

Community Fair shares resources
Page 2



Sydney Sweeney faces backlash
Page 4



Moore Field House gets a makeover
Page 6

SOUTHERN NEWS

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Hispanic Heritage unites campus

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PHOTO | LILY RAND

Western Connecticut State University President Jesse Bernal, presenting at the "Empowering Lives Lecture," on Sept. 23 in the Adanti Student Center Ballroom.

Students and faculty gathered in the Adanti Student Center Ballroom for a conversation about education, inclusion and empowerment at "Empowering Lives Lecture" on Sept. 23.

Every year, the university hosts this lecture in order to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month and this year's speaker was Western Connecticut State University's President Jesse Bernal. During his lecture, he told stories that brought the entire room together.

"I wanted to start by talking about my grandmother, who really raised me," Bernal said. "Her formal education ended in middle school and I became a university president."

The lecture included photos of Bernal's family and made it clear how personal this topic was to him as both a former student and current educator.

Bernal shared how his personal experiences have shaped the decisions he has made as a university president and how certain things have opened his eyes to things that others might overlook.

The hardships he faced as an undergraduate student regarding his sexuality and feeling as though he did not fit in is the reason that he strives for inclusivity at his university and therefore, the Connecticut State University System as a whole.

One topic that Bernal spoke about was the idea that no one has any idea what someone else is truly going through behind closed doors.

College students are dealing with personal and academic struggles daily and Bernal stressed the importance of understanding that when working in higher education.

"I'm much more cautious about assuming that what I see in someone's life today tells me everything I need to know about how we arrived there," Bernal said.

Every student is on their own journey and has their own goals and dreams in addition to hardships and worries.

Bernal also noted that the only way issues concerning students can be addressed, is if students approach leadership with what it is they have been struggling with, which not everyone feels comfortable doing.

Following that, Bernal shared that there is always more that universities can do when it comes to being a Hispanic-Serving institution.

"As our students change, how must our institutions change to better serve them and to continue developing empowered lives?" Bernal said. "My undergraduate years remind me how much a person can carry quietly, even being unseen or not noticed."

According to the university's Common Data Set for 2025-26, there were 452 Hispanic/Latino degree-seeking first-year students and 1,886 Hispanic/Latino degree-seeking undergraduates, including first-year students, as of Oct. 15, 2025.

CDS recorded that their were 2,225 Hispanic/Latino undergraduate students in total, including both degree and non-degree-seeking students, out of the total student population of 10,027 during the 2025-26 academic year.

This was an increase from the previous year. CDS highlighted that as of Oct. 15, 2024, there were 314 Hispanic/Latino degree-seeking first-year students, 1,632 Hispanic/Latino degree-seeking undergraduates and 1,880 Hispanic/Latino undergraduate students in total, including both degree and non-degree-seeking students.

This was out of the total student population of 9,377 during the 2024-25 academic year.

The CDS data indicates that Hispanic/Latino students made up 20.05% of the student population in 2024-25, compared to 22.19% in the following year.

As the Hispanic and Latino community continues to grow, the efforts have expanded to create a campus environment that recognizes and supports it cultural diversity.

This includes a list of events centered around Hispanic heritage Month, that the community can learn about and enjoy, from "Mi Gente, Mi Familia, Mis Amigos: Student, Staff & Faculty Mentorship Connection" to "Día de los Muertos Ofrenda Planning Meeting."

Bernal also stated that to be a Hispanic-Serving Institution has everything to do with how university leadership works to acquire and maintain that title.

He said that intentionally choosing to serve students is something that not all university leaders may do, despite how important that is to everyone in the campus community.

With that in mind, Bernal left the audience with the knowledge that there is always more that universities can do for their students, especially when it comes to striving to become a Hispanic-Serving Institution.

"Students should not have to carry the responsibility for changing the institutions they came here to learn from," Bernal said.

School of Nursing earns national honor

By Valentina Toro
Managing Editor

The School of Nursing earned national recognition, becoming the first public university in Connecticut to be designated a National League for Nursing Center of Excellence.

The university is one of 20 nursing schools and programs selected as 2026 NLN Centers of Excellence across the country.

