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## **Husson University Receives \$2.2 Million Grant from the Harold Alfond Foundation**

*Grant will support programs and outreach from Husson's new School of Technology and Innovation*

**BANGOR, MAINE – June 17, 2022** – Husson University announced today that it recently received a generous \$2.2 million grant from the Harold Alfond Foundation. The grant will accelerate the implementation of programs and outreach associated with the new School of Technology and Innovation. This school is part of Husson University's College of Business, the largest collegiate business educator in the state. As an active regional economic development partner, the College of Business is continuously working to enhance the growth and success of for-profit and non-profit organizations in Maine.

"The Foundation is delighted to support Husson University's efforts to grow Maine's economy," said Gregory W. Powell, chair of the Harold Alfond Foundation. "When the University's forward-thinking, entrepreneurial, educational initiatives are combined with its commitment to improving the economic future of Maine people, the result is an unbeatable combination from an ideal community partner."

"This support from the Harold Alfond Foundation will help the University address some pressing workforce issues identified in the 2018 "Measures of Growth", published by the Maine Development Foundation. According to the report, there are multiple challenges that are restraining Maine's economic growth," said Husson University President Robert A. Clark, PhD, CFA. "Two of these were the lack of innovation and a shrinking workforce."

Clark continued: "This grant will allow Husson University to address both of these issues. Though education, we can develop a workforce with expertise in various technologies including extended reality. Approximately 75% of recent Husson graduates reside in Maine. Creating a high-tech workforce has the potential to transform Maine's economic landscape and attract good paying, high-tech companies and jobs to the region."

College graduates with a knowledge of information technology (IT) and expertise in virtual

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reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are in demand. According to Statista, “it is forecast that over 23 million jobs will be enhanced by virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies globally by 2030, an increase from the 800 thousand jobs that were enhanced by VR and AR in 2019.”<sup>1</sup>

“Having a strong understanding of technology is becoming an essential skill for all students,” said Dr. Marie Hansen, dean of Husson University’s College of Business. “This knowledge can make graduates more appealing to potential employers. Companies are looking for individuals who can help them resolve business challenges utilizing the latest technology.”

Beyond problem solving, AR and VR have the potential to grow into a thriving industry. A report from PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC) states that VR and AR have the potential to add \$1.5 trillion to the global economy by 2030.<sup>2</sup> While job growth in Maine’s IT sector for developers of software and applications is projected to grow 15% from 2018 to 2028,<sup>3</sup> growth will be hindered if there are not enough educated individuals to fill available job vacancies.

The \$2.2 million grant from the Harold Alfond Foundation, will help support Husson programs in integrated technology and the University’s new degree in extended reality (XR). With the help of these programs, Maine will have the qualified professionals it needs to fill future job openings. The funding is also designed to support project research and development as well as business partnerships that will help stimulate job growth and economic development in Maine.

“Husson University’s XR degree program and iEX Center focus on interactive, immersive media that combines real and virtual elements,” said Brave Williams, director of the iEX Center and associate professor in the School of Technology and Innovation. “Students work beside innovative peers, faculty, and outside partners to find solutions to real-world business issues utilizing emerging XR technology. The vision is to develop a place that creates seamless extended reality for our communities and the world.”

A key facility at Husson University that’s integral to this educational process is the School of Technology and Innovation’s iEX Center. This ultra-high tech interactive space is housed in Harold Alfond Hall, home of Husson University’s College of Business. The Center is an integrated workspace that includes a virtual production system, motion capture, and dozens of kits used for virtual and augmented reality exploration. It’s devoted to teaching and creating immersive interactive experiences. In this location, many types of virtual reality and augmented

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<sup>1</sup> Statista, “Number of jobs enhanced by augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) worldwide from 2019 to 2030,” <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1121601/number-of-jobs-enhanced-globally-by-vr-and-ar/>, Accessed 6/1/22

<sup>2</sup> PriceWaterhouseCoopers, “Seeing is Believing,” <https://www.pwc.com/seeingisbelieving>, Accessed 6/1/22

<sup>3</sup> Maine.Gov, Center for Workforce Research and Information, “Workforce Outlook: Statewide Employment Projections to 2028,” <https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/outlook.html>, Accessed 6/1/22

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reality combinations are being studied in order to enhance daily life and solve real-world business problems.

“This is not the first time the Harold Alfond Foundation has supported projects at Husson,” said Sarah Robinson, vice president for advancement at the University. “On August 26, 2021, Husson University officially opened Harold Alfond Hall as part of a ribbon-cutting ceremony. This 2021 Maine Real Estate & Development Association (MEREDA) award-winning building was made possible, thanks in large part, to a \$4 million matching gift from the Harold Alfond Foundation. When the gift was announced in 2017, it was the largest outright gift ever made to Husson University.”

Founded in 1950, the **Harold Alfond Foundation** furthers the philanthropic legacy of Harold Alfond, the founder of Dexter Shoe Company and a longtime supporter of Maine communities in which he and his family worked and resided. He ensured that his philanthropy would live on by committing nearly all of his wealth to the Foundation, which continues to support charitable causes in the State of Maine. Consistent with Harold Alfond’s own giving pattern and philanthropic principles, the Foundation favors education, healthcare, youth development, and other selected charitable causes. For more information, visit [HaroldAlfondFoundation.org](http://HaroldAlfondFoundation.org).

For more than 120 years, **Husson University** has shown its adaptability and strength in delivering educational programs that prepare future leaders to handle the challenges of tomorrow through innovative undergraduate and graduate degrees. With a commitment to delivering affordable classroom, online and experiential learning opportunities, Husson University has come to represent a superior value in higher education. The hallmarks of a Husson education include advanced knowledge delivered through quality educational programs. According to an analysis of tuition and fees by *U.S. News & World Report*, Husson University is one of the most affordable private colleges in New England. For more information about educational opportunities that can lead to personal and professional success, visit [Husson.edu](http://Husson.edu).

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