Thursday, March 7, 2019


Appropriations Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
Legislative Office Building, Room 2700
300 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representatives DiMassa and Horn, and members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Siavash Samei and I am a Graduate Teaching Assistant at the University of Connecticut and a member of the Graduate Employee Union-United Autoworkers Local 6950. On behalf of our members, I appear before you and I urge you to continue your generous support of our state’s flagship institute of higher education. GEU-UAW represents over 2100 Graduate Assistants (GAs) who work tirelessly every day in the classroom and in the lab across five campuses to help UConn fulfill its core mission of quality education and research; to sustain excellence in and access to our university; and to drive the innovative research that attracts critical investment to the state economy. Our work is only possible with your continued financial support of UConn. So, let me tell you a little bit about who we are.

We are graduate students and employees that work alongside faculty and the university administration to provide critical teaching and research services while spending five to seven years pursuing a postgraduate degree in fields ranging from Civil Engineering and Computer Science, to the Social Sciences.

**We work hard to make quality education possible for 20,000 students of Connecticut families.** Nearly 1400 of our members are Teaching Assistants (TAs) that serve as lead instructors for hundreds of courses or lead thousands of small discussions, classes, and lab sections that provide critical face-to-face interactions. Whether we teach chemistry, English, mathematics, or sociology, our students learn the writing skills, analytical and critical thinking skills, and cultural competencies that are key to success in the competitive and global job market of the 21st century.

**We enhance Connecticut as a hub of innovation and scientific breakthrough.** Nearly 800 of our members are Research Assistants (RAs) who conduct a significant portion of day-to-day experimental work in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. Their contributions to the STEM fields as well as the social sciences drive the University’s continually-growing reputation in scientific innovation. We are active in the fields of cancer research, clean water and environmental health, climate change, social justice, and nanotechnology, to name just a few.
We generate millions of dollars in research revenue for UConn and the state. Both TAs and RAs often serve as co-Investigators on research proposals that generate over $150 million per year in funding through private and federal grants and contracts including from NASA, the Pentagon, the NSF, and the NIH. My own story is a case in point. A few weeks ago, I defended my doctoral dissertation in anthropology thanks to an NSF research grant on which I was the co-investigator, working on a collaborative and interdisciplinary project in one of the least studied parts of the world.

Ladies and gentlemen, Connecticut’s prosperity is inextricably linked with the vitality and reputation of UConn and indeed all of its institutes of higher education. I, along with my fellow GAs from UConn are here before you to reaffirm our commitment to provide the world-class education that Connecticut families deserve and to UConn’s growth as a leading hub of innovation and research. But our ability to deliver on these promises depends on our elected officials’ continued financial support of Connecticut’s colleges and universities.

The written testimonies that are attached below highlight some of the most salient contributions of our members to UConn and our state. We ask that you please take a moment and read these testimonies,

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Siavash Samei

PS. Personal testimonies from our members are attached below. These testimonies consist of several short statements as well as 10 full-length letters to the Appropriations Committee, all of which highlight the value of our hard work to UConn and the State of Connecticut.
Adam Haynes – Natural Resources and the Environment (Willimantic)
“My research includes groundwater quality monitoring in hopes of keeping both environmental and public waters clean. This research and my position would not exist if it was not for state investment. As a graduate student studying groundwater quality, my UConn graduate degree will prepare me to protect water resources, a much-needed skill that protects the public health for the state of Connecticut. I chose UConn over other universities for my graduate program because of the renowned and expert faculty, who rely on funding from the state. Support for UConn allows us to maintain a reputation as a competitive and strong university, ensuring that we can recruit and retain dedicated and skilled faculty and staff.”

Saketh Gudipati – Chemistry
“My research focuses on developing an improved drug for patients suffering with cancer and going through painful side-effects of treatment methods like chemotherapy etc. which will not only change the life of people living in Connecticut but throughout the world. I know I can make a difference, much like all the researchers here at UConn who want the best of resources to be able to give their best outcome, which I assure you, can solve a lot of humanitarian and economic problems.”

Nafis Fuad – Environmental Engineering (Willington)
“My research is on aquatic chemistry and metal toxicity in urban water. I am specifically looking at essential metals such as Cu and Zn which are ubiquitous in streams in urban or developed area. These metals are essential for the metabolism of aquatic organisms in trace amount, however, can be toxic in high concentrations. These metals can have impacts to higher organism through trophic transfer from primary producers to different organisms in the trophic scale via dietary transfer. My research will also involve the comparison of performance in terms of toxicity of these metals of different Best management practices (BMPs) used to treat stormwater runoff that is a major point source of Cu and Zn in natural streams.”

