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MEDIA RELEASE

SFU team wins best student prize in 48-hour appathon

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A team of Simon Fraser University computing science students has won a 48-hour “appathon” during which they conceived and built an app to help Canadian high school students compare the costs of a post-secondary education anywhere in the country.

Canadian Open Data Experience (CODE) 2015, hosted by the federal government, invited software developers, graphic designers, students and interested individuals to create an app using Government of Canada open data available on the CODE site.

The competition also encouraged participants to mash up these federal data sets with provincial, territorial and municipal data found on the site's *Open Government across Canada* page.

SFU team members Jonathan Bhaskar, Bradley Ellert, Jasneet Sabharwal and Maryam Siahbani won the \$5,000 prize for Best Student Team for [High School Down, Where Next?](#)

The graduate students only learned about the appathon on the day it began, and joined in several hours late. They spent what remained of the first 24 hours brainstorming about what they could do with the data sets, and then spent the second 24 hours building the app.

Team member Sabharwal is an international student from India studying at SFU for a master's degree in computing science, specializing in natural language processing. He used big-data and data-visualization skills learned during a Mitacs internship at Worksafe BC to more quickly build the team's app.

“At a glance, users can view the average rent and tuition fee for any program and institution in the country,” he says. “Other apps currently on the market only permit students to compare two or three institutions.”

The SFU team hunkered down in residence to create the app, which they're now [hosting online](#). The app includes a map of post-secondary institutions in Canada and charts showing the number of post-secondary institutions by province, their program costs, and average local rents. Users can click on, or drag their selections, then download the results.

The CODE competition attracted 125 submissions and 1,300 participants from across Canada.

SFU computing science professor Fred Popowich says managing Canada's big data capabilities is critical to the country's competitive advantage, and there is a growing need for education and training in the field.

Last fall, SFU launched Canada's first [Professional Master's Program in Big Data](#) in a bid to help meet the demand for big data specialists. One of the team members, Jonathan Bhaskar, is a student in the program.

As Canada's engaged university, SFU is defined by its dynamic integration of innovative education, cutting-edge research

and far-reaching community engagement. SFU was founded almost 50 years ago with a mission to be a different kind of university—to bring an interdisciplinary approach to learning, embrace bold initiatives, and engage with communities near and far. Today, SFU is a leader amongst Canada's comprehensive research universities and is ranked one of the top universities in the world under 50 years of age. With campuses in British Columbia's three largest cities—Vancouver, Surrey and Burnaby—SFU has eight faculties, delivers almost 150 programs to over 30,000 students, and boasts more than 130,000 alumni in 130 countries around the world.

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