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Students Demonstrate “Swift” Development of Mobile Games

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Students Demonstrate “Swift” Development of Mobile Games

April 26, 2016

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— The class was about to start and in typical fashion, students spent the last seconds hunched over their cell phones. Instead of scrolling through text messages or watching cat videos, however, students in the Illinois Wesleyan University “Software Development” course were making last-minute checks on the iPhone games they’d designed and were about to present.

Teams of students were tasked with coming up with ideas for iPhone games utilizing Xcode, an Apple code development program. To use this program, they had to draw on their knowledge of Apple’s programming language Swift, a language new to the students at the beginning of the semester.

After voting on the most promising proposals, students perfected the best ideas and presented them to their classmates in a sort of focus group test of new products. One of the games was “Swift Hero,” the creation of Jacob Nowakowski ’17. Inspired by the music video game “Guitar Hero” and recalling how much he enjoyed playing rhythm-based games like “Tap Tap Revolution” in high school study hall, Nowakowski (Crystal Lake, Ill.) drew on his love of music to design and program “Swift Hero.”

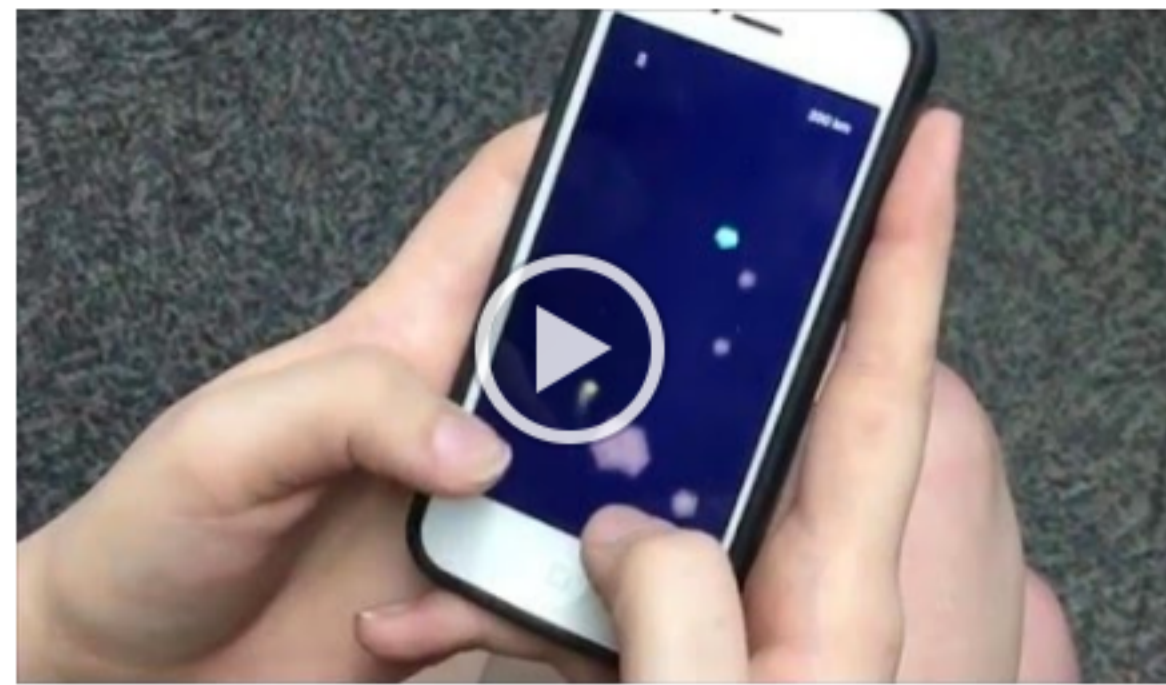
Nowakowski demonstrated the game in “easy” mode. Colored notes in four vertical rows drift down the screen. Players tap left or right in time to the music as the notes reach a line at the bottom of the screen. Nowakowski then ramped up “Swift Hero” to a harder playing level and the notes barreled down the phone’s face like bullets. He’s at ease in front of the class, perhaps a skill gained from his years performing music (violin and percussion) or gained as a teaching assistant in [math](#) and [computer science](#), both of which he’s majoring in. “I find teaching people really rewarding,” he said. “But I also like the philosophy of logic that overlaps in math and computer science. I like the formalism and the purity of what you’re proving and showing.”

