

ITLS Students Take First Place in NATO Design Competition | CEHS

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A unique training solution designed by two Utah State University students using available technology just took 1st place in an international design competition and has the potential for worldwide deployment by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Michelle Jensen and Aprel Mendenhall, graduate students in USU's Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences Department in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services, won top honors in the 2019 Design and Development Competition at the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) International Conference in Las Vegas on October 22.

NATO, an intergovernmental alliance formed in 1949 after the end of World War II, is looking for educational technology that can be used to train new employees and provide ongoing instruction to all staff members, even during deployment. The agency also has a large population of knowledgeable employees whose retirement is pending.

"One of the things NATO was concerned about was capturing tacit knowledge from within the organization," Jensen said.

To meet these needs of the organization, Mendenhall and Jensen created the *Knowing NATO* app, which contains microlearning modules based on NATO and user-generated content. The app features social connections and motivational elements such as badges, likes, and followers to encourage users to share their knowledge.

"Part of our plan was to create this socialized app that motivates people to submit video snippets, articles, podcasts, and infographics to share with others," Jensen said.

The competition was sponsored by NATO's warfare development command, [Allied Command Transformation](#). Competitors researched microlearning and recommended a plan to implement it to train NATO officers, helping them

connect employees from 29 different nations. Judges found that the solution created by Jensen and Mendenhall excelled in terms of theoretical excellence, creativity, and feasibility.

One problem the team tackled with *Knowing NATO* was how to effectively connect officers all over the world who have different political, ethnic, cultural, and philosophical points of view.

"We believe the socialization element of our app will encourage officers and staff to build valuable relationships," Mendenhall said.

Jensen and Mendenhall said they found invaluable consultants and resources in many mentors, including Jeannemarie Sierant of Socratic Arts in Chicago and Dr. Kristy Bloxham, a USU ITLS professor who was a previous finalist in the AECT competition. Their ITLS courses provided a solid foundation, the collaborators agreed.

"Everything we've learned is sprinkled throughout the project," Jensen said.

Dr. Andy Walker, ITLS department head, said he was impressed with the team's responsive design capabilities. At a reception of the night before the competition, Jensen and Mendenhall asked a NATO official about the top five concerns facing the organization.

"Like any great designers, Michelle and Aprel were collecting data right up to the last minute," Walker said. "Based on some of his responses, they restructured their presentation to emphasize capturing institutional knowledge."

Salih Cem Kumsal, Civilian Training Technologies Staff Officer from NATO, was so impressed with the duo's prototype that he asked them to present their design at the NATO Training Technology Conference in Virginia Beach in June 2020.

"[Kumsal] wants to consult with us and incorporate our ideas into a microlearning platform for NATO officers and staff," Mendenhall said.

Jensen and Mendenhall's success has also been featured by [Cache Valley Daily](#) and [Markets Insider](#).

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