

Coding Camps Build Career Skills

Campus Computer Science Outreach program provides essential knowledge, skills to kids

<http://utdmercury.com/coding-camp-builds-career-skills/>

Nearly 90 computer science students from UTD had the opportunity to coach 1,000 children with their coding skills this summer at the Computer Science Outreach program. These camps help children learn, as well as UTD students who work as instructors to build skills that would be useful in their careers.

“As a public university, we should do more public good,” said Jey Veerasamy, director of Center for Computer Science Education & Outreach. “If we run a program like (CS Outreach), the whole community will know that we are here.”

This program began with one workshop for 50 participants in 2012, and currently caters to nearly 1,500 students. While many of the camps occur during summer, after school clubs and private tutoring are held throughout the year.

Teenaz Ralhan, senior undergraduate computer science student, is a second-year coding instructor.

“I joined outreach because I enjoy working with kids and it obviously strengthens my own knowledge,” Ralhan said. “Our team is very strong and we have a great rapport between all of us and it has been a really positive experience.”

Ralhan said working with students, being able to work as a team leader and being there for students both emotionally and as a problem solver helps her grow as a person and improves her logical-thinking skills.

Outreach camps are designed to cater to students from kindergarten to twelfth grade. Instructors are trained on specific teaching methodologies for these camps. All of them follow a hands-on approach in their teaching to ensure children stay engaged throughout the sessions.

“During the summer, we are fighting with children’s videogame time. We have to make coding as exciting as those games,” Veerasamy said. “If a course is enjoyable, learning happens automatically.”

Vidya Mani, computer science graduate and outreach instructor, said her role as an instructor involves some creativity while designing her classes.

“The (simple) PowerPoint way of teaching doesn’t really work. You have to give examples which are relevant to them,” Mani said. “In general, we pick more of game-based examples, something that they can play around with.”

Hiranya Kumar, a computer science graduate, has been associated with Outreach for over a year. He teaches elementary, as well as advanced, coding languages and said it was a wonderful experience for him.

“(The camp) is a good understanding for me about how the professional world works, how management works and what are the troubles of organizing events,” Kumar said.

He also said it feels great when they receive positive responses from children and parents on their coding camps.

“You feel like you have done something productive,” he said. “It is one of the merits of being an instructor.”