Castella Copeland – Educational Psychology (Windsor)
“In my teaching and research work with undergraduate students, graduate students and community members, I prepare them to enter the workforce with a stronger foundation in teaching and STEM curriculum. Fostering skills such as communication, interpersonal development, research, empathy, social justice, creativity, and intersectionality directly impact local communities by allowing members to speak truth to power for themselves and others.”

Jordan McMillan – Sociology (Hartford)
“I help fulfil UConn’s mission by teaching undergraduates and by conducting important research on gun violence in Connecticut. Support for UConn directly stimulates Connecticut’s economy, providing jobs throughout the state, bringing and keeping faculty, staff and their families to Connecticut, and driving innovation and entrepreneurship in the state. I moved to Connecticut to attend UConn, putting down roots, renting homes, and participating in the local and state economy. Furthermore, I plan to stay in Connecticut when I finish my degree, adding my own skills and education to the Connecticut labor force. As a graduate instructor who teaches as many 70 students a semester, decreased funding will make it very hard to maintain UConn’s high standards. Lower financial support may cause an increase in class sizes, a decrease in resources, and higher tuition.”
Sara Ailshire – Anthropology (Willimantic)

“As a graduate student at the University of Connecticut, I conduct anthropological research on the mistreatment of women during childbirth in India and human rights law in India. I have also assisted with research in the School of Nursing regarding the health behaviors of formerly incarcerated people in Connecticut. At the University of Connecticut, I have the opportunity to work with top scholars in human rights and medical anthropology to build an innovative research agenda. During my time at UConn I have received highly competitive fellowships and scholarships from the U.S. State Department and Department of Education.”

Kristin Vyhnal – Veterinary Science

“I perform necropsies on animals submitted to the Connecticut Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory (CVMDL), trim in tissues, and review histology, with varying degrees of supervision by boarded veterinary pathologists, who also provide direct didactic instruction as I work towards my Diplomacy in the American College of Veterinary Pathologists. In my role as a teaching assistant, I provide instruction during laboratory periods to small groups of students to reinforce what they have learned in lecture. Support for UCONN is vital to this department, where many of our students will pursue careers within Connecticut as farmers or in disease research, or in support positions in those industries; and where we support the citizens of Connecticut through CVMDL.”

Vinakay Gupta – Computer Science and Engineering (Willimantic)

“I’m pursuing Master’s degree in Computer Science; my work relies on UConn’s excellent facilities for our research. I also TA the Systems Programming course. The Systems Programming course I am a Teaching Assistant for, teaches students the basics of the C programming language, and programming on POSIX systems. This language, and its derivatives, are used in creating a huge number of computing systems; for example, the Linux kernel is written in C, and most iPhone applications are written in Objective-C. The valuable skills learned in this course help make our graduates more employable upon graduation.”

William Biel – Medieval Studies (North Windham)

“I am pursuing my PhD in Medieval Studies at UConn because it is the only public university with a degree program in that field on the east coast. I also regularly teach freshman composition as well as classes in ancient and medieval literature to approximately 50 students per academic year. As a teacher, I aim to give UConn students a foundation for understanding their place in history and educate them how to make the most of that knowledge through skillful writing. Without state funding, my degree program cannot be sustained at UConn, and losing it would mean depriving our undergraduates of classes which teach them their own histories.”

Roman Mays – Electrical and Computer Engineering (Mansfield)

“My work consists of utilizing quantum dots for different devices, such as Field Effect Transistors (FETs), modulators, and solar cells. Quantum dots allow for the entrapment of charge and are tuneable to wavelength, which allows for utilization in multi-state logic and for wavelength absorption of different parts of the solar spectrum. This research has applications in a variety of areas, from dealing with the ever-increasing need of energy dense devices to the speeding up and bettering of electronics. It is because of this, the research done here has impacts that deal with the general public both in and behind the scenes.”
Joey Morrissette – Dramatic Arts
“In my teaching work with undergraduate students, I prepare them for the workforce, foster skills such as lighting and sound technical know-how, how to reach drafting plans, work in a team, and develop theatre crew skills that directly impact local communities by having young, fresh artists contribute to the theater and the arts.”

Martin Fultot – Psychological Sciences (Willington)
“As a research assistant I spend circa 20 hours per week working on two separate projects in the study of cognitive psychology. My activities in the lab not only overlap significantly with those of the professors themselves but for many crucial tasks such as coding or designing software to run experiments or even handling high-level technological equipment, I am the only one who has the skills to do it. My stipend only covers 5 hours per week per assistantship even though I am working almost twice that time. But I am happy to do it because I love it. On the other hand, it would be impossible for UConn to count on assistantships like mine and that of so many other teaching and research assistants without state investment. This would of course dramatically hinder experimental research and trigger a very dangerous vicious circle of activity shrinkage and therefore external grant income.”

