

April 16, 2007

**TO:** The University Community

**FROM:** Philip E. Austin

Shortly before Christmas, when I announced my decision to leave the Presidency this coming Fall, I concluded by saying that I expected the next months to be active as well as challenging. That prediction has been more than borne out. I want to take this opportunity to discuss, as I have almost every semester over the past eleven years, the major issues now before the University. Before my term as President ends there will be time for a more detailed review of achievements and challenges—but, for now, attention needs to be focused on more immediate concerns.

### Faculty Enhancement

One of the University's major legislative priorities this year is the expansion of faculty at Storrs and the regional campuses.

UConn ranks high in many important indicators, and for the most part this is cause for celebration. In one area, however, our high ranking is a major concern: our student/faculty ratio, now 17.3:1, down a bit from a high of 18.2:1 in the 2002-03 academic year, is still out of line with institutions we regard as our peers.

Back in 1996, as UCONN 2000 began to take shape, the student/faculty ratio was 14.2:1. It is important to understand why it has climbed, what the high ratio means for students, faculty and the institution itself, and what we need to do about it.

The increase in student population is a major success story, due in about equal measure to the building program and our growing reputation for academic quality. In 1996 about 10,000 prospective students applied for admission to Storrs. The average SAT score (not the only measure of academic strength, but one easily communicated and understood) of the 2,163 Storrs freshmen who came that Fall was 1113. Those numbers were soon to rise: Storrs applications approached 13,000 in 2001, 17,000 in 2003, and exceeded 18,000 in 2004. Applications for this coming Fall's freshman class crossed the 20,000 mark a few days before the February 1 deadline.

In the late 1990s we responded to growing demand by increasing the size of the freshman class and, over time, the size of the undergraduate student body. By 2001 we reached the limit of physical and faculty resources and froze the Storrs freshman admission figure at 3,200-3,250. As standards tightened, the academic strength of the student body grew. The average SAT score for last Fall's freshman class was 1195. We now enroll 100 or more valedictorians and salutatorians in each class. And we are more diverse than ever: about 19% of last Fall's freshmen came from minority backgrounds. As I have often said, there is no conflict between quality and diversity. The two can, and here at UConn do, go hand in hand.

Even with freshman enrollment held steady, the impact of prior years' growth—plus an exceptionally high student retention level (freshman to sophomore retention is 93%, compared to a national public university average of 81%)—produced an aggregate increase in the size of the undergraduate student body, from 14,382 across the University in Fall 1997 to 20,784 this past September. Again, this growth is a clear indicator of success on multiple fronts: appeal to applicants, academic level of the entering class, satisfaction with UConn once students arrive, coupled with strong programs to enhance retention for students who might encounter challenges along the way.

The size of the faculty, as we all know, did not keep pace with enrollment. Numbers fluctuated over the years due in part to early retirement incentives in 1996, 1997 and 2002, but the long-term trend line demonstrates the challenge. In Fall 1995 there were 1,068 full-time faculty at Storrs and the regional campuses, and in Fall 2006 there were 1,180—a 10.5% increase to serve a student body that had grown by more than 40%.

This would be a serious situation in itself, but there is another factor to consider. As UConn moved toward the top ranks of American public higher education, our research expectations for faculty grew as well. We were always fortunate to have a number of highly distinguished professors at UConn. Increasingly, however, productive scholarship is a basic expectation for tenured and tenure-track professors. It is an expectation that is being met with distinction, as evidenced by grants and awards from the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and such prestigious private entities as the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Donaghue Medical Research Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. This is just a partial list and does not reflect a number of other distinctions awarded to members of the faculty at all stages in their careers. UConn scholarship is important not just because it increases the fund of human knowledge—a vital goal at any great university, to be sure—but, in a more tangible sense, because it contributes to the quality of life and economic vitality of the nation and the state. The fact that UConn research and training grants now exceed \$180 million each year is one sign among many of its significance.

It is often, perhaps usually, the case that professors who generate knowledge are also exceptionally adept at conveying it; good researchers tend to be good teachers. But as the student/faculty ratio grew, the University was faced with several unacceptable choices: ask outstanding scholars to research less and teach more; increase the size of classes

(even if facilities would make this possible, as is often not the case at UConn); reduce rather than increase the size of the freshman class. UConn prides itself on being big enough to be a major research university, but still the kind of place where students and faculty can interact on a one-on-one level.

