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SBU students design campus bus info system

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When it comes to business, some students at Stony Brook University are learning a valuable lesson -- the customer needs information.

So about 15 graduate and undergraduate computer science students worked for the past year putting together a global positioning system for the campus buses. The system is now being tested on five of the vehicles, and in a year or so will be on all 35. The system, called SBU Smart Transit, sends data on a bus' location and also how may passengers are onboard to a central campus server. The data is routed to campus websites. Apps for iPhone, Android and BlackBerry are planned for release before this summer.

James O'Connor, director of the college's office of sustainability, said the campus has not had such a system in place before. O'Connor added that the system is "homegrown."

Jennifer Wong, an assistant professor of computer science who oversaw the project, said the students were involved in producing the software. "We bought off-the-shelf hardware and we built a flexible system that allows us to build future advanced elements into the system," Wong said.

Students waiting for a bus will know when it is coming, and will know the number of passengers onboard. They can then decide to get on the bus or wait for another.

The project, Wong said, gave the students "an opportunity to see the needs of the customer and how the customer is benefiting from the system. It's great to see all their hard work being utilized."

Xincheng Zhang, 22, who graduated last December and worked on the system, building a website and working on apps, is now working at Stony Brooks' Center of Excellence in Wireless and Information Technology. He said he is also applying for graduate school.

The project was among the highlights of his college years, he said. "It was a great learning experience."

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