Deckers stepping down from Health Center leadership

BY KRISTINA GOODROUGH

Dr. Peter J. Deckers, dean of the School of Medicine since 1995 and executive vice president of health affairs since 2000, has announced that he will step down from both positions on June 30, at the conclusion of his appointment.

On behalf of the University, President Philip E. Austin expressed “deep appreciation for Dr. Deckers’arsighted leadership at the Health Center.”

Austin said the timing of the announcement will allow for an orderly transition.

“In order to begin the process of choosing a new executive vice president and dean,” he said, “I am establishing a search committee that will be chaired by Dr. Richard Garibaldi and supported by the services of a national recruitment firm. Other members of the committee will be announced shortly.”

Garibaldi, who recently stepped down as chair of the Department of Medicine, has been with the Health Center since 1992. He served as director of the Internal Medicine Residency Program for 17 years, before becoming department chair 10 years ago.

“The initiation of the search comes at a time when the committee charged with recruiting my own replacement is narrowing the list of candidates,” said Austin. “I expect the Board of Trustees will appoint the new University president shortly. Ultimately the Board of Trustees will appoint the new executive vice president and dean will be made by the next president and the Health Center Board of Directors.

Nevertheless, Board of Directors Chairman Dr. Gerald Burrow, Board of Trustees Chairman Dr. John W. Rowe, and I believe that it is prudent to begin the search for a new Health Center leader now,” said Austin.

Deckers’ leadership of the UConn Health Center has been marked by a transformation of the educational curriculum, by a dramatic increase in patient care provided by John Dempsey Hospital and the UConn Medical Group, and by strong growth in public and private research awards to biomedical scientists and clinicians.

Deckers joined the Health Center in 1987. He took the top administrative position in 2000.

Chief financial officer to retire

BY SHERRI FISHER

Lorraine M. Aronson, the University’s chief financial officer, will retire in May 2008.

She says she is retiring for personal reasons, including a wish to spend more time with her family. “I’ve been in high pressure, high profile positions for 25 years. I’ve come to a point in my life where my priorities are changing.”

Before coming to UConn in 1995, she held top positions under Gove, William A. O’Neill, Lowell P. Weicker Jr., and John G. Rowland. These include service as deputy commissioner of education, commissioner of the Department of Income Maintenance (now the Department of Social Services), and deputy secretary of the Office of Policy and Management.

At UConn, Aronson was assistant to the chancellor, associate vice president of institutional advancement, and in 2000 became vice president for financial planning and management, assuming responsibility for the University’s budget and finance activities. In 2003, business/accounting functions were added to her portfolio as vice president.

Of her decision to retire at the end of May, she says, “I want to do this in an orderly way. This timetable will allow me to assist President Austin for the remainder of his tenure as president, and will give his successor the opportunity to get to know the University and its financial operations. We’ve got a fabulous fiscal team, both at Storrs and at the Health Center, so I know Helen Rozwadowski, associate professor of history and coordinator of maritime studies at the Avery Point campus, climbs the rigging of a whaling ship at Mystic Seaport.

New dean of engineering named

BY MICHAEL KIRK

Mun Young Choi of Drexel University has been named as the next dean of UConn’s School of Engineering. He will begin in January 2008.

Choi, 43, is currently the associate dean for research and graduate studies at Drexel University’s College of Engineering in Philadelphia, where he also heads the department of mechanical engineering and mechanics.

“I believe that in Mun we have found an outstanding leader for the school,” says Provost Peter J. Nicholls. “He will not only lead the school to the next level of excellence but has already shared with me many exciting possibilities for collaborations with other schools and colleges at UConn that will be to the great benefit of the entire university.”

“He is an outstanding leader for the University, President Peter J. Deacikers' leadership of the UConn Health Center was marked by the transformation of the educational curriculum, an dramatic increase in patient care provided by John Dempsey Hospital and the UConn Medical Group, and by strong growth in public and private research awards to biomedical scientists and clinicians.

Choi’s primary research interests are in the areas of combustion, energy, and experimental diagnostics. His programs have been funded by various federal agencies, including the National Science Foundation, the Department of Defense, the Department of Energy, and NASA for experiments to be performed aboard the International Space Station.

Choi says that during his interactions with faculty, staff, and administrators at UConn, he sensed “tremendous excitement” about the opportunities for the University and the School of Engineering. He also noted a strong commitment from the University and the state to elevate the School to be a premier engineering school.

