

# **SPRING WEEKEND REVIEW**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



UCONN

**PRESENTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
BY THE STUDENT LIFE COMMITTEE OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2009**

## Executive Summary

In June 2008, Dr. John Rowe, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, University of Connecticut, expressed concern regarding Spring Weekend and requested that the Student Life Committee of the Board of Trustees conduct a review of the event.

Under the leadership of Louise Bailey, Chair of the Student Life Committee, a representative group of Faculty, Staff, Students and Trustees launched a process to respond to the request of Dr. Rowe. Specifically, the group was charged with the responsibility to provide the full Board of Trustees, a set of recommendations that will refocus Spring Weekend in such a way that it effectively serves to celebrate student's academic accomplishments, the end of the academic year, and demonstrably and significantly reduces and preferably eliminates the focus on alcohol, other forms of substance abuse, and risky behaviors that expose students and others to injury and damage to property.

The full report contains a complete record of the study including results of a campus-wide survey, recommendations from a broad array of constituent groups, and recommendations emerging from a series of forums held during the Fall 2008 semester. The issues surrounding Spring Weekend are complex. This executive summary reflects the themes and recommendations that emerged from the review.

One of the consistent themes emerging from the review is the sense of pride and accomplishment people from the student body to the Town of Mansfield feel regarding efforts they have already taken to ameliorate concerns. The full report provides a detailed outline of the comprehensive approach that a network of individuals, organizations, and agencies have taken over the years to manage Spring Weekend. There is also a common feeling that more can and needs to be done. Efforts in prevention, education, enforcement, and management are reflected in the recommendations. We propose that the constituencies who shared their concerns unite in a focused effort to act on these recommendations.

### Common Themes and Key Recommendations

#### Take ownership and establish unified leadership with appropriate authority to make change:

While many individuals interviewed stated that they felt that the majority of the issues regarding Spring Weekend were tied to individuals and groups who are not part of the University of Connecticut or surrounding Mansfield communities, it is important to acknowledge that Spring Weekend events, sanctioned and unsanctioned, are inextricably tied to the University. Without the UConn student body, Spring Weekend would not exist. Many constituencies work long and hard to improve the weekend and make it safer for those involved.

#### Recommendation:

The Town of Mansfield and the University of Connecticut administrative and student leadership establish a Standing Committee through which all efforts and initiatives related to Spring Weekend are vetted and approved. This committee should be co-chaired by representatives of the town and the University with authority to make recommendations regarding their respective resources as appropriate.

#### Take control of what you can control:

The great majority of the students want to keep Spring Weekend as a tradition for UConn students and their guests as a University event, in which they can take pride. The University administration wants to minimize risk of injury, property damage and loss of institutional reputation. The Town of Mansfield wants to provide a safe and healthy living environment for all members of the community, be they off campus students or long time residents.

Recommendations:

To the greatest extent possible, make Spring Weekend activities exclusive to the UConn community. Reduce or eliminate opportunities for visitors to the campus. Establish strict guidelines for guests (and their UConn sponsors) and hold UConn sponsors responsible for their guests who violate university policies. Further, the University should charge a fee for any guests and have them wear an identifying wrist band.

The Town of Mansfield should continue to move forward aggressively to establish high expectations for landlords, particularly those whose properties have traditionally hosted Spring Weekend events. Landlords should be held accountable for the expenses and behaviors of their residents to the extent that law allows. Faculty can play an important role in helping promote a safe Spring Weekend that celebrates students' academic achievements by requiring attendance in classes held the Friday of Spring Weekend and/or establishing learning experiences that promote scholarly engagement over the weekend.

The present schedule of classes should be evaluated. To the extent possible, all undergraduate students should be required to attend classes on Friday throughout the year, not just the Friday of Spring Weekend. Major projects, student presentations, exams and/or quizzes should be scheduled on Fridays to maximize attendance.

Alternative programs that celebrate students' scholarly achievements and promote their contributions to the community have the potential to shift the focus and meaning of Spring Weekend within the University community and beyond. The University should continue to develop events and activities during Spring Weekend that promote student scholarship and civic engagement.

Analyze the expense of Spring Weekend and establish revenue streams as appropriate to cover costs:

Concern regarding the fiscal impact of Spring Weekend was a prevalent theme. Data were collected from various constituents to establish an understanding of the costs inherent in Spring Weekend, but time did not permit for a systematic analysis of these costs or potential revenue streams.

