

Contact: Kara Nesimiuk
+974 4454 8490
karan@qatar.cmu.edu

PRESS RELEASE
February 11, 2017

Nour Abdelnasser
+974 7021 8260
nour@bljworldwide.com

CMU-Q aims to introduce computing to 1000 high schoolers

Minecraft outreach program engages students in the precision and possibility of a career in computer science

As computer science becomes integral to more and more fields of study, Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar (CMU-Q) is reaching out to high schoolers to introduce them to the field. The Computer Science Program at CMU-Q has teamed up with Boeing to design and deliver the “Minecraft” workshops, day-long sessions that guide students through computer science disciplines like robotics, cryptography, and computational thinking.

Leading the project is Khaled Harras, program director and associate professor of computer science at CMU-Q: “The National Vision 2030 is to transform Qatar into a knowledge-based economy; computer science knowledge is an unavoidable requirement to help materialize this vision. We have the goal of introducing 1000 high school students in Qatar to computer science over this academic year. We want to have a deep impact.”

Since launching the program in September, 550 students have participated in the Saturday workshops taught by computer science faculty members, researchers and engineers.

“Boeing is proud to support programs that aim to inspire our next generation of leaders and innovators to pursue careers in STEM-related fields,” said Maria Laine, vice president of International Strategic Partnerships for Boeing Defense, Space & Security. “Through this new initiative, students will have access to challenges and workshops that introduce them to a range of computer science material that can help give them the 21st century skills and knowledge they need to be successful long-term.”

“Computing will be important to these students, no matter what they study in university; many advancements in other fields of science, engineering and even humanities have been further enabled with the integration of various computer science disciplines” remarked Harras.

Participant Gabriel Bullen is an 11th grade aspiring filmmaker at Qatar Academy. He learned of Minecraft through his school counsellor. “Computers and technology are of course a major part of life, and they have also become such a big part of filmmaking and art in general. That really made me want to try Minecraft to understand more about how I can use them in my films.”

Just a few hours into the workshop, Mohammed Al-Sayed of the Academic Bridge Program had learned the difference between Java and Python programming languages and used functions to solve tasks. He is now inspired to create his own apps.

“One recent idea that I had that got me quite excited about programming is making a mobile application to create economic competition between garages in Qatar. You could look at the app and see what garages are selling things for, and compare prices,” he says.

Carnegie Mellon University Qatar

While Bullen and Al-Sayed had previous experience with programming, one challenge for the Minecraft facilitators is to create workshops that can accommodate varying levels of student skills without intimidating or excluding anyone.

“We have worked hard to ensure that the Minecraft program is both interesting and educational. We don’t want anyone to feel bored because it is too basic, or left behind because it is too advanced,” says Nour Tabet, outreach coordinator in the Computer Science Program at CMU-Q. She adds that future plans include a similar program aimed at students in grades seven through nine.

Interested students can apply for Minecraft at www.qatar.cmu.edu/future-students/workshops-events/minecraft.

Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar is now accepting applications to the Computer Science Program for fall 2017, as well as its other programs in biological sciences, business administration, computational biology and information systems.

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About Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar

For more than a century, Carnegie Mellon University has challenged the curious and passionate to imagine and deliver work that matters. A private, global university, Carnegie Mellon stands among the world’s most renowned educational institutions, setting its own course with programs that inspire creativity and collaboration. Consistently top-ranked, Carnegie Mellon has more than 13,000 students and 100,000 alumni worldwide.

At the invitation of Qatar Foundation, Carnegie Mellon joined Education City in 2004 to deliver select programs that will support and contribute to the long-term development of Qatar. Today, Carnegie Mellon Qatar offers undergraduate programs in biological sciences, business administration, computational biology, computer science, and information systems. More than 400 students from 40 countries call Carnegie Mellon Qatar home.

Graduates from CMU-Q are highly sought-after: most choose careers in top organizations, both in Qatar and around the world, while a significant number pursue graduate studies at international institutions. With nine graduating classes, the total number of alumni is 570.

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