“The key elements are already in place for success,” Choi says. “The School has excell-
English language program teaches students about American culture

BY KALA KACHMAR

Turkish students in UCAELI’s High School Intensive English program perform a sneaker commercial they created during a language class.

Students from more than 25 countries on six different continents come to UConn each year for one purpose: to learn English at the University’s American English Language Institute.

UCAELI students that have attended formal English language skills, and encourages them to engage in cultural activities that help them understand American life.

A warm July evening when the sky is ablaze with fireworks is a cultural activity students from the UConn community who do not have immigration documents are put together by the UCAELI program.

The Health Center was recognized several times by Solucient, a leading health care information company. In 2007 it was named a top 100 hospital, and in both 2006 and 2005 it was named a top 100 performance improvement leader. The Health Center, in collaboration with the University’s Storrs campus, also became a national leader in human embryonic stem cell research by spearheading research projects that won the lion’s share (60 percent of $20 million) of Connecticut’s first dispersal of funds for stem cell work.

As dean of the School of Medicine, Deckers supported the development of a new curriculum that won national recognition for the Health Center.

And during his tenure, the School of Dental Medicine twice ranked No. 1 among the country’s 55 dental schools, based on national examination results.

Deckers earned his medical degree from the Boston University School of Medicine, where he received the Outstanding Student Award. He completed his residency in general surgery and was a U.S. Public Health Service trainee in academic surgery at Boston University Medical School, where he began his career. He joined the Health Center after three years as chairman of surgery at Hartford Hospital.

Counselling Writers: David Bauman, Sharon Fisher, Michael Korth, Beth Kenne, Mark J. Roy, Richard Vuilloud

Health Center leader continued from page 1

2000, after a year as interim. At the time, the Health Center was in a period marked by low reimbursement rates from Medicare, Medicaid, and health insurers looking to rein in skyrocketing costs. Deckers was instrumental in the lobbying effort that won for the Health Center special financial assistance of $20 million from the state legislature.

He then helped engineer a turn-around that achieved $74 million in cost reductions and revenue enhancements, focused resources on areas of excellence, stepped up recruitment of nationally prominent physicians and researchers, and brought more patients to the Health Center.

“IT’s been a remarkable tenure,” says Dr. Bruce Koeppen, dean of academic affairs.

Deckers believed that the Health Center’s special strength came from its combined mission of research, education, and clinical care, Koeppen adds. By supporting the development of research strategies, he pushed the institution to identify specific areas of expertise and to focus its resources on those areas of strength.

“The ultimate purpose of our signature programs is to build a stronger Health Center by closely linking areas of research excellence with areas of clinical distinction,” Deckers said at the time.

The Health Center built a new building to house its New England Musculoskeletal Institute and expand research and clinical care in orthopedics, arthritis, bone biology, biomaterials and biomechanics. Musculoskeletal disease and bone biology is one of the Health Center’s signature programs — along with cancer, cardiology and public health — that grew out of the strategic planning process. His leadership yielded significant results. Between 1999 and 2005, external research award expenditures by the Health Center almost doubled, to nearly $93 million during roughly the same time frame. Annual admissions to the hospital increased 42 percent to 9,826, and annual patient visits to the UConn Medical Group rose 49 percent to 507,000.

Also under his leadership, the

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The financial services company ING has named UConn an official priority-recruitment school, as part of a global effort to partner with higher education institutions around the world.

The ING Foundation also has pledged $450,000 over three years to support initiatives in the School of Business.

The recruiting partnership, the first in ING’s Americas region, will include the creation of internships, mentorships, research projects, and lecture opportunities to benefit UConn students and faculty as well as ING.

“The aim of ING’s university recruitment approach is to attract talented, diverse, and smart future leaders by partnering with selected universities in a focused manner,” says Kathleen Murphy, CEO of ING U.S. Wealth Management. “The University of Connecticut embodies the characteristics we are looking for in a leading school: a high-quality institution, a global perspective, and educational programs that fit well with the needs of a world-class financial institution.”

This commitment to the University builds on a robust relationship between ING and UConn, as the ING Center in Financial Services, which was established at the UConn School of Business in 2001. The ING Center specializes in research and development of real-world solutions to marketing challenges such as identifying profitable customers and optimizing customer acquisition and retention. Corporate clients have included IBM, Bristol-Meyers, and L.L. Bean.

