

FIREworks!

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Throughout freshman year, Paul College stresses the importance of real world experience. While internships can perhaps provide the best insight to working in an actual business setting, the [First-year Innovation and Research Experience Program \(FIRE\)](#), provides a unique, and early opportunity that simulates working in a small company.



The FIRE curriculum begins with teaching us three skill sets: problem solving, professionalism, and appreciating group dynamics. By the end of our first year, we pull it all together in the [Undergraduate Research Conference](#). Before I share my experience on the final day of the conference, I want to note an external conversation I had with an outside business leader. He could not stress enough the importance of strong business teams being far more important than any one individual: "If it's about the company, then it's about the team".

Our team, first place winners in the Undergraduate Research Conference, was a mix of different

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personalities and skills, some analytical, some creative, and some great presenters. All members of the team demonstrated problem solving, professionalism, and the ability to recognize group

dynamics. Each member contributed to our success, much like colleagues would in a successful business.

The year-long FIRE curriculum culminates in a one-day Undergraduate Research Conference designed to simulate companies competing to provide solutions to real world problems. All of the teams in the first round did a good job presenting new products and services. The finalists truly captured the spirit of the conference. From a mobile app that filters social media, to an emergency water filtration system, the presentations were so well thought out. Problem solving, professionalism, and teamwork clearly shined.

Presenters not only communicated their team's product, but were asked many questions from judges and other students that helped distinguish the company's competencies and the team's preparedness.

Our group challenge was to



create a product or service

that could help those

affected by extreme weather. After a review of real problems facing the world today, our team decided that fresh water will play an even more critical role globally. Our product, “Oasis”, is a compact water purifier specifically designed for natural and environmental disasters (e.g. floods, hurricanes, contaminants).

I enjoyed the opportunity to be one of our team’s five presenters. I recognized the importance of the detailed preparation that went into our business plan. Each of the members of my team played a critical role. No one person can be credited with our team/company success. As previously mentioned, “If it’s about the company, then it’s about the team.”

We made it through the first round with a very relevant product combined with an impactful presentation. I believe we won in the final round because judges found our team to be professional and our presentation well-designed. Winning the URC for FIRE was so satisfying because it was at that point I recognized the true value of the UNH curriculum.

When I began freshman year I, like so many others had that anxious feeling.



Have I chosen the right school? Have I chosen the right major? As the year progressed I valued the real


life business experiences of the faculty and the many clubs and organizations that compliment the academics (e.g. Women in Business Club and Student Council Honors Program). FIRE gave me the opportunity to pull it all together. The FIRE program coordinators Tamara and Sean, and my team’s peer advisor Catie, put so much time and effort into helping us develop our skills. I’ve enjoyed my freshman year at UNH. FIRE has only furthered my desire to gain business experience as I continue my education.

The Conference was one of the highlights of my freshman year. I will gain from this experience for many years to come. While companies are different, the fundamentals we’ve learned remain the same. Thanks to the Paul College staff for creating such a valuable program.

—Melissa Schwartz '19

About Melissa Schwartz '19:

Melissa



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Schwartz is a freshman Honors student at the Peter T. Paul College of Business & Economics at the University of New Hampshire planning to major in finance and marketing. She is secretary of the Honors Program Student Council, a member of Women in Business, and as a member of her sorority Chi Omega, she volunteers her time with the Make-A-Wish Foundation. Melissa will be a Peer Academic Leader this summer during Paul Freshmen Orientation. In her first year, received the Paul College Academic Excellence Award, the FIRE Luminary Award, and the Pursuit of Pi Award. She is from Bedford, New Hampshire.

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