

SMU app wins two education awards in US

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Leadership and team-building classes for 23-year-old undergraduate Timothy Tan were not just a series of lectures – they were filled with discussion, debate and competition.

This was because of an app designed by course coordinator, Dr Rani Tan, his Singapore Management University (SMU) lecturer.

Called GameLead, the app won two awards at the second annual Wharton-QSStars Reimagine Education awards and conference last week in Philadelphia, United States. The awards are given to innovative projects around the world designed to improve pedagogy and employability.

GameLead won a Social Sciences and MBA Discipline award, and a silver award in the ICT (information and communications technology) Tools for Learning and Teaching category.

Another app designed by Dr Rosie Ching, a senior lecturer of statistics in SMU's school of economics, won a bronze award in the Educational App category. Called CSI Agent on a Mission, it is an iPad gaming app.

It was the first time Dr Tan, a senior lecturer in the Lee Kong Chian School of Business, had designed an app for her course. She did it with the help of her undergraduate teaching assistants and Mr Keith Ng, co-founder of gamification platform Gametize, who was also from SMU.

The app was a hit when it was introduced as an ungraded component of the leadership course in 2013. Now, more than 500 undergraduates use it each term.

It serves as a discussion platform outside class, for students to share their views and complete activities that complement teaching material each week.

They are then ranked on a live leader board based on the points they get by finishing given tasks.

"I made this (app)... for (the students) to have an experience beyond the classroom," said Dr Tan, who added it works especially well with the younger generation. "What I appreciate about (the students), being used to social media, is that they are very uninhibited in sharing their feelings, opinions and views."

Mr Tan, who used the GameLead app, said the weekly discussions broadened his horizons. Classmates would compete to gain the most points.

"Because it was community-based, I learnt from my peers when I looked at how they thought about questions and answered them," he said.

Mr Tan Swee Liang, director at the Centre for Teaching Excellence in SMU, said it "supports faculty who are interested in innovating through the purposeful adoption of technology".

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