Sean Khan Ooi – Natural Resources and the Environment (Bolton)
“I conduct research on nitrogen cycling in Connecticut salt marshes. The salt marsh research that research group and I conduct here at UConn is important to protecting our coastal ecosystems and communities in the long-term. We rely on the state’s financial support of UConn to ensure we have the logistical and infrastructural support necessary to conduct high-quality science that can benefit the state. I chose to pursue my graduate degree at UConn’s Department of Natural Resources and the Environment because of its track-record for providing graduate students ample resources and support to carry out their research. During my time here, I have been grateful to have access to the exceptional depth of faculty expertise and research facilities that are only possible with the state’s continued support of UConn.”

Nirah Ghimire – Physics (Willington)
“You might have heard of the term “quantum computer” which, if we are able to build, will be a revolution in technology, and make the United States literally invincible. As part of my PhD, I work on cutting-edge research. I use computers to model and understand quantum materials. I also teach physics courses to undergraduates. The materials I model will get us closer to a quantum computer. As for teaching, I train undergraduates with critical-thinking and problem-solving skills which they need to be successful in virtually any career path they pursue. The economy of Connecticut as well as the United States depends on the quality of education UCONN provides to these undergrads, and graduate students like me work very hard to excel in our roles.”

Michael Pfremmer – Literatures, Cultures, and Languages (Willington)
“I teach German language and writing courses at UConn. Many of my students are seeking a dual degree in both German and another area, to including business or engineering. These two programs have robust partnerships with German firms, offering additional employment opportunities for UConn graduates both here at home and abroad.”
Michael Gaiewski – Mathematics (Mystic)
“I am a TA for Calculus 2 in the Math Department. I lead three discussion sections each twice a week, hold office hours, and grade all my students’ work for the course. UConn allows me to pursue a higher degree, as well as gain experience in teaching. I intend to become a college professor. I chose UConn over my other universities for my graduate program because of the high reputation of my program. UConn’s math graduate program is in the top 100 programs nationally.”

Rishav Aryal – Environmental Engineering (Willington)
“Support for UConn is an investment to develop a highly skilled workforce for the state. I study environmental engineering and it has a wide application in the field of air pollution controlling, soil science developments, wastewater treatment, hazardous sites cleanup, etc. Our work provides solutions to numerous environmental problems.”

Shamayeta Bhattacharya – Geography (Mansfield)
“As a graduate student studying Geography, my UConn graduate degree will prepare me to polish my research, programming and analytical skills. My research focuses on investigating the problems and challenges LGBT community faces throughout the world and find out the ways to alleviate the mental trauma they face due to not being fully accepted by the society.”

Shaine Scarminach – History (Willimantic)
“As a doctoral student in the Department of History, I dedicate a significant portion of my time to pursuing necessary research in the field of history, as well as education the young people of Connecticut and beyond about the nation’s past. In my courses, the goal is to teach these students how the skills, knowledge, and habits of mind grounded in the discipline of history, combined with a strong ability to express their ideas and communicate with others through the written word, can help them pursue successful careers after college, make a meaningful contribution to their local communities, and live a more reflective and purposeful life.”

Yanina Prystauk – Psychology
“I TA a Psychology of Language class and also work at the Neuroimaging Center helping people prepare their fMRI and EEG studies and analyze the data afterwards. And of course, I work hard towards my PhD degree. I am also an active member of the community, for example I help to organize Open House events, Language Fest, and participate in outreach activities (e.g. lead tours of the Neuroimaging center for high school students and visitors from other colleges).”

Azady Pirhanov – Chemical and Biomedical Engineering
“I carry out Department of Education-funded research with potential applications in agriculture and renewable energy. I chose UConn over other universities for my graduate program because of the reputation of my program, the resources to complete high risk/high return type of research, and the renowned and expert faculty. As a graduate student studying Biomedical Engineering, my UConn graduate degree will prepare me to do outstanding research, a much-needed/important skill that does bring more investment for the state of Connecticut.”

Acima Cherian – Natural Resources and the Environment (Mansfield)
“I am an instruct-on-record for undergraduate courses in my department and have been recognized for teaching excellence as a Teaching Assistant in the College of Agriculture, Health, and Natural
Resources. My ability to fully participate in the economy of Connecticut would not have been possible without my assistantship from UConn. Supporting UConn stimulates the economy not only by providing Graduate students with jobs, but also through cascading effects of their research grants and contribution to the local economy.”