"This is a significant national recognition," Michele Vancour, interim dean of the College of Health and Human Services, said in a news release. "We are proud to join 114 institutions nationwide, out of approximately 3,000, to hold this prestigious designation."

The university was recognized in the category "Promotes the Pedagogical Expertise of Faculty."

The designation recognizes programs that demonstrate sustained excellence in nursing education.

The university is one of three institutions in Connecticut with the designation and the only public institution.

Fairfield University and Quinnipiac University are the other two schools in the state to receive the recognition.

The designation follows several years of work by the School of Nursing to strengthen faculty development, teaching and curriculum.

Maria Krol, interim executive director of healthcare programs and professor of nursing, said the school began exploring the requirements for becoming a Center of Excellence about two years ago.

Faculty professional development became a major part of the process as the school worked to align its program with new nursing education standards and competency-based education.

"In order to align our faculty with the new essentials and new competency-based education, we started to invest in them by increasing their professional development and encouraging them to obtain certification as nurse educators," Krol said.

Research, writing and curriculum development also became areas of focus for nursing faculty. Krol and her colleagues collected data, worked with a consultant and prepared a report documenting the school's efforts.

The School of Nursing submitted its application in April and learned in July that it had been accepted as a Center of Excellence.

The recognition requires the school to continue maintaining high standards in professional education, faculty training and the continued development of its nursing curriculum.



PHOTO | ISABEL CHENOWETH

Maria Krol, interim executive director of healthcare programs and professor of nursing, Andrea Adimando, chair and associate professor of nursing and Michele Vancour, interim dean of the College of Health and Human Services.

The recognition is renewable every four or five years, according to Krol, meaning faculty will continue the work that contributed to the designation.

The Center of Excellence program recognizes nursing schools and health care organizations for sustained achievements in areas including faculty development, student learning and academic leadership.

For the university, the recognition specifically focuses on the work faculty members have done to improve their teaching expertise.

The honor also places the university among a group of institutions nationally recognized by the NLN for excellence in nursing education.

The university was formally recognized during the Honors Convocation at the 2026 NLN Education Summit in Washington, D.C., on Friday, Sept. 25. The event brought together nursing educators and leaders from institutions across the country.

NLN President and CEO Beverly Malone said the designation reflects the work nursing programs put into maintaining innovation and excellence throughout students' academic experiences.

"We applaud the 2026 NLN Centers of Excellence and thank them for demonstrating values and actions that transform the ordinary into the extraordinary in nursing education," Malone said.

Nor'easter brings wind and flooding

By Brianna Wallen
Editor-in-Chief

Connecticut was hit with heavy rain, strong winds and coastal flooding over the weekend as a nor'easter stormed through the state.

The National Weather Service reported that coastal flooding left more than two feet of water covering some streets in South Milford on Saturday, Sept. 26 at 10:30 a.m.

NWS also documented coastal flooding near Tweed New Haven Airport about thirty minutes later.

The following day, NWS reported wind gusts reaching 49 mph near Tweed New Haven airport.

The storm is part of a weather pattern that can affect the East Coast during several months of the year, according to NWS.

"A nor'easter is a storm along the East Coast of North America, so called because the winds over the coastal area are typically from the northeast," NWS stated. "These storms may occur at any time of year but are most frequent and most violent between September and April."

Rainfall continued to pour across New Haven County throughout the weekend.

According to NWS, an automated weather station about four miles northwest of Hamden recorded 2.81 inches of rain over a 72-hour period ending at 8:50 p.m. on Sunday, Sept. 27. The total represents accumulated rainfall over three days.

Before the storm, NWS announced that a wind advisory was in effect from 2 p.m. Friday, Sept. 25 through 6 a.m. on Sunday, Sept. 27 for southern Connecticut.

"Strong winds and rough seas along with a prolonged period of steady rain across the region are expected through this weekend," NWS said. "Beach erosion, coastal flooding and wind damage including downed limbs and power outages are our main concerns."

The storm also affected electric service across the region.

As of Sunday night, Eversource reported between 7,500 active power outages statewide.

While parts of the state experienced significant flooding and strong winds, the storm had a less severe impact in New Haven. This left some students surprised by how little they experienced.

"The storm wasn't as bad as I expected," marketing major Juwell Clay, a senior, said.

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