

The Dean's Almanac

Dead Llamas, Tattered Flags, New Faces

July 21, 2006

Hi from Storrs, where a cool breeze is cause for celebration. Actually, I'm pretty glad I'm the Dean of Students here and not at one of those big-city schools. I was in Boston earlier this week, and the temperature was a balmy 102. So I'm happy to be here rather than there where a slight incline like the northeast corner of the Boston Common is considered a "hill" you climb to find a cool breeze.



Not much going on around here now that orientation is over and our incoming freshmen have gone home to upgrade their wardrobes to college level and purchase lots of plastic objects at Wal-Mart for their rooms. But some new arrivals have taken their place. I chatted up three spindly-legged foals over on Horsebarn Hill, and I regularly see some equally spindly-legged freshman basketball players walk below my window every morning at around 9:15.

The thirty thousand or so campers here for the Jim Calhoun Basketball Camp keep **CROSSING WITHOUT LOOKING BOTH WAYS!** And you know how I feel about that.

I also saw three men with clipboards and old blueprints standing in front of the old pharmacy building (next to the Union), eyeing it from every angle, which can only mean one thing: demolition.

Speaking of the Student Union, the menu at the Union Street Market ("Bringing food to life") is in the testing phase, and they'll be open for business by the time school starts. Things look good for Blimpie and Panda Express as well. The Cultural Centers have moved in on the fourth floor and are mostly unpacked at this point. The new sod is doing well except for a patch out front that is now being watered hourly. Meeting rooms are getting furnished and pictures hung, all under the watchful eye of new Student Union Director Monica Rudzik.

A couple of other new faces in the Union: Associate Dean of Students/Director of Student Activities Christine Wilson and Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life Todd Sullivan. They still have the wide-eyed and disoriented expression of new employees (the one I think I haven't quite shed), but I'm sure by the time you get here, they'll look a little less overwhelmed.

"How's your summer going, Lee?" Hey, thanks for asking. It's been great. Some kayaking, hiking, movies, biking, swimming the usual summer fare. But I know I'm about to hit that moment in the summer when I start to miss you all and anticipate your return. It usually comes around August 1 when back-to-school displays in stores become ubiquitous and I start thinking I need new clothes and lots of plastic objects from Wal-Mart myself.

Couple things from the mailbag: Several of you have written to ask for an update on the construction going on in Charter Oak, and I'm happy to report that it's all on schedule, at least for the moment. If I hear otherwise from Associate VP of Y'all Sam Miller or his trusty steed Logan Trimble, I'll let you know.

Jesse asked about the tattered condition of the U.S., CT and UCONN flags that fly between CLAS and Beach Hall. Good eye, Jesse. They were replaced on July 18, according to Gene Roberts, Director of Facilities Operations. As I used to sing as a child, "José, does that star-spangled banner yet wave?"

Donna emailed with this question:

Why is it that I get paid minimum wage for a job that should be paid much higher? I work in the UCONN Necropsy lab. My job duties include but are not limited to: admitting dead animals and taking information from clients, entering the animal and its info into our system, being on call after hours to do the above-mentioned work, dismembering animals for disposal (even large ones like cows, horses, llamas and pigs), removing brains for rabies testing, generally getting bloody and sweaty and being exposed to various diseases and ailments and smells, cleaning up the lab of all blood and animal parts after the necropsy, arranging carcass barrels for pick-up by the rendering truck and cleaning said barrels. You would think the university would be willing to pay more for help like that. So any clue why pay is so low?

Wow. We have a Necropsy lab? We have barrels full of dead animals? The things I don't know about this place... Well, I don't know why the pay is low, other than there are pay scales for student workers in all jobs, but I think all of us would certainly support your request for a higher wage. Have you asked? What does your boss think?

Dead llamas? Wow. And to think some students complain about working in the library.

My comments in the last Almanac about parking elicited some irritable responses from a couple of you. I was reminded of this last night when I noticed a "historical" photo of the UCONN campus in the local newspaper that showed a series of large, ugly, square-ish buildings and hundreds of cars. That's what the center of campus once looked like. Fairfield Way was a parking lot. It was downright ugly. Sure, we could pave over all lawns and pedestrian walkways so more people could park closer, but the feel of this whole place would change dramatically (again). This is not to say there aren't parking issues that need to be addressed. Some of you mentioned your safety concerns (walking to and from your cars very late or very early), and I'll be passing those on to the Police Department. Perhaps the Escort Service hours can be extended to accommodate those of you who leave very early in the morning for work, or have to get to an early practice. Right now, they go till 2 am on weekdays and 3 am Thursday through Saturday. If the need is there, I'm sure Chief Hudd will consider extending these hours.

Some of you have also asked about building parking decks where there are now surface lots. Yes, I agree, it would be a great thing to double or triple the spaces in some of those lots by building up, but of course, the problem is money. A surface lot doesn't cost much to build. A parking deck? Big bucks. And just like a family that wants to put an addition on the house, we

have two sources of funds: we can dip into the savings account (usually called "the reserves" around here), or we can borrow the money (usually done through a bond). Like any reasonable person, we want to make sure we don't drain the savings account, and these days, it's probably a little lower than some people might like due to unexpected costs related to the residence hall repairs that you all know about. And borrowing money too often is not a great idea because, just like with individuals, it affects our credit rating and makes it more expensive to borrow any money at all. Plus, just like anyone else, we have to pay back the money we borrow, and that means increasing fees that we charge students. A parking deck can cost an average of \$10-\$15,000 per space. How many years would it take to recoup that cost through parking fees? At \$500 per year, a space would pay for itself in maybe 20 years. So should we triple the price and pay it off more quickly? Keep the price low but pass the cost on to all students, even those who don't use it?

Of course, some new buildings are paid for by gifts from generous donors. If any of you know someone who would like to pay for a new parking deck with a gift of, say, \$10 million, please contact the UCONN Foundation.

And that's it for University Finance 101. I hope you're all doing well and enjoying yourselves out there. Stay safe. Keep an eye on your friends. Be nice to your parents. It's their summer, too.

Got a question? Or just want to let me know how your summer's going? Send me a note at: Lee.Williams@uconn.edu.

More dangerous than an unanswered question is an unquestioned answer. - unknown