“This effort builds on our already strong partnership between ING and UConn,” said Robert Crispin, chairman and CEO of ING Investment Management Americas. “It is mutually beneficial. ING gains by focusing our efforts to recruit talented future leaders, and UConn students get access to enhanced learning opportunities and gain an edge at becoming part of a global business leader.”

Provoost Peter J. Nickolls, executive vice president for academic affairs at UConn, says, “Expanding UConn’s relationship with ING ties in strategically with the University’s academic plan, which places priority on the field of globalization, curricular diversity, and workforce development. The opportunities for experiential learning and mentorship will have tremendous benefit for students.”

ING’s recruitment efforts will target a variety of disciplines, primarily business, accounting, and actuarial science. The company is developing programs that will support workforce development in these fields, including internships, scholarships, and networking.

“Devin really embraced all aspects of university life,” says David G. Woods, dean of the School of Fine Arts. “He was a creative artist, had a mathematical mind, was witty, and he was caring. Those of us in fine arts enjoyed and cherished our friendship with him and will miss him and his many artistic talents.”

“Mohamed always brought a global perspective to the table,” says G. Woods, dean of the School of Fine Arts. “He was a creative art director, a talented musician, and a dedicated businessman. He was a special person who will be missed by all.”

Mohamed Hussein, interim dean of the School of Business, says, “In terms of global education, UConn has taken a strong position. Mohamed was one of the nation’s leaders in this area, and his work will continue to have an impact for years to come.”

Mohamed’s academic career spanned more than 27 years at UConn and he was a leader in the global education movement. He was a strong supporter of UConn’s internationalization efforts and was instrumental in establishing partnerships with universities around the world.

Mohamed Hussein was a trailblazer in the field of global education and his contributions will be remembered for years to come. He will be missed by his family, friends, colleagues, and students.

**Recent grad dies in swimming accident**

A remarkable story ended tragically when Devin Gavins, class of 2007, died in a swimming accident last July 10.

Gavins, who graduated from UConn in May, had achieved an extraordinary feat: He had earned 276 credits in five years, enough to earn five degrees — in computer science, cognitive science, theatre studies, linguistics/psychology, and an individualized major in cinema, culture, and cognition.

He accomplished this while maintaining a 3.2 grade point average.

He had planned to continue his education by pursuing a master’s degree in educational communications technology at New York University.

“Mohamed was always a role model for students, and his passing is a great loss for all of us,” says David G. Woods, dean of the School of Fine Arts. “He was a creative artist, had a mathematical mind, was witty, and he was caring. Those of us in fine arts enjoyed and cherished our friendship with him and will miss him and his many artistic talents.”

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**Special district okayed for Downtown Storrs**

**By Richard Veilleux**

The Mansfield planning and zoning commission this summer approved a request from the developers of Storrs Center to create a special design district, one of the final hurdles in efforts to build a new downtown area of Storrs Road.

The commission has also approved the first building for the project, designed to accommodate some of the businesses that will be relocated in the Storrs commercial area. The building will be located off Dog Lane, near the entrance to Bishop Center. Cynthia van Zeln, executive director of the Downtown Partnership, says 10 to 15 businesses will be canvassed to ascertain their interest in obtaining space in the building, and then designers will draw plans for the structure.

Storrs Center is being designed as a center of civic activity that links the University, Mansfield businesses and civic functions, local residents, and visitors within a pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly environment. The project will include on-street retail and restaurant activity, offices, public gathering places, and up to 400 units of new housing.

On July 19, officials held a ribbon-cutting in front of Mansfield Town Hall, dedicating the brick walkway envisioned to connect the town hall and the community center with the downtown. The walkway is lined with trees and benches. And, on Sept. 16, from noon until 5 p.m., the partnership, UConn, and Mansfield businesses will celebrate the fourth annual Festival on the Green, in the park areas behind Storrs Commons and Store 24.

The planning and zoning approvals will be followed by the required site plan approval process, with an eye toward a groundbreaking next year.

**Classroom building plans to be discussed July 31**

There will be a special meeting of the Capital Projects Planning Advisory Committee on Tuesday, July 31 from 9 to 10:30 a.m. in Bishop Center room 7.

The committee will discuss several ideas for replacing the Arjona and Montechiello classroom buildings.

The committee will discuss where replacement buildings could be sited.

**Convocation set for Aug. 24**

Faculty and staff are invited to join incoming students, their families and friends at Convocation on Friday, Aug. 24 at 5 p.m. in Gampel Pavilion.

