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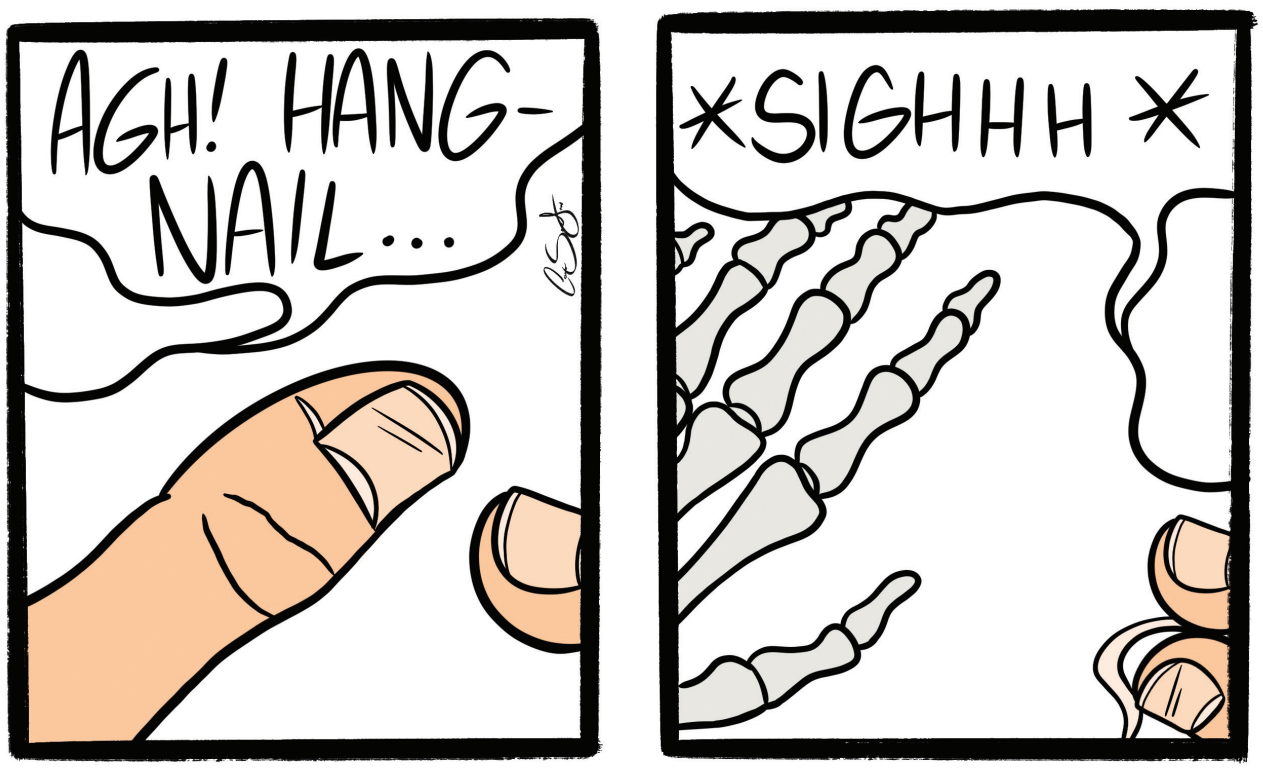
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COMIC BY CONNOR SZREJNA, STAFF ARTIST/THE DAILY CAMPUS

Daily OPINION

THE CASE OF RYAN COLES AND UCONN'S FAILING CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY

EDITORIAL



The improper allocation of university funds by Dr. Ryan Coles towards personal activities totaled up to $147,000, according to an internal UConn review. Coles was a professor at the UConn School of Business. PHOTO COURTESY OF STOCKVAULT.NET.

In June 2026, University of Connecticut assistant professor Dr. Ryan Coles abruptly resigned from his position and left the university. The reason? He was about to be terminated for improperly allocating university funds towards personal activities. The spending totaled up to $147,000, according to an internal UConn review that was obtained by CTInsider. While UConn successfully conducted a review and discovered these issues, the underlying problem of UConn's easily avoidable conflict of interest policy remains unsolved. The investigation also does not solve the lasting impact this case may leave on Coles' fellow professors and the students he taught.

UConn's review of Coles' actions found that he used university dollars for travel that was not entirely related to university activities. This money was primarily used to benefit two companies: Nomyx, a tokenization firm, and PatentPlus AI, which researches patents using artificial intelligence. Coles held equity interest in both companies when he misused the funds, meaning he may have financially benefitted from breaking UConn's policy on conflicts of interest. These issues meant that Coles violated the university's code of conduct, travel and entertainment policy and the state code of ethics, among other UConn guidelines.

In the review, UConn identified Coles' supervisor, Professor Greg Reilly, as failing to provide oversight to Coles' activities. Yet laying sole blame on Reilly raises a troubling issue. Why was Reilly the only person or guardrail that could have provided oversight? UConn's conflict of interest policy provides a disclosure form, but it doesn't ask for a specific description of the conflict of interest beyond whether the respondent might receive financial benefit for themselves, a family member or an associated business. UConn, of course, says it is necessary to disclose a conflict of interest, but there appears to be little or no enforcement of this fact. It is notable that UConn only discovered Coles' problems after complaints came in; by the time Coles was placed on administrative leave, it had been four years since his first violation occurred and more than a year after his last recorded violation.

The issue of Coles' violations will reverberate in more ways than one. Beyond the exposure of UConn's conflict of interest policy, both faculty and students will be affected.

For one, this case puts the many business professors on campus under scrutiny. UConn's report recommended that an audit of the business department be conducted. A potential audit is a blow to professors who go about disclosing potential conflicts of interest the right way and play by the rules laid out by the state. Especially in the business field, where profits and financial gain are often understandably emphasized, the ethics of handling money are fraught. It sets a bad example when a professor benefits financially from their business dealings and isn't caught until well after the activity occurred.

For students, the example is even worse. According to an interview with the Hartford Business Journal, Coles wanted to make his classes lively and entertaining to students. Instead, he facilitated trips which benefitted the companies he was involved with. Using university funds for personal gain is hardly an appropriate lesson for students. Furthermore, UConn's report disclosed that he promoted one such company to students to encourage potential investment. Not only did Coles set a bad example; he also may have roped students into his violations. In his capacity as a faculty member, Coles was able to get away with advancing his own interests at the expense of impressionable students who were trying to start their own careers. Students at UConn shouldn't have to wonder if their professor is receiving undue gains while they're just trying to receive advice.

The problems raised by Coles' case underscore that UConn's handling of conflict of interests is sorely lacking. Judging from how long it took for Coles' behavior to come to the university's attention, there is no adequate system to enforce the rules at the moment. Accountability only occurred after the damage was done, and Coles was able to move on to future opportunities. Beyond supervision and oversight from one person, which in this case proved faulty, the Editorial Board maintains that UConn needs a more robust way to identify misconduct before it continues for years.



COMIC BY RHIANNON WALLACE, CONTRIBUTING ARTIST/THE DAILY CAMPUS