Aidan Barry – Natural Resources and the Environment (Ashford)

“As a graduate student, I am conducting novel research and enrolled in courses that will publicly promote scientific understanding of coastal ecosystems and benefit myself personally as I engage in a future career. Simultaneously, I teach a senior undergraduate science writing course, assisting other students who will soon be entering various careers.”
Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representatives DiMassa and Horn, and members of the Appropriations Committee;

My name is James deMayo, and I am both a graduate student and Graduate Researcher at the University of Connecticut, Department of Marine Sciences and a member of the Graduate Employee Union (GEU-UAW Local 6950). Since 2014, I have been actively involved in the first-class research and teaching that UConn provides for the students at the University. As a teaching assistant, I have taught classes ranging from introductory biology, to pharmaceutical dosage formation in the school of pharmacy, to introductory oceanography at both the Avery Point and Storrs campuses. As a researcher, I have been a part of several research projects that resulted in presentations at international conferences, multiple publications, and fellowship awards. I am writing to testify on the Budget Hearing for Higher Education.

I would like to highlight some of the reasons supporting UConn is beneficial to both our state economy and to the students who make UConn such an attractive place to work. Firstly, support for UConn allows us to maintain a reputation as a competitive and strong university, ensuring that we can recruit and retain dedicated and skilled faculty and staff. I moved to the state of Connecticut for the excellent research programs and resources available, and to be able work with some of the most highly sought-after minds in the country. UConn has and does certainly offer the one of the most exciting research programs of any university in the country, and the resources available to graduate researchers in particular are exceptional.

In addition, support for UConn directly stimulates Connecticut’s economy, providing jobs throughout the state, bringing and keeping faculty, staff and their families to Connecticut, and driving innovation and entrepreneurship in the state. For example, I moved to Connecticut after living and working in California, and now my partner and I both work exclusively in this state. Furthermore, I have been involved in several outreach programs that help spread the research to underserved communities in the state and around the world. My research program in particular relies almost exclusively on grant funding. I have been involved in the construction and submission of several national research grants, which adds to total grant revenue that the state produces, which is over $150 million. That money alone stimulates my research, the research of my peers, our full-time technician, and several undergraduates who work to pay for their education.

Finally, I would like to highlight the efforts of graduate assistants like myself who have worked tirelessly to offer the highest quality education to over 20,000 students of Connecticut families each year and who help generate over $250 million per year in grants from local, public, and private sources. Clearly, UConn is a vital asset to the State of Connecticut. In the past, the state
budget has provided generous support to UConn’s important mission of providing education, service, and research to the state and residents of Connecticut, and I strongly encourage you to continue this generosity in the next budget.

Sincerely,

James deMayo
Graduate Assistant/Researcher at UConn Department of Marine Sciences
james.demayo@uconn.edu
February 21, 2019

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representatives DiMassa and Horn, and members of the Appropriations Committee;

My name is Kitty O’Riordan, and I am both a graduate student and a teaching assistant in the department of anthropology at the University of Connecticut and a member of the Graduate Employee Union (GEU-UAW Local 6950). I am privileged as a grad student to be able to pursue my own research (which I am conducting right here in the state of Connecticut), earn my doctoral degree (which I plan to use to apply to jobs in the state of Connecticut), and have the opportunity to teach my own course to Connecticut students. I am writing to testify on the Budget Hearing for Higher Education, because without state funding, none of this would be possible.

I truly believe that support for UConn is an investment to develop a highly skilled workforce for the state, as well as to support communities of informed, compassionate, and active citizens. In my teaching and teaching assistant work, I foster skills with our undergraduates that range from competence in writing, speaking, and debating to political and social literacy. Such skills directly impact local communities by shaping the leaders of their future, whether in business, politics, or volunteerism.

Further, I have received countless evaluations from students in my role as a teaching assistant that express sentiments such as “Everything I learned, I learned in discussion section from you—the small class size and opportunity to discuss the lecture material made all the difference”. Funding for our TAs separates just a 300-student lecture course from a real learning experience and an opportunity for growth, and keeps UConn competitive and innovative.

As a graduate student working towards a PhD in anthropology who plans to stay in-state after graduation, my UConn degree will help me to uphold the prestigious academic legacy of Connecticut’s universities, within and beyond UConn. I intend to apply to community colleges after graduation, servicing the ideal of affordable but intellectually rigorous education for all Connecticut citizens, ultimately driving our economy and making our communities better places to live for everyone.

Finally, I have been renting property in Willimantic for years now, and feel deeply integrated into this local community. I have had the chance to get involved in local politics, to join in as a co-owner of our Co-op, to enjoy Third Thursdays on Main Street with my community, and to give my time and service in performing at the local Bread Box Folk Theater in St. Paul’s Church, to raise money for the Covenant Soup Kitchen—none of which would have been possible had my UConn degree not brought me here from the Midwest. Now I am committed to the betterment of Willimantic, my home, and supporting the state of Connecticut.

UConn is a vital asset to the State of Connecticut. In the past, the state budget has provided generous support to UConn’s important mission of providing education, service, and research to the state and residents of Connecticut, and I strongly encourage you to continue this generosity in the next budget.

