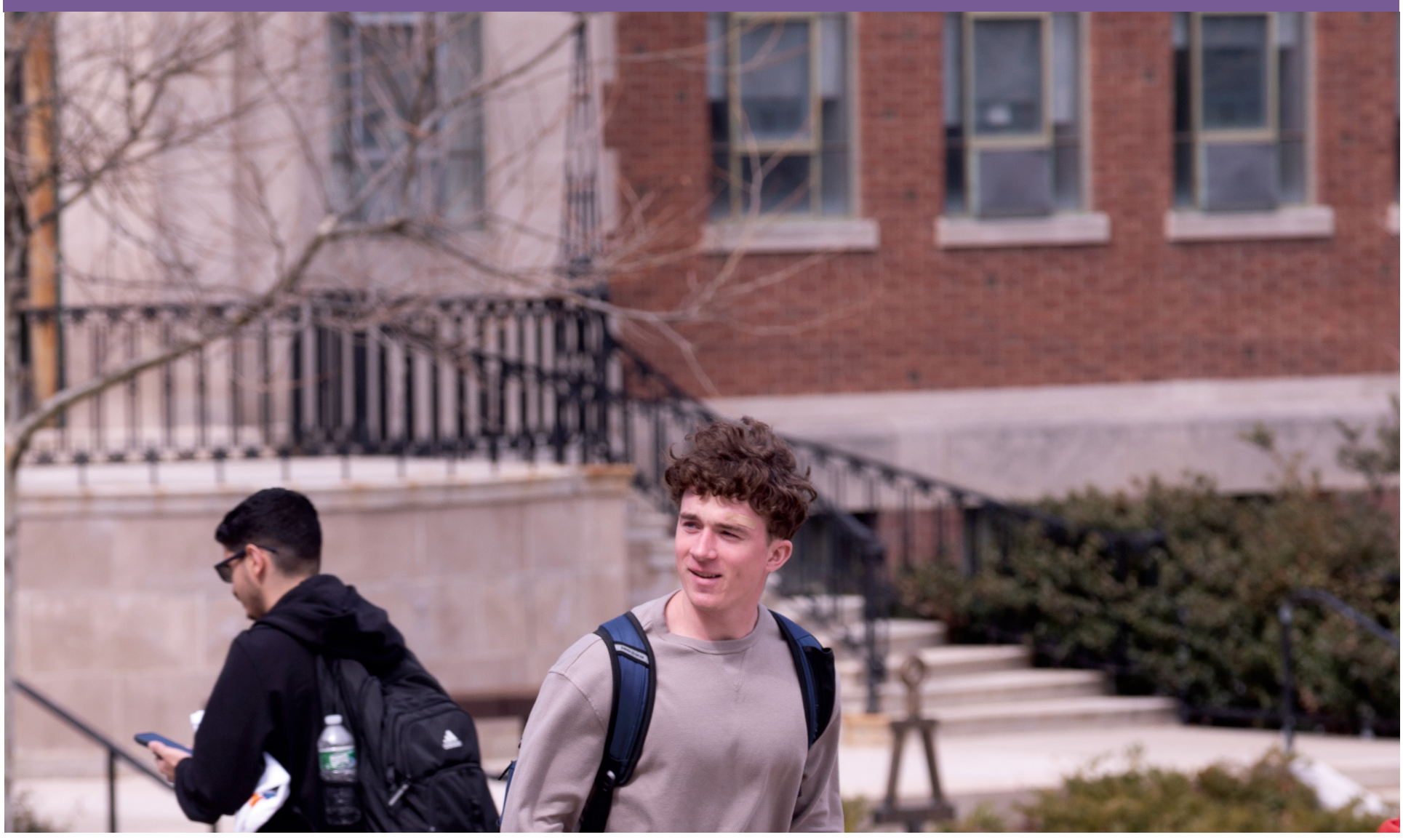
Photo of the Day | Warmer days ahead



The Great Lawn was buzzing with UConn students on Monday with the warmer weather. Finals season is slowly approaching as March comes to a close.
PHOTO BY MADISON HENDRICKS, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

Space is Worth It

by Sam Garifalos | CONTRIBUTOR | HE/HIM/HIS | bnw25003@uconn.edu



A view of the Earth from space. Ever since the beginning of civilization, humanity has ventured to explore the unknown.
PHOTO COURTESY OF CREATIVE COMMONS.