The obvious remedy is to increase the number of faculty to at least a level that will bring us to the average student/faculty ratio of our peers. Simple arithmetic gives us the appropriate number, but the process of determining and ultimately justifying the goal has been anything but simple. For the past several years the University has been engaged in extensive processes of academic planning, heavily involving faculty and including student participation. Since his arrival in 2005 Provost Nicholls has led this endeavor, helped faculty sharpen the planning process's focus, and, concurrently, made difficult but essential choices to assure that existing resources are put to the most effective use. Internal budget reallocations allowed us to add 51 full-time faculty in 2005 and another 13 in 2006. Every department that experiences a vacancy or seeks an additional faculty line is asked to provide a justification based on such factors as enrollment, contribution to an area of academic promise, or relevance to a compelling public need. As any of the hundreds of faculty members who have served on search committees in the last few years will report, each recruitment is undertaken with the utmost care. Each opportunity to hire a new colleague represents an occasion for a department to re-examine its mission and re-evaluate its effectiveness in meeting teaching, research and service goals.

Last year the University set a target figure of 175 additional full-time faculty over a five-year span, or 35 per year. The anticipated cost, including average salary and other support, is about \$4.6 million per year. I do not know at this writing how the request will fare in the General Assembly this year, though, thanks in large measure to a highly effective presentation by Provost Nicholls and others, we have effectively conveyed the importance of the goal.

### Maintaining a World-Class Health Center

Our second major legislative priority relates to the Health Center. The University of Connecticut Health Center is not just a point of pride for UConn. It is also one of the State of Connecticut's most valuable assets. It now faces short-term problems that, if not resolved soon, will put it in long-term jeopardy.

The UConn School of Medicine graduated its first students in 1972. Since then nearly 2,600 men and women have received their M.D. degree, of whom about 35% practice in Connecticut. The School of Dental Medicine has graduated 1,400 students, approximately 45% of whom are now practicing in Connecticut. The graduate programs in biological sciences now graduate another 15-20 Ph.D. students per year and help populate research laboratories in academia and industry. In the 1960s Connecticut's elected leaders made the absolutely correct decision to build a hospital that would serve concurrently as a center of clinical care and a training facility for our medical students. There are 125 accredited schools of medicine in the United

States and most of them have hospitals on-site or adjacent to the medical school facility. This is not just a matter of convenience. It is more a result of the compelling logic of placing teaching, clinical care, and research activities in close proximity to each other so that the activities of any one of those three can connect to the others, to the benefit of patients, students, researchers, and the public at large. The term “translational medicine” has a direct, specific and vital meaning when applied to major schools of medicine and their hospitals.

Though the connection to the UConn School of Medicine makes it unique, John Dempsey Hospital is an important center of health care in and of itself. It is relatively small; with 224 total beds it is the nation’s second smallest university hospital. More than half of those beds are dedicated to specialized functions, including care for prison inmates from across the state (a service for which the University receives compensation from the Department of Corrections that almost always falls short of actual expenses), neonatal care, high risk pregnancy, and psychiatry. Only 108 beds are truly available for a general patient population.

In 1999-2000, John Dempsey joined almost every major academic hospital in the United States in confronting very serious fiscal problems. Cutbacks in Medicare and the growth of “managed care” affected all hospitals, but had a particularly severe impact on university hospitals where the sickest, most medically challenged patients are often sent for care. The Connecticut General Assembly had the foresight to provide \$20 million in additional funding, most of which went to support John Dempsey Hospital operations, while we implemented an aggressive program of cost reductions and revenue enhancements. I am proud to say that the Health Center administration, faculty and staff turned a dire fiscal situation around, and within two years revenues exceeded expenditures to the point where the hospital’s operating gain could help support the School of Medicine’s academic program. I am even prouder to say that this goal was achieved without ever compromising either the quality of patient care or the level of excellence of teaching or research. Over the past five years the Health Center has received national recognition on numerous occasions, and most recently was named one of the nation’s top 100 hospitals in the *Solucient 100 Top Hospitals: National Benchmarks for Success* study published in 2006. The UConn Health Center is one of only 15 hospitals nationwide recognized in the “major teaching hospital” category. Considered one of the hospital industry’s most prestigious awards, the Solucient rating is based on objective statistical measurement of performance in critical areas including clinical outcomes, patient safety, operational efficiency and growth in patient volume.