The keynote speaker will be Dr. Sandra Weller, Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor and chair of Molecular, Microbial, and Structural Biology at the Health Center. Weller is one of the nation’s leading scientists in viral DNA replication. She conducts research on the herpes simplex virus Type 1.

In 2000, Weller was elected to the Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering, and in 2001, she was elected a fellow in the American Academy of Microbiology.

She was awarded the Method to Extend Research in Time (MERIT) award by the National Institutes of Health, and trained two students who received the prestigious Henderson Award given at the Health Center each year for the best thesis.

She serves on the Faculty Review Board, the Medical Council, and the School of Medicine Oversight Committee, and is a member of the University’s ESCRO committee, which oversees the ethics of stem cell research.
Full-time firefighters’ fast response helps keep campus safe

BY RICHARD VEILLEUX

When a fire alarm sounds at UConn’s Storrs campus, a cadre of full-time firefighters scrambles into action. The first engine can be on the scene of a fire anywhere on campus within three minutes.

UConn is the only New England public university, and one of only a handful of campuses nationwide, that employs its own paid and fully staffed fire department. And the three-minute response time is not only faster than most departments—college or town—can match, it far exceeds the minimum standard recommended by the National Fire Protection Association, which is four minutes for the first responder, eight minutes for a full cohort.

“Averagable response time of three minutes or less is unheard of, regardless of whether it’s a municipal or a university setting,” says Barry Feldman, UConn’s chief operating officer and former West Hartford town manager.

The UConn Fire Department receives about 3,000 fire and emergency calls a year. But the daily business of the 29 uniformed UConn firefighters, all University employees, includes more than responding to those calls.

The department also undertakes building inspections, monthly sprinkler system inspections, valve inspections (some 2,600), and running fire drills, both during the academic year and in the summer when camps and conferences on campus are in full swing.

And during the academic year, firefighters also provide fire safety training to all the community assistants in the residence halls, and to many students. The University’s 2007-08 budget recommends two additional firefighters, owing to UConn’s growth during the past decade.

“We do many things of other municipal or even city departments don’t,” Fire Chief Francis Williams says, “including emergency medical services, hazardous material emergency response, fire education. And we’re also part of a large mutual aid partnership. We’ve been called to assist many Windham County towns.”

Robert Hudd, director of public safety, adds, “This is a very hard-working department. They have plenty to keep them busy, and they do it well.”

The department has a full complement of equipment, including one of only two aerial trucks in the region. It also has two engines, two basic life support ambulances, and a pair of hazardous material response trucks, one of which is outfitted to tow a fully self-supporting decontamination trailer in case of a toxic release or nuclear accident.

UConn has had its own department for more than 80 years, gradually growing into the fully certified, well-trained unit it is today. Hudd credits the University for making a long-term commitment to the safety of students and faculty by providing its own specially trained fire and emergency rescue service, a service not generally found on-site at other colleges.

“The University recognized many years ago that our location requires a rapid response in the event of an emergency,” says Hudd.

Williams, the fire chief, says very few campuses have their own departments because they are located in or in close proximity to a city. “In Storrs, we have local volunteer departments that are nearby,” he says, “but at their site, they couldn’t take care of our daily business.”

Hudd says the fact that UConn has its own fire department sits very well with parents. “Most people have come to expect police service at a major university,” he says, “but a campus with its own fire service is highly valued by parents, who often are handing the task of ensuring the safety of their children to someone else for the first time.”

The universities of Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont all rely on fire departments in the towns contiguous to their campuses for fire protection. The Amherst Fire Department, the department in Burlington, VT, employs 50, while the others use a volunteer force. All those departments also are responsible for far more than the university that’s located in their town. The Amherst department, for example, provides services to the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and Hampshire colleges, and the town of Amherst—more than 75,000 people living in a 28-square-mile area. The Burlington department also covers a town of nearly 40,000 residents.

Ed Comeau, director of Campus Fire, says those services primarily focus on issues of campus fire safety, says that besides UConn, he can think of only a handful of full-time, on-campus departments. These include Clemson University, Purdue, New Mexico State, and the University of California at Davis. Williams says he’s proud of the services his department provides—services that are complemented by the addition of sprinklers to on-campus residence halls over the past few years.

