,” he said. “I am trying to bring the two together.” Tim is working toward a future in which patients manage their own medical records that they take, electronically speaking, from provider to provider. “The technical challenge is the variation in records procedures among providers.” Each health care provider has a unique system for encoding medications and treatments. To see his vision through, Tim and his colleagues must convince all of these players to put the patients in charge.

Tim originally studied math while attending the UO, but moved to the fledgling computer science department as it grew around him. “In those days, the CS department would add a completely new graduate course each term. Since I had already exhausted the undergraduate curriculum, I was allowed to take the grad courses. So, by the time I graduated, I had taken the courses for the master’s degree.”

Originally hailing from Bend, Oregon, Tim met his wife, Joyce, while at the UO. She was an interdisciplinary studies major from Newport, Oregon; consequently, the Kirk family has always followed the Ducks. “My wife’s brother went to OSU,” he said. “So, there was some strife originally, but over the years, we’ve forgiven him.” After twelve years at Sacred Heart, Tim and Joyce moved to California, where they currently live. Tim still comes to Oregon often to visit his ninety-two-year-old mother in Bend. Tim and Joyce have a son who, despite his lack of a technical degree, works in the research department at e-Harmony, and a daughter who is scheduled to make them grandparents in October. Joyce taught journalism when she was first out of college, but now works as a contract writer.
Student Profile

Jimmy Hastings: musician, theoretician, teacher

The roar of the Autzen Stadium crowds, the cadence of coordinated marchers, and the clatter of fingers across a keyboard are what attracted undergraduate Jimmy Hastings to the UO CIS program. “My parents had attended Northwest Christian College next to the UO and were huge Duck fans,” he explains. “So in high school I got to hear the UO Marching Band and was highly impressed. I liked the UO’s theoretical approach to computer science and I was impressed by their commitment to using undergrads in research projects.”

Jimmy’s interest in music began in elementary school choir. Later, he switched to band. He plays trumpet in the Oregon Marching Band, Campus Band, and Basketball Band. “I just don’t think I would have enjoyed college if I didn’t have those musical outlets.”

Jimmy finished the 300-level core sequence in the spring and plans to begin research next year. This year, Jimmy was named a 2007 George and Susan Fugelsang Scholar, an annual award from the College of Arts and Sciences based on faculty recommendations.

When not performing, Jimmy is engaged in software competitions. He mentors high school students in the department’s outreach program. He teaches Python in preparation for the statewide high school programming contest. This year, his team took third place. Jimmy competed in the 2007 regional ACM programming contest. In the Imagine Cup Software Design competition, he and ten other UO CIS students qualified for the second round regional finals in New Orleans. In the department’s programming competition, his team took first place and his high school protégés, competing by special invitation, won second place.

Faculty Profile

Reza Rejaie puts Oregon on multimedia map

From idyllic childhood days spent by the lake, assistant professor Reza Rejaie’s path to teaching and researching in Eugene has been a winding road. Raised in rural Khuzistan in the shadow of the 3,200-year-old ziggurat of Chogha Zambil in southeast Iran, Reza and his family lived a peaceful existence. However, when he was twelve years old, the Iran-Iraq war broke out and that part of the country became unsafe for raising a family. Like so many others, Reza’s family moved to the modern, fast-paced metropolis of Tehran where he was plunged into the urban competition for scholastic achievement.

On the snowy slopes near Tehran and in the lake behind Karaj Dam, Reza acquired his lifelong love of sports. “I was never very bookish,” he said. “I was mostly interested in snow and water skiing and other sports, but when I took the nationwide college boards, I was ranked 135th among the half million Iranians applying for university studies. I found that I was good in math and engineering, and electrical engineering was the most challenging, demanding, and hard-to-enter major, and I am always looking for challenge.” While earning his bachelor’s degree at Sharif University, he was part of the volleyball team that won second place in the national college tournament. When he relocated to the U.S., Reza took up racquetball and soccer.

He enrolled in the University of Southern California to study signal processing in electrical engineering, but eventually fell in with the computer science crowd, studying first multimedia databases and then bringing his multimedia work to the networking group. His dissertation covered the problem of providing multimedia streaming over congestion-controlled connections.

While earning his master’s and doctorate at USC, he developed another passion: cultural exchange. He wrote the constitution for the USC Iranian Graduate Student Association (IGSA). The group, still thriving today, provides information for classes and professors, reaches out to Iranian ex-patriots, and hosts cultural events attended by thousands of Iranians in an attempt to foster true understanding of Iranian culture and civilization beyond the politics of the moment. Because of his work with IGSA to promote cultural understanding, Reza received the Excellence in Leadership award from the Association of Professors and Scholars of Iranian Heritage.

In 2002, Daniel Zappala, a friend who was teaching at the UO, contacted him about an open faculty position. At that time, the UO had no active research projects in multimedia networking. “Before I came to the UO, our department was not well known and had a limited visibility in the multimedia networking and networking system research communities. Now, as a result of my research (along with my colleague’s, Jun Li) and my active participation in various conferences and research venues, our department is really more visible. We are now on the map of both communities.” Reza has brought more than $800,000 in research grants to the UO.

Reza’s wife Maryam joined him in the U.S. during his Ph.D. studies, and the couple had their first child, daughter Nikki, just before moving to Oregon. Their second child, a boy Nima, was delivered in June.

UO summer school draws grads worldwide

In July, the department once again hosted an international summer school on programming languages. Each year, the program draws about forty graduate students, along with a few professors, undergraduates and people from industry to a series of lectures from people engaged in leading research in formal methods and language theory. This year, the title was Language-Based Techniques for Integrating with the External World. The speakers include professors from universities in Europe and the U.S., and researchers from AT&T Labs and Microsoft Research. The lectures cover foundational materials on principles, logic and type systems, advanced techniques, and applications of these ideas in practice.

Professor Zena Ariola, who started the school six years ago, said, “The summer school is great for our program. Scholars all over the world now associate Oregon with language theory.” After two years of directing the summer school, Zena stepped down as director to lead the group’s scientific committee. The summer school is reorganizing for 2008 to become an ACM-sponsored program, permanently housed at the UO.

While the students are in Eugene, they take advantage of the local culture. Jim Allen, the logistics coordinator for the school, says, “After class, we take a hike along the river, or up to Hendricks Park, and then head for one of the campus pubs. On the weekend, I take them to the coast or the mountains because I like to show off everything Oregon has to offer.”