Sincerely,
Kitty O’Riordan
Graduate Student and Teaching Assistant, Department of Anthropology
Willimantic, CT
caitlin.oriordan@uconn.edu
Dear Senator Osten, Senator Hartley, Representative Walker, Representative DiMassa,
Representative Horn, and members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Jenna Powers. I am providing my written testimony for the March 7th Budget
Hearing on Higher Education as a doctoral student and Graduate Research Assistant in the
University of Connecticut (UConn) School of Social Work (SSW), as well as a member of the
Graduate Employee Union (GEU-UAW Local 6950). My wife and I moved here from Maine
three years ago in order for me to attend UConn SSW’s doctoral program. Had I not been
guaranteed an assistantship by UConn, I would have attended a doctoral program in a different
state that could guarantee an assistantship. Not only did an assistantship provide me with the
financial assistance necessary to attend a doctoral program, but it has also provided me with
valuable experience. Having this experience is vital for PhD students, such as myself, to be
considered as serious contenders within a competitive job market upon graduating. For example,
the UConn SSW has a stellar reputation of preparing its PhD students to teach independently
once they are hired as faculty within other colleges and universities. The UConn SSW’s more
recent focus on preparing their doctoral students for independent research is also notable, as
current students have been awarded with competitive research grants and graduates have landed
jobs at their top-choice schools—often being local and allowing them and their families to
remain living in Connecticut. In short, UConn’s ability to provide their doctoral students with
assistantships are advantageous to UConn’s recruitment of students, which contributes to
Connecticut’s economy as well as UConn’s reputation of high-quality education.

UConn’s Graduate Assistantships—whether they be focused on teaching or research—have
immediate impacts on Connecticut as a state. Beyond being able to recruit students from outside
of Connecticut—many of whom, such as myself, move to Connecticut in order to attend
UConn—the teaching and research that students are engaged in directly contribute to the state.
For example, undergraduate and graduate students have uniquely valuable learning experiences
in classes that are taught by doctoral students. Doctoral students are particularly energized
and qualified to teach across the curriculum, as they are able to apply their fresh learnings from their
practice and the doctoral program to their teaching. Further, doctoral students who teach are also
provided support and mentorship from the SSW faculty and leadership—through class
observations and feedback, seminars around curriculum development and classroom teaching,
individualized support as needed, etc. As a result, these undergraduate and graduate students in
the SSW are provided with high quality education, which they take with them into their practice
with individuals and communities throughout the state of Connecticut.

Doctoral students’ research assistantships provide critical support to studies aimed at
understanding and improving circumstances for Connecticut residents. Many faculty in the SSW
are Principal Investigators on research that directly study vulnerable populations and social
issues in Connecticut, such as homelessness, substance use, unemployment, child abuse and
neglect, mental illness, violence, and so on. These studies are imperative to our understanding of
the causes and solutions to these social issues. Such research has implications for UConn as a
leader of research—thus attracting more expert researchers as faculty as well as funding from
large research grants—as well as Connecticut’s and our country’s overall understanding and
improvement of these issues. The SSW’s ability to conduct and disseminate such studies largely
rests upon doctoral students providing valuable support along each step of the research process.
Within this written testimony, I have discussed only a few key benefits of UConn Graduate Assistantships. As I have outlined through these examples, UConn’s ability to provide assistantships to its students is vital on many levels. It has direct benefits for UConn and the state of Connecticut overall. Reducing or eliminating these positions would have multifaceted consequences for UConn, Connecticut’s economy, and residents of Connecticut. For these reasons, I urge you to prioritize UConn Graduate Assistantships within the next budget.

If you have any follow-up questions, I would be more than happy to discuss this matter with you further. Please do not hesitate to contact me (via my email listed below) if I can clarify anything or be of any assistance to you during this decision-making process. Thank you for your service to the State of Connecticut as well as your time and consideration of my testimony.

Sincerely,
Jenna Powers
UConn SSW Doctoral Student & Research Assistant
Middletown, CT
jenna.powers@uconn.edu
Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representatives DiMassa and Horn, and members of the Appropriations Committee;

My name is Eric Moore, and I am both a graduate student and research associate at the University of Connecticut and a member of the Graduate Employee Union (GEU-UAW Local 6950). My Ph.D. research is focused on groundwater inputs of nitrogen into rivers that feed the Long Island Sound providing insight into causes of eutrophication and dead zones. My research is important to the state of Connecticut as it will develop a river network scale model of groundwater nitrogen input for the Farmington River Watershed. This model will provide valuable metrics for downstream water quality estimates and future management decisions. I am writing to testify on the Budget Hearing for Higher Education.

