

The Dean's Almanac

Dean Responds to Student Questions

April 11, 2006

Thanks to all of you who wrote in response to my first column. I appreciate your taking the time to write both encouraging and thoughtful comments. I even appreciated the criticism, which lets me know you're out there.



Zach asked a question about the limit of 19 students in a W (writing)-designated course. He wondered if UConn does this to "look good to outsiders." While it's true that we like to look good to outsiders (hence the street sweepers you see around campus), that's not the reason for this particular policy. It has to do with what research has taught us about effective writing instruction for students. In order for a faculty member or TA to read and respond to all the beautiful prose that her/his students may write, there has to be a limit to the number of students in the class. Otherwise, students won't actually improve their writing, which is the point of having classes that emphasize writing. So no, it's not an image thing (those rankings really don't take such microscopic issues into account). It's a workload thing (for faculty) and a quality of education thing (for students). The University does continue to add sections of those courses that are in the most demand, though, since faculty are strongly discouraged from overenrolling their classes.

Bruce asked about the availability of the lawn outside the Student Union prior to graduation. I agree that it would be wonderful for all of you seniors who have walked around that construction site for four years. But it looks like you'll have to come back as alumni to enjoy the lawn. It will probably be sodded and seeded this summer and be open, at least in a limited way, in the Fall. While I know nothing can replace those construction trailers and porta-johns in your hearts, seniors, I hope that current and incoming students can find something to love about the new look.

Beth asked a very provocative question: Is there any truth to the rumor that UConn doesn't really recycle, but simply dumps all its separated trash into one dumpster? That would be quite troubling. I'm going to do some checking around on this and get back to you in a future column.

Lastly, to those of you who took me to task for my comments about pedestrians in crosswalks, I'm sorry if offended anyone. Of course I don't blame pedestrians who are in crosswalks when they are hit or nearly hit by cars. The law is on your side. But the truth is, many such collisions could be avoided if we didn't assume that every driver is in agreement with that law (or even saw the crosswalk) and instead looked both ways, then looked again, then made eye contact before proceeding. Right or wrong, it's no fun to be either the hitter or the hittee.

So here's my question for you, UConn students, faculty and staff: what is the state animal of Connecticut, and, perhaps more importantly, why?

Stay safe. Take care of each other.

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