ADAM STANKIEWICZ ’15

WEBSITE WHIZ, HONOR STUDENT, CHAMPION BOOMERANG THROWER

Stankiewicz’s career in computer science actually began as a result of his passion for riding unicycles. As a freshman in high school, he started a website about unicycles, using professional software for building websites. He soon began teaching himself how to build web pages on his own so he would no longer have to pay for the software. When it came time to apply to colleges, Stankiewicz found that there were not a lot of undergraduate programs that focused specifically on web design and development. The University of Hartford’s MWD program seemed to be a good fit.

Two UHart faculty members in particular have had a significant impact on him: Larissa Schroeder, assistant professor of mathematics, and former MWD faculty member Brian Dom, who is now at the University of Nebraska-Omaha. It was Dom who encouraged Stankiewicz to get involved in a project involving collaborative discussion of video content among students. Stankiewicz and Dom are still working on the project, together with Schroeder.

“He [Dom] introduced me to the research world, and I have not turned back since,” Stankiewicz says. “If it weren’t for him, I would definitely not be going to grad school for a PhD this fall.”

Stankiewicz and Dom have co-written papers on their project. In March, Stankiewicz joined Dom at an international conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, where Dom gave a presentation on their work.

During his undergraduate career, Stankiewicz completed technical internships at three different companies, and he did a summer research internship at Carnegie Mellon. But even with his success in the computer science world, he plans to maintain his status as one of the world’s best boomerang throwers. As a member of the U.S. Boomerang Team, Stankiewicz competed in the 2014 World Boomerang Cup in Porto Alegre, Brazil, where he finished eighth out of 74 individual competitors. He also competed in the 2012 World Boomerang Cup in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Stankiewicz plans to compete in three regional tournaments this year. He is hoping to make the team for the next World Boomerang Cup, which will take place in 2016 in Cologne, Germany.

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“The Hartford Hand Project is how much time and effort the students and Wininger have put into the project, not all of it with pay or course credit. Most say they are grateful for the experience,” says Beasley. “Having Stephanie’s skill set last summer for the project was so important to getting us to where we are today,” says Beasley. Hebert, a biomedical engineering major, was recommended to the Hartford Hand Project by CETA Assistant Professor Mary Arico.

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“This project is very interesting,” says Beasley, “and it’s something that has been happening for a number of years.”

For those students interested in helping patients as well as learning the technology, they have put their hearts and souls into this project. Next year, his plans to recruit undergraduates so they will have an opportunity to work for a longer period of time on the project.

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“I’m very surprised and proud with where it’s gone. It’s going to be big to leave the project behind.” Beasley, who graduated in May, plans to do residencies in prosthetics and orthotics in the Washington, D.C., area before going to graduate school for a doctoral degree, possibly in biomedical engineering. “In observing patients in clinic work as an undergraduate, Beasley had made an important discovery: patients had difficulty using their prosthetic hands, sometimes even rejecting them, and then she noticed why. The fingers of prosthetic hands do not bear much resemblance to actual human fingers. For one thing, all the fingers on a prosthetic hand tend to be the same size. And for that matter, all prosthetic hands tend to be the same size. Also, Beasley observed, they were missing the fat pads on the inner side of the fingers that are vital to human grasp.

Beasley began working with Wininger, assistant professor of mechanical engineering, to design a finger that more closely mimics a human one. They began with an index finger in the summer of 2013, successfully completing the final prototype in early 2014. By that time, two other P&O students, Jos Casella M’15 and Steve Sousa ’14, M’16, were also working on the project.

The next step was to build an entire prosthetic hand, and on the Hartford Hand Project began in the spring of 2014. This team grew to six, now including Frank Finelli ’15, an entrepreneurial studies major, who was recommended by Associate Professor Irina Naumov of the Barney School of Business. Finelli’s assignment was to build a business plan for the project. Michelle Swanson M’16, who joined the project in fall 2014 and hopes one day to manage a P&O practice, assisted Finelli in the preparation of the 100-page business plan.

“Why a business plan?” says Wininger. “I’m very interested in getting students involved from across the campus. A lot of students here have interests that are similar to our own. The second reason is a national student design competition run by the Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America, or RESNA. Frank’s work on the business plan, which deals only with the finger, has been vital to our submission to the contest.” With the plan, they sent along photos and videos, as well as a 2,000-word paper explaining their research, in mid-April; a decision will be made in mid-June.

One of the biggest challenges was to apply classroom theory to the real world. But that’s not all, according to Wininger.

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