The University of Connecticut has recently been named among the top five 2013 Presidential Award winners in the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. This prestigious award is the highest honor that a university can receive in recognition of its work in service-learning, public engagement and volunteerism. Although UConn has been included in the Honor Roll every year that it has applied for consideration, this is the University’s first time being honored as a Presidential Award winner. The other universities that received this national recognition include La Sierra University, Georgia Perimeter College, Gettysburg College, and Nazareth College.

Matt Farley, the director of Community Outreach and a member of the Public Engagement Forum, called attention to the University’s continuous focus on public engagement, explaining, “All the trends that UConn was recognized for in receiving the Presidential Award were already happening. We weren’t simply doing this for the award.”

Farley went on to discuss the significance of receiving this prestigious honor, noting that the Presidential Award “helps to elevate the conversation about public engagement. [...] It helps raise the University’s name in a positive way; locally, statewide and nationally.”

UConn Receives National Recognition for its Public Engagement Efforts

By Mariel Smith
Public Engagement: Past, Present, and Future

By Mariel Smith

Public engagement has always played a key role in UConn’s overall mission. However over the years, the University’s public engagement efforts have undergone significant growth and development. Matt Farley, the director of Community Outreach and a member of the Public Engagement Forum since 2004, noted the growth of public engagement efforts across UConn over the years.

Farley also explained that in general, “public engagement has become much more a part of the lexicon at the University. Everyone’s doing it, even areas that aren’t necessarily involved with public engagement have started incorporating service-learning or other aspects of engagement.”

The Public Engagement Forum, formally known as the Outreach Forum, has played a crucial role in the development and recognition of public engagement efforts at UConn. The Forum was formed in 2003 in an effort to better understand and recognize the public engagement work done across the University.

“Over the years the Forum has become more inclusive, intentionally reaching out to not only different schools and colleges across the University, but also to several programs and organizations,” said Farley. He went on to explain the manner in which “the Forum started by trying to figure out who was doing what. However, over the years, the group has taken on a strong advocacy role.”

In terms of the future of public engagement efforts, Farley emphasized the importance of “looking more intentionally at the civic learning of students,” asking ourselves, “What are the structural changes that need to occur in order to engage students in a deeper way? It is not just about creating leaders, leaders for what? We need to focus on creating ‘civic leaders.’”

Matt Farley was appointed co-chair in 2013 of the Public Engagement Forum, along with Ted Yungclas. Although active with the Public Engagement Forum, Yungclas recently stepped down as co-chair, as he left UConn to accept a position with the State of Connecticut’s Board of Regents. On behalf of the Public Engagement Forum, “we wish Ted the best of luck in his endeavors and thank him for all his support of public engagement at UConn.”

Dr. E. Carol Polifroni Appointed Director of Public Engagement

By Shawn Kornegay

On behalf of the University of Connecticut’s Office of Public Engagement, Provost Mun Choi announced that Dr. E. Carol Polifroni has been appointed director of Public Engagement.

“Polifroni is an outstanding and experienced nurse, administrator, and educator, and we are confident that she will lead the University’s engagement initiatives with passion and dedication,” said Provost Mun Choi and Vice Provost for Academic Affairs Sally Reis.

Polifroni is a professor in the School of Nursing, where she has worked since 1981. She will remain on the faculty of nursing while she also works as director of Public Engagement. Her research is in health policy with a focus on engaged learning, transitions from one role to another, and workplace environment issues. She was the chair of the Hartford Public High School design team, which created the Academy of Nursing and Health Sciences and has been the chairperson of the Advisory Board since its inception in 2007.

“Carol has been a friend and colleague for many years,” said former Dean and Vice Provost Robert McCarthy. “She is a highly regarded teacher, scholar, practitioner, and administrator with a life-long commitment to engagement and outreach. I can’t think of a better person to lead the university’s public engagement efforts!”

Polifroni is noted for her leadership ability as evidenced by her academic administrative roles as well as her professional organization leadership activities as past president of Phi Kappa Phi, Sigma Theta Tau Mu Chapter, the Connecticut Nurses Association and UConn AAUP, and her teaching of the patient care services and systems administration courses at UConn. She is certified in nursing administration advanced through ANCC and was the first faculty member in the SON certified as a nurse educator. In 2011, she received the Diamond Jubilee Mary Jane Williams Award from the Connecticut Nurses Association for Lifetime Achievement in Nursing and in 2012 was inducted into the Academy of Nurse Educators for her work in community partnerships and engagement.

She took over for Dr. Robert McCarthy, who is returned to faculty after leading Public Engagement, first as director then vice provost of public engagement. He also served with distinction as dean of the School of Pharmacy for 11 years at the same time of his involvement with Public Engagement.

“We wish to express our thanks to Dean and Vice Provost Robert McCarthy who has been a steadfast leader of engagement over the last several years,” said Choi and Reis. “His dedication and service to the University are greatly appreciated.”

www.engagement.uconn.edu
Our Responsibility as a Land Grant University

By Mariel Smith

In 1893, the University of Connecticut was designated as one of 75 land-grant universities in the United States. In accordance with the Morrill Act, 30,000 acres of land were donated to one college per state in an effort to fund schools that focused on agriculture and mechanical arts. Although originally granted to Yale University, the Connecticut General Assembly later turned the allotted funds over to the Storrs Agricultural School, believing that the school better met the central ideals of the Land-Grant mission, which is based upon three basic elements: education, research and outreach.

