

UNH LunaCats Mine the Moon

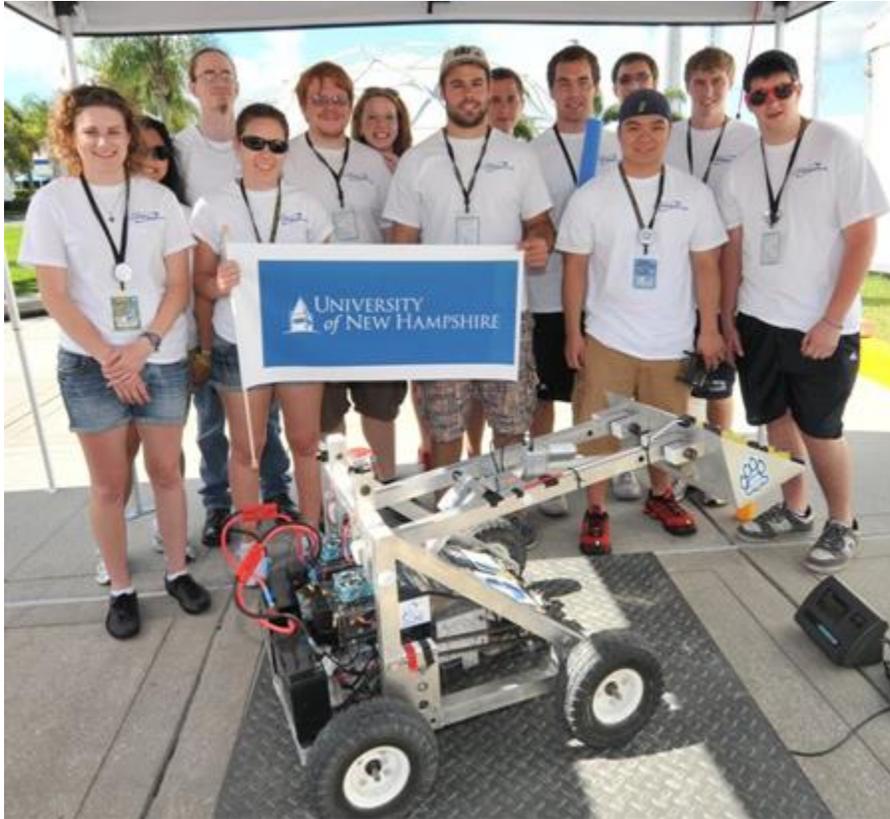
Thursday, June 21, 2012

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SALL-E, THE LUNABOT CREATED FOR COMPETITION BY THE UNH LUNACATS.
At the end of May, 11 UNH students took their senior project to the moon.

The simulated moon, that is, of the Kennedy Space Center's LunArena in Florida. There, the students – the UNH LunaCats – competed against 60 other universities in NASA's third annual Lunabotics Mining Competition. Each team created a robot that could mine the surface of the moon for resources; the UNH entry, nicknamed SALL-E, resembles a small Bobcat skid steer tricked out with impressive electronics.



LUNABOTICS 2012TEAM.JPG: THE 2012 UNH LUNACATS. L-R: CALEIGH MACPHERSON, ADVISOR MAY-WIN THEIN (HIDDEN), JONATHAN WILSON, CAMILLE POULIN, ANTHONY MORIN, ELIZABETH CAMPBELL, TADD SMITH, JACOB CHAMBERLIN (PARTIALLY HIDDEN), ANDREW KENNEDY, HAO HOANG, PATRICK MERRILL (BEHIND HAO), ERIC BEISWENGER, JARON PETERS.

Designed to engage university students in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields and to seek innovations in lunar excavation, the competition pitted lunabots against the clock, challenging them to dig up at least 10 kilograms of simulated lunar regolith – moon dirt – in 10 minutes and rewarding one point for each 10 kilograms that followed.

In this, their second entry into the Lunabotics fray, the LunaCats mined a whopping 31.8 kilograms of regolith, finishing a respectable ninth despite having to forfeit one of their rounds due to malfunctioning electronics.



UNH MECHANICAL ENGINEERING STUDENTS ANDREW KENNEDY '12 AND ERIC BEISWENGER '12 PREPARE THE UNH LUNABOT, SALL-E, FOR COMPETITION IN THE LUNARENA AT KENNEDY SPACE CENTER.

“We were pretty happy with ninth, especially with only one round of competition,” says team leader Caleigh MacPherson '12, a mechanical engineering major. MacPherson was joined in Florida by the team of LunaCats who worked throughout the year to design and build SALL-E: mechanical engineering seniors Hao Hoang, Andrew Kennedy, Jaron Peters, Tadd Smith, Jacob Chamberlain, Eric Beiswenger, Elizabeth Campbell, Camille Poulin, and Anthony Morin; and computer science seniors Jonathan Wilson and Patrick Merrill. May-Win Thein, associate professor of mechanical engineering, served as their advisor.

MacPherson, who is continuing at UNH for a master's degree, is already planning for next year's LunaCats, for which she will serve as graduate advisor. She'll work on pulling together a team earlier in the year, to maximize the time they have to design and test their next generation lunabot. And, by bringing the lunabot to local schools, museums, and events – this past year, the team did nearly 20 outreach events -- MacPherson and the LunaCats always have their sights set on recruiting the next generation of LunaCats.

Originally published by:
UNH Today

Written by [Beth Potier](#), UNH Media Relations



University of New Hampshire

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The stories are written by the staff of [UNH Communications and Public Affairs](#).
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