



Blue Ridge Area
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COMPUTER INFORMATION SYSTEMS
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JMU Student Teams Compete to Have their Technology Used in Food Banking Operations

(VERONA, Va. – Dec. 5, 2017) – Similar to contestants on ABC’s hit TV show “Shark Tank,” two James Madison University student teams will pitch their ideas for digital apps aimed at helping the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank select the most nutritious foods available for its clients. The competition takes place on **Saturday, Dec. 9, beginning at 1p.m., in JMU’s Grafton Stovall Theatre.**

Instead of winning a large monetary investment, the students will take away valuable lessons in creating technological solutions to real-world challenges and how to present their ideas to potential clients.

The problem: It’s harder for the Food Bank to reliably obtain nutritious food items through its traditional channels. The Food Bank needs a refined, evidence-based way to estimate the nutritional value of foods for its inventory.

The solution: an app that enables the Food Bank to cross reference the ingredients of procured foods using a Nutrient Rich Food (NRF) algorithm, which is based on nutrient data contained in an USDA database.

“In the beginning, we started this project with eight groups, and now we’re down to two. The process has been grueling for the students, with JMU faculty and mentors offering advice and critiques at every turn,” said Cary Cole, professor of Computer Information Systems and Business Analytics at JMU. “This competition has tested the students’ skills and knowledge gained up to this point in their academic careers in an important way.”

Students in the Computer Information Systems (CIS) Program and the School of Media Arts & Design (SMAD) joined forces to create a computer-based scoring system that will enable the Food Bank to determine if a food item should be avoided, consumed with caution, or eaten freely and often because of its abundance of healthful ingredients. The chosen

application could one day help ensure a consistent mix of nutritious foods in the Food Bank's inventory.

“With millions of pounds of food flowing through the Food Bank each year, we need a systematic way of acquiring food based on nutrient values, and JMU faculty and students are creating just that,” said Michael McKee, CEO of the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank. “Our partnership with JMU is a sterling example of the power of university-community partnerships.” He added that the winning student team has the potential to not only help the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank but also the entire network of Feeding America food banks.

The competition is part of a capstone project that began in the spring of 2017— the outgrowth of a 2015 partnership between the Food Bank and JMU dieticians to determine how best to assess and quantify nutritional quality. Judges for the competition include JMU faculty members, representatives from KPMG, a leading employer of JMU CIS students, and Food Bank leadership.

For questions, contact Abena Foreman-Trice at 540-280-6588, or by email at aforemantrice@brafb.org.

About the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank

Founded in 1981, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank is the largest organization alleviating hunger in western and central Virginia. Headquartered in Verona, VA, the Food Bank serves 25 counties and eight cities through distribution centers in Charlottesville, Lynchburg, Winchester and Verona. The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank distributes nearly 25 million pounds of food annually to 105,100 people each month through a network of 212 community partners – food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, schools, churches and other non-profit groups. The Food Bank is a member of Feeding America, a national food bank association that supports 200 food banks across the United States. For more information, visit www.brafb.org.

About James Madison University

James Madison University is a comprehensive university that is part of the statewide system of public higher education in the Commonwealth of Virginia and is the only university in America named for James Madison. Established March 14, 1908, the university offers programs on the bachelor's, master's and doctoral levels with its primary emphasis on the undergraduate student. JMU provides a total education to students – one that has a broad range of the liberal arts as its foundation and encompasses an extensive variety of professional and pre-professional programs, augmented by a multitude of learning experiences outside the classroom. The university has been a coeducational institution since 1966 and is located in the heart of the Shenandoah Valley.

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