The University of Connecticut places a high value on conducting good research. The Department of Natural Resources and Environment has a continuing track record of placing graduates with full time positions within the State of Connecticut. I chose the University of Connecticut over other universities because of the reputation and resources available within the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, as well as the expert faculty employed by the University of Connecticut within my research area. As a graduate student studying hydrology, my UConn graduate degree will prepare me for a career researching water quality modeling, an important skill as our rivers are evermore influenced by anthropogenic inputs. The University of Connecticut needs to maintain its reputation as a competitive research institution, ensuring it can recruit and retain dedicated graduate students, staff, and faculty.

UConn is a vital asset to the State of Connecticut. In the past, the state budget has provided generous support to UConn’s important mission of providing education, service, and research to the state and residents of Connecticut, and I strongly encourage you to continue this generosity in the next budget.

Sincerely,

Eric Michael Moore
Graduate Student
Willimantic,CT
eric.m.moore@uconn.edu
Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representatives DiMassa and Horn, and members of the Appropriations Committee;

My name is Benjamin Gluck, and I am both a graduate student and Teaching Assistant at the University of Connecticut and a member of the Graduate Employee Union (GEU-UAW Local 6950). This semester I am finishing my thesis on drought-resistant pollinator plants and helping the teach the Horticulture of Cannabis class. This class has brought a great deal of positive press coverage for the university, but relies on proper funding to provide a good learning environment. I am writing to testify on the Budget Hearing for Higher Education.

Support for UConn allows us to continue to provide access to affordable and high-quality education for 20,000 undergraduates. As a lifelong resident of Connecticut, the affordability of UConn was one of the main reasons why I enrolled here for my bachelor’s degree. I came back for my master’s degree because of the great education and well-funded teaching opportunities. UConn provided a world class education at an affordable rate, and I hope future students get to experience this as well.

Any cuts to the UConn budget will increase class size, and decrease the amount of time that teaching assistants can provide for each student. For example, the Horticulture of Cannabis class that I am an assistant for already has over 300 students. It would be hard to deliver the same quality support for the students if the class had fewer teaching assistants, as each assistant would be responsible for more students.

UConn is a vital asset to the State of Connecticut. In the past, the state budget has provided generous support to UConn’s important mission of providing education, service, and research to the state and residents of Connecticut, and I strongly encourage you to continue this generosity in the next budget.

Sincerely,

Benjamin Gluck

Master’s Student/Teaching Assistant in Plant Science
Willimantic, CT
Benjamin.L.Gluck@Uconn.edu
Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representatives DiMassa and Horn, and members of the Appropriations Committee;

My name is Ashley Robinson, and I am both a graduate student and Research Assistant at the University of Connecticut and a member of the Graduate Employee Union (GEU-UAW Local 6950). As a PhD student in the Neag School of Education, I work on a research project that examines the factors in teacher education programs that lead to successful instruction of Math and English Language Arts for beginning teachers. I am also pursuing my dissertation research on college students’ experiences of racial bias incidents on campus. Additionally, I am a teaching assistant this semester for the Multicultural Education course in the Teacher Certification Program for College Graduates at the Hartford campus. UConn’s commitment to an excellent school of education provides me with the faculty, resources, and skills that will allow me to continue to research cutting-edge concerns in education that impact the practices of colleges and universities in Connecticut and beyond. I am writing to testify on the Budget Hearing for Higher Education.

State support for UConn allows us to maintain a reputation as a competitive and strong university, ensuring that we can recruit and retain dedicated and skilled faculty and staff. As a graduate student and research assistant in the Neag School of Education, I am earning my degree from a graduate school of education ranked No. 17 by the U.S. News and World Report and working in a specialty department that is ranked No. 15. I applied to my Ph.D program while already living and working in Connecticut--this is also true of many of my colleagues. I chose UConn instead of leaving the state for another university for my graduate program because of the stellar reputation of the Neag School of Education. I knew that I could stay in Connecticut and receive a competitive education at a high-quality public research university. State support allows UConn to continue to have excellent programs such as those within Neag, providing crucial opportunities to further the educational success and future of the entire state by educating teachers, administrators, and educational researchers who are living in, working in, and committed to the future success of the state of Connecticut.

Support for UConn directly stimulates Connecticut’s economy, providing jobs throughout the state, bringing and keeping faculty, staff and their families to Connecticut. In 2012, I moved to Connecticut for a job at UConn. I am not a Connecticut native, and I did not complete my previous education in Connecticut. However, when I was job searching, I knew that UConn was the best public University in New England, and that made it my top choice of employer. When I chose to continue with my education and earn a PhD, I spent about a year looking at programs across the country, but decided that with the quality and reputation of the Neag School of Education, I did not have to leave the state that I now called home. My husband and I recently purchased a home in Mansfield, he has now worked at Pratt & Whitney for over a year, and is taking graduate courses in Organizational Management at Eastern Connecticut State University. UConn’s quality has drawn and kept me and my family in the state, a reality that I’m sure is true for countless faculty, staff, and students of the university.

