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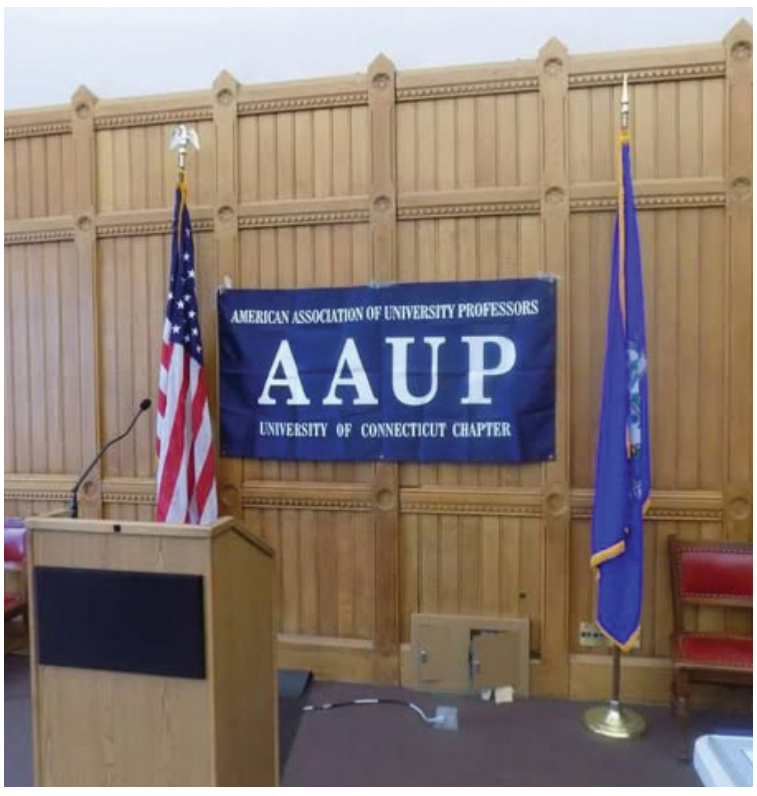
Misguided Budget Plan Jeopardizes Educational Mission

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

by the Executive Committee of the UConn AAUP

The executive committee of the UConn American Association of University Professors opposes selective transparency regarding decision making and fiscal affairs of the university. We also remind the UConn administration that transparency alone is not enough. We seek full transparency and genuine, substantive, timely shared governance. It is not sufficient to share selective details after the budget and program decisions have already been made.

Take the Budget Transformation Initiative (BTI) as an example. Faculty had no role in the question of whether to adopt such an approach. Even now, when the administration appears to be moving ahead with the BTI, the faculty has little representation in the discussion. According to Devin Kennedy, the outside consultant hired by the administration, only "13-ish" of the 100 BTI committee members are faculty members. (Financial Affairs Committee meeting, Feb. 25, 2026)



We remain "dismayed that the UConn administration ignores our own UConn faculty in education, budgeting, accounting, pedagogy, institutional change, curriculum, and subject area knowledge." (EC Statement, Jan. 9, 2026) Frankly, this low faculty representation and limited role in the BTI adoption process is embarrassing and counterproductive.

University officials seem to be under the mistaken impression that so-called town halls - often with pre-submitted questions and scripted answers - are a substitute for full transparency and genuine shared decision making. They are not. As one administration official noted at the aforementioned meeting, the BTI's so-called town halls and listening sessions are "to educate the university community about this new model." Note what was not said about the town halls: to receive input from attendees, to make changes based on faculty and staff responses, or to consider whether the BTI is even the right way to go in the first place.

Models like the BTI are not value-neutral, objective frameworks. They are built on the assumptions and ethics of those who construct them. Given that, we very much worry that the near total exclusion of many UConn constituencies from the BTI process - starting from the decision to even consider this model - is a deeply troubling move by the UConn administration. We were not involved at the most basic level, and we fear the people of this university will suffer as a result.



UConn American Association of University Professors (AAUP) protests UConn's lack of transparency on decision making and fiscal matters. Last fall, UConn made the decision to adopt a Budget Transformation Initiative (BTI) and has faced backlash from faculty members who feel they have little representation. PHOTO COURTESY OF @UCONNAAUP ON INSTAGRAM

We echo an additional concern raised by the senate budget committee at its Jan. 29, 2026, meeting and relayed to the Financial Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees on Feb. 25: The BTI has very little in it that stresses the quality of instruction. Think about that. As faculty, we believe quality of instruction is a crucial pillar of what we are doing here at UConn.