“The rapid response time, coupled with the automatic fire alarm detection system in the residence halls, allows fires, when they do occur, to be controlled very quickly,” Williams says. “Some/mo. It’s not unusual that within ten minutes the fire has spread to the point where the sprinklers would have activated. And even though the alarm system has evacuated the residents, they don’t know that a fire actually occurred.”
A masked ball is being held on June 9 to benefit UConn’s skin cancer program. "This inaugural event will celebrate the extraordinary individuals at the UConn Health Center who make a difference every day in the lives of cancer patients and their loved ones, and will raise awareness of many of the cutting-edge services within the Neag Comprehensive Cancer Center," says Linda Lax, who has been working with a volunteer committee to organize the event. Three well-known individuals who have each made considerable contributions to raise awareness about cancer will be honored during the ball.

Jim Calhoun has led the UConn men’s basketball program to two NCAA National Championships (1999, 2004) and earned nearly every possible honor, election into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame. In addition to his many professional successes, Calhoun has a long affiliation with the Health Center. He and his wife Pat have supported cardiology research for many years. In his role as ambassador, Calhoun can play a role model for cancer survivors across the nation. This year, he started the Big Y Jim Calhoun Cancer Challenge to benefit the Neag Comprehensive Cancer Center, and Coaches vs. Cancer. He logged 50 miles for the inaugural ride.

Wendy Lux of the UConn Foundation, who has long been involved in uncovering Connecticut’s past, Read-Burns, a member of Lisbon’s historic society, has previously helped uncover artifacts near the historic Bishop House in her hometown. "When I first learned about the field school, I jumped at the opportunity," she says. "I thought I would finesse what I’d already learned." Not all the participants in the field school had previous experience. "The purpose of the school is to teach interested adults the basics," says Colin Read-Burns. The first day served as a training session. Participants learned about the cultural, legal, and theoretical aspects of archaeology, as well as what to expect in the field. The next three days were spent in the field. One day was spent in the lab, cataloging items and learning how to determine the gender, age, and lifestyle of humans by looking at their bones.

"We want people to get not only the excitement from this experience, but to understand that it’s work too," Bellantoni says. "It’s exciting when someone finds something that hasn’t been seen in 1,000 years or longer." Each student was responsible for a 25-square-foot grid of earth. They were provided with hand tools, including trowels, brushes, and bamboo picks, which they used to slice and scrape the earth level, one centimeter at a time, in a way that allowed for artifacts to be recorded in place.

Understanding the association of the objects with the place they were found is crucial, Bellantoni says. "An artifact alone doesn’t tell us a lot of information," he says. "Artifacts are material culture. They are nothing more than manifestations of our technology, morals, and beliefs, all which reflect our behavior. We take all the artifacts from a site together with their location and try to interpret human behavior."

Sam Lee, a high school student who hopes to be an archaeologist in the future, found a wet stone and a piece of stone jewelry on his first day digging. "This experience has made me want to do more," Lee says. "It’s also taught me how to treat others." Another participant, Herb Davidson of Somers didn’t have to dig deep before encountering an artifact. He found a quartz flake, the byproduct of a tool that was made long ago. "There’s a lot to discover about the past underneath the earth’s surface," he says. Although some other institutions offer archaeology field schools, most are longer than UConn’s, making it difficult for the general public to participate, according to Bellantoni. Participants came from all over the east coast, and as far south as Virginia. "People in this area will no longer have to travel to the southwest United States, Mexico, or Europe to take part in a dig," he says. The Connecticut Archaeological Center also offers field schools for children.

"We’ve long been involved in doing this for children and students," says David Colberg, director of the Center for Anthropological Research at UConn. "But it’s an opportunity for adults to learn about the past and contribute to the process of uncovering it."

One of those contributing was Dr. Judith Reichman, who has long been involved in cancer research. "I feel comfortable with the Health Center. We have an access point to the educational community," she says. "We are so pleased they can join us for this event to acknowledge our thanks and appreciation." Reichman is a national leader in health care policy. "Dr. Jack W. Rowe is chair- man of the University’s Board of Trustees. He served as chairman and CEO of Aetna Inc. for many years and was an inspirational leader during a critical time in the company’s more than 150-year history. In addition, Rowe is a national leader in health care policy."

The Connecticut Archaeological Center also offers field schools for children. "We’ve long been involved in doing this for children and students," says David Colberg, a national leader in health care policy. "But it’s a chance to let adults play in the dirt."
### GRANTS

The following grants were received through the Office for Sponsored Programs (OSP) in April 2007. The list represents only new proposals awarded, and excludes continuations. The list is supplied to the Advance each month by OSP.

