

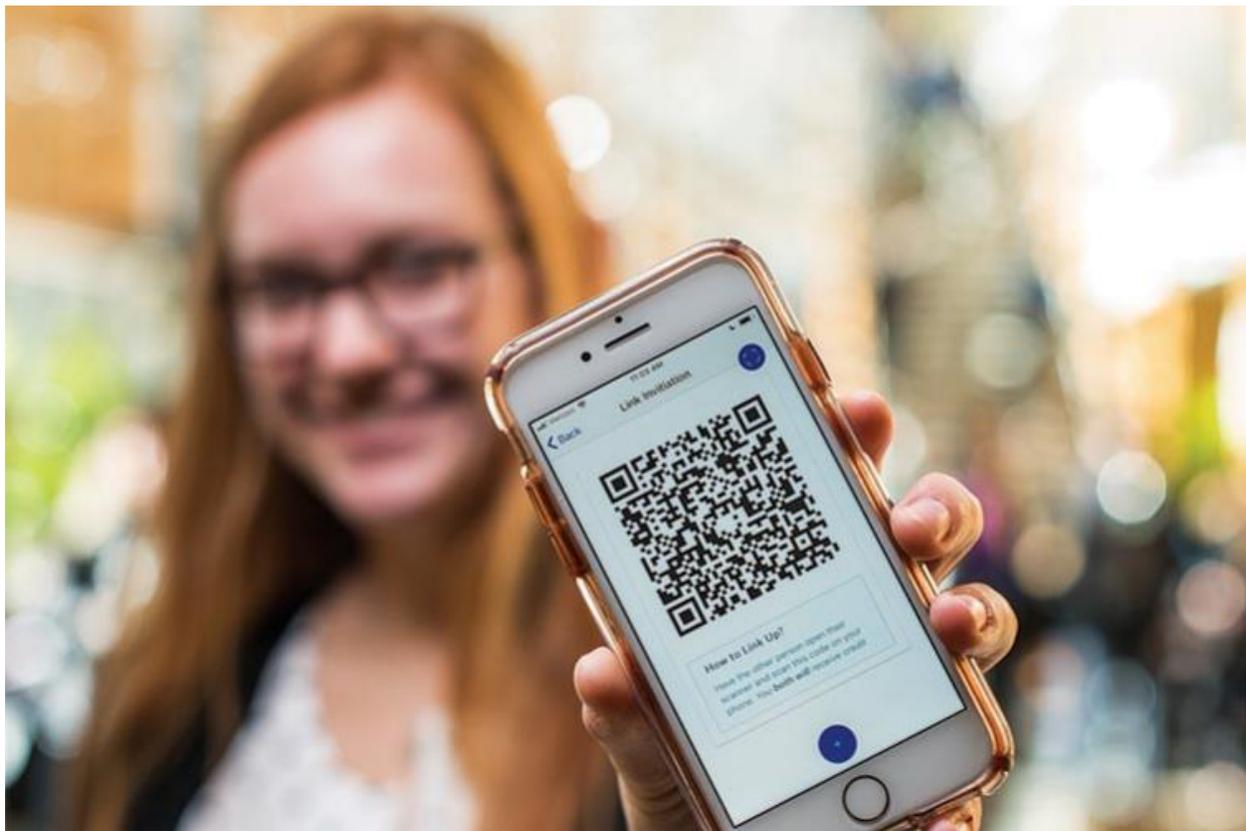
# Fanning the FIRE

**A technology platform and mobile app enhance an innovative program for first-year students**

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Thursday, January 3, 2019

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**SARAH WILKINSON '22 USES THE NEW FIRE MOBILE APP TO LINK UP WITH OTHERS IN THE PROGRAM.**

As an undergraduate business student at UNH, Tim Collins '85 started the company that would evolve into EBSCO Information Services — an online research service and publisher widely used by all kinds of libraries. The business was intended to be a consumer guide to articles in popular magazines, but when his marketing class took it on as a hands-on case study, Collins learned that his real market was in the B2B space.

Today, EBSCO is part of one of the largest private companies in the United States. His student experience is among the reasons Collins and his wife, Emily '89, chose to support UNH by underwriting a technology platform to enhance Paul College's signature [First-year Innovation and Research Experience \(FIRE\) program](#). In particular, they saw an opportunity to both support students and explore how current technology could build community and encourage face-to-face interactions. Their prior support for Paul College includes the Collins Career and Resource Center.

Now in its fourth year, FIRE is a year-long, team-based and game-like experience for freshmen who, in about 30 mentored teams of 20 students, earn points via activities and challenges designed to help them become adept problem-solvers, get involved on campus and build lifelong habits and strategies for success. At the end of the year, each team presents a business plan for addressing a real-world problem.

Healthy competition is at the heart of the program, so tracking activities and points is an important motivator for students. But FIRE's exponential growth made this increasingly difficult to manage. "Three years ago, we awarded 250,000 points for the year, which we tracked in a spreadsheet," says Neil Niman, associate dean for academic affairs and the brains behind FIRE. "This year, we awarded 350,000 points in the first five weeks."

A transformational gift from the Collinses has allowed the program to develop a database, web-based dashboards and leaderboards and a mobile app with networking features.

Sarah Wilkinson '22 says FIRE has helped her acclimate to campus life. She uses the app's linking-up feature to meet new people and likes how easy it is to submit points and check her progress from her phone. "FIRE has introduced me to great people, including my team leader, who is always open to helping with anything UNH-related," she says. "It has also been a good way of learning how aspects of the business world work." Wilkinson is particularly excited about developing a business plan with her team.

Collins, who has a daughter in college and remembers what it was like to be a freshman, says he would have liked something that facilitated new connections and is happy to be part of making it available to students today. As someone who likes to invest in people — Collins and his wife also support the [Northeast Passage](#) program at the College of Health and Human Services — Collins encourages other alumni to consider how they could be involved at UNH. "The rewards of having a positive influence in someone's life are meaningful."

*Interested in making a gift to a UNH college, school or program that matters to you? [Find out how.](#)*

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