He estimates “Swift Hero” took 15 to 20 hours of coding. “On a project like this, it’s tempting to go straight at it and make up code as you go, but I learned it’s really better to look ahead and compartmentalize the things you need to do,” said Nowakowski. “There were a lot of times through this project I rewrote so much code, but that’s just how it goes in learning how to be a good programmer.”

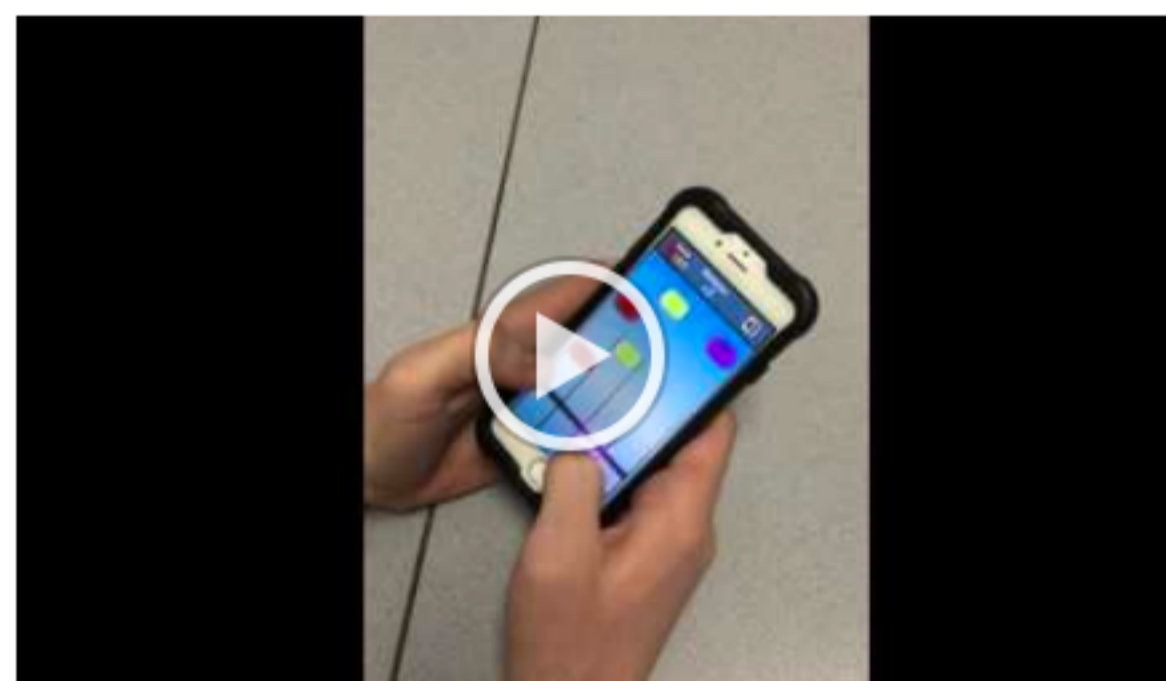
Classmate Sydney Cucerzan ’18 spent even more time – she estimates close to 40 hours – on her game “Shooting Star.” Fascinated with space, she wanted to create a game that was simple yet challenging. “I was heavily influenced by another game called “Powder” and I also drew from [mobile game] “Flappy Bird,” a hard game that was so frustrating yet you were addicted at the same time,” said Cucerzan, a native of Murfreesboro, Tenn.

After each student presentation, phones were passed around the class so each student could take a turn making balloons fly, having bees collect honey, or guiding stars through asteroid belts. Course instructor Pavel Naumov, visiting associate professor of computer science, deemed several projects “very neat and polished.” Students praised a fellow programmer’s choice of music or clever play on words in naming their projects. The celebratory atmosphere acknowledged the sometimes frustrating and seemingly endless work necessary to complete such a project.

Cucerzan said she was so obsessed with “Shooting Star” she forgot to eat at times. “It’s time well spent, however,” said Cucerzan, who would like to design games as a career. “You find one problem and while solving that, you might create another one, or maybe you think of ways to make the game better than it already is. It’s the most fun you can have while doing something that’s really hard.”



Sydney Cucerzan '18 demonstrates her game, "Shooting Star."



"Swift Hero" was developed by Jacob Nowakowski '17, inspired by "Guitar Hero" and "Tap Tap Revolution."