

Connecticut General Assembly – Appropriations Committee Testimony
Phil Forzley and Peter Grose, Fuss & O’Neill
February 10, 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about the importance of fiscal support for a strong University of Connecticut.

My name is Philip Forzley, and I am a Vice President and shareholder of Fuss & O’Neill, a 92 year-old, 260-person engineering consulting firm headquartered in Manchester, CT. I went to UCONN, earning two bachelor’s degrees and a Master’s degree.

I want to express my personal concerns, which are those held by the leadership of our firm, about the importance of the University of Connecticut to the Nutmeg State, and to firms like ours. I will focus on three main points: the need for a strong STEM-trained workforce, the importance of these professions to our state, and the criticality of sustaining vitality at UCONN and our state.

First, I think you are all aware of the significant need for students trained in science, technology, engineering and math. Many current STEM-related jobs have been held by the baby-boomer generation, which is reaching retirement age. There is a critical shortage of entry-level (and more experienced) candidates to fill these positions, despite the fact that these are desirable, well-paying jobs. As a consulting firm business owner, let me say that this human resource limitation keeps us up at night!

The University of Connecticut trains many students vital to our engineering and scientific professions. And I’m sure you agree that it’s important to keep our young professionals here in Connecticut. Fuss & O’Neill has hired hundreds of UCONN graduates over the years and we currently employ 43 grads. Ten of our company officers attended UCONN.

The high-level courses and project experience UCONN students bring to us and myriad other businesses are extremely important to us and to them. We’ve seen the results of the last decade of improvements in quality of incoming students, the quality of courses, professors and facilities in the strength of UCONN’s graduates and preparedness for the working world. Another important aspect of UCONN’s increased support for a diverse student population is the opportunity to hire more trained women and minority graduates.

My second main point is that UCONN’s programs are well-aligned with key needs for our state. For instance:

- Connecticut’s transportation infrastructure is in dire need of improvement and the state’s 30 year vision contemplates a \$100 billion investment to address these needs. Implementation of this program will require substantial resources and talent in the transportation and structural engineering fields as we upgrade our mass transit and highway infrastructure. UCONN has the premier transportation engineering program in the state and provides a critical talent pool to an industry searching for engineers.

- We know that sea level is rising and that weather events are becoming more severe, and we must move ahead rapidly to strengthen the resilience of our infrastructure systems and facilities to these changing climate conditions. UCONN and CIRCA are working together to address these needs, and providing some of the scientists and engineers to drive these responses.
- Other UCONN programs provide the foundations in innovative research, development and manufacturing that our state desperately needs for our industries to stay competitive in the nation and the world.

Finally, we believe it is critical to provide the financial support to sustain the growth in programs, faculty and facilities that prepare UCONN's students for the important careers they will have after graduation. UCONN has come so far in the last two decades to become a real top quality educational institution. Let's not go backwards!

As you've heard repeatedly from business owners relative to the state's overall budget, uncertainty and sudden changes impact our abilities to plan and implement improvements and growth. This is true for UCONN as well. The university has done a very thoughtful and thorough job planning exemplary improvements to the institution, and the State of Connecticut has supported this evolution. Now is not the time to pull back the funding levels that have been promised.

We strongly request that the Appropriations Committee maintain the state's level of financial support to the University of Connecticut, for its capital and operational needs.

Connecticut needs a thriving University of Connecticut. We need its graduating engineers and scientists to tackle the myriad needs of our state, so that have the trained professionals to solve our infrastructure, climate change and advanced manufacturing challenges and turn these into opportunities. We need the financial resources to bring a diverse student body into the workforce. And we need to sustain UCONN's evolution into one of the nation's top universities, in a state sorely needing inspirational results.

Thank you for your past support of UCONN, and for the chance to speak in favor of strong ongoing support.