As I reported in October, the Health Center now faces renewed fiscal challenges, most immediately with regard to the academic program. Like just about everything else in health care, medical education is very expensive, and is getting more so every year. It costs an average of about \$85,000-100,000 per year to train a single medical student in the United States. In Fiscal Year 2002, the cost of the Health Center’s academic program was slightly in excess of \$279 million. Revenues from all academic sources were \$181 million, leaving a gap of more than \$98 million. The State provided an appropriation of \$97 million to cover the gap and the balance came from John Dempsey Hospital

operating revenues. This past year, Fiscal 2006, tells a less favorable story: Costs during the past five years have climbed to nearly \$339 million, an increase of about 21% (about 4% per annum). Revenues (tuition, research dollars, auxiliary service funds, endowment support, clinical dollars earned by the University Medical Group academic faculty, and graduate education funds) went up, also—to about \$225 million. All this represents a \$60 million increase in costs, with only a \$44 million increase in revenues. That equates to a \$16 million increase in the size of the gap.

Yet State support, so important in meeting the FY '02 gap, went up just \$5 million over the same interval, to about \$102 million. The funds available from John Dempsey Hospital climbed, thanks to the continuing effect of the revenue enhancement and expense reduction policies and programs put in motion in 1999-2000. This made it possible to direct a bit more than \$5 million from the hospital to the medical education programs. But the total impact of all these numbers was an unmet “academic gap” of \$6 million in FY 2006. The gap projected for the current fiscal year, FY '07 is \$13.5 million.

Pulling needed dollars from the hospital's revenue stream is neither wise nor, in the long term, possible for a combination of reasons, some related to the general health care marketplace and others more fundamental. In the former category, costs continue to rise and reimbursements continue not to keep up. John Dempsey Hospital's Medicaid Inpatient Days in the last fiscal year represented 22.3% of total patient days, the fifth highest figure for any hospital in Connecticut. This is comparable to St. Francis Hospital (22.8%) and greater than Hartford Hospital (18.9%) and The Hospital of Central Connecticut (19.4%). Arguments that we are not providing our share of Medicaid-reimbursed care are, frankly, false. As the federal government seeks to cut the nation's deficit on the backs of those with the least political power, Medicaid reimbursements fall further behind true costs each year.

More fundamentally, John Dempsey Hospital is simply too small (see above) and, in terms of facilities attractive to patients (though *not* in terms of quality of medical care) too outmoded to survive these pressures. We cannot meet cost pressures simply by serving more patients. Almost every bed truly available for general care is usually filled and we expect demand to absolutely outstrip capacity by 2008. The hospital opened its doors in 1975 and has not had any major facilities improvements since then. What was once a state-of-the-art facility, designed according to the most advanced standards, is now a generation out of date. It cannot readily accommodate new technologies or meet patient or physician expectations relating to operating rooms inpatient rooms, neonatal intensive care, and outpatient diagnostic and treatment facilities.

This is a challenge that cannot be met by stopgap measures or marginal State funding increases, though the latter are indeed essential in the short term to meet the academic gap. After careful study, including an exhaustive external analysis, the Health Center Board of Directors and the University Board of Trustees recommended that we construct a new hospital on the Health Center campus in Farmington, and devote the existing John

Dempsey Building to much needed research space. The new hospital will include 352 beds, a 128-bed increase over current levels. The anticipated cost is \$495 million.

We do not seek additional State funding for the new facility, and anticipate that over time it will pay for itself from patient revenues. What we do seek from the State is backing for bonds to be repaid by the Health Center from patient revenues and a reallocation of \$45 million from UCONN 2000 funding now slated for other Health Center projects. In addition, we hope to raise a minimum of \$20 million in philanthropic support.

