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By Janet Lathrop
UNH News Bureau

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DURHAM, N.H. -- The University of New Hampshire's Office of Economic Initiatives (OEI) at the Whittemore School of Business and Economics has won a national award for research on business and labor needs in New Hampshire's North Country.

Janice Kitchen, OEI director, will accept the National Association of Management and Technical Assistance Centers (NAMTAC) award at the organization's spring banquet in Tucson, Ariz. April 4.

UNH's research project, "Underemployment and the Living Wage in New Hampshire," won recognition in the economic development category of NAMTAC's Project of the Year competition. It identifies outstanding efforts in assisting local business to become more globally competitive, more viable in their fields of expertise, or more capable of delivering services to the public sector.

UNH's OEI undertook the economic research project in August 1999 when the North Country Council, Inc., Bethlehem, requested help in deciding which economic development path to pursue.

"There was some concern that state policy makers were not focusing enough attention and resources on the problems of the North Country, an area characterized by declining industries. The area was not benefiting from economic growth and expansion in the same way that technology-based businesses in southern New Hampshire had," Kitchen explains, "and they wanted to turn that situation around."

After consulting with OEI, the North Country Council
decided to focus on determining the extent of underemployment and related labor force issues in the region. UNH's OEI, the North Country Council and its partners, the N.H. Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and USDA Rural Development designed a three-part research project.

It called first for surveying North Country business labor needs as well as workers' skills, education and aspirations. Researchers also looked at basic costs of living for six types of households, ranging from a single adult to a household with two working parents and two children. Findings were reported by county and statistics from northern areas were compared with data from the state's southern counties. Finally, the UNH research team looked at the kinds of jobs that pay a living wage in New Hampshire, and where they are located.

"The research has proved to be extremely useful to a wide variety of people interested in New Hampshire's economic future," Kitchen says.

Two reports, "New Hampshire Basic Needs and a Livable Wage" and "The Availability of Livable Wage Jobs in New Hampshire," have received national attention, she added, and are now being used by policy makers and non-profit organizations throughout the Granite State. These include educational foundations, small business advocacy groups, planners in affordable housing and day care, independent living for people with disabilities and the elderly, and health care providers. The research has also informed economic development debate and strategy development in the North Country, says Kitchen.

NAMTAC is a not-for-profit association offering information to enhance the performance of organizations that provide basic business, economic development and technical assistance to businesses and communities. The organization prides itself on providing a forum where a diverse group of assistance and service providers with common goals work together to enhance enterprise competitiveness and community wealth.

The report, "Availability of Livable Wage Jobs in New Hampshire" is available in pdf format at the SBDC
website: www.nhsbdc.org/ Click on "NH's Livable Wage Report." For a hard copy, contact the N.H. SBDC at 862-2200.

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