

Public comments by Mary Gallucci, Adjunct Professor

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Legislators and Representatives of the State of Connecticut, good evening.

“Man hopes; genius creates,” Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in his speech to the senior class of Harvard, 1838.

Emerson wrote this for students attending Harvard, not the University of Connecticut—or did he? I would venture to say he would not distinguish between the Harvard student and the UConn student—Emerson celebrated the *American Scholar*—or, as he liked to say, Man (or Woman) Thinking.

For visionaries such as Emerson, students in college represent the greatest potential—for themselves and for the future of society. **One cannot invest too much in this potential.**

A publicly supported state university such as the University of Connecticut offers chances and opportunities to a greater range of students than an elite private college does. Earlier today you heard of some of the exemplary accomplishments of UConn students and professors. This is what creates the dynamism of a state university—the range of students from different backgrounds, the vital exchange of ideas that occurs in a well-funded center of learning—well-funded but available to all who qualify for the rigors of a college education. Many UConn students prove themselves equal to—or better—than students educated at elite institutions—yet many Connecticut students would never be able to attend college but for the public university. For this reason, the state must make a strong and unwaivering commitment to Connecticut’s students and citizens. Many UConn students and recent graduates have not even had a chance to display their full potential—but they have established a solid foundation by attending a research 1 university with a strong liberal arts curriculum, a range of majors and schools, and a diverse student body.

The state—in my opinion—has an obligation to offer a first-class education in the arts and sciences to the students of Connecticut. This was also the opinion of former US President Thomas Jefferson, who established the first fully secular state university, the University of Virginia, in the United States. Building that university—which was centered around a library, according to Jefferson’s ideal—was one of the biggest construction projects of

the age (and we are all familiar with how big university construction projects are!—but they must be big to match the grand mission of the public university to nurture well-rounded students; skilled future professionals; and thoughtful, engaged citizens). Jefferson also included gardens in his university design, as he revered the science of agriculture, which is something we can all appreciate at the University of Connecticut.

Jefferson, like Emerson, and like all advocates of education for thousands of years, envisioned a college education in the broadest possible sense—not as skills training, nor in favor of one discipline or set of disciplines. Fads and schemes to circumvent required prerequisites, language learning, writing courses, etc., have existed in the past, but much less frequently at state universities. The accountability that a state university maintains to the legislature and to the citizens prevents the worst of these educational novelties. **Let us hope we do not rush to implement unproven shortcuts in the name of affordability. This investment, remember, is priceless.**

Emerson, in praising the potential of students, wrote “Meek young men grow up in libraries believing it their duty to accept the views which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon have given, forgetful that Cicero, Locke, and Bacon were only young men in libraries when they wrote these books.” Our students are the future leaders, thinkers, teachers, and healers of the world. They deserve an affordable education. Yet, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (<http://www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=3927>) nationwide, state appropriations for higher education between the 2007/08 academic year and 2012-13 fell by more than 19%; student enrollment in the same period rose by over 11%; and state appropriations per student fell by 27%. Do the math—the numbers do not favor the young people of the United States of America.

Let us reverse this trend, and invest in our future and in our children’s future.

Thank you.