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QCRI INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME CONTINUES TO PIQUE STUDENT INTEREST

Growth underscores importance of institute's mission to develop Qatar's computing research capacity

Doha, 21 October 2014: Since its inauguration, the Qatar Computing Research Institute's (QCRI) Summer Internship Programme has grown to become one of the most sought after computer science trainee programmes in Qatar. As part of Qatar Foundation Research and Development, QCRI promotes educational and training initiatives which encourage students to pursue a career in research and science.

During the third summer internship cycle this year, QCRI admitted 30 undergraduate students from universities in Qatar, India, the US, the UK, France and Algeria. They were mentored by 24 QCRI scientists working across the Institute's six research departments for eight weeks. QCRI commemorated the end of the 2014 programme with a closing ceremony last month, where the interns presented the results of their research.

Launched in 2012, the Summer Internship Programme's inaugural intake was of six undergraduate students from Qatar University and Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar (CMUQ). In 2013, the programme grew to 22 students hailing from universities in Qatar, the UK, Egypt and India. QCRI received over 100 applications for 2014. Such growth and focus on the programme underscores its importance in QCRI's mission to develop computing research capacity in Qatar.

The programme offers a variety of practical and hands on projects from which students can choose, providing them an opportunity to develop their innovation and technical skills. While the programme has attracted much interest by students locally as well as internationally, QCRI is cautious to keep its focus and ensure a valuable experience and meaningful research results.

"The growing interest we have seen is due to the fact that some students work on real projects that are part of ongoing research underway at QCRI, while other students help us explore concepts that we would otherwise not be able to fit into our agenda," said Dr Stephan Vogel, Research Director of Arabic Language Technologies and co-founder of the internship programme. "This year the programme reached the ideal size in order to maintain the standard for students in future, which means we have reached the point where we have had to turn applicants away."

Qatari graduate Kamla Al Manna is a Qatar Science Leadership Program trainee and returned to the QCRI Summer Internship Programme for the second time this year. Having graduated from Texas A&M University at Qatar with an electrical engineering degree, she went on to explore language at CMUQ.

“During my first internship at QCRI, I worked on Arabic language technology because of my interest in computer science,” said Kamla. “Then after having taken some language courses at CMUQ, I came back to QCRI this year to work on the machine learning programme in order to apply what I had learned.”

Similarly, Shailja Relwani is a recent computer science graduate from CMUQ, who joined the QCRI Summer Internship Programme as part of the team working on botnet analyses.

“Botnets are a malware which attackers can use to control infected devices or machine at any point in time,” said the CMUQ graduate. “So for eight weeks I was part of a team that conducted experiments on five botnets, all involved in-click fraud and the stealing of financial information, in order to collect data and visualise the results.”

Although Relwani and her fellow interns were faced with challenges, the QCRI mentors were always on hand to help. “The mentors were really supportive throughout my time at QCRI because they provided us with tools and guidance we needed to build on their work,” she added.

Similar student efforts from previous years have often resulted in real life successes and include the launch of the Humanitarian Computing Library: an organised compilation of academic articles and papers on topics related to humanitarian computing, developed and executed as part of QCRI’s 2013 summer internship programme.

Another of QCRI’s interns from the inaugural class, Baljit Singh a graduate of CMUQ, used the skills and techniques he learned while working on his summer project to implement iPad and iPhone versions of *Madar Al-Huruf*, a mobile application that introduces native English speakers to the Arabic alphabet created by Qatar Foundation International.

“Having access to young minds through our internship programme is a rewarding experience as we see more students interested in research and acquiring a taste to conduct it, as they bring a richness of ideas that are frankly baffling and magnificent,” said Dr Francisco J. Guzman Herrera, who is a scientist in Arabic Language Technologies and co-founder of the Summer Internship Programme. “Whenever you see more mentors involved with students it is very gratifying because this programme is part of QCRI’s community development initiative, aligned with Qatar Foundation’s three pillars of Education, Science and Community Development.”

Meanwhile, the number of women admitted into this QCRI’s Summer Internship Programme this year slightly outnumbered the men. This reflects a growing regional trend that is seeing more women take up interest in computer science - a phenomenon currently being investigated by regional researchers.

“Usually in the computer science and technology field men outnumber women, which is an issue that is being taken very seriously in the western world,” said Dr Eman Fituri, Director of Educational Initiatives at QCRI. “However, here in Qatar, and the rest of the Arab world, it is the other way around, because it seems that Arab women are not intimidated by computer science, as they do not regard it as male dominated profession.”

Several of the interns from the 2013 class presented at last year’s Qatar Foundation Annual Research Conference, and walked away with first and third prizes in the student posters category.

“The prizes were a nice success that enabled the students to showcase the work they did at QCRI over the summer in a larger forum,” added Dr. Vogel. “We hope to be as successful this year too.”

As a principal constituent of Qatar Foundation Research and Development, QCRI is one of three national research institutes established by Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development. QCRI is focused on tackling large-scale computing challenges that address national priorities for growth and development.

For more information on QCRI, please visit www.qcri.qa

Photo Caption

Image 1: Dr Ahmed Elmagarmid, Executive Director of Qatar Computing Research Institute, delivering opening remarks at the ceremony celebrating students’ success at the summer internship programme.

Image 2: Ali Khalil El Dous, of Qatar University, accepting his internship certificate from Dr Stephan Vogel, QCRI’s Research Director of Arabic Language Technologies.

Image 3: Tamim Jabban, of Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, pictured left, discussing his work at the students’ internship programme celebration.

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For more information, please contact:

Kimberly Mathern
Qatar Computing Research Institute
Tel: +(974) 4454 2515
Mob: +(974) 6645 5177
Email: kmathern@qf.org.qa

About Qatar Computing Research Institute

Qatar Computing Research Institute (QCRI) was established in 2010 by Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, a private, non-profit organization that is supporting Qatar's transformation from a hydrocarbon-based economy to knowledge-based economy.

A primary constituent of QF Research and Development, QCRI is a national research institute supporting Qatar Foundation's mission to build Qatar's innovation and technology capacity by focusing on large-scale computing challenges that address national priorities for growth and development.

In doing this, QCRI conducts world-class multidisciplinary computing research that is relevant to the needs of Qatar, the wider Arab region, and the world. It performs cutting-edge research in such areas as Arabic language technologies, social computing, data analytics, distributed systems, cyber security and computational science and engineering.

The research conducted at QCRI is aligned with the Qatar National Research Strategy and supports the strategic priorities outlined in the Qatar National Vision 2030. For more information, please visit www.qcri.qa.

About Qatar Foundation Research and Development (QF R&D)

Leading Qatar's vision to become an international center for research and development excellence and innovation, QF R&D is home to Qatar Science & Technology Park (QSTP), a world-class hub for technology innovation and commercialization, as well as the Qatar National Research Fund (QNRF), a globally renowned scientific research funding organisation, and prominent research institutes operating at the frontiers of science, including Qatar Biomedical Research Institute (QBRI), Qatar Computing Research Institute (QCRI) and Qatar Energy and Environment Research Institute (QEERI).