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UNH Business Students Network with E-coast to Learn High Tech, 'High Growth Culture'

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DURHAM, N.H. -- To be successful in the growing world of high-tech companies on New Hampshire's e-coast, employees must be creative thinkers who are productive, flexible and deadline-driven.

"It's not just about knowing how to program a computer," explains Jeffrey Sohl, University of New Hampshire professor of decision sciences. "In a start-up company, today you may be the marketing manager; tomorrow you may be the financial person. It's a whole culture of entrepreneurship that requires employees to roll up their sleeves. Because you're not here just to become a millionaire; you're here to create something."

To help meet the demand for this type of resourceful employee and to give UNH students valuable exposure to New Hampshire's high-tech businesses, Sohl and colleague, Professor Ross Gittell, this fall are teaching UNH's first-ever class on entrepreneurial internships.

"We felt there was a need not just for an internship, but to produce a labor supply that can work in this high growth culture," Sohl explains. "And we wanted to wrap it into an academic focus."

The roughly 20 students admitted to the class are matched with internships at New Hampshire companies in the start-up sphere. They also meet weekly in the classroom to give presentations, discuss workplace issues and focus on the core topics of the class: "venture capital" and "the new economy and New Hampshire."

Twenty-eight companies from Portsmouth to Manchester are participating, including Flywire, an internet solutions start-up company in Portsmouth, and MerchantBanc, a venture capital firm in Manchester.

"This new program struck us as a tremendous opportunity to work with the most entrepreneurial and motivated students," says Scott Campbell, Flywire's director of marketing and public relations. "Professors Sohl and Gittell are well-known for reaching out to the

business community to create synergistic public-private partnerships."

Flywire marketing intern Heather Townsend says the start-up sector suits her well. "I'm applying concepts from my marketing and business courses and getting solid experience in a small, dynamic and growing internet firm," says the UNH senior.

"When finished with the course, our students will have a fistful of contacts and will have learned a lot about a range of things -- how to market a product, deal with suppliers, navigate securities regulations and about the products themselves," adds Sohl.

The internships involve businesses in the Technology Roundtable (a group of e-coast businesses), the Software Association of New Hampshire and the Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce.

Sohl explains that e-coast businesses are eager to sponsor the unpaid internships because UNH provides "highly motivated, alive, probing, questioning minds." The students participate in and observe first-hand the workings of the high-tech business world. These internships are not work-study jobs, but rather mentoring relationships that the participating businesses have agreed to nurture.

The pay-off, according to Sohl: "By sharing experiences and networking with each other, students will get exposure to not only their own internship companies, but all their classmates' too."

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