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Tech-Savvy UNH Business Students Complete Technology Projects for N.H. Businesses

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DURHAM, N.H. -- Twenty undergraduate and two graduate MBA students at the University of New Hampshire's Whittemore School of Business and Economics rolled up their sleeves recently to tackle real-world projects for local companies such as Sanmina-SCI of Salem and Bottomline Technologies of Portsmouth.

The goal of this partnership between New Hampshire businesses and the Whittemore School's Information Systems program was for students to solve real problems by designing new information systems using information technology and related support.

"The students delivered a working, usable and useful system to our help desk," says Steve Chopelas, consultant software engineer for Fidelity Management and Research Company. "Their final presentation was successful, and they answered a myriad of questions of the senior management very well. For their first real-world project, that was impressive, given the demands on their time. These students will be successful in the working world."

Projects ranged from a cost-benefit analysis of an integrated messaging system for Sanmina-SCI, to a build-vs.-buy feasibility study of financial reporting software for Bottomline Technologies. Other student teams developed a framework to manage morning checkout at Fidelity Management and Research Co. of Merrimack, and a handheld, wireless application cost-benefit analysis tool for Liberty Mutual Insurance Co. of Portsmouth.

The program was offered for the first time this spring, and, according to A.R. Venkatachalam, Hamel Professor and associate professor of information systems, the course design was somewhat unconventional. "Right from the beginning I was very particular that there had to be value for both the student teams and the sponsor companies involved in each project. Each student team had to learn project management, understand the needs of the end users and come up with effective solutions."

Projects were evaluated by their corporate sponsors on the presentation of results, overall quality of the project, its usefulness to the company, effectiveness of communication, project management and their ability to work independently.

By all accounts, the UNH business students did well. "In the process of presenting a new system design, the group came up with innovative ideas that again demonstrated that they made an excellent effort to understand Bottomline Technologies' needs," says Dan Gangai, manager of information solutions for Bottomline Technologies. He gave the students an overall "outstanding" evaluation.

Venkatachalam noted that for Fall 2002, the UNH business school is developing a networked computer laboratory and academic partnerships with Oracle, IBM and Microsoft corporations.

New Hampshire students who participated in the project course were Steven Vitali, Nicholas Hort and Jeffrey Kenyon, all of Nashua; Robert Weskerna, Portsmouth; William Dobe, Raymond; Thomas Gouthro, Merrimack; Joshua Lanoie, Chester; John Caucis, Somersworth; Bradford Charters, Danville; Ryan McIver, Warner; Jeremy White, Newington; Vina Mai, Dover; Maura Molan, Manchester; Shane Pelissier, Hooksett; Matthew Simpson, Newton; Jeffrey Daniels, Pelham; Laura Fairburn, Salem; and Jason LaBonte, Berlin.

Out-of-state students were Brent Austin, Morgan, Vt.; Benjamin Carlo, Avon, Conn.; Riley Tippet, Readfield, Maine; and Hans-Christian Pauckstadt, Senzig, Germany.

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