UT Austin | Portugal
INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATORY FOR EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES, CoLab

DIGITAL BITS

Researchers and Experts to Present at SXSW

The UT Austin | Portugal Digital Media Program will make its presence felt at the 2011 South By Southwest conferences and festivals. As in years past, the SXSW Interactive conference will feature presentations by affiliated faculty and students, but this year the new SXSW Technology Summit will also feature leaders of the Portugal Program. The new event is expected to provide attendees with a global perspective on technology use and trends.

Manuel Heitor, Portugal's secretary of state for science, technology, and higher education, will speak at the technology summit in a special event dedicated to Portugal's technology industries. He will be joined by Artur Alves, a professor at the University of Porto and one of the co-directors of the Digital Media Program. Alves will also present at a second panel on creative industries development alongside David Gibson of UT's IC2 Institute. Each of these panels should raise awareness in the US of technology initiatives in Portugal and its emerging media industries.

At the SXSW Interactive conference, a handful of Portugese researchers will present on panels. Nuno Correia, a professor at the New University of Lisbon, and Monica Mendes, a PhD student in the digital media program there, will show some of their visualization research at the panel, "Big Brother Goes Green: Surveillance for Sustainable Forests." In addition, Heitor Alvelos, a professor at U.Porto, will appear in the panel "Neither Moguls nor Pirates: Grey Area Music Distribution" to share some insight into the music industry.

Some current and former UT faculty who have worked with the program will also present at SXSW Interactive. Professor and Digital Media co-director Sharon Strover will give a talk titled "Why the FCC Can't Please Anyone – Net Neutrality Blues" which will explain one of the most contentious issues in telecommunication policy today. Former iSchool professor Don Turnbull will speak on the future of search at "Left Brain Search = Google. Right Brain Search = X," and former postdoctoral fellow Derek Lackaff and a team of collaborators will speak about recent political change in Iceland at "Rebooting Iceland: Crowdsourcing Innovation in Uncertain Times."

The South By Southwest Interactive conference is one of the largest technology conferences in the world and by far the largest in Austin. Last year, SXSWi had over 14 thousand registered attendees from 55 different nations. The Digital Media Program is proud of its role in expanding the international scope of the conference and believes it is an ideal showcase for Portugal's technology innovations. To learn more about the conference and see a schedule of speakers, visit the UT Austin | Portugal website.

Music Professor Visits Porto for Collaboration, Lectures

Professor Russell Pinkston of UT's Butler School of Music came to Porto last month to meet with collaborators on the kinetic controllers research project funded by the Digital Media Program. Pinkston also visited Professor Carlos Guedes' music class at U.Porto to give a guest lecture. Pinkston teaches electronic music composition and synthesis at UT Austin and is the director of its Electronic Music Studios.

Guedes, along with UT professor Bruce Pennycook lead a research project that develops software for using motion-sensitive devices like Wii controllers and iPhones to control music synthesis systems. Pinkston met with the team in Coimbra to review their progress and offer feedback about their work. By his own account, he was impressed with the progress the team is making. Pinkston also demonstrated software being developed in Austin for melodic phrase segment analysis and music generation. In addition Tomas Henriques of the University of Lisbon gave a preview of some devices for gestural control of synthesizers.

These meetings laid the groundwork for future collaboration. The research teams discussed how the results of their projects could be integrated into a more comprehensive set of tools for kinetic music control. Pinkston also indicated interest in teaching a short course in Porto later this year.

Virtual Collaborators Meet Face-to-face in Austin

A team of UT and Portuguese researchers working on an online platform for virtual collaboration got the rare opportunity to meet in person this month in Austin. Researchers on the INVITE: social Identity and partNership in VIrTual Environments project funded by the Digital Media Program met at the College of Communication to discuss progress and a future roadmap.

Rui Prada of Lisbon's Instituto Superior Técnico came to Austin with Pedro Santos and Carlos Martinho to meet with UT Communication Studies professor Jorge Pena. They spent about a week at UT catching up on research and the software the team is currently developing.

The goal of this research project is to see how a networked virtual environment can be used to teach and nurture interpersonal "soft skills." The software targets adult learners such as college students and working professionals who want to improve their communication and collaboration skills. When finished, the software will run on desktop and notebook computers and provide a virtual environment structured to teach these skills.

Digital Media Interns Explore Journalism, Data Marketplaces

Internship Update

Four new interns came to Austin in February to explore careers that emerged from the shift to digital media. Two new interns will be at UT's public radio station KUT, getting their feet wet with mobile journalism. Another intern was placed in a journalism-related role working with the School of Journalism's Knight Center for Excellence in Journalism in the Americas, helping to update its website. A fourth intern is in Austin working a data marketplace startup, Infochimps, which resells information culled from a variety of government and private sources.

The Digital Media Program places several interns from both Portugal and UT each semester and is always looking for new organizations to host interns. There is always interest in internships with video production, but there is particular demand currently for placements in animation. If you or anyone you know has ties to an organization that needs animators, please let us know by emailing Jonathan Daniels at jonathan.a.daniels@gmail.com.