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Blizzard Calvin forces campus closure

By Brianna Wallen
News Editor

Blizzard Calvin buried New Haven under more than a foot of snow, forcing the university to cancel classes and shut down campus for three days. According to the National Weather Service, New Haven recorded 16.1 inches of snow on Feb. 23.

Allison O'Leary, interim director of integrated communications and marketing, said this decision to put normal operations on hold was based on the university's assessment of the weather forecasts, travel risks and campus conditions.

"The decision to cancel classes is made with input from across the university," O'Leary said. "Leadership considers the timing of the storm, the anticipated impact on campus and how conditions may affect commuters traveling from across the state."

O'Leary said university leaders evaluated how the storm would affect commuters and overall campus safety before making the final call.

"With forecasts consistently indicating a significant blizzard, closing the campus was a timely and necessary decision in this instance," O'Leary said.

O'Leary said that administrators weighed the need to keep classes running against the risks of icy walkways, high levels of snow and unsafe driving conditions.



PHOTO | WILLIAM GAGNÉ

Students walking in front of the academic quad on Feb. 25 when classes resumed after the blizzard.

"Leadership makes decisions that aim to minimize disruptions to academic learning while supporting the safety of students, faculty and staff. When travel to or around campus is uncertain, leadership errs on the side of caution," O'Leary said.

After the closure was announced on Feb. 23, several campus offices worked together to send updates through email alerts, the university website and social media to quickly inform the campus community.

"Once the decision to close or delay is made, I coordinate with University Police, facilities, Residence Life and the president's office to determine key information to communicate to the campus," O'Leary said.

If students or staff missed the notification that campus was closed through their university email, they were able to receive the news across other platforms.

"That information is then sent via university email and through SouthernAlert, posted as a banner on the university homepage, communicated to local TV stations and posted to university social media," O'Leary said.

Although snow stopped on Feb. 23, university officials decided to not reopen the campus immediately.

With the campus community's safety as the top priority, they chose to monitor cleanup progress and campus conditions.

"Due to the heavy snowfall, discussions continued throughout the cleanup process to assess campus readiness and determine the safest time to reopen," O'Leary said. "This is standard practice during high-impact weather events."

While university facilities teams focused on reopening walkways and entrances around campus, O'Leary said that clearing parking lots was more difficult because snow removal required large open spaces for plows to move efficiently.

"Our facilities team works across campus throughout a storm to clear as much snow and ice as possible as efficiently and thoroughly as they can. When vehicles are scattered throughout parking lots and garages, it makes snow removal much more difficult and results in incomplete clearing," O'Leary said.

For this reason, multiple messages were sent out to students and staff about temporarily moving their car to West Campus or Wintergreen Parking Garage.

"To help the process go smoothly, we ask students to move their cars from surface lots into the garages before a storm begins," O'Leary said. "Once the storm is over and surface lots are cleared, we then ask students to move their cars out of the garages so all levels can be properly plowed."

Although the university was closed, support services remained available for students navigating disruptions caused by the storm.

"The Student Support Team provides a proactive and coordinated approach to support students in distress while promoting their well-being and maintaining campus safety," according to the university's dean of students office.

Sports betting apps spark safety concerns

By Brianna Wallen
News Editor

With sports betting apps now only a tap away, conversations about gambling are becoming more common among college students.

Karreem Mebane, an assistant professor in recreation, tourism and sport management who teaches sport ethics, said the growing normalization of sports wagering is creating serious concerns about student safety and well-being.

"All of our students have access to this option and to the app, but there aren't necessarily any controls that will provide protections and safety for our students," Mebane said.

Mebane said that the lack of safeguards leaves many students vulnerable once they begin placing bets.

"Who is going to protect the 18 to 24 year old when they start betting, and they're losing thousands and tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands of dollars," Mebane said.

In his sport ethics class, SMT 355, Mebane said most students already know about sports betting. Those who are of legal age often speak openly about their experiences, including both wins and losses.