As we noted in our Executive Committee statement of Jan 9, 2026, "the AAUP and its members stand for research innovation, stimulating teaching and mentoring, and shared decision-making. We ask the administration to do the same."

Pretty Little Liars: Updated Y2K references and looming media control

by Tamara Segal
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The book series "Pretty Little Liars," which inspired the TV show of the same name, has come into recent attention after readers discovered one of its lines had been mysteriously changed in the e-book version. Instead of a reference to the show "Fear Factor," the line now reads, "You guys want to come over and watch this cool TikTok I found?" This "update" seems to be an attempt to appeal to younger audiences who might be unfamiliar with the original reference. Yet, apart from the sheer ridiculousness of that idea, there is a more sinister undertone to the change that should not be ignored: its dangling threat of media control.

Of course, it is not as though altering media is inherently a bad thing. In fact, it's common. Song lyrics get tweaked to remove offensive lyrics, news articles see corrections of mistaken information and books are reprinted in new editions to reflect evolving messages. Yet these instances are all accompanied by statements announcing the changes made and the reason for them, so there is no deception. What distinguishes the change to "Pretty Little Liars" is that it was made discreetly. The line seems to have been updated some four years ago, yet it only gained public attention in the past couple of weeks. This change was meant to fly under the radar, and that is an eerie prospect.

For one thing, it is critical to recognize that the mark of when a book was written is central to its significance. No one would think, for instance, to change the title of George Orwell's "1984" to some future year like 2061 now that the year 1984 has long since passed. We cannot overwrite an author's personal, timestamped account of history and make it "more applicable" to younger audiences. That would be absurd. Understanding any book's message requires appealing to the unique political and societal influences of its time. In the same way, Sara Shepard, the author of "Pretty Little Liars," knew that "Fear Factor" was a reference that placed the novel at a decided point in time, and she chose it for that reason. The plot of the series, which involves recurring text messages from an unknown and unfriendly "A", only makes sense in that short moment in the history of technology where digital communication was emerging and enabling new malicious behavior, but at the same time digital literacy and cybersecurity were not advanced enough to protect the story's victims against those cyberattacks. Changing the original line insinuates that the story takes place alongside smartphones and social media, transforming and largely nullifying the plot. The book, like so many, captures a snapshot of history which is neither irrelevant nor outdated, even if the reference itself may seem to be. In this way, books serve as cultural and ideological time capsules which underpin our understanding of perspectives and experiences throughout history.

While the change to "Pretty Little Liars" is damaging enough on its own, the precedent it sets looms even larger: It is acceptable for media to be altered at the sole discretion of the distributors of that media without notifying readers. The corollary to this is alarming. Undisclosed modifications could very easily give way to malign falsifications in the near future. In a digital age where fewer and fewer materials exist as physical copies, media is especially susceptible to manipulation. Today it is YA fiction. Tomorrow, who knows what else could be altered without us realizing.



The book covers for popular YA series "Pretty Little Liars." the author and publisher have come under fire for discreet changes they made to the book in an effort to be less dated.
PHOTO COURTESY OF @SARACSHEPARD ON INSTAGRAM

The notion that media might be controlled is not speculative, but simply realistic. The U.S. is certainly not immune to Orwellian censorship, as is clearly proven by today's harrowing political climate. The government has carried out or incited countless chilling invasions of free speech in the media in just the past year, including the temporary pulling of Jimmy Kimmel's talk show and the full cancellation of Stephen Colbert's, both of which followed their respective host's criticism of President Trump. That's not to mention the numerous instances of "woke" information on federal websites that Trump has modified or removed altogether, the FBI search of a Washington Post reporter's house, or the pulling from the air of the "60 Minutes" episode which was set to cover the CECOT megaprison in El Salvador where many detained by ICE have been sent. Today, as ever, the truth holds little value to those who wield the power of controlling it.

As simple as it would be to suppose that covert modifications of our media are benign, we should know better. Otherwise, the books that tell this story could just as easily be rewritten to fool an audience who can't remember it.