Other hospitals in the region have raised issues, some reflecting legitimate concerns and others based on a desire to reduce competition. As this is written, the replacement hospital proposal is before key committees of the Connecticut General Assembly in the form of a bill to direct the Connecticut Office of Health Care Access to conduct a study to be provided to the General Assembly by January 1, 2008. I am confident that the study will validate the increasing demand for John Dempsey Hospital's services, while recognizing the hospital's pivotal role in supporting medical and dental education, research, clinical care and the economic vitality of the region.

This much is already clear. If the University of Connecticut Health Center does not ultimately win approval for the new hospital, it will become increasingly difficult for us to attract to our faculty the kind of physicians who want to practice, teach, and do research in facilities that meet 21<sup>st</sup> century standards. The best such candidates will choose to go elsewhere. So will some of the outstanding people now here. As we lose the best faculty, our reputation will start to decline—from excellent, to good, to mediocre. Once that happens, we will lose our best potential students and, in significant numbers, our State's best future physicians.

These things won't happen all at once. But at some point in the not-too-distant future we may awaken to find that an institution that once added to UConn's luster and to our State's quality of life is no longer as great an asset as it once was. I believe that as this becomes clear to Connecticut's elected leaders, they will take the steps necessary to keep that from happening.

### New Faces

Universities are particularly organic entities, and the community is perpetually refreshed by the arrival of new members. Every year, of course, we welcome several thousand new undergraduate and graduate students and many new faculty and staff members. At UConn we have also been fortunate to be able to recruit outstanding individuals to serve in key leadership positions. Many are new to the institution, but others have been promoted from within.

Since my last letter to the community we have made several particularly significant appointments, all following full national searches:

- In collaboration with the UConn Alumni Association, I was pleased to announce in December the appointment of Lisa Lewis as the Alumni Association's new Executive Director. Ms. Lewis comes to us most immediately from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International. Prior to her work with AACSB she served for many years in the University of South Florida Alumni Association, ultimately rising to the position of President.
- Barry Feldman was named Vice President and Chief Operating Officer in January. Before coming to UConn, Dr. Feldman had a long and exceptionally well regarded career in municipal administration, notably including 21 years as Town Manager of West Hartford. He brings with him, in addition to his professional experience, a close familiarity with UConn, where he earned his doctorate in political science and taught on an adjunct basis at the Greater Hartford campus.
- Dr. Lamont "Monty" MacNeil assumed office as the new Dean of the School of Dental Medicine at the start of the year. Dr. MacNeil has been at UConn since 1998, as a member of the faculty in the Department of Periodontology and later Vice Dean. He is president-elect of the American Dental Association's Section on Academic Affairs.
- Jeremy Paul, Associate Dean and Thomas F. Gallivan, Jr. Professor at the University of Connecticut Law School, was appointed Dean of the Law School in January and assumes office this month. Professor Paul received his law degree from the Harvard Law School, and over the course of his career has served as law clerk to Judge Irving R. Kaufman of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit and as Professor-in-Residence at the Appellate Staff of the Civil Division of the U.S. Department of Justice. He joined the UConn Law School in 1989.
- Bhupen Patel, former Director of Public Works in the City of Hartford, joined us in February as Director of Construction Assurance, reporting jointly to the President of the University and the Board of Trustees Construction Management Oversight Committee. This new position was created last year and will be of invaluable assistance as we assure the continuing progress and quality of our construction program. Mr. Patel is a civil engineer with more than 30 years experience.

Other searches are proceeding on schedule, including recruitment of new deans of Business, Engineering, Nursing, and Social Work. I want to express my appreciation to those who have served on the search committees, and to the individuals holding positions on an interim basis.

## Accreditation and Certification

The NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges) site visit team came to campus on January 28th and was with us for a customarily intense four days. This is one of the key steps along the way toward the ten-year review of our accreditation status and follows from the detailed self-study that many faculty, students, staff and others participated in developing over the past year and a half.

