

SBTDC Tech Team members with Summer Consultancy Program interns



## Tech time

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Josh Ritch from Western Carolina University during his final presentation



Graduate student intern Josh Ritch summed up his time working with two technology-based companies as a part of the Small Business and Technology Development Center's Summer Consultancy Program simply: "It was quite an amazing experience."

Each year the SBTDC hires highly qualified graduate students from North Carolina universities to work with technology-based companies. This is the 18th year John Ujvari, SBTDC's SBIR Program Specialist and member of the Technology Commercialization Services team, or Tech Team, has run the summer internship program.

The SBTDC is a business and technology extension program of the UNC System, administered by North Carolina State University and operated in partnership with the U.S. Small Business Administration. SBTDC's business counselors assist small- and mid-size businesses throughout North Carolina from 16 offices across the state, each affiliated with a college or university.

The SBTDC's Tech Team focuses on providing counseling and resources to small business owners, university researchers and entrepreneurs looking to advance their innovations to the marketplace. These innovations typically involve intellectual property which has a strong competitive advantage in the marketplace and serves as a foundation for the business.

Growing technology firms often need access to hands-on business skills and expertise to help their ventures advance to

the next level. The Summer Consultancy Program matches selected student interns with well-defined commercialization projects chosen by the businesses. Throughout the summer, the Tech Team provides in-depth mentorship to the students and monitor their projects to make sure the deliverables are achieved. Six group meetings are held with all the interns to discuss their projects, encourage knowledge sharing, hold practice pitch sessions and present final project deliverables.

This summer, 12 graduate student interns from across the state are working with 24 small businesses. Projects include primary market research, financial analysis, commercialization plan development, market assessments, competitive analysis and others. Participating schools have included North Carolina State University, UNC-Chapel Hill, Duke, Western Carolina University, UNC-Charlotte and Appalachian State. The students receive a stipend that is paid by the SBTDC and the universities the students are enrolled in.

Josh Ritch worked with two technology-based companies in western North Carolina and was able to gain networking skills and add to his resume. "I'd never written an NSF [National Science Foundation] grant before and hadn't really done a lot of accounting outside my class, so I had a chance to work in those areas," Josh says.

The SBTDC has offered the Summer Consultancy Program for 18 years, during which 165 students have worked with over

300 clients for a total of 65,000 hours. Economic development impacts associated with their consulting work include well over \$200 million in funding from both private equity and Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grant infusions.

Past interns have gone on to land full-time positions at companies of all sizes in a multitude of industries around the world. A handful have taken on the challenge of starting their own businesses, some of which have grown significantly and achieved successful financial exits for their founders.

With the Summer Consulting Program, everyone wins. Graduate student interns gain hands-on experience with technology-based entrepreneurial companies. Companies receive high-quality assistance from motivated students learning the newest theory and techniques. State universities provide invaluable real-world experiences for their students and the SBTDC's Tech Team is able to expand its bandwidth and offer significantly greater services to clients.

> Consultancy Program  
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