Opinion

Photo of the Day



A band performs for a crowd in Downtown Storrs on Thursday, Aug. 27, 2026. The outdoor performance drew community members and students to the area to enjoy live music. PHOTO BY SARAH TURNER, GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

In Medias Res:

THE UNCOMMON RIGHT OF THE COLLEGE STUDENT

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Welcome, Huskies, to the University of Connecticut. You have arrived at UConn in a moment when it is increasingly tempting to believe that the world around us, and the policy that shapes it, is an extrapersonal affair. After all, as a college student, you are told to focus on your studies. How can you possibly find the time to keep up with the world? This year alone has already brought a slew of headlines: from foreign wars, to privacy debates and to November's upcoming midterm elections. For many new college students, it's easiest to believe these are problems for someone else to solve. Leave politics to the politicians and the righteous activism to the Greta Thunbergs and the Wawa Gatherus of the world. You, after all, are just a student. What can you do?

Yet despite your busy schedules, the world continues to go on all around you. Federal decisions about education funding have already impacted UConn, threatening the programs it is able to provide. Amid government pressure, support for low-income students has been slashed at universities nationwide, and student loan forgiveness continues to be cut back. On campus, debates over immigration continue, with many students concerned about UConn's lack of a committed response to the potential for deportations to occur on campus.

The realities of such a politically charged atmosphere are not new to college students. Since the very beginning of our nation's higher education system, students have been faced with injustice of varying scales. The first known case of student activism on an American campus was in 1766, when students at Harvard organized strikes in protest of poor food quality during the 'Butter Rebellion.' Ever since, college campuses have been at the forefront of change. During the civil rights movement of the 1960s, students in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee emerged as leaders in community organizing by looking beyond their campus to bring change nationwide. Speaking at the White Rock Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. acknowledged the emerging importance of young people in the fight for change, stating it "was initiated, fed, and sustained by students."

The same spirit of student advocacy has persisted since. Student strikes in the wake of the Kent State shooting helped bring the growing opposition to the Vietnam War into the national spotlight. After the Santa Barbara Oil Spill occurred off the coast of California, local college students rallied alongside their neighbors, helping to create some of our nation's first organizations dedicated to environmental accountability.

These movements were formed because college students understood one thing: they were not merely spectators of global events, but active protagonists in a changing world. Students in the past have repeatedly demonstrated this spirit, and UConn Huskies have the same capacity today.

As college students, our education is not meant to be contained to the classroom. UConn teaches each of its students to be global citizens. The knowledge we receive in the lecture hall is one half of this. The second half of our education comes from the application of what we have learned to the real world. As the Class of 2030, you don't need to agree on what this change should look like. A student advocating for abortion rights has the same right to push for change as one advocating for abortion restrictions. A student concerned about immigration has the same right to organize as one concerned about deportation policy. Recent on-campus campaigns have demonstrated this range of perspective — from Mutual Aid's grassroots support network to UConnifer's advocacy against a potentially environmentally damaging golf facility.

It is tempting to believe that, as a freshman, you will figure this all out later. While that may be the case, your actions already exist in the context of an ever-more divisive political climate. As a Husky, you do not have to be an activist. You must, however, remember that you have the right to be one. As the Class of 2030, you represent the future of not just our university, but our nation. With your diplomas, you will emerge into the world as talented, educated and politically consequential individuals. You represent an inheritance of responsibility: you are the future of our nation. It is this inheritance that grants you a right to participate in our nation's civic processes — and the agency to shape them. Huskies, do not waste this opportunity. Don't just ask how your freshman year will shape you. Ask how you will shape it.

Students are adults. Treat them accordingly.

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Earlier this month, the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts at the University of Michigan announced that they'd be piloting a new grading policy for first year students. The updated policy means that future freshmen in the university's largest college will have private first semester grades that do not count toward GPAs or external transcripts. While the goal of the program is to "help first-year students acclimate to the demands of college and allow intrinsic motivations to guide personally meaningful academic journeys," I think that this development is part of a bigger trend: one in which we are removing all meaningful accountability from students' lives.

It isn't just the University of Michigan making these policies. Other colleges like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Swarthmore College and California Institute of Technology have all implemented similar programs meant to protect student mental health and ease the transition to college level coursework.

While the transition from high school to college can be difficult for some students, especially those with a lack of financial and emotional support at home, it is important to understand that we should support students in meeting the new standards set for them, rather than eliminating them entirely.

The University of Connecticut and other higher-education institutions already offer a plethora of resources for students to take advantage of, that can both make their adjustment easier and teach them the skills needed to advocate for themselves. During the first weeks at UConn, orientation sessions strongly promoted First Year Experience courses, as well as the Academic Achievement Center and Learning Communities. Colleges have a responsibility to make these resources plentiful, easily accessible and well-known, but beyond that, it is the students' responsibility to recognize when and how to use them.

Beyond the academic concerns that these policies aim to address, the mental health aspect is important to discuss. University concern for student mental health is valid, and data shows that students today are struggling, especially minorities and students that identify as female or financially distressed. Though this trend is alarming, there is a key difference between discomfort and harm. Stress, performance anxiety, and even failure are all uncomfortable parts of adulthood, but that doesn't make them automatically harmful and removing them entirely also removes the potential for learning experiences. Instead, we should aim to address and learn to manage the "healthy" stress before it turns into something more serious. This goal is exactly what UConn looks to achieve with Student Health and Wellness mental health services. Away from home and the prying eyes of parents, students have opportunities to confidentially access therapy, medication and support through these services.

Finally, I want to address the University of Michigan's implication that first semester grades are somehow destroying student potential for "personally meaningful academic journeys." Responsibility for meaningful and exploratory growth goes both ways. In typical liberal arts curriculums like those at UConn and yes, the University of Michigan, general education requirements are meant for students to explore topics outside of their specialized degree. These core curriculum classes are introductory-level for a reason and are meant to be a place to discover or dive back into a passion in a low-stakes and easier-to-manage environment.

The opportunity to find something "personally meaningful" is there. Therefore, it is students' responsibility to find and take courses that meet their ability level and areas of interest, even when the four letters before the course number don't align with their major. Students who take the appropriate courses that align with their passion should feel driven to put in high effort, even when the content is not completely familiar or even when it means getting a B. For example, nursing students can fulfill their interest in healthcare and their philosophy requirement via PHIL 1175, Ethics in Healthcare. It isn't a huge ask to expect students to pursue their interests, while also exploring them from multiple angles. Meaningful exploration doesn't require guaranteed success, and part of exploration and mastery is learning to navigate unfamiliar environments without the promise of a perfect outcome each time.

18-year-olds aren't perfect and they certainly don't have all the answers in first semester. But neither do 22-year-olds, or 40-year-olds or 65-year-olds. So, if students aren't ready to take accountability for their own wellbeing and success during first semester, then what makes second semester fundamentally different? If responsibility doesn't begin at 18, then when does it begin? Beyond entering college, people of all ages will encounter a variety of transition periods as they start a career, manage finances and retire. These times don't come with trial periods, but they do have training and support, so let's teach our students the skills needed to leverage those resources instead of running away from the results.