

## CTG Online News

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### Students Create Data Visualizations for a Healthier New York

Three UAlbany graduate students spent this summer honing their programming and research skills by making charts, tables, graph and scatter plots come visually to life for the benefit of a more healthy New York.

Working at the Center of Technology in Government (CTG) on a project with the New York State Department of Health (DOH) as part of CTG UAlbany's Student Technology Innovations Lab Experience (STILE) program, Meet Parikh, Varun Narayanan and Sora Park developed software that can create interactive data visualizations using publicly available data from New York's Health Data NY website.

Parikh and Narayanan are graduate students in the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences and Park is a doctoral student in Rockefeller College's Department of Public Administration and Policy.

Health Data NY is part of Gov. Andrew Cuomo's open data initiative, Sora worked closely with her UAlbany colleagues and DOH staff to assess if such visualizations would improve the usefulness of the health information by both internal DOH staff and some external stakeholders. In addition, she documented any efficiencies achieved by the new software compared to the current processes for making the health data available.

"CTG UAlbany's STILE program has provided a tremendous opportunity for the Health Data NY program to expand its capability in presenting our own health data," said Natalie Helbig, director of Health Data NY for DOH. "We learned a great deal about what makes a good open dataset and ways to improve how we publish data."

The students demonstrated the visualizations they created to officials from DOH and received feedback on their work in a real-world, practical setting (pictured at right in photo is Chitra Iyer of DOH). In addition to making the visualizations user-friendly, a major focus of this exploratory project was to build the coding in a way that would be reusable. Reusable code allows state agencies like DOH to modify and build on the visualizations by adding additional data sets and improving the ways the health data is made available. The project was funded through DOH by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

"Working on this project was a great experience because our supervisors were very supportive and provided us with ample time to learn technologies we were not familiar with, but at the same time, there was freedom to explore and learn as we went along and worked through challenges," Narayanan said. "This has really helped me feel more confident in launching my career."

"As a researcher in training, my research usually involves a lot of independent work and very rarely do I work with colleagues in another field, so working in a multidisciplinary team at CTG was fascinating," Park said. "We were able to really feed off one another's ideas and accomplish more because everyone had a different role in the team. They incorporated my ideas and research in our new data visualization tools and I was so excited to see my ideas become actualized."

The STILE program recruits students at UAlbany, as well as nationally and internationally, for experiential learning opportunities through CTG projects with state and local agencies. The program responds to increasing demand from government partners looking to find innovative solutions to pressing challenges.