

The Dean's Almanac

Has Anyone Seen My Summer???

August 28, 2008

I'm not sure, but I think I skipped July. I could have sworn it was June about three weeks ago, and then, suddenly...you're back! Or, you're here for the first time. Either way, welcome to the Dean's Almanac. This is an occasional missive I write to answer questions you have, muse about the state of all things UConn, and let you know if anything incredibly interesting is about to happen.



Hanging around the Great Pyramid of Giza

My summer? It was fine. Thanks for asking.

Except for the time compression I seem to have experienced, I had a great time. I spent a couple of weeks in the Middle East (Egypt and Jordan, specifically), which was amazing and hot and totally out of my comfort zone. Then I headed west, to Montana, which was...also hot, but after the 115-degree temperatures of the Nile Valley, didn't seem to bother me much. The rest of the time, I spent here, in Storrs, looking out my window and pining for you.

Okay. Maybe I didn't pine. But I did wonder how your summer was going. One of the ways I entertain myself during the summer is imagining incoming freshmen at home, duking it out with their parents over the purchase of a new laptop, a bed-in-a-bag, various music devices and a wardrobe. I imagine trips to Target and Wal-Mart to buy large plastic objects and things that are crucial to success as a college student, like a collapsible laundry basket (back when I was a student, we didn't have high-tech laundry baskets. We just had bags that hung on a hook. Or alternately, we threw dirty laundry in the bottom of the closet).

I imagine the debates about what clothing to take, what to leave behind. I imagine the ambivalence caused by certain beloved stuffed animals. I imagine you wearing your UConn t-shirt and proudly telling your great aunt and uncle what you're going to major in, and having them responding, "Oh, my. Molecular *and* Cell Biology!"

I imagine you arriving here and quickly sizing up your roommate (although Facebook certainly gives you a leg up on such things), and deciding if this is someone you want to hang around with, or just someone you'll live with (or neither). I imagine your parents wearing that odd combined expression of pride and sadness and fear, which is expressed by either 1) tears, 2) yelling, or 3) stoic indifference (until they drive away).

And now I imagine you here, hopefully having a good first week.

Some questions came in over the summer, a few of them in the last week or so, so let me get right to the mailbag. **Bruce** wondered, “Why were trees removed from the island in Mirror Lake? Why were the healthy trees (Japanese and European Larches) cut down at the intersection of Glenbrook Road and North Eagleville Road and the Typha removed from Swan Lake?”

Obviously, the man knows his trees. You might actually have noticed that there have been a number of pruning and cleaning projects done over the summer. About these particular efforts, Head Landscaping Guy Dave Lotreck had this to say:

The trees at Mirror Lake were taken down at the request of the President's Office. There were many dead trees that had never been attended to along with countless loads of brush and debris. This area will be planted with Rhododendrons and Mountain Laurel in the next month. The idea was to get rid of the undesirable growth and replace it with a more attractive selection. You are seeing it as a work in progress currently. I think anyone would be hard pressed to say that the previous state was a visual asset to the campus.

The trees that were removed from Swan Lake were done so to afford a better view of the Chemistry building and to open the area up. The larches are a common tree to our campus and there are quite a few examples in other areas. The same rationale was used for the removal of the plant life on the edges of the lake.

Just as a point of information - The campus has been in a dire need of pruning. There is a lot of dead and dying material on the campus that is an eyesore and a safety concern for the students. You will witness more trimming on the campus, with the intention of creating a more beautiful and safe campus for the students.

So get used to men (and occasionally women) in trees with large, sharp implements. Actually, it's been the Mirror Lake project that I've been watching with interest this summer. That lake (or, as one student called it, trying to be more truthful, “Goose Poop Lake”) was really pretty disgusting. I guess our president, Open Mike Hogan, agreed, and suggested it could look a lot better with some work. So over the summer, the lake was dredged, and the silt that was pulled from the lake was placed on the lawn next to it for a few days until a big sucking truck could come by and collect it. It was the most foul-smelling ooze you could imagine. Keep an eye on Mirror Lake as this project continues, ultimately giving us a beautiful front yard for our campus.

You might also notice that the enormous open space in front of the Student Union has a pretty decent lawn now. The area between the Union and the Benton will remain open space. The area closer to Fairfield Way, however, will eventually be the site of a new academic building (students new to campus: there was a building on that site till about a year and a half ago). So yes, another construction fence will be going up sometime this year. Enjoy the area while you can.

Several students have wondered about the whole “trayless dining” efforts in our dining halls. This is an incredibly important effort by our campus to reduce water use and food waste, and I

hope you like it. It may seem a bit inconvenient at times, but the results from the pilot program were astonishing, and UConn's gotten some very good national press for this effort. Other campuses are now looking to UConn for advice on how to implement this effort. For some very interesting background on this effort, check out the [FAQ website](http://www.dining.uconn.edu/faq_trayless.html) (http://www.dining.uconn.edu/faq_trayless.html) that Dining Services has put together.

Please send me your questions and suggestions, and I'll be happy to get right to work on them. In the past, I've answered questions about academics, parking, dining, residence life, potholes, footballs flying into parking lots, heating, cooling, clogged shower heads, crosswalks, basketball tickets, Spring Weekend, cable TV, the housing lottery, and a host of other topics that trouble you, deeply or otherwise. So send me a note if you're so inclined. I am also happy to answer questions off-line, so don't worry if you have a more personal question. I promise I won't make it an almanac topic if you'd prefer I didn't. Also, I also occasionally provide pseudonyms for those who write in with more...sensitive questions. You can reach me best [by email](#).

I'll see you around campus. Welcome/welcome back!