

COMPUTERWORLD®



IT SCHOOLS TO WATCH 2008



Northeastern University

A streamlined system helps it develop and deliver innovative curricula fast.

BY MARY BRANDEL

MICHAEL GODIN had been working in IT for 10 years when he decided he wanted a change. A network administrator in California at the time, he wanted to be more involved in the business side of the company and even toyed with the idea of law school.

When he started researching his options, Godin realized he wasn't eager to abandon the technology experience he'd gained.

That's when he stumbled on the information assurance degree, an interdisciplinary program at the College of Computer Science at Northeastern University that encompasses law, computer science, information security and business.

"I enrolled the first semester they offered it," Godin says. And he's glad he did. After graduating in 2007, he took a job two months later as a professional services consultant at Ecora Software Corp., which makes compliance and auditing software, and his salary rose 10% over his previous income.

One of two interdisciplinary courses of study offered to IT graduate students, the information assurance program taps the college's computer science expertise, as well as security expertise within the College of Criminal Justice. "We emphasize that security is never a black-and-white issue but a trade-off issue," says Agnes Chan, a professor, associate dean and graduate director.

Godin says the course content and dialogue among students strongly reflected the working world as he knows it. "The class discussions about IT management were literally like listening to a narrative of my day-to-day encounters at work," he says. However, it was the guidance on how to deal with common problems that was exceptionally beneficial, he notes.

The school's other interdisciplinary program is its master's in health informatics, which enrolled its first students in the fall of 2007. The curriculum was developed in conjunction with Northeastern's Bouvé

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Location: Boston

www.ccs.neu.edu

Department: College of Computer and Information Science

Program: M.S. in computer science

Key administrator:
Larry Finkelstein, dean

In-state and out-of-state tuition:
\$16,000 (for 16 credit hours)

College of Health Sciences, and its objective is to educate students about the use of technology in the health care industry.

Northeastern has also worked to incorporate real-life experience into its traditional master's in computer science. A new required course, Program Design Paradigm, gives students a hands-on opportunity to build software systems. They are expected not only to write code, but also to defend it in front of the other students. "We keep hearing from the industry that tech people can't communicate," Chan says. "So we wanted to improve our courses by providing as much opportunity as possible for students to carry out not just written but oral communications."

It also helps that 80% of the graduate faculty has worked or consulted in the industry during their careers. And Northeastern offers a well-known co-op program, in which students break from their studies to work full time for up to three semesters. Chan says 70% of master's students choose to participate in that program, and 100% are placed.

Mansi Rajkondawar just finished a co-op at Goldman Sachs and feels she was well prepared for the experience. Her coursework at Northeastern included a project to create a tool that could predict which movies people would most like to watch, based on previous preferences. During the co-op recruitment process, she says, she was in demand because of that experience.

Godin notes that the program taught him how to communicate with business people. "I have a tool belt that I built over two years of the program, so I know what to focus on," he says. ■