UConn is a vital asset to the State of Connecticut. In the past, the state budget has provided generous support to UConn’s important mission of providing education, service, and research to
the state and residents of Connecticut, and I strongly encourage you to continue this generosity in the next budget.

Sincerely,

Ashley N. Robinson, M.Ed.
Research Assistant, Department of Education Curriculum & Instruction
Neag School of Education
Mansfield, CT
ashley.robinson@uconn.edu
Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representatives DiMassa and Horn, and members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Mary Hartford, and I am both a graduate student and graduate assistant at the University of Connecticut, and a member of the Graduate Employee Union (GEU-UAW Local 6950). As a doctoral student and teaching assistant in the Department of Geography, I am able to contribute to the research profile of the University and provide the support necessary to accommodate large introductory classes without sacrificing quality of education or faculty availability for research. I am also a graduate assistant at the foremost academic association for international affairs, the International Studies Association, whose headquarters at the Storrs campus elevates the name of the UConn community in a global network of international studies scholarship and action. I am writing to testify on the Budget Hearing for Higher Education.

Support for UConn is an investment to develop a highly skilled workforce for the state. In my work with undergraduate students learning to think critically about the entangled social, economic, political, and physical geographic parts and processes that drive the world system – one more interconnected than ever before – I encourage the growth of globally-minded citizens who can think in systems and who value diversity and difference, abilities critical to understanding the questions of sustainability, economics, justice, or others they wish to tackle here at home. Personally, as a PhD student studying the implications of national flood policy and sea level rise for coastal communities, my UConn graduate degree will position me to contribute policy-informing research on a topic of great consequence for the state of Connecticut.

Without support for UConn, we cannot continue to provide this – access to an education that is both affordable and high-quality – to the working families of Connecticut, from which most of our 23,000 undergraduates come. The class sizes required to maintain this economic driver for the Connecticut population cannot bear reductions in faculty, TA support, and other resources. The 125- to 320-student classes I have assisted have left each TA responsible for 70 to 100 students and their weekly needs. A reduction in state support will cause at least one of two unacceptable outcomes: either a marked decline in educational quality as faculty and TAs are spread too thin, or another rise in student costs, ones that are already increasingly difficult for Connecticut families to afford.

UConn is a vital asset to the State of Connecticut. In the past, the state budget has provided generous support to UConn’s important mission of providing education, service, and research to the state and residents of Connecticut, and I strongly encourage you to continue this generosity in the next budget.

Sincerely,

Mary J.L. Hartford

PhD Student and Graduate Assistant, UConn Department of Geography and the International Studies Association

Mansfield

mary.hartford@uconn.edu
Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representatives DiMassa and Horn, and members of the Appropriations Committee;

My name is Micah Goodrich, and I am both a graduate student and Instructor of Record at the University of Connecticut and a member of the Graduate Employee Union (GEU-UAW Local 6950). I chose the University of Connecticut to pursue my PhD because of its dedication to affordable education for undergraduates and its commitment to research. Quality and accessible education depends on continued investment. As such, the impact of my teaching, research, and service at UConn will suffer if we are faced with larger class sizes, higher tuition, and diminished resources. Since UConn is a public university, it has a unique role in bridging research, teaching, and service commitments to local communities across the state. Without investment from the state, UConn would not be able to train graduate students to research or to provide impactful teaching practices. I am writing to testify on the Budget Hearing for Higher Education.

Support for UConn is an investment to develop a highly skilled workforce for the state. In my teaching and advising work with undergraduate students in the English department, I prepare students across fields to construct written oral arguments, develop critical thinking and analysis, and understand rhetorical communication. In my capacity as an instructor, I help students foster skills to compose and transfer ideas through writing and other multimodal platforms. In my First-Year Writing courses, I show students the connection between theoretical reading and applied service. For instance, in a course inquiry centered on “waste”, students learn the ideological scope of waste and its rhetorical use in media while developing concurrent projects that address waste on campus and in our wider local communities. As a graduate student studying literature, my UConn graduate degree will prepare me to do archival and manuscript work, historical book preservation, and engage in public humanities work; much-needed and important skills that bridge the work of academia with public libraries, historical preservation, and public learning for the state of Connecticut.

Continued investment in UConn upholds and adds value to a UConn degree, making employers eager and enthusiastic to hire both recent graduates and all UConn alumni across the state. In the UConn English Department, our job placement rate is among the highest in the country. Approximately 75% of graduate students who have completed PhDs in English between 2003-2018 have secured full-time academic teaching positions, and of these approximately 60% are tenure-track positions. Recent UConn English PhD students have accepted full-time academic positions at institutions such as Rutgers University, the University of Louisiana, Rhode Island College, and the University of Southern Maine. In many instances, UConn English PhD alumni are in full-time positions at other state-funded universities because UConn historically prepares graduate students to balance research, teaching, and service in ways that private institutions do not directly accommodate.

