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COMIC BY SETH WALLEN, CONTRIBUTING ARTIST/THE DAILY CAMPUS

Daily OPINION

OP-ED: WHEN IT COMES TO CAMPUS SAFETY, UCONN MUST LOOK BEYOND THE NUMBERS

by Julia Simons
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As the University of Connecticut moves to remove most of its blue-light emergency phones, I urge university leadership to reconsider what these fixtures represent and how campus safety should be measured.

As UConn's Undergraduate Student Government (USG) President from 2003 to 2004, campus safety was the cornerstone of my administration. We understood that creating a safe campus required more than responding to emergencies; it required identifying risks, preventing harm and working collaboratively to make safety a shared institutional priority.

USG's efforts included campus safety walks, advocating for the addition of a sidewalk on North Eagleville Road and promoting a safer Spring Weekend. These initiatives reflected a common goal: making campus safer through practical improvements and prevention.

None of this happened in isolation. Our progress was the result of collaboration among dedicated students, UConn Police, university administrators, faculty, Trustees and the Town of Mansfield. I remain grateful to have worked alongside such talented and invested people who shared a commitment to student safety. That experience taught me that meaningful progress comes when a university community works together to address risks before they become tragedies.

That is why I am concerned by the decision to remove the blue lights.

UConn reports that its blue-light phones received 166 calls over the past five years, with only two incidents requiring a public safety response. University officials have cited low usage, annual operating costs exceeding $70,000, and the estimated $6 million cost of upgrading the aging system as reasons for phasing out most of the phones. They point to modern alternatives, including cellphones, the LiveSafe app, and text-to-911 services. Those are legitimate considerations, and emergency technology should be evaluated regularly. But low usage alone does not establish that a safety measure has no value.

Consider the concept of survivorship bias, illustrated by the famous World War II airplane example. When military analysts examined returning aircraft, they initially focused on the locations with the most visible bullet damage. Statistician Abraham Wald recognized that they were overlooking the planes that never returned. The missing evidence mattered; the most vulnerable areas were those where damage could prevent an aircraft from making it home.

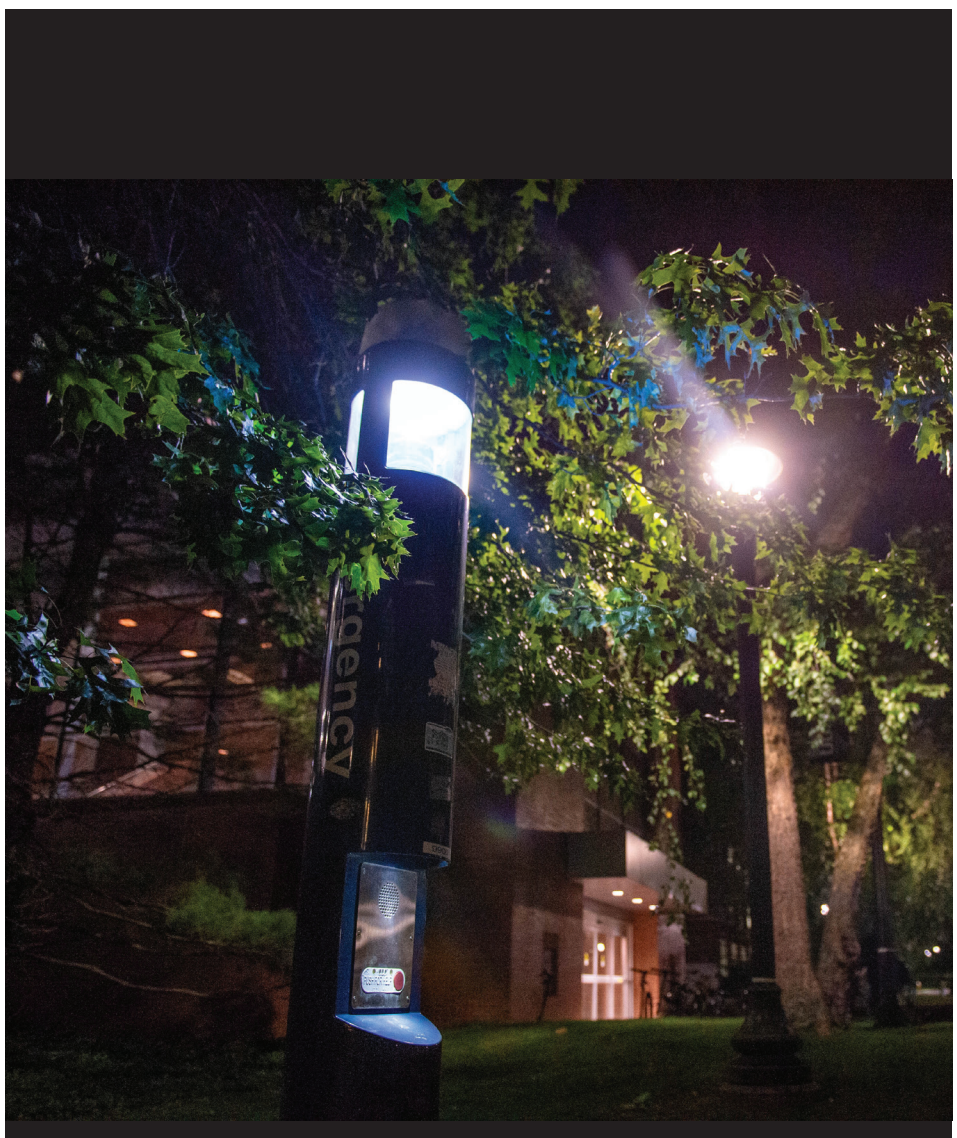
The lesson is to ask what the available data does not capture.

When evaluating campus safety, how do we measure a crime that was deterred, a student who felt secure walking across campus or a potential offender who reconsidered because emergency assistance was visibly accessible? The number of calls made to a blue-light phone cannot answer those questions. Nor does a low number of reported incidents establish that the lights alone prevented crime. It does, however, leave an important question unanswered: Are we measuring the full value of the system?

A comprehensive safety strategy must consider both the availability of emergency assistance and the environment in which students live, learn and socialize. The blue lights should not be expected to prevent every crime, but neither should their contribution be dismissed because they are rarely used.

UConn has invested in campus safety through a combination of infrastructure, partnerships and community engagement. We should build on that commitment, not assume that a measure is unnecessary simply because it has not been used often.

Student safety is not a matter of counting emergency calls or calculating maintenance expenses. I've seen what can be accomplished when students, police, administrators, faculty, Trustees and the Town of Mansfield work together toward a common goal. I hope UConn will approach this decision with that same spirit of collaboration and prevention.



A blue emergency phone sits under the trees on Tuesday, September 22nd, 2026. UConn has decided to remove most emergency phones from campus.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL JEFFERS/GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER, THE DAILY CAMPUS



Two blue emergency phones sits in the darkness on Tuesday, September 22nd, 2026. UConn is removing most emergency phones from campus.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL JEFFERS/GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER, THE DAILY CAMPUS