



University of Connecticut
Undergraduate Student Government

03/17/2014

Office of the Student Body
President

HB 5494

Hon. Steve Cassano
Hon. Roberta Willis
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
Room 1800, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

The Honorable Steve Cassano and Roberta Willis,

The Board of Trustees for the University of Connecticut is made up of many esteemed leaders in our community, including one undergraduate student and one graduate student. It is my firm belief that the 18,000 undergraduates who attend the Storrs Campus of the University of Connecticut are significant enough stakeholders to warrant one additional undergraduate voice on the Board of Trustees.



At this time, we feel that the current proposal of adding an undergraduate position is an excellent solution, and I expect that a bill solidifying our support will pass in the Undergraduate Senate in the next two weeks. Currently, we envision a situation where the two undergraduate trustees will be elected in alternate years for two-year terms, ideally allowing the senior member to guide and mentor the junior as they build relationships with the board. The member holding seniority would be the voting member at all times except where he or she is absent. I believe that two voices on the Board are more important than two votes, and this bill accomplishes that goal.

You will find with this letter a memorandum outlining our case in greater detail. There is no questioning the quality experience the University of Connecticut affords its students, but there is also no questioning the exploding cost of higher education everywhere. I would not attend another school if I had the chance to decide again, but I do not want future undergraduates to second guess their decision based on rising costs at UConn. It is our feeling that the best way to represent undergraduate interests, and provide the necessary level of scrutiny to the decisions of the board is to have this second undergraduate member of the Board.

I greatly appreciate your time in considering this testimony and the testimony of my colleagues in the Undergraduate Student Government. We all look forward to working with the committee on this issue in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,

Edward M. Courchaine

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Memorandum Concerning Undergraduate Representation on the University of Connecticut Board of Trustees

The University of Connecticut is currently in a phase of intense growth, one that will only accelerate as Next Generation Connecticut goes into full effect. The Board of Trustees lies at the center of decisions that will impact the success of the University for years to come and represents the major stakeholders of that success. The Undergraduate Student Body has representation on the Board, but currently holds only one seat. As the University grows, and the cost of attendance becomes increasingly burdensome for students, it holds that Undergraduate representation on the Board should increase.

Proportional Financial Burden

Over the past ten years, the operating funds of the University have become increasingly dependent on the tuition of Undergraduate Students. The chart below demonstrates this point.



Fiscal Year	Tuition (in millions)	Tuition Percentage of total receipts (%)	Total Operating Fund Revenue	Storrs Undergraduate Enrollment
2002	\$148.9	23.0	\$365.8	14,693
2006	\$165.6	26.4	\$798.2	16,112
2011	\$132.9	28.5	\$1,033.5	17,345
2012	\$137.5	29.0	\$1,028.6	17,528

Despite the increase in this percentage since 2002, the opportunities for students to be systematically involved in decision making processes have remained relatively unchanged.

Careful Critique of University Strategy

Recently, the affordability and efficiency of the University have been examined in great detail. Clearly, there is a desire to maintain the affordability of a degree, and simultaneously enhance the value of that degree. Out of all stakeholders to this goal, it is the undergraduate student currently enrolled at the University who is most likely to be adversely affected. Financing an education has dramatically increased student loan debt, and the stresses of dramatic institutional change are felt immediately on all campuses.

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This is not to say that undergraduate representatives would be opposed to change or remain short sighted with respect to the cost of attendance. Rather, it is to demonstrate that undergraduate representatives on the Board of Trustees have the most vested interest in keeping tuition, fees and services affordable, as well as demanding that operations are run efficiently. This reflects the interests of the State of Connecticut as well. Oversight over University action is charged to the Board of Trustees and it is essential that the Board be critical in its scrutiny of University initiatives. Historically, student members have demonstrated exceptional ability to fulfill this aspect of the role.

Student Representatives as Leaders

The single Undergraduate Trustee holds a significant amount of power and responsibility amongst student leaders at the University. In a two year term, it takes a great deal of time and effort to become a competent and effective member of the Board of Trustees. Further, as one member of the board, they must concentrate on specific work done in only few committees. The University of Connecticut spans many campuses, with undergraduate students studying or working at all of them. It thus calls into question whether or not a single undergraduate representative can aptly represent the 22,595 undergraduate students across six campuses.



Adding a second trustee representing undergraduate interests provides the opportunity for the senior trustee to retain the single undergraduate vote while the junior member is being mentored and developed in the role. The second voice will increase the prominence of the undergraduate perspective and improve the quality of representation overall through increased outreach and training. Last year, a bill was passed that limits the trustee position to current students. Though we believe that change has its benefits, one of the primary drawbacks is the inability for the undergraduate Trustee to be a consistently experienced student leader, because the representative must be elected in their sophomore year to serve the full two-year term. The addition of an additional trustee solves this problem, allowing the senior trustee time to mentor and train the incoming one.

Conclusion

The addition of a second alternate undergraduate trustee to the Board will positively affect multiple stakeholders of the University of Connecticut. An additional undergraduate voice on the Board will increase the scrutiny of University activities, to the benefit of both students and the State of Connecticut. The transfer of knowledge and experience between undergraduate Trustees will be smoother and more efficient, resulting in a higher quality of student representation, and a furthering the goal of making UConn an institution of excellence.

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