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DURHAM, N.H. — A team of University of New Hampshire business and engineering students won first place in their task at the 2008 Environmental Design Contest held April 6-9, 2008, at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, N.M.

This year's team, Retrolutions, retrofitted an existing commercial building to reduce its environmental footprint. The 14-member team was so impressive that they have been invited to present their project at the EPA Science Forum in Washington, DC, May 20–22, 2008.

The students developed the project EARTH (Education, Awareness, Reduction, Technology, and Holistic Approach), an integrated plan to retrofit a building in Phoenix. They conducted energy and water audits, and suggested reducing the demand of energy and water through education and awareness of the building’s occupants as well as by employing existing technologies. They designed three technologies -- a grey water recycling system, a solar concentrating energy production system, and a compressed air enhanced evaporative cooling system -- that could be implemented to minimize the buildings energy and water demands.

The competition is an important bridge from a student’s academic career to a real-world career, according to Jenna Jambeck, research assistant professor of civil and environmental engineering and a faculty advisor to the team.

“This is the first time they organize as an interdisciplinary group, have real deadlines to meet, prepare professional deliverables such as reports, PowerPoint presentations, poster presentations and bench-scale demonstrations, and are judged by outsiders. They put all their knowledge of their time at UNH into practice. This helps them to gain confidence, grow and evolve beyond the classroom while still here at UNH,” Jambeck said.

Faculty advisor Jeffrey Sohl, who directs the UNH Center for Venture Research, agreed. As a former engineer who now is a professor in the Whittemore School of Business and Economics, he believes it is critical for engineers to be exposed to the business side of engineering and for business students to understand technology.

“The competition gives the business students hands-on experience with developing a technology in the lab and understanding the commercialization process. As a faculty member it is a great feeling to hear the business students talk knowledgeably about the technology and likewise to hear engineers discuss bottom-line implications,” Sohl said.

Business administration student and Retrolutions team member Cara Hayward found the competition a valuable experience.
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“This competition allowed me to actually apply what I am learning in the classroom. I was able to assist in all stages of technology development as well as plan the commercialization of the technology. This was an invaluable experience because I now feel as though I can make that transfer from the classroom to the real world in any situation,” she said.

In addition to the first-place win, Scott Cloutier of Rochester won the Terry McManus Memorial Student Award. The other members of the UNH team were Justin Butterfield of Pittsfield; Amy Conaty of Dighton, Mass.; Tyler Crowe of Littleton; Owen Friend-Gray of Nottingham; Patrick Hartnett of Hampstead; Cara Hayward of Acton, Mass.; John Heaney of East Kingston; Zachary Magdol of West Hartford, Conn.; Jesse Medeiros of Rochester; Hillary Schmidline of East Greenwich, Rhode Island; Jeff Senders of Camden, Maine; Greg Sereni of Sanbornto; and Philip Trzcinski of Londonderry.

The competition, sponsored by WERC: A Consortium for Environmental Education and Technology Development, challenges student teams to develop solutions for real-world environmental problems that have been submitted by various companies and government institutions. Thirty-three teams from 23 universities including 190 participants from around the United States, Bogazici University in Turkey, the Universities of Manitoba, and Waterloo in Canada, and a team from Universidad de las Américas in Puebla, Mexico, competed.

The WERC consortium is comprised of New Mexico State University (its administrative location), the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology, the University of New Mexico, Diné College, Los Alamos and Sandia National Laboratories.

PHOTOS

http://www.unh.edu/news/img/werc_jump.jpg
Members of the Retrolutions team enjoy themselves at White Sands National Monument in New Mexico during a break from the competition.

http://www.unh.edu/news/img/werc1.jpg
UNH students John Heaney and Tyler Crowe demonstrate the Retrolutions Fresnel Lens solar concentrator technology to the judges at the competition

http://www.unh.edu/news/img/werc2.jpg
Members of Retrolutions present their poster and bench scale technologies to the judges. Pictured from left to right behind bench are Phillip Trzcinski, Jeff Senders, Greg Sereni and Amy Conaty. Pictured to the right of the judges is Cara Hayward.