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**The Impact of Acculturation on HIV Risk in a Young Hispanic Population, Predoctoral Fellowship for Stephenie Chaudoir**

### SHOKO YAMAMOTO

Shoko Yamamoto, left, a research specialist at the Center for Regenerative Biology, and her husband Masakazu, a post doctoral fellow, share an ice cream sundae outside the Student Union.
Professor emeritus dies

Walter C. McKain Jr., a professor emeritus of rural sociology and gerontology, died July 2 at the Mertens House nursing home in Woodstock, Vt. He was 94.

McKain, of Bridgewater Center, Vt., received his master's degree in 1943 and a doctoral degree in 1947 at Harvard Graduate School.

He joined the UConn faculty in 1947 and retired in 1972. During his tenure, he added a more than a dozen national and international civic and public service organizations including the Social Science Admissions Committee of Harvard, the National Institute of Mental Health, the United Nations, the World Health Organization and the World Health in the Soviet Union.

His work often led to books and articles on aspects of aging, social security, the Soviet Union, and standards of living. He studied health programs available to the elderly in the former Soviet Union, visiting nine republics between 1964 and 1987.

McKain enjoyed activities including vegetable gardening, raising chickens, maintaining a Christmas tree farm, and playing and teaching bridge.

He was predeceased by his wife Elizabeth in 2005, and son, Richard, in 1999. He is survived by his children Nancy McKain Jonas, Walter Michael McKain III, Douglas Seckerson McKain, and Susan McKain Steiner, 13 grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild.

Memorial donations may be made to Mertens House at 73 River Street, Woodstock, VT 05091.

Chief financial officer (continued from page 1)

I’ll be leaving the University in good hands.

In a letter to the University community announcing Aronson’s retirement, President Philip E. Austin said, “Lori’s contributions to UConn’s progress over these years have been highly significant. She has played a critical role in every important University advance in areas related to women’s development and departmental relations, and has been trusted and valued advisor in a host of other areas as well.”

Aronson said McKain’s role in the development and implementation of the University’s master plan for facilities, the roadmap for the implementation of UConn’s 21st Century Campus, the elimination of the structural deficit that was a fact of life here in the mid-1990s, the financial restructuring of the Health Center when external factors placed it at risk and securing state support for the $3.2 billion 21st Century UConn program that continues the progress of UConn 2000.

Aronson also demonstrated her legendary quick wit in her letter of retirement to Austin: “As you know, I am long a believer in the belief that I am 71, but there are a few intangible, unverifiable evidences to the reality that I am now only five feet tall,” she wrote. “My rough calculation suggests that if I do not retire in the near future, I will disappear altogether.”

She told the Advance that what she will miss most is working with her “great, enthusiastic, and highly professional colleagues—be it to advise the president or any member of the球ball team.”

“I think for me, the only person I know who is shorter than I am, ” Aronson said.

Engineering dean (continued from page 1)

lent faculty members in each de- partment who are internationally recognized for their scholarship and educational programs. I look forward to working with them to promote student and academic research programs, inter-department collaboration, and innovative educational programs. We will also conduct outreach to enhance du- al enrollment opportunities and positive feelings of camaraderie.”

During the transition period, Chis will work with UConn ad- ministers on academic planning and campaign goals for the School.

UConn’s School of Engineering has more than 2,600 graduate and undergraduate students, and roughly 10,000 full-time faculty members, and roughly 20,000 alumni.
Maritime studies course offers academic, seafaring challenge

BY DAVID BULMAN

When Michael Bokoff applied to take a brand new maritime studies course at the Avery Point campus this spring, he wanted a real seafaring experience navigating the ocean.

"I didn't want to put into port every night," says the 19-year-old sophomore from Norwich.

Bokoff, a business major interested in the economic effects of maritime policy, was among 24 UConn students ranging in age from 18 to 38 years, selected to participate in the course, "Exploring the Blue."

Although he had little previous nautical training, Bokoff relished the experience, which included time aboard a two-masted sailing vessel.

Recalling storm-tossed days and nights in rough North Atlantic weather, he says, "You don't take this course for a ride; you're part of the crew as well as a student. Physically hauling on lines soaked with cold rain while you're literally being tossed in every direction at night – well, it takes its toll. But the course really challenged me to do new things."

