

The Dean's Almanac

What's the Deal with Spring Weekend, Anyway?

April 17, 2006

Thanks to all of you who shared with me that the sperm whale is the state animal of Connecticut, especially Sarah LaRose, who has worked as a Visitor Services Representative (is that a tour guide?) at Mystic Seaport. Sarah explained that the sperm whale is honored in Connecticut because New London was once the second largest whaling port in the country, second only to New Bedford, MA (whoo-hoo!!! We're Number Two!). They were prized for, not surprisingly, whale oil (also called spermaceti), which was used to light lamps, as well as for their teeth, used for scrimshaw.



I don't know. It just seems to me that the honor of being a state animal should go to an animal seen frequently around the state, which, in this area, would be squirrels, wild turkeys, suicidal deer and golden retrievers. I've lived in Connecticut for nine months now, and I've yet to lay eyes on a sperm whale.

Here's another question for you: What is up with this Spring Weekend thing? I started hearing about Spring Weekend before I ever stepped foot in Storrs. I've heard the media's version of it. I've heard from my colleagues in the administration and on the faculty, I've even heard about it on Sunday mornings from folks in church. What I don't know is what it means to you. What does Spring Weekend look like through students' eyes? Do you like it? Hate it? Couldn't care less? Why is it important? Why isn't it? Being new here, I'm really at a disadvantage to explain to people who ask why it happens, why we "allow" it, why students participate, some in very high-risk behaviors. So send me a note and give me your insights. Tell me what you think I need to know, and, if you were me, what, if anything you would do about Spring Weekend. I'll be on campus during the weekend, so if you think there are any places I should go to help understand things, or avoid, tell me about those, too.

Onto some other questions you've asked (and answered). A couple of weeks ago, Beth asked about recycling[¶] does it really happen here, or is it all a sham? I heard from Rob Liu, an intern in the Office of Environmental Policy, and his very thoughtful answer can be found below.

Gabrielle asked why the smoking policy (smokers must be more than 25 feet from the entrance of a building) is enforced around the residence halls, but not at some academic and administrative buildings. I think this is an enforcement v. discomfort issue. While people who don't smoke generally dislike it when they have to walk through a phalanx of smokers on their way into and out of a building, they also don't like having potentially unpleasant interactions with their colleagues[¶] people they have to work with the rest of the day. So they ignore it. In a residence hall, it's not usually students who enforce it with each other; it's usually staff, right? We have no equivalent "authorities" among us in these buildings, so it just gets ignored, or at

least un-remarked upon. Is that fair? Of course not. Consistency should rule the day. But most people prefer to avoid confrontations so just mumble under their breath and go on their way. If anyone has a different take on this, send me a note.

Alysa asked about the closing of Ryan Refectory, and the implication that students' opinions don't matter. Ryan is being closed because we are in desperate need of classroom space. Sometimes it's simply a matter of competing priorities: students need classes, students want convenient dining. Classes win. You may have to walk further, but you can still eat. If we don't have space for classes, it's not a matter of just walking further. We simply can't offer the classes. Of course student opinion matters (and students "vote with their feet" Ryan's usage is just not high enough to be a compelling reason to keep it open when other options exist). For example, student opinion determined the food vendors (Wendy's, Blimpie and Panda Express) that will open in the Union this Fall. But not every decision is made with student input considered. This is not because you don't matter. You really do. It's more that some decisions require a level of knowledge and expertise that students don't have (such as pressures on academic departments to provide a specific number of seats in a specific number of classes over a semester or year). I know there's a petition out there to keep Ryan open. I doubt it will make any difference. Yes, your convenience is important to us. But your educational options are more important. Though it's hard to believe, even my opinion is not sought in such matters, AND HEY! I'M THE DEAN! But I'm not an expert on space usage and dining options, so I let my more knowledgeable colleagues make those decisions, and I try and trust their judgment, just like they trust mine on some decisions.

Valentino asked if anyone's ever thought to take advantage of the windy weather here in Storrs and build wind turbines to capture energy. I'll ask around, but if someone knows something about this, let me know. Personally, I like the look of windmills. They make me feel as though I'm in the midst of a very important quest (two extra credit points for those who know the literary allusion).

Kelly asked about the heat in residence halls. "Why are the dorms always so unbearably hot? The dorms cost so much to live in, and the University is wasting money on heating costs by keeping them so warm. I had to have a fan running in the middle of January, it was so hot in the rooms. Wouldn't it save the university money in the long run to have some way of residents controlling the temperature themselves?" Here's the answer from the horse's mouth, or, as the horse is often called, Logan Trimble, Associate Director of Residential Life:

"Unfortunately, the Office of Facilities cannot turn the heat on and off campus-wide the way we can control a home furnace. It is particularly difficult this time of year when we have warm days and cool nights. The central heating plant is either on or off. Once shut down, the heating plant cannot generate enough heat to quickly bring temperatures back up, so it remains active until we are clear of the cooler weather. The plant will shut down sometime in April. On the other hand, the temperature in your particular building could be turned up too high. Contact your complex office and ask them to check the temperature of the building. An adjustment may be possible."

Thanks, Logan and Kelly.

That's about it for this week. Thanks for your various notes, questions, encouragement, ideas. Study hard, don't skimp on sleep, and look both ways before crossing, whether you're in a crosswalk or not.

Rob's Recycling Response:

"As an intern at the Office of Environmental Policy, and lead intern on the recycling program, I can say that UConn does indeed recycle and has been putting an incredible amount of effort into improving our current system.

Willimantic Waste, our waste contractor, can deal with a reasonable amount of contamination at their facilities. They won't throw away an entire bag of cans because of half a donut. Those cans = \$\$\$.

Sometimes it seems as if recyclables and trash are all thrown into the same waste stream. This is not true. They are sorted out either at the point of recycling (right here at UConn, or in the back of the trucks or at the Williwaste facilities. The latter two processes are not visible to students which is why it seems that student recycling efforts are for naught.

In short, UConn is indeed making an effort to recycle. We have reached the era where it is economically feasible and beneficial to do so. We've even hired a consultant to research ways we could improve our program and conduct cost benefit analyses. The result of that is a new pilot program we've instituted in North Dining Hall and the Young Building. In fact, we ran a contest at North Dining last week. Students who printed their names on the front page of the Daily Campus and recycled them into the new blue Slim Jim recycling bins were entered into a raffle for two 25 dollar gift certificates to the Coop and a free sunday at the Dairy Bar.

So keep recycling, your efforts are not wasted and you may even be rewarded!"

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