UConn is a vital asset to the State of Connecticut. In the past, the state budget has provided generous support to UConn’s important mission of providing education, service, and research to the state and residents of Connecticut, and I strongly encourage you to continue this generosity in the next budget.

Sincerely,
Micah Goodrich
Graduate Assistant and Instructor of Record at UConn in the English Department
Willimantic, CT
micah.goodrich@uconn.edu
To:
Members of the Appropriations Committee:
Senator Osten
Representative Walker
Senator Hartley
Representative DiMassa
Representative Horn

My name is Justin Fang, and I am both a graduate student and the President of the Graduate Student Senate at the University of Connecticut, as well as a member of the Graduate Employee Union (GEU-UAW Local 6950). As the president of the graduate student body, I can attest to the fact that state support in the context of funding is crucial to maintaining UConn’s continued excellence. Furthermore, when UConn succeeds, so does the rest of CT. In my time here, I have seen how UConn produces newly minted doctorates who then go on to support the economy of CT by fulfilling high-tech jobs, and even creating new jobs.

Through my position on the Graduate Student Senate, I have met UConn graduates who graduated with advanced degrees in engineering who have gone on to successful careers in Electric Boat located in Groton. Other peers of mine have gone on to prestigious appointments at Unilever, and other industry giants located in CT. UConn also produces successful graduates who enter the medical and healthcare field, working at UConn Health in Farmington, and other locations scattered throughout the state. Additional examples of successful UConn graduates can be found in all corners of the state, helping advance the economy wherever they are.

Continued support from the Government of Connecticut is absolutely essential in order to ensure that UConn has the necessary resources to fulfill its mission and mandates, to the residents of Connecticut. UConn provides a world-class education at an affordable rate, especially for the students hailing from CT. Each year, UConn receives a plethora of applications for positions in the Graduate School, in the different academic disciplines. Indeed, many of the graduate programs at UConn are highly ranked, and highly sought after by applicants with impressive credentials. It is directly due to the financial support that UConn receives from CT that enables UConn to be so successful, and to draw in the best applicants possible.

One example of an investment in UConn by CT that has paid off is the expansion of the STEM campus. Through these investments, UConn was able to expand and build new buildings dedicated to the advancement of science and engineering, such as the Engineering Science Building (ESB), Industrial Partnership Building (IPB), and the planned Science One. The presence of these new research facilities, modern teaching classrooms and labs have been cited by newly hired faculty as a positive factor that led to them choosing to become faculty at UConn.

The University of Connecticut is the flagship university of the State of Connecticut, and when UConn succeeds, so does the State of Connecticut. All residents of Connecticut can take pride in their flagship university, and reassurance that a UConn degree means the beginning of a long and successful career, especially in the current economy. In the past, the state budget has provided generous support to UConn’s important mission of providing education, service, and research to the state and residents of Connecticut, and I strongly encourage you to continue this generosity in the next budget.

Sincerely,
Justin M Fang
justin.fang@uconn.edu
President of the Graduate Student Senate
Biomedical Engineering
Physiology and Neurobiology
Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representatives DiMassa and Horn, and members of the Appropriations Committee;

My name is Krista Dotzel, and I am both a graduate student and teaching assistant at the University of Connecticut and a member of the Graduate Employee Union (GEU-UAW Local 6950). Each semester I teach up to 100 undergraduates while pursuing my PhD at UConn and I am writing to testify on the Budget Hearing for Higher Education.

I am asking the committee to support UConn because it is an investment in developing a highly skilled workforce for the state. In my role as teaching assistant in the anthropology department, I work to prepare undergraduates for life in an increasingly multicultural and global world and economy. As a teaching assistant, I work to foster in my students’ critical thinking skills, written and verbal communication skills, and the ability to effectively listen to others, all of which are necessary for an effective workplace. As a graduate student studying Connecticut archaeology, my graduate degree will help me protect Connecticut’s cultural and archaeological resources.

As someone who grew up out of state, I chose to attend UConn over other universities because of the renowned faculty, UConn’s excellent reputation for research, UConn’s excellent track record for receiving outside grant money, and UConn’s ability to provide funding for graduate students. Now I have settled in Connecticut and made it my home. I am now a Connecticut resident, I have purchased a home here with my spouse, and I am invested in my Connecticut community.

UConn provides vital services to students in the State of Connecticut and draws new residents who contribute to the economy. I am asking you to please continue to support UConn’s important mission of providing education, service, and research to the state and residents of Connecticut, and I strongly encourage you to continue this generosity in the next budget.

Sincerely,
Krista Dotzel
Graduate Assistant at UConn, Department of Anthropology
Resident of Willimantic, Connecticut
Contact e-mail: krista.dotzel@gmail.com