The rigorous three-week, four-credit course was designed by two faculty based at the Avery Point campus: Helen Rozwadowski, associate professor of history and coordinator of maritime studies, and Mary K. Bercaw Edwards, associate professor of English, one of the country's foremost Herman Melville scholars.

Bercaw Edwards also serves as the foreman of the Mystic Seaport demonstration squad.

Rather than drafting a science-based curriculum, as most education-at-sea programs, they took a multidisciplinary approach that focused on maritime history, literature, and policy. The experiential aspects of the course – students participating in sailing and navigating the ship – complemented the academic component, giving students a comprehensive look at the oceans' influence on people and human history.

"Historians rarely study the ocean: they treat it as a place separated from people," said Rozwadowski. "We treat the ocean not as a surface but as a three-dimensional place with political, economic, and environmental aspects, and also cultural and psychological dimensions – those qualities of ocean literature or the history of the sea that are absolutely critical for understanding the ocean as part of our world." The course had two parts. The first week was spent on land participating in museum-based exercises and hands-on learning, such as climbing rigging, tying knots, and reading maritime charts, as well as attending lectures. Lecture topics ranged from literature of the sea to maritime law and the environmental history of the ocean. The students also took two day trips on Project Oceanology vessels.

Rozwadowski says southeastern Connecticut is an ideal place to study connections between oceans and people. "UConn's maritime studies program is able to tap into the resources of Mystic Seaport, Project Oceanology, and the U.S. Coast Guard Museum and Academy," she says. "We benefit from a group of marine scholars and experts that you can't replicate anywhere in the country." For the remaining two weeks, the class set sail on the SSV (Sailship Vessel) Westward, a 125-foot staysail schooner owned by the non-profit organization Ocean Classroom, which provided a captain and eight crew members.

This year's cruise departed Baltimore, Md., on May 13 and sailed north to Nantucket and New Bedford, Mass., visiting a number of important maritime museums along the way. The Westward returned to New London on May 26, having completed a voyage of 1,165 nautical miles.

For the voyage, the students were assigned to one of three classes on topics including the Chesapeake Bay oyster wars, dictatorialism as the necessary form of leadership at sea, and the history of fisheries and whaling.

"It's not a pleasure cruise," says Benedict. "It's in addition to standing watch, students had required reading for every class, and most class meetings included academic assignments and discussion.

"Going to sea is always a personal growth experience, but we designed this program to be academically rigorous," she adds. Students had to keep loosebooks, write analytical pieces after each museum visit, and research the origin of a maritime term. After the voyage, there were several writing and research assignments.

One priority in designing this program was to make going to sea both affordable and accessible in terms of timing.

Rozwadowski says the maritime studies program received support that helped create an affordable program. "That speaks to the opportunities UConn makes possible for a well-rounded educational experience," she says.

Liverpool Study Abroad experience an eye opener for students

BY SHERRY FISHER


"It's not something that's mentioned in high school history books," he says.

Benedict was among 10 UConn participants in a three-week Study Abroad program at the University of Liverpool this summer.

The group studied black history, focusing on the culture and politics of 400 years of black settlement, and the role Liverpool played in the African slave trade. Students met with individuals and community groups, attended lectures on contemporary issues, and visited political, social, and cultural sites. They earned six academic credits.

The students also traveled to Wales, London, and Germany.

Benedict, a senior from Trumbull majoring in economics, says the experience broadened his horizons. "It gave me a deeper and more complete sense of my history and identity. I learned more about the history of the slave trade, and that it all began in Liverpool," he says.

The Liverpool experience had the same effect on Ashley Cazeau, a senior from Stamford majoring in biological sciences.

"The Study Abroad has given me a new way of looking at my surroundings," she says. "I find myself looking at buildings here in America."

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UConn SSS students, along with some British students, took an excursion to London during a Study Abroad program based in Liverpool. The focus of the course was on black history and Liverpool's role in the slave trade.

"The course really challenged me to do new things," says Benedict. "It's not a pleasure cruise," says Benedict. "It's in addition to standing watch, students had required reading for every class, and most class meetings included academic assignments and discussion.

"Going to sea is always a personal growth experience, but we designed this program to be academically rigorous," she adds. Students had to keep loosebooks, write analytical pieces after each museum visit, and research the origin of a maritime term. After the voyage, there were several writing and research assignments.

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