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## Support for *Next Generation Connecticut*

Good afternoon. My name is Laura Santry and I am a second semester junior in the Honors Program at the University of Connecticut. I am double majoring in Physiology & Neurobiology and Spanish with a minor in Molecular & Cellular Biology. As a science major and resident of Connecticut, I can not help but become excited at the possibilities the *Next Generation Connecticut* initiative could provide.

This semester, I am currently enrolled in an Honors course titled Stem Cell Biology. Since Connecticut is one of a few states that actively fund research in this area, UCONN is already a hotbed for exploration. Therefore, I am instructed by scientists in this field who are actively engaged in various forms of stem cell research. It is a privilege to be able to take this class, since it is a course not traditionally offered at many colleges and universities. Although I am only part way through the semester, I have already gained an understanding into what exactly are stem cells, how they can be created or induced, what sorts of potential application they have clinically and how they are an invaluable mechanism by which to study countless disease processes affecting millions of people. I believe that UCONN has the ability to offer this class because the state, and thus the University, is a leader in stem cell research. With the implementation of the *Next Generation Connecticut* Initiative, UCONN will be able to greatly enhance research in other fields across the sciences and become a leader in many other specialties. With the influx of researchers on the cutting edge of the newest scientific advancements, more unique courses could be created. Imagine the distinctive undergraduate, graduate and doctorate curriculums UCONN would be able to offer. Imagine the world-class scientists Connecticut could recruit to take part in these advancements. Imagine how enticing the state would be for companies and industries dedicated to growing new business in these fields. It would appear that an investment in the ever-evolving sciences would provide Connecticut with a distinct educational identity conducive for growth and development in many aspects of the state.

The question has been raised as to why UCONN, specifically the Storrs campus, is the right venue for *Next Generation Connecticut*. I believe that this initiative can not only lift the quality of education to new heights, but also enhance an already thriving university setting. For me, while academic rigor was of the upmost importance when choosing a college, it was also essential to find an environment that would allow me to grow and thrive as an individual as well as a student. When I leave UCONN, I know that the memories of the long hours of studying, late nights at the library, and countless pages of books will fade, but those outside the classroom will remain. I will recall taking horse back riding lessons at Horsebarn Hill, diving in the mud at the annual Oozeball Mud Volleyball Tournament, standing front row at a spring concert, presenting at the National Collegiate Honors Conference, and of course, anxiously watching the 2011 Men's Basketball team compete in the national championship game, on the jumbo-tron in Gampel Pavilion surrounded by thousands of fellow students. Feeling apart of a greater community has been one of the

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best gifts this university has given me. UCONN's reputation as a top public research institute and thriving college community is, in my opinion, its most compelling recruitment argument. By targeting the UCONN campus as the foundation of the *Next Generation Connecticut initiative*, the state will create an environment enticing to many people. A hypothetical new *Next Generation University Campus* would have to compete with, or try to recreate the unique atmosphere at UCONN. This would be counter-productive. By making UCONN the benefactor of this statewide initiative, it will boost the University to new heights, and with it, the rest of Connecticut.