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Penn Libraries to Host PennApps Competition

PHILADELPHIA, PA, August 30, 2013 - On September 6, the University of Pennsylvania will host [PennApps](#), the largest student-run hackathon in the world. As part of the event, the Penn Libraries will hold a competition for 200 hackathon participants. The team that develops the best app using library data will win a \$500 cash prize.

The Libraries' contribution to the data pool will draw from the Schoenberg Database of Manuscripts, a vast cache of information which tracks the historical movement of medieval manuscripts among collectors and libraries. The Libraries will also offer data from the Penn Provenance Project, which uses Flickr to record the origin of items now in Penn's rare book collections. The possibilities for revealing useful patterns in collection building—and finding the next big thing—are virtually endless.

In addition to data, the Libraries will provide the competing teams with work space in the newly renovated Special Collections Center. It's an inspirational setting for these scribes of the digital age—for the mingling of ancient and modern forms of writing. And it's precisely the program the Libraries envisioned when imagining the kinds of events a center for rare and unique printed works might support.

Founded four years ago, PennApps has attracted more than 1,600 applicants from the top computer science programs around the globe. Of the thousand selected to compete, roughly 650 will be from this international pool, with the rest coming from the Penn campus.

At the heart of the immersive experience of a hackathon is the idea that the most instructive experience with coding can take place outside the walls of a classroom. Will Noel, Director of the Special Collections Center and the Schoenberg Institute for Manuscript Studies at Penn Libraries, believes that “including library data in the hack pool, and encouraging use of that data through a cash prize, will help introduce computer science students from Penn and around the world to the significance of library data.”

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Philadelphia Mayor Michael A. Nutter kicks off the event Friday evening with an opening address. Teams working in the Engineering Quad and in Van Pelt will have until Sunday morning to conceive, code and polish a web or mobile application, which they will demonstrate at an expo held in the Palestra from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Judges will select the top 20 applications to advance to the final round. These teams will face off with demos in a live event in Irvine Auditorium from 2 to 5 p.m., culminating with an award ceremony that will distribute at least \$25,000 in prizes. The top team will take home \$10,000.

Previous contestants have gone on to commercialize their creations and turn them into start-up businesses, such as [Firefly](#), [PayTango](#) and [Pagevamp](#).

PennApps receives backing from major technology and venture capital companies. In addition to furnishing some of the prizes, representatives of these firms will attend the events, providing both technical insights and networking opportunities for the contestants.

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