

ITLS Doctoral Students 'Hack the Garden' | CEHS

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Not everyone who tries to plant a garden has the proverbial 'green thumb,' which is why a group of doctoral students in the ITLS program at Utah State developed a prototype indoor gardening system. Complete with text message notifications and the ability to automatically water plants when the soil is too dry, the system earned the students a first-place prize at the annual Hack-The-Garden event, hosted at Thanksgiving Point.

The system was impressive enough that onlookers asked the students if it was available for purchase. The prototype is not yet complete, but the students plan to finish it and share the completed designs on the internet.

"Being instructional designers, our aim was to teach others how to make these systems," said Ryan Cain, one of the competitors on the USU team.

Teams at the event were instructed to make a low or high-tech 'hack' that made gardening easier in some way using simple, everyday items like cardboard, scrap wood, or tin. Competitors were provided with a few supplies, including simple coding technology, which the USU team used to develop its system.

"I took this as an opportunity to expose myself to new experiences and learn new skills," said Katarina Pantic, another doctoral student on the team. "I wanted to be involved in a project where I would participate in a design process, make something new, and learn along the way."

Working closely with a team and being successful in their project was an enjoyable experience for the USU competitors.

"What I enjoyed most was the teamwork—seeing how different people fit together, how they think," Pantic said. "Being able to contribute myself to the whole dynamic with both my ideas and work was very gratifying."