For centuries, the night sky has fascinated humanity more than almost any other part of our natural environment. We drew pictures with the stars and saw our heroes and our gods amongst them. Lost sailors found hope and direction from them on clear nights. We trusted them with our deepest wishes and desires and, almost seventy years ago, we finally reached out and touched them. An idea that at once seemed impossible, with the launch of "Sputnik 1" on Oct. 4, 1957, humanity finally placed something of our own into the cosmos. It didn't stop there, either. Less than four years later, we sent a human being into space. For the first time in our history as a species, it seemed that even the sky could not bind us. This trail of accomplishments continued, with cold war rivals trading firsts in a quest to conquer the endless horizon, culminating in the landing of two humans on the surface of the moon. The same silent fixture that had captured the eye of every human who had ever looked up at night was now occupied by two of our own species. No doubt, from the perspective of the two astronauts looking up at our birthplace suspended in an endless sea of black, the possibilities seemed endless and the boundaries nonexistent. Then, it all fell apart.



The Space Shuttle taking off. despite it's reusable design, it soon became more expensive to launch than the rocket it replaced, the Saturn V.
PHOTO COURTESY OF CREATIVE COMMONS

Though the Apollo program and its accomplishments were widely praised and its astronauts looked upon fondly, its time in the public's good graces was limited. With the Vietnam war claiming thousands of lives, social unrest at home and a grim economic outlook ahead, many began to question whether the billions spent on landing humans on the moon was truly a worthwhile investment. After all, while it was certainly an impressive spectacle, when people lowered their gaze from our cosmic neighbor, they were still met with empty plates and empty chairs. It was all too unsurprising then, that when the time came to draw up our plan for space exploration beyond the "Flags and footprints" scope of the Apollo program, the decision was made to abandon the moon. Instead, NASA would pursue a more theoretically sustainable and limited vision for space exploration. This came in the form of the Space Shuttle. It was an incredibly impressive technological feat, employing the cutting edge of 1980s technology and proving our countless ideas. During its operation, our understanding of how to live and work in space, our knowledge of the universe around us, and our understanding of our own planet expanded massively. All of this came at a cost, though. With 14 deaths across two separate tragedies, the Shuttle became the deadliest space vehicle in history. Its reusable design grew to be more costly per launch than the Saturn V it replaced. Though it succeeded in making spaceflight routine, this led many to perceive space exploration as a simultaneously mundane and dangerous undertaking. Altogether, though a valuable and impressive part of space history, the Shuttle era left a deep scar on humanity's drive to explore the stars.

This leads us to the modern era of space exploration. The retirement of the Shuttle and the wave of innovation in many sectors in the early 2000s made way for a new age of exploration. For the first time, private companies had the resources and support to pursue their own space exploration ventures. This led to many of the giants we know today, like SpaceX, Rocket Lab, Blue Origin and others. As I'm writing this, Artemis II is scheduled to launch in two days, taking humans, including the first woman to the moon for the first time in over 50 years. On the precipice of this new era, it's important to answer the question that last dampened our exploratory spirit: Is space worth it?

I'm sure you've already heard the practical arguments in its favor. Space exploration has brought a myriad of new technologies and advancements in nearly every field of human achievement. This, in my opinion, is not the most important reason though. Exploration is an inseparable part of the essence of humanity. Our drive to expand beyond our known horizons is what allowed us to progress from small, isolated enclaves fighting for survival, to a planet-spanning civilization. When we looked out at an endless ocean, we decided to cross it. When we looked at a towering mountain, we climbed it. When plagues ravaged us, we looked to the world around us for a cure. When famines starved us, we ventured out and found new harvests. We've crossed insurmountable obstacles at every stage of our existence. First on foot, then by boat, by covered wagon, balloon, airplane and submarine. When gravity bound us, we broke its chains and touched the stars. It's a trait that unites across time, culture, gender, race and religion. To be human is to explore. Space is worth it. It allows us to experience the depths of our humanity and dissolves the petty walls we allow to divide us. As we stand on the shore of our next great ocean and look out towards the uncertain future, the greatest aspiration we can possibly have is to be as human as possible: Venture forth and be human.