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IRDI SUCCESS STORY: COLLEGE MOBILE OFFERS NEW APP FOR BLACKBERRY USERS



Chad Jones (right), CEO of College Mobile, and Andy Wang, IRDI intern



While on a summer internship at College Mobile, University of Saskatchewan graduate student Andy Wong took an iPhone application—or “app” for short—previously developed by the company, which allows University of Saskatchewan students to easily access and navigate their campus accounts, and adapted it for the BlackBerry. Like its predecessor, the new BlackBerry app lets students logon to their accounts to do such things as view their grades and class schedule, or search the library catalogue; but, thanks to Andy, it can now reach a wider audience of smartphone users.

On the brink of completing his master’s thesis in computer science, Andy was given the opportunity to work at College Mobile this past summer by the Industrial Research and Development Internship (IRDI) program; it is one of the Networks of Centres of Excellence flagship programs that matches graduate students and postdoctoral fellows with a company in their field, allowing them to deal with an industry problem directly. Meanwhile, firms also benefit from having a highly-skilled intern with specialized research knowledge.

Founder and CEO of College Mobile, Chad Jones, says his company was lucky to find someone with Andy’s level of specialized knowledge and expertise to work on adapting the smartphone application.

“His research area is exactly the same as what we’re working on, so there’s a whole learning curve that took him probably over a year [that he did on his own] that we didn’t have to go through with him,” says Jones. “He basically did in a few weeks, what it would take some other person months to do.”

College Mobile is a 10-person company based in Saskatoon that develops applications for smartphones, servicing universities across Canada, even as far away as Australia and the United Kingdom. With the opportunity to work on real-world, cutting-edge software applications in a tight-knit environment, Andy says this internship has been of tremendous value to him both professionally and personally.

“From the programming side, I got to experience application development on the BlackBerry framework. As for my personal working experience, I know how to communicate with my boss and how to manage my tasks efficiently. The research itself was also helpful, because the work was related to my thesis. I was able to transfer a lot of knowledge to my research area.”

In the IRDI program, any work that is done by the student while on the internship is owned by the company. Although Andy’s work directly helps him in his graduate studies on web apps for mobile devices, College Mobile owns the code he wrote while working there.

Andy was College Mobile’s first intern. Jones was so impressed with his work that he said he hopes to have Andy back as a full-time employee.

“The idea is that once Andy finishes his graduate work, we’re just going to hire him.”

Introduced in 2007, over the past two years the IRDI program has offered internships to almost 1,000 graduate students and post-doctoral fellows. Ideally, the IRDI program will grow to introduce 1,000 new internships per year.

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