

NEWS & NOTES

## X-Labs bridges gap between curriculum and industry

BY KIMBERLY A. FISHER

**O**n Dec. 7, 2018, JMU X-Labs hosted its second Innovation Summit, featuring the projects of more than 100 students from 28 academic majors.

X-Labs uses design thinking and lean startup methodology to challenge students to investigate every aspect of a problem, iterate possible solutions, welcome meaningful failure in addressing those problems, and collaborate with industry professionals and peers.

Since opening in 2015, X-Labs has expanded its course offerings to include Augmented/Virtual Reality, Autonomous Vehicles, Blockchain, Creativity and Innovation, Community Innovations, Hacking for Diplomacy and Internet of Things.

JMU President Jonathan R. Alger attended the December summit to learn

about projects such as an augmented reality app with the potential to revolutionize how molecules are visualized and taught in introductory chemistry classes.

“We’re very proud of what you all are doing,” Alger said. “Let’s keep this going and grow these efforts across the university.”

Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs Heather Coltman also spoke at the event, emphasizing that “this program allows students to think outside the box in a very creative and exciting space. It takes people who are willing to be humble, to take calculated risks ... who can have the power to change lives.”

Some people whose lives might be changed in the future are members of the Bridgewater Retirement Community. At their request, the Autonomous Vehicles class

started developing a self-driving kit that can be installed on any golf cart to make it run autonomously.

“There are roadblocks, but everything is feasible with the knowledge we’ve gained,” senior engineering major Alex Gellios said of the project. “Hopefully [in the spring], they’ll be able to finish what we started.”

A student team from the Hacking for Diplomacy class collaborated with Maj. Laura Keenan of the District of Columbia National Guard to help active-duty service members who want to continue serving their country after retirement make an informed decision about joining the unit. The students developed a recruiting tool to increase the number of positive matches so that the right candidates can find, and seamlessly transition into, the program. 

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— ALEX GELLIOS, *senior engineering major*



Students, faculty members and staff gather with business and industry representatives at JMU X-Labs’ Innovation Summit. Teams present their solutions to societal problems to eager learners.