Recommendation:

The Joint Committee on Spring Weekend should conduct a systematic analysis of the costs associated with Spring Weekend and, wherever possible and appropriate, initiate steps to charge the individuals and groups for costs and explore ways to reduce the overhead.

Take immediate steps to minimize/eliminate the involvement of outsiders:

Individuals who attend Spring Weekend, but are not members of the UConn or Mansfield communities are a major source of concern. Spring Weekend draws attendees from throughout the Northeast, representing a wide range of ages who have no investment in UConn or Mansfield.

Recommendations:

Explore strategies that make visiting the University of Connecticut and the Town of Mansfield on Spring Weekend inconvenient and unattractive. Recommendations from multiple constituents regarding such options include:

- Evaluate the role of parking
- Temporarily closing access options including roads
- Establishing road check points
- Establishing policies regarding underage visitors including not admitting high school students to campus to attend events associated with Spring Weekend and partnering with the Department of Child and Family Services to respond to minors

Hold all University of Connecticut Students to the highest behavioral expectations possible:

Hold students and student groups who violate the policies/laws of the University Community and/or the State of Connecticut accountable.

Recommendation:

Implement an immediate campaign to educate students regarding the degree to which they place their relationship with the University of Connecticut at risk when they choose to violate University policies or state laws.

Do not allow the days of unsanctioned events of Spring Weekend to grow; establish a goal to eliminate one of the three days within 3 years:

In recent years, some efforts have been made to establish unsanctioned parties on the Wednesday of Spring Weekend, which must be countered.

Recommendation:

The Town and University should take steps (e.g., education and enforcement) to stop unsanctioned, off-campus events. Further, in partnership with the property owners, eliminate Thursday night at Carriage House as an unsanctioned part of the weekend.

Assess all efforts immediately after Spring Weekend and adjust efforts accordingly:

It has often been difficult to gain a comprehensive understanding of the event, its costs and impact.

Recommendation:

A post-Spring Weekend assessment should be completed before the following Memorial Day weekend of the same year. This report should be made public and should include an accounting of expenses, hospital visits, arrests, sanctions and all other information that provides a clear understanding of the event. The Assessment will then be used to guide future modifications to approaching Spring Weekend in the future.

## In closing

From the students who came to the open forum to the detailed testimony from the State of Connecticut Attorney General, a common theme emerged: Any effort to immediately end Spring Weekend would result in dire consequences, which would likely exceed the capacity of the University and Town communities (including public safety officials) to effectively respond. It is not inconceivable that great harm to persons and property would occur.

The other common theme was that the Town and the University should take pride and comfort that the efforts already put into place are having a positive impact. The recommendations of this report build upon those efforts and continue to move Spring Weekend toward the goal established by the initial charge, to establish Spring Weekend as a safe, community celebration of achievement.

## ATTACHMENT A

Student Life Committee members of the Board of Trustees:

Trustee Louise M. Bailey, Chair

Trustee Philip Barry

Student Trustee Richard Colon

Trustee Linda Gatling

Student Trustee Ross Gionfriddo

Trustee Michael Martinez

John R. Saddlemire, Vice President for Student Affairs

Kathryn Ratcliff, Chair, Senate Student Welfare Committee

Donna Korb, Senate Observer

Lisa Troyer, Chief of Staff, President's Office

## ATTACHMENT B

The Following Constituent Groups provided testimony and/or written materials during the following dates and times:

### **Student Life Committee meeting on 10/09/08**

*Mansfield Campus Community Partnership*

*UConn Student Alumni Association*

*Town of Mansfield*

*Student Activities/Student Union Board of Governors*

*Undergraduate Student Government*

*Office of Community Standards*

### **Student Life Committee Meeting on 10/15/08**

*Assistant Attorney General's Office*

*Department of Residential Life*

*Off-Campus Student Services/Local Landlords*

*Windham Hospital*

*Public Comment*

*Department of Wellness and Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Services*

*Student Health Services*

*University of Connecticut Senate Executive Committee*

*University of Connecticut Fire Department/University of Connecticut Police Department*

### **Student Life Committee Open Forum on 10/29/08**

*Comments from various students, student groups, administration, landlords, and other constituents*