



SIUE team wins national prize for augmented reality in Head Start proposal

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EDWARDSVILLE - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville computer science graduate student Ehren Wolfe and Stephen Hupp, PhD, professor of psychology in the School of Education, Health and Human Behavior, along with a team of creative minds from across the nation, earned first place for their innovative ideas during the 2017 Tech and Early Education Incubator held Dec. 2-3 in Austin, Texas.

The incubator event brought together technology, design and early childhood innovators, and challenged them to “develop an idea that enhances the impact of early childhood education through the use of technology.” Wolfe and Hupp were invited to the competition because of their [research involving a robot named Mo](#), who has worked with children in SIUE Head Start/Early Head Start classrooms.

For the competition, they collaborated with a team of interdisciplinary thinkers, including Colleen Anderson and Step Aument from ReadyRosie, Jake McClure from Salado Montessori, Karen Carradine from Geminus Corp., Joel Saldaña from the National Head Start Association, and Su Fang and Kate Hodges from the University of Texas at Austin. The team also received helpful guidance from Rachel Sibley, an augmented reality expert from Leap Motion.

The team achieved the grand prize for their winning idea of Project *Safe-AR-i* (pronounced “safari”), an Augmented Reality App, similar to Pokémon Go. Wolfe was nominated as team leader.

“Attending the Incubator was an incredible experience,” Wolfe said. “It was extremely rewarding to see the power of interdisciplinary teamwork in action to bring an impactful idea into existence. I’m thrilled for our win and the opportunity to continue working with such an amazing team of thinkers and doers who are passionate about making a difference for children in Head Start.”

“Project *Safe-AR-i* was designed specifically for the early childhood environment in order to provide greater access to a broad range of experiential learning opportunities for children including social-emotional skills, literacy, math and other important areas,” Hupp explained.

Among the event judges were Jennifer Sukis, creative director of Cognitive Experiences for IBM Watson, and Carol Cone, author of *Breakthrough Nonprofit Branding*.

The winning team earned tickets to attend the 8th Annual SXSW EDU (South by Southwest – Education) Conference and Festival in March 2018. According to Hupp, they may also be able to turn their idea into reality with support from the HeadStarter Network and external funding.

“Dr. Jerry Weinberg, dean of the SIUE Graduate School, was the force that brought us together to do the robot-human interaction research that prompted our invitation to this competition,” said Wolfe. “Dr. Weinberg, Dr. Hupp and I plan to continue our interdisciplinary research with robots and children. We may soon add augmented reality experiences into the mix.”

This collaboration was also made possible with help from the [SIUE Head Start/Early Head Start](#) program. “Our Head Start teachers and staff are forward thinking and supportive of new ideas. They always put the needs of the children first and we appreciate the opportunity to work with them to innovate early child education,” said Hupp. “The executive director of the National Head Start Association, Yasmina Vinci,

is the one who invited us all to work together. We are thankful to her and the rest of the staff who made this opportunity possible.”

[Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](#) provides students with a high quality, affordable education that prepares them for successful careers and lives of purpose to shape a changing world. Built on the foundation of a broad-based liberal education, and enhanced by hands-on research and real-world experiences, the academic preparation SIUE students receive equips them to thrive in the global marketplace and make our communities better places to live. Situated on 2,660 acres of beautiful woodland atop the bluffs overlooking the natural beauty of the Mississippi River’s rich bottomland and only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of more than 14,000.