

The Dean's Almanac

Post-Spring Weekend Observations and Other Stuff

April 24, 2006

"So, what did you think of your first Spring Weekend?" I've been asked that question about 40 times in the last couple of days. Here are some of the things I've thought:



- ▶ We must have the best University police department in the country.
- ▶ Ditto for the staff in the residence halls and Student Health Services.
- ▶ UConn students are, for the most part, pretty polite and reasonable. Not so much their friends, I'm afraid. Numbers of incidents and medical emergencies for visitors far exceeded those for our own students.
- ▶ The above makes me think that the messages being sent by students and staff, much of them coordinated by the truly marvelous Spring Weekend Committee, are getting through to our students. Outsiders miss the message and act like idiots.
- ▶ The answer to the question "Why do students do this?" seems to be, "So they can say they did it." I can't argue with that.
- ▶ Sponge Bob Squarepants is funny no matter where s/he turns up. Why is that?
- ▶ Public urination is rude no matter where it happens.
- ▶ \$9000 in damage in the residence halls is ridiculous. Who's going to pay for that? Oh, right. You will, through your housing fees. Any ideas how to prevent that kind of damage?
- ▶ The Celeron Trail (that's what I call it, at least) was a wild ride. I felt like I could have picked up my feet and been carried like a river current would carry me.
- ▶ I like rain.
- ▶ Guster and O.A.R. were great choices, and the concert ran like a well-oiled machine. Nice work, SUBOG and Student Activities.
- ▶ I am too old to stay up that late three nights in a row. And I'm okay with that.
- ▶ The overnight clean-up of X lot was amazing. Our facilities folks deserve kudos.
- ▶ The Daily Campus said some people threw bottles at a fire truck after they put out a fire at Celeron. If that was you, you're a jerk.
- ▶ But I saw lots of people taking care of one another. If that was you, you're great. Thanks for doing that.

And thanks to everyone at the University, students and staff, who worked all year to plan a safe and fun weekend.

So let's see what's in the e-mailbag this week. **Rachel** asked why the Burton Complex (the new athletic facility) seems to have been built so quickly, especially compared to the Student Union,

which has taken years. She wondered if it was an example of preferential treatment that athletes receive.

The main reason is a fairly simple one: Burton is a much less complex Complex. It is mostly a steel-framed big open space. Yes, there are other components to it, but nothing like the Union. The Student Union has some major food operations, which require much more electrical, heating, refrigeration and venting work. There are also many more individual spaces-meeting rooms, offices, lounges-which require a great deal more interior work (walls, ceilings, trim, carpeting). This is not to say that it couldn't have been done more quickly. Like most big construction projects, there were cost overruns and delays, some of those attributable to contractor problems.

Angela asked about the decision to turn Ryan Refectory into academic space, when there is obviously a housing shortage on campus. Wouldn't it make more sense to convert it to residential space? And she wondered if there are plans to build new residence halls. In my opinion, we don't have a housing shortage as much as an over-demand. Oh...wait. That's the same thing. I took Econ courses, you know. Anyway, we are in dire need of academic space, and can't exactly say to faculty, "Go teach off campus somewhere" (though some already do, through on-line courses). But we can say to students, "Go live off campus somewhere," which is what almost every large university says to its upperclass and graduate students. The difference between us and those other universities, though, is that Mansfield and Storrs do not have adequate amounts of off-campus housing, at least enough in decent condition. Unlike many other campuses, our university housing is substantially nicer than many of the options off-campus. But there's a point where a housing system cannot get bigger, and we're at that point now. We don't have the space or the money to build new residence halls. We have the fifth largest residential population in America, but are not even in the top 100 in overall size. So we are housing a larger percentage of our students right now than just about anyone else our size or larger. We need more decent quality off-campus options for students to live in, and that is up to the town and to prospective developers. We are working with the town to push landlords to take better care of their properties. And we're hopeful that when Storrs Center opens in a few years, those beds will provide some relief. Till then, we'll try and squeeze as many beds out of our existing buildings as is safe and comfortable, but not at the cost of compromising your educational opportunities.

So why don't we just admit fewer students? Great question, and yes, there are equally great answers. But that's a topic for another day.

Now go back to your studying.

Have a question about something here at UConn? Heard a rumor and would like the inside story? Don't like something I've written? Just want to vent? Send me an email.

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