

Social networking apps for cars to be unveiled at U-M

April 20 2010

(PhysOrg.com) -- Social networking and transportation utility applications for cars are being prototyped in a Cloud Computing in the Commute course taught this semester at the University of Michigan in partnership with Ford Motor Company's Research & Advanced Engineering department.

Microsoft and Intel have also collaborated on the project, contributing technology tools and expertise during this 12-week course.

Students from the course will unveil their projects at 4 p.m. Friday, (April 23) in Tishman Hall at the Computer Science and Engineering building on U-M's North Campus.

Six teams of students will demonstrate their projects, which include a green-routing system that guides vehicles on the most fuel-efficient path, a collaborative ridesharing program that could connect drivers and potential riders, an on-the-go recommendation system and a road-trip caravan app, among other projects. Demo videos will be posted Friday afternoon on Michigan Engineering's Facebook page at facebook.com/michigan.engineering .

In the class, students explored and built applications focused on "what's next" for in-car connectivity based on access to a developmental application platform. This platform is built on Microsoft Windows 7 and Robotics Developer Studio in the vehicle and integrated with Windows Azure in the cloud, enabling students to harness the power of social

networks on an advanced research platform that can safely and responsibly connect to the cloud.

The system provides access to vehicle performance data, networking services, voice recognition, [social networking](#) tools and other data. Students were able to use the platform's programming tools to conceptualize and build a new class of applications as course projects.

The class was taught by Jason Flinn and Brian Noble, associate professors in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, and T.J. Giuli from Ford, with guest lecturers from Microsoft.

“This is a brand-new platform for the car, with potential that is only beginning to be realized. After all, the types of apps that make sense on a phone don't make sense in a [car](#), and we need to deal with issues like hands-free operation and driver distraction,” Noble said. “I think these students have done some pretty cool stuff. What has made this so successful is the close collaboration with Ford and Microsoft.”

The professors say hands-on engineering design classes like this help build a high-tech culture in the region.

“They show that if you want to be post-web 2.0, contributing to the world in a high-tech, geek sort of way, you don't have to leave the state,” Flinn said. “The context for computing is becoming broader with platforms like these.”

Ford considers this collaboration a model for innovation and open collaboration, said Venkatesh Prasad, group and technical leader of Ford's Infotronics team in Research & Advanced Engineering.

“It's an exciting way to help shape tomorrow's workforce,” Prasad said. “Our philosophy is to constantly seek new channels of innovation and the

opportunity to share Ford's platform and expertise in a university environment has been invaluable. The applications are all that we had hoped they would be in terms of creativity, functionality and inventiveness, and these may provide a catalyst for entrepreneurs."

"By working with Ford and the University of Michigan, Microsoft is helping further technology innovations within the automotive industry and providing customers with a consistent, connected in-vehicle experience that seamlessly integrates into their digital lifestyles," said David Graff, director of U.S. Automotive and Industrial Equipment Industry Solutions, Microsoft. "We look forward to continued collaboration opportunities to fuel the connectivity of future in-car systems with the vast world of Windows."

Ford and Microsoft's collaboration on this project builds on a decade-long partnership. The Ford SYNC communications and infotainment system, built on the Windows Embedded Automotive software platform, has been installed on more than 2 million Ford, Lincoln and Mercury vehicles since its launch in 2007.

This class was the first phase of a larger project Ford calls "American Journey 2.0." After the evening's presentations, a panel of judges from Ford, U-M, and Microsoft will pick the winning application set. The winning application will run on a Windows 7 PC in a 2011 Ford Fiesta, which will be driven by the student team alongside a networked vehicle and team from Ford and Microsoft. In early May, the team will embark on a socially networked road trip from Ann Arbor to Maker Faire, the world's largest do-it-yourself ideas festival in Silicon Valley, which begins May 22, 2010.

"The students have embraced the collaboration at every level and are really looking forward to the opportunity to take their projects on the road to Maker Faire," Giuli said. "The Journey will include stops at four

universities including Northwestern, University of Colorado, Boulder, Stanford and the University of California, Berkeley which will give the students further opportunity to share their projects with their peers at other universities.”

Provided by University of Michigan

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