The chair of the NEASC team, Chancellor Mark Nordenberg of the University of Pittsburgh, and his eleven colleagues met with more than 100 members of the UConn community in one-on-one interviews, small group sessions, and open forums. The visit included stops at the Health Center in Farmington and the Avery Point, Greater Hartford and Stamford regional campuses. I want to thank all those at the University who participated in the discussions or otherwise helped facilitate the site visit, and particularly Professor Karla Fox, who directed the self-study and organized the University for the team's visit. I know that Dr. Nordenberg and his colleagues were deeply appreciative of our hospitality and came away with a good understanding of the University.

The team will present its report to NEASC's Commission on Higher Education in the fall, and we expect action on our accreditation status shortly thereafter. The accreditation process, while time- and energy-consuming, is always valuable to the institution involved; the self-study provides an opportunity for us to think deeply about goals, and the site visit offers an objective assessment of progress and challenges. This has been the case with this NEASC assessment, and I look forward to what I am confident will be a favorable action by the Commission.

We are also now near completion of a self-study undertaken in connection with our intercollegiate athletics program. The NCAA now requires institutions that, like UConn, are engaged in Division I athletics to undergo a certification and recertification process roughly analogous to the NEASC accreditation for the entire university. About 70 faculty, students, staff and others have participated in our self-study; by NCAA requirement and our own preference, most participants come from outside the Division of Athletics. As with NEASC, the self-study committee and its subcommittees held extensive meetings with members of the campus community, both within and outside of athletics. In every important area the University is in conformity with NCAA standards, but at my request the self-study focused on potential areas of improvement in an already-strong program. We expect a site visit by external reviewers in October, and action by the NCAA on our certification status shortly thereafter.

## Other Issues

We continue to deal with a number of other important issues this semester. Some that are particularly worthy of note:

- *UConn-Dubai.* The possibility of a UConn program in Dubai is enormously appealing and extremely complex. I have long believed that international engagement should be a major component of our movement toward first-tier status among public universities, and the Dubai project offers a great opportunity to students, faculty, and the State of Connecticut. Dubai is a progressive, outward-looking part of the United Arab Emirates, and the eagerness of Dubai's leaders to partner with an American university speaks volumes about their aspirations.

For nearly two years we have engaged in extensive discussions with Dubai's educational leaders and we are not too far apart from a final agreement. Our absolute preconditions are that any UConn program there must be under the complete academic control of the University, with the same guarantees of academic freedom that exist here in Connecticut; that there be no discrimination on the basis of race, gender, religion, or any of the other categories that apply here; and that the program entail no cost to the University. Our counterparts in Dubai accept these principles, and we are working to resolve matters of detail. Once that occurs, we can proceed with more comprehensive planning.

- *Campus safety.* The safety of students, faculty, staff and visitors to our campus is always a major concern, and we continue to look for ways to deal with potentially difficult situations. The tragic hit-and-run death of one of our students this winter, though under unique circumstances, drew particular attention to the need to continuously upgrade pedestrian safety across the University, and especially at heavily-traveled areas like North Eagleville Road and the surrounding roads.

We have initiated several steps to respond to this concern. We have already provided better signage for the many crosswalks in that area. Northeast Utilities is installing more uniform street lighting. We are working with the Connecticut Department of Transportation to create a safe sidewalk from the Public Safety Building to Hunting Lodge Road, where many students reside; this will reduce pedestrian traffic at the lower end of North Eagleville Road. This summer the University will retain a traffic engineer and landscape architect to recommend design changes for North Eagleville Road; among the issues to be reviewed will be the number of crosswalks needed on this street and ways to slow traffic down. We will also initiate a broader study of crosswalk safety all across campus, exploring the need for upgrades and better signage and lighting at several locations. I understand that the Town of Mansfield has moved plans to construct a sidewalk and bicycle path on Hunting Lodge Road from North Eagleville Road to Celeron Square ahead, to 2008.

Assuring pedestrian safety involves all of us: the people who design roads and crossings, the University Police who enforce traffic rules, drivers in general, and pedestrians—most often students—themselves. Back in the mid-1990s UConn determined that it would be a “pedestrian-friendly” campus, and that goal requires community-wide engagement.

