

Engineering students create original app to educate children about severe weather

Aaron Howell, Assistant News Editor | Posted: Monday, June 16, 2014 12:08 pm

Engineering students created an app to help children understand the weather by simulating flight plans. This will give them a bird's eye perspective of real life weather situations, including tornados.

"Storm Evader," made for iPad, is a game with positive underlying themes. Amy McGovern, associate professor of computer science and adjunct associate professor of meteorology, started the project over two years ago.

"We really wanted to focus on finding a way to combine research and outreach, and I think we have," McGovern said.

McGovern received a \$600,000 grant from the National Science Foundation. She went on to form a team of three College of Engineering students, David Harrison, Marissa Been and Andrea Balfour.

Together they worked full time over the past two summers and part time in the fall and spring to create "Storm Evader."

"It was hard but fun work," Harrison said. "Our goal was to get a young audience interested in weather."

"Storm Evader" was created as a game with typical functions like career mode, free play and tutorials, only with hidden meteorology themes. Players select a date in the past year, and the app will access the weather activity that occurred that day. Players then have to plan their simulated flights according to the weather from that day.

By using everyday activities, they have tried to show the relationship of interpreting weather into a real world application. They hope this will lead to a better understanding of weather in younger audiences. They chose to make the attempt to convey this message through a game in hopes to make weather more relatable to children.



Storm Defenders

Amy McGovern, associate professor of Computer Science, and Engineering student David Harrison show off their new app, "Storm Defenders." The app educates young children about the weather by engaging them in a flight-simulation game.

“Ultimately we just want to make weather fun,” Beene said.

The team originally met in McGovern's classes, which is where they began the process of making the app. In the coming year, they hope their game can educate students across the nation about how weather patterns work.

“It feels good to reach out to people,” said Balfour. “Being able to work together on something that would become available to the public was really cool, because I would not have that opportunity otherwise.”

They are in the process of creating more games to be released in the following years. “Storm Evader” is free to download under the OU educational license.