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University of West Florida Team Wins Statewide “Hackathon” Competition To Help Modernize Municipal Government

FAMU students defeat teams from other Florida universities

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Students from the University of West Florida took first place in the MuniMod competition in Orlando this past weekend. The team won with their vehicle telematics product, a vehicle plug-in device that would transmit data about driving activity. The product, “USafe Technologies – Vehicle Telematics IoT,” would enable local governments to increase accountability, fiscal responsibility and transparency in their municipal fleet vehicle maintenance. Florida A&M University took second place in the competition.

Hosted by the Florida League of Cities, MuniMod is the only civic tech competition in Florida to focus solely on solutions for cities.

The weekend event brought together six teams from universities across Florida to showcase student-developed technological solutions to common problems affecting communities. Students, ranging from freshmen to PhD candidates, tackled challenging areas such as sustainability, emergency response communications, property redevelopment and permitting processes. In addition to receiving marketing advice and access to numerous networks across the state, the winning team from the University of West Florida took home a \$10,000 prize. Florida A&M University took home a second-place prize of \$5,000.

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.

“Cities are constantly facing new challenges, which means they’re also looking for new solutions to those challenges,” said FLC President and Bartow Mayor Leo E. Longworth. “This competition is an ingenious way to find some of those solutions. We’re able to educate and work with students across the state in an effort to bridge the gap between technology and cities and ultimately to modernize municipal government.”

“It was such a pleasure to work with all the students at this year’s MuniMod,” continued President Longworth. “On behalf of the Florida League of Cities and Florida’s 412 municipalities, we greatly appreciate their efforts.”

The teams were selected by their 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 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 one last opportunity to work with advisers and mentors late into the night to perfect the demo and pitch their technology. Competition was fierce as the teams presented their solutions to a panel of four judges.

“The resources provided by the Florida League of Cities made the difference,” explained University of West Florida student and member of the 2019 MuniMod winning team Morgan Peppers. Her partner, Cody Hill, agreed. “Being able to take advantage of the advisors and resources on-site was pivotal to our success.”

“This competition was like being on a plane getting ready to go – here we go – and now we have lifted off,” said Cody Hill. “We are ready to take the funding we received and form a new partnership to develop the right application for our new customers: Florida’s municipal governments.”

The second-place team from Florida A&M University developed “Accru,” an application dedicated to matching local businesses with municipal-owned vacant spaces.

In addition to the University of West Florida and Florida A&M University, the four other universities that participated this year were:

- Florida Atlantic University;
- FAMU-FSU College of Engineering;
- Florida State University;
- University of Florida.

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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 floridaleagueofcities.com.