

Durban computer whiz-kid to rub shoulders with Microsoft's big guns

STEPHEN COAN

DURBAN University of Technology (DUT) student Pivendren Naik (21) is heading for Microsoft headquarters in Redmond near Seattle, Washington, in the United States, thanks to being chosen as the South African Microsoft Student Partner (MSP) of the Year for 2013.

Naik's first encounter with Microsoft came about by a combination of chance and perseverance when he was in the second semester of his first year at DUT.

"I saw a poster on campus advertising the Lumia Hackathon," said Naik. "It was the day before the event and registration had closed."

Undeterred, Naik did a computer search and found the Twitter address of one of the speakers, mLab CEO Derick Coetzee. Naik contacted him and said he was keen to attend and Coetzee put him in touch with the event organisers. "By the end of the afternoon I was registered," said Naik.

The Hackathon revolves around creating apps and Naik obviously made an impression as he was later contacted by academic developer adviser at Microsoft SA, Nyaladzi Mpofu, and asked if he would like to become an MSP.

Naik, who grew up in Newlands West and attended Briardale Primary and New West Secondary, recalls opting to study information technology during Grade 9 — "that was when we had to decide on our subjects for Grade 10. It was the second year our school had offered it. I went for the orientation session and it sounded cool to type code for computers — to tell them what to do and they did it."

Naik's programming skills really took off at DUT where he is doing a National Diploma in engineering, focusing on engineering in computer systems. "It's a bridge between electronic engineering and IT."

As an MSP, Naik has access to the MSP programme, a worldwide educational programme designed to enhance a student's employability by providing training skills not usually taught in academic institutions.

MSP students are expected to share the knowledge and skills they gain with the wider academic community. "I set up events aimed at the training and transfer of knowledge to other students," said Naik. Though the majority of students attending tended to be from the



DUT student Pivendren Naik has been chosen as South African Microsoft Student Partner of the Year and will be heading to the Microsoft headquarters in the U.S. for the student partner summit.

PHOTO: STEPHEN COAN

IT field, such events were open to "anyone who was interested".

Events such as Phone Fridays looked at Windows phone development. "We would explore the Windows eco-system and students would create their own apps," said Naik.

This led to Naik being employed as an intern by Roguecode, who make apps for

a number of South African companies, including Media24, SuperSport and DSTV.

Roguecode CEO Matt Cavanagh had been advised to find an intern to assist him. "I didn't have the time to train up somebody," said Cavanagh. "But there was this random guy who I came across who organised most of the events that I helped at. Initiative is a rare thing to

find in students." And so "random guy" Naik went rogue.

MSPs are also required to provide quarterly performance reports to the local Microsoft office, in turn passed on to Microsoft HQ in Redmond. Naik's performance led to his being chosen as one of 30 top international MSPs out of a field of 7 000.

Naik will attend the Microsoft Student Partner summit from July 29 to August 2, 2014 in Redmond. "We will spend a week of intense training," said Naik.

Looking further ahead, Naik hopes to complete his Bachelor of Technology and Master of Technology degrees in engineering.

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