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Faculty Member Helped Secure GE Support for E-Business Lab

When you try to enter the new "edgelab" at the Stamford campus, the e-business laboratory built last fall with an initial \$2.5 million investment from GE Capital, the security system will look you in the eye, scanning your iris to determine whether you are cleared for entry.

The choice of this particular system for security resulted from the first student project at the new lab, a detailed business analysis of high-tech security systems.

Edgelab is part of an \$11 million commitment by the GE companies to UConn that will benefit the School of Business, the School of Engineering and the Neag School of Education.

The commitment, announced Nov. 14, is the largest single corporate investment in UConn to date. It came during the leadership - or "silent" - phase of Campaign UConn, which began in 1998. A new, even more vigorous phase of the fund-raising campaign will be publicly announced May 3.

As a result of the collaboration between GE Capital and business students and faculty, projects will roll out of the edgelab each semester.

Jim Marsden, department head of operations and information management in the School of Business, says the collaboration offers valuable opportunities for both students and faculty.

Marsden was a key player in developing the collaboration. He says



James Marsden, professor of operations and information management, at his office.

Photo by Shannon McAvoy

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- ✦ [More About Jim Marsden](#)
- ✦ [More About the GE Gift](#)
- ✦ [School of Business Administration](#)
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helping raise money to support the work of faculty and students in his school came naturally to him. What it involves, he says, is what faculty do best: talk about their work.

"We do innovative things, and we know them in great depth," says Marsden, who holds the Shenkman Family Chair in E-Business. "Those innovative projects are often the factors that donors are very interested in."

He became involved with GE after visiting its headquarters and other companies and civic groups in Fairfield County as executive director of CITI, UConn's Connecticut Information Technology Institute at Stamford. Others who took part in those visits included Paulo Goes and Alok Gupta, operations and information management faculty, and Richard Dino, associate dean of business.

Marsden became aware of a common interest at GE Capital and went on to conduct a successful "icebreaker" project last year. More than 100 UConn students and five faculty members conducted detailed analyses and evaluations of Web-enabled businesses.

When the project was presented to GE Capital executives, the students were excited by the "immediacy" of their report and the interest shown by Denis J. Nayden, GE Capital President and CEO. Nayden, a UConn alumnus, also is chair of the Campaign Steering Committee. "GE listened to us," Marsden says, "and made business decisions based on the input they got from students."

The project blossomed into brainstorming sessions involving GE executives, School of Business faculty, and development officers from the UConn Foundation, to determine how the mutual interest in business research could be pursued.

Proposals by the Schools of Business, Engineering and Education were coordinated into one request by the Foundation, based on input from faculty and deans on what their schools needed and how that related to what GE might be interested in funding.

Working with development officers, Marsden was able to promote the goals of his department, at the same time continuing his research, teaching, and service. His role was primarily to talk about his work.

"I do not talk a whole lot about philanthropy, but about investment," he says. "Investing in the University yields returns."

By July, work on the lab was underway and it became part of GE's \$11 million commitment, which by then included several projects and three GE entities: GE Fund, GE Capital, and GE Industrial Systems.

The first return on GE's investment was the edgelab facility itself, a

9,000-plus-square-foot technology/collaborative research showcase. And the first project was to select the lab's security device, by conducting a cost analysis, investigating competing technologies from a variety of vendors, trying out software and hardware, and testing customer reaction.

Edgelab now involves 20 MBA students and seven undergraduates working on-site with GE Capital executives and UConn faculty. The projects are selected by a steering committee of operations and information management faculty and GE Capital executives. To pass muster, projects must have real business value, significant educational benefit, and intellectual challenge.

Marsden sees the collaboration as "a natural part of our mission" at the business school, tapping into partnerships with the business community and offering an opportunity for students and faculty to work on real business problems.

"We value faculty as partners in identifying potential collaborations and funding opportunities, and in promoting the University and its programs to potential donors," says Nevin E. Kessler, vice president for development at the Foundation. "Together, we can help the University achieve a level of excellence that will benefit faculty and students for generations to come."

Cindy Weiss

