

The Dean's Almanac

There's No Writers' Strike in the Wilbur Cross Building

January 19, 2008

A big welcome back to returning Huskies, and an even bigger welcome to new Huskies. Obviously, you did something right in a past life and your good karma has landed you here...in Storrs...in January. Sorry about the wind. Earmuffs will help.

So whatcha been doing? I'm hoping your winter break weeks were full of friends and fun and sleep, some bargain-hunting and more than a few nutritious meals. Those of us you left behind have spent our time shoveling, enjoying the lack of long lines at the food court, and, of course, watching the Husky women slice through the Big East like a hot knife through butter. Sadly, my two favorite players, Kalana Greene and Mel Thomas, both went down with knee injuries, and I, along with fans across the state, will really miss watching them play. Lest I curse anyone, I've decided not to have a favorite player anymore. It's too hard anyway, because they all play the kind of in-your-face ball I really like.



The Dean takes a dive

I hope by now you've noticed the open, paved paths between the Student Union and the CUE building. The lighting looks pretty nice, and will make your commute between class and a burrito a bit shorter. Speaking of lighting, I went on a tour one night this week to look at the kind of new lighting we'll be installing around campus. You know those old-fashioned-looking light posts that make our campus look so quaint and New England-y? There are over 2000 of those on campus, and gradually, the tops of them will be replaced with a new kind of fixture that is "dark skies compliant." Apparently, our campus produces a lot of light pollution at night (most campuses do), which has a negative effect on trees, birds and other species that depend on normal dark/light cycles for growth and health. Poorly-designed lights that "leak" light upwards cause our communities to be over-lit, and also waste a lot of energy. So I'm happy to report that we'll be doing our part to keep the night skies dark enough for us to enjoy a little star-gazing. Watch for the new fixtures. The first of them have been installed on the road from CLAS to Beach Hall, in front of Wilbur Cross, and the difference is pretty amazing.

The tour I took (again, it was at night, with an air temperature of around 18 degrees---have I mentioned what a great job I have?) also included a stop at the new parking lot up behind the warehouse on North Hillside Road. It will add 600 spaces to our parking supply, which means we'll now only be about, oh, 13,000 short of what you all would like us to have. But it's a start.

Other big transportation news: the airport shuttle is back! So if you don't want to depend on your friend to wake up in time to drive you to Bradley to catch your 7 am flight to Cancun this Spring Break, call Transportation Services and sign up with them. It's a great price (about half what a commercial service would charge), and you can count on them to show up when they say they will.

There were a few items in the mailbag at the end of the semester, most of them having to do with weather and final exams. A number of you asked, as per usual this time of year, "Who makes the decision to delay the start of school, or close early?" No, it's not Jay Hickey. He just gets to tell you about it via email. I know—you love Jay. We all do. But the decision process actually begins with another high-ranking administrator who shall remain nameless lest s/he succumb to student pressure in a weak moment. That person begins at around 4 am to talk with UConn Public Safety and Facilities as well as Connecticut State Police, about the condition of roads and the time needed to plow the campus. Obviously, there is some variance in conditions between Storrs and, say, Hartford, or Putnam. But conditions around Storrs are the most significant in this decision because if it's bad here, then it's going to be a mess if people start coming in from elsewhere.

I've got to tell you, though: Finals Week was a mess all around. The recently-retired assistant registrar, Laurie Best, who was responsible for creating the what-if-an-exam-is-cancelled schedule, told me that in her 27 years in that job, we never had a cancelled final. Apparently, she retired one semester too late. While my office doesn't make the decision about cancelling exams, we are the ones responsible for helping students reschedule them, which, as you can imagine, was complicated. Thanks to all the faculty and students who did their best to administer and take exams at unexpected times with a minimum of kvetching.

And about plowing and shoveling. I received a few emails from students who complained that they were awakened by someone plowing or shoveling in the middle of the night, or early in the morning (which, for many of you, are the same thing). Folks, our Facilities staff don't sit in a warm shop drinking coffee waiting for 3 am to roll around before they start plowing. They plow all night long, and into the morning, working double shifts to get our campus sidewalks and parking lots clear. If they happen to end up under your window at an odd hour, just put your pillow over your head and give thanks to whatever higher power you thank for such things that you are in your warm bed able to go back to sleep, while some poor person is out there on a cold, dark winter's night working hard for us.

Enough about that. Onto some other things. **Joe** wrote in to say that "A majority of UConn men's basketball games are broadcast on the channel MyTV9. However, on-campus television does not include this channel. Could you change that?" Turns out this was a surprise to Rob Vietzke, Director of Network Services for UITS. He immediately looked into it, and the channel was added. Thanks, Rob, as well as John Babbitt in the same shop. You can now see men's games on Channel 64.

Stephen wrote in to ask about the "planetarium" on North Eagleville Rd. near the Chemistry Building. Apparently, it really is a miniature planetarium, the oldest one in Connecticut, built in 1954. It seats 25 and is used primarily for Physics 155, taught by Dr. Cynthia Peterson.

However, it can be reserved through the Physics Department for special shows. So if you're looking for an interesting date idea...

Lastly, a few of you wrote to say that the 1 pm opening of the halls on Sunday this week was going to be a bit of a hassle due to the 1 pm start of the men's game. Residence Life agreed and moved the opening time up. So next time you get an itch to gripe about my friends across the hall, remember that they do hear you, they do care, and they are happy to change those things they can change to serve you better.

My last word of wisdom: even though hats can make your hair look stupid, they really do keep you warm. So give one a try.

Send me a note if you're so inclined, and let me know how you're doing. I'll see you all around campus.