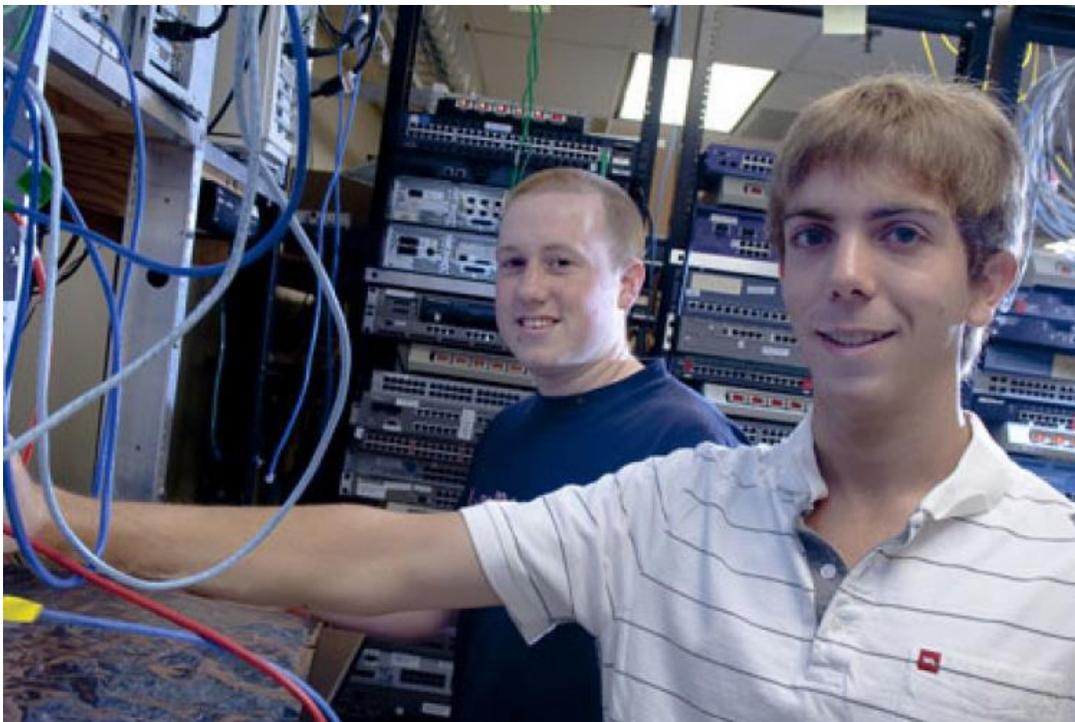


Making Connections with the InterOperability Lab

25 years of technological testing and training future generations of engineers

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If your Dell computer prints to your HP printer and your smartphone programs your TV, you might thank some UNH students.

For 25 years, students have powered the University of New Hampshire InterOperability Laboratory, one of the nation's premier independent test sites for new technologies, while jump-starting their own careers. The UNH-IOL, which celebrates its 25th anniversary with an open house Monday, Sept. 16, is unique in its dual mission to serve the technology industry and to train more than 100 student employees each year.



UNH-IOL DIRECTOR ERICA JOHNSON '01, '11G

"We're educating the next generation of engineers," says UNH-IOL director Erica Johnson '01, '11G. "By the time they graduate, they are experienced in working with many different companies. They're like seasoned professionals." Johnson, who has directed the UNH-IOL since 2008, should know: She began working at the facility as an undergraduate computer science major in 1999.

Johnson describes interoperability as akin to the understanding two friends have when they give each other a high five. "Interoperability is what ensures that you both put up your hands and one of you doesn't stick your foot out instead," she says. In the technology realm, interoperability assures that the latest devices work with each other and can share data over the most advanced networks available.

The UNH-IOL provides independent, neutral, confidential testing of new technology for interoperability for hundreds of member companies each year. With a strong reputation, the laboratory's test reports are recognized throughout the industry as a "seal of approval" for interoperability and conformance to technical standards.

When the UNH-IOL began in 1988, just 15 percent of U.S. households had a personal computer and the Internet was an exotic entity unknown beyond academia and the military. Launched by former Research Computing Center (now Research Computing and Instrumentation) director Bill Lenharth as a branch of that group, the laboratory started in a small room in Morse Hall. "They were packed in there like sardines," recalls current RCI director Patrick Messer, who worked for Lenharth when he started the UNH-IOL.

Now, the self-sustaining UNH-IOL occupies a 32,000 square-foot facility on the edge of campus and employs more than 150 students and full-time staff. Current projects represent a Jetsons-like technological future: testing physical standards for Ethernet ports in automobiles, for instance, or enhancing data communication among home appliances “so you could get notified in your car that you’re running low on milk and pick it up on your way home,” says Johnson.

What’s remained constant in the past quarter decade, Johnson says, is the UNH-IOL’s two-pronged focus on industry and education. “Everyone here owns our mission of helping industry and educating students. I’m very proud of the fact that over 25 years we have not strayed from that mission,” she says.

Marion Dillon, a master’s student in computer science from Conway, has worked at the UNH-IOL for more than two years, since she was an undergraduate math major. “I’ve had a really great experience here,” she says. “It’s rare that you find a job that is so technical and that gives college students so much to do. Most people rise to that responsibility.” Currently testing home routers for interoperability for IPv6, a new version of Internet protocol, Dillon intends to tap the industry contacts she’s made when it’s time for her job search.

Dillon will join current student-employees, UNH-IOL alumni, and technology leaders at the UNH-IOL’s 25th anniversary open house Monday, Sept. 16 from 2 – 6 p.m. Interactive demonstrations and tours will introduce the wider community to the laboratory’s work, and industry leaders will speak about the importance of the UNH-IOL. [More information is here.](#)

Johnson and her colleagues look forward to UNH faculty, staff and students making the trip to the UNH-IOL’s facility on Technology Drive for the celebration.

“Our work here is always exciting, but we’re really thrilled to share what we do with the broader UNH and New Hampshire community,” says Johnson. “This open house will introduce our services and the incredible student employees who make them happen – well known in the technology industry – to a broader audience.”

Learn more about the University of New Hampshire InterOperability Laboratory on the [Web](#), [Facebook](#), or [Twitter](#).

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