- *Environmental Integrity.* On March 13 the Board of Trustees adopted a “University of Connecticut Sustainable Design and Construction Policy.” Developed over many months, the policy states that “The University of Connecticut shall plan, design, construct, renovate and maintain sustainable energy- and water-efficient buildings that yield cost savings through lowered lifetime operating costs; provide enhanced learning atmospheres for students and healthier environments for all building occupants and visitors; and realize the University’s commitment to responsible growth and environmental stewardship.” Specifically, it mandates that for any major building construction or renovation project, the University will conform to a major national standard—the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) “Silver” rating as a minimum performance requirement, and unless there is a highly unusual and project-specific reason for exception approved by the Board of Trustees, we will comply with all applicable LEED protocols, register the project with the U.S. Green Building Council at the beginning of the design phase, and apply for LEED certification at the time of project completion.

The new policy links our longstanding commitment to environmental responsibility to the attainment of objective externally developed standards. I will not be surprised if within a decade most major universities and other public institutions adopt a similar policy, and I am proud that UConn is taking a leadership position here.

- *Promotion of Human Rights.* UConn’s commitment to human rights and social justice is evidenced in the human rights minor that is now part of the academic program, the research and public events sponsored by the Human Rights Institute, activities and archival collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, in the work of Professor Amii Omara-Otunnu, who holds the UNESCO Chair in Human Rights and directs our ongoing partnership with the African National Congress in South Africa, in the focus of the Embryonic Stem Cell Research Oversight Committee, and in many of the activities of our Center for Applied Genetics and Technology. This is just a partial list.

The University’s emphasis on human rights is attracting increasing numbers of talented, highly idealistic students whose presence enlivens the University. Over the past few years students have directed our attention to issues relating to sweatshop labor, fair wages for custodial workers, and concerns about war and peace.

An issue of great current concern is the ongoing genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan. Many UConn students have joined in a national movement to stop this horror; in this, they are joining in common cause with political leaders of the left and right. A key means of achieving the goal is to apply economic pressure on the Sudanese government. Many states, including Connecticut, have adopted legislation that authorizes divestment of holdings in corporations whose investments support the government of Sudan, and many major institutions have similar policies. The Connecticut legislation applies to the University’s funds managed by the State Treasurer, but not to the investments of the UConn Foundation. Students concerned about this issue gave an exceptionally well-prepared, carefully reasoned presentation

to the Foundation's Investment Committee on March 8th and found a receptive audience; the Foundation Board had already held deliberations on the Darfur issue. Following the student presentation, the Investment Committee unanimously approved actions requesting the Foundation's investment managers to consider divestment from companies on a watch list maintained by the Sudan Divestment Task Force, requiring that when future investment managers are hired, "Sudan-free" will be among the criteria considered, and that the manager of funds solely consisting of Foundation assets (i.e., not commingled with funds from other organizations) divest and make no new investments in any companies on the watch list.

I mention this at some length both because of the intrinsic importance of the issue itself, and because I see this as an excellent example of engaged students working, constructively and effectively, with a University community that shares a common commitment to human rights. I am proud of our students, and equally proud of the Foundation's actions.

### Concluding Thoughts

As the end of the academic year approaches, many of us find our calendars are filled with ceremonies, commemorations, and other activities. In recent days I had the pleasure of participating in Scholar's Day, at which we recognized students who excel academically; the UConn Foundation's annual dinner, in honor of faculty who hold endowed chairs and our major donors; and the Open House for the outstanding prospective freshmen to whom we have offered admission. Soon to come are a day-long visit by guidance counselors from Connecticut and beyond who will find, as has been the case in every year in which we held this event, that UConn is a place worthy of their best students; several school and college end-of-the-year banquets; and, of course, Commencement ceremonies at Storrs, the Health Center, and the School of Law.

In its own way, each of these events marks a major achievement by one or another part of our community or, in the case of our open houses, lays the groundwork for advances yet to come. In the midst of the flurry of activity, it is easy to lose sight of the larger story: this is a University that continues to advance on every possible front. Equally important, our progress reflects the contributions of thousands of individuals—faculty, students, staff, alumni, friends, parents, and many others.

The issues outlined earlier in this message represent immediate challenges, but they also reflect long-term aspirations. Based on where we stand in Spring 2007, I have every confidence that UConn will meet its goals with a high degree of distinction in the years ahead.

c: Board of Trustees