These classroom discussions reveal how casual betting has become among young adults and how it is often viewed as part of sports culture.

Mebane said accessibility is the main reason for that shift.

"Sport betting has become normalized because it's always been around," Mebane said. "The question is, who has access to it? And now, because everyone has those devices in their hands, everyone has access to it, regardless if they're 21 or older or 21 and younger."

Mebane emphasized that with gambling no longer requiring a trip to a casino, young people are able to place a bet with the tap of their fingers.

"We have two big casinos that were built here in Connecticut when I was in college. Now all these years later, casinos are a thing of the past, but the sports betting apps are the new thing," Mebane said.

Whether it is commercials from DraftKings or FanDuel, these advertisements appear during games, on streaming platforms and on screens across campus, normalizing betting .

"You go to a restaurant; you watch something on YouTube; you see something on a screen, whether it's a portable screen or it's on a big flat screen TV: at some point our students are going to see something from one of those companies that provides an opportunity for them to place a bet on a sport," Mebane said.

As sports wagering grows in popularity among young adults, the discussion emphasizes both the social aspect and the potential risks for campus communities.

Recent events in the media that are connected to the university have also intensified concerns.

According to CT Insider, a 24-year-old man from Wolcott and former basketball player from the university has been charged in a federal case involving a cryptocurrency fraud scheme worth nearly $1 million.

Investigators said money from investors was used for online gambling instead of legitimate investments. Court documents reveal that Elim Redzepagic was involved with the scheme while attending the university.

Redzepagic has pleaded not guilty and was recently released on bond with a requirement to receive treatment for gambling addiction.

Mebane said cases like this highlight how gambling can intersect with sports culture and financial decisions among young adults.

"I'm very concerned because that is another basketball player that has gotten involved in some type of scheme," Mebane said. "It's been reported about his crypto investments, but also, there's a gambling issue there."

Mebane's advice to students who partake in sports betting is simple.

"My advice to them is to stop. There's much better ways to earn money and the thrill and satisfaction that they are seeking and want to have by placing a bet that is very temporary," Mebane said.



PHOTO | BRIANNA WALLEN

Karreem Mebane, an assistant professor in recreation, tourism and sport management in his office in the Health & Human Services building on Feb. 19.

With March representing National Problem Gambling Awareness Month, Mebane hopes the university doubles down on discussions about responsibility, long-term consequences that come with sports betting as well as making support services more visible.

"More articles should be on the front page of the website providing counseling and addiction services options because we have a lot of students who don't even realize that they need some type of outside counsel because they have an addiction that is being fed due to the device that they hold in their hand," Mebane said.

By increasing education, visibility and support services, Mebane said these factors can help prevent students from jeopardizing their future when a casual bet turns into a serious risk.

"This university's No. 1 priority is to make sure that our students are safe," Mebane said. "And if we can't provide them safety from these apps that are destroying their mental well-being, then we need to have a very serious conversation on this campus."

WSIN hosts PunKnight

By Victoria Cruz
News Writer

On Friday, Feb. 27, the WSIN Radio Station hosted an on-campus live show PunKnight in collaboration with Knight Owls New Haven and Cresent Players.

The show opened at 6:30 p.m. with an acoustic set by music major Jack Flanagan, a junior and the program's director.

"The Nest was an excellent show. Starting with my set, the crowd enjoyed a rendition of Green Day's 'Basket Case' as well as my own song, 'Candy Cane,'" Flanagan said.

The show took place in the Lyman Center Black Box with four acts on the bill.

The first band to come on was Spray Bottle Fever. Their specialty includes heavy electronic with visual effects.

Their unique blend of effects and powerful lyrics created an energy that was contagious.

Next was inplainsight, a band out of Boston with a hardcore edge.

Their New Haven debut was a tremendous success, performing their new album as part of their anniversary release tour.

Finally, University of Connecticut's Ruby Leftstep brought indie-rock to the stage.

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