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UNH's New Information Technology Program Fills Marketplace Need

Beth Potier

UNH Media Relations

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UNH's New Information Technology Program Fills Marketplace Need

Media Contact: [Beth Potier](#)
603-862-1566
UNH Media Relations

Contact for Information: [Israel Yost](#)
603-862-2245
Department of Computer Science

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DURHAM, N.H. - In response to a growing demand among employers, the University of New Hampshire will launch its new Bachelor of Science in information technology degree with the major's first freshman class this fall. The program, an option of the computer science department in the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences (CEPS), will prepare students for careers in information technology, or IT, within a variety of industries.

Within computer science, IT focuses less on creating software than on applying existing computer technologies to the information needs of a business or institution. As an academic field, IT has reached maturity only in the past few years, says Israel Yost, lecturer and program director for the major; currently, many people working in the information technology field have academic backgrounds in something else.

While industry's needs for information technology have boomed in the past decade, students pursuing computer science degrees have dropped at UNH and elsewhere since the dot-com bust of the early part of this decade. Although tech jobs returned to their 1990s levels by 2003, public perception did not, says Phil Hatcher, professor of computer science and chair of the department.

"There's a tremendous demand for people who are able to help companies utilize software to drive their business," says Hatcher.

Because "you don't do IT in a vacuum," he says, the new program requires students to choose a second discipline outside IT to better understand how an industry utilizes information. The department offers secondary focus disciplines in business administration, justice studies and health management and policy, but students can design their own.

Internships – most of them paid – are a hallmark of the existing computer science degree, and it's expected that IT majors will take advantage of the many opportunities to work in industry while pursuing their degrees. "New Hampshire is a great place to study computer science because we're a high-tech center," says Hatcher, who anticipates students will find internships in UNH's own computer information systems department as well as with nearby businesses. "Local industries love hiring our students," he adds.

And with this new degree, says Hatcher, UNH can ensure that New Hampshire's high technology sector continues to find a well-trained workforce close to home. "We're trying to help the state keep its high-tech orientation by producing the right kind of employees," says Hatcher, adding that graduates of the computer science department are "highly employable."

For more information on the new Bachelor of Science degree in information technology, go to <http://www.cs.unh.edu/bsit.htm>.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 11,800 undergraduate and 2,400 graduate students.

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