UConn recently recognized the 150th anniversary of the Morrill Act, celebrating the importance of the land-grant mission in relation to the development of the University.

“It would be impossible for J. S. Morrill to foresee the widespread impact of the legislation he championed back in the middle of the 19th century to establish the land-grant universities such as the University of Connecticut given the great developments in areas such as technology and health to name a few, which were totally unimagined then,” stated Peter Tyczkowski, the events co-chair of the Public Engagement Forum. He went on to note that “there is no doubt that the diverse work of our University in so many disciplines embodies the spirit of this visionary movement in real ways enhancing the capability of our stakeholders to improve so many aspects of their lives.”

It is important to note that although the Morrill Act was set into place over a century and a half ago, the core ideals of the land-grant mission still play a crucial role at the University. This designation is more than a mere title, but a large component of the overall mission of UConn. Former Vice Provost Robert McCarthy suggested, “As a land-grant university, outreach, extension and engagement are a crucial part of what we do.”

Karen Filchak, a faculty member of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources Department of Extension and the programs and partnerships chair of the Public Engagement Forum, noted the immense impact of the land-grant designation. “The Land Grant designation for our University means many things to the residents of Connecticut. Among those that I see as the most important are the opportunities for individuals, communities, businesses and students to benefit from the great breadth of research and knowledge that is generated at our University. Of equal value are the mutual benefits that accrue from projects that involve community partners and the University,” explained Filchak.

Preston Britner, professor in Human Development & Family Studies and the former co-chair of the Public Engagement Forum, further commented upon the importance of UConn’s role as a land-grant university. In his article, “Bringing public engagement into an academic plan and its assessment metrics,” Britner stated, “the University of Connecticut is Connecticut’s flagship public research university; it is also the state’s land-grant university. It has a strong cooperative extension system, and a long tradition of service and outreach (i.e., instances in which the university’s faculty and staff, and sometimes students, share expertise in the community).”

Britner went on to explain, “Today, however, [the University] strives to be a university that is more civically and publicly engaged with its various communities for the ‘mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity’ (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2011).”
In 2008, Julia Yakovich set out to create a support program for University of Connecticut faculty teaching Service-Learning courses at locations across the state. Five years later, this Faculty Fellows Program now provides curriculum development, student assessment and other support and resources for faculty based in Storrs, Waterbury, Greater Hartford, Stamford, Torrington, Avery Point, and even the Health Center.

Director of the UConn Office of Service-Learning, Yakovich credits much of the program’s success to the broad and diverse range of faculty and staff involved. “The Fellows program has evolved into something that all of us in the Office of Public Engagement are very proud to celebrate,” said Former Vice Provost of Engagement Robert McCarthy.

Throughout the academic year, the Office of Service-Learning provides Faculty Fellows with essential professional development and course assistance. Programs include a two-day summer orientation workshop presented in collaboration with the Institute for Teaching and Learning, as well as monthly meetings and ongoing workshops. During the orientation session, Service-Learning and Teaching and Learning staff ensure faculty receive a solid foundation on how to best match class goals, objectives, assessment and activities with those needed for successful service learning to occur. This “Service-Learning 101” also provides in-depth information on constructing critical reflections, strengthening community partnerships and more.

“Although the fellowship only lasts one year, faculty members remain fellows throughout their careers and serve as ambassadors and facilitators for Service-Learning across the university,” explained McCarthy. “So a relationship with the program and its important work is ongoing.”

Philip Hritcko, assistant clinical professor in the Department of Pharmacy Practice, said he has benefitted from both the peer-to-peer contact and Yakovich’s expertise, especially in regards to developing the best possible tool for student self-reflection.

“The opportunity to share plans with other faculty, talk about experiences and discuss ways to overcome problems was really helpful,” said Hritcko, who also serves as the Department of Pharmacy Practice’s director of Experiential Education. “Everyone gets ideas from everyone else, even those from other disciplines. The program provides faculty with great support mechanisms.”

Neag School of Education Assistant Professor Jennifer Bruening also found the program’s curriculum assessment assistance to be invaluable. “The Faculty Fellows Program is such a positive thing, and the help creating assessments has been huge,” Bruening said. “How do you know students are benefitting from a Service-Learning class more than from a non-Service-Learning class? Having an effective assessment tool for faculty to see whether what we’re doing is positive and beneficial for students and our community partners is an essential thing.”

Beth Russell, an assistant professor of Human Development and Family Studies at the Waterbury campus, described the program as “powerful” and said she appreciates the opportunity to meet with colleagues with a wide range of experiences, and who she might not otherwise see.

Although their locations and roles within the UConn system are diverse, Faculty Fellow participants have more similarities than differences, Yakovich said, “They’re a group of like-minded faculty who deeply care about creating meaningful community projects aligned with course content, as well as with students’ and the community’s needs. They want to learn from each other’s successes and challenges, and to give each other much-needed advice and feedback. It’s great to have input from all of them.”

Future plans for the program include the possibility of creating a Council of Fellows to provide service learning support and visibility on each UConn campus.

“I think the future for this program looks bright,” Russell added. It’s a sentiment Yakovich agrees with fully, “All of us are beyond proud of the program’s successes and look forward to seeing how it will evolve over the next five years.”
UConn Professor Preston Britner Contributes Research Efforts to New Housing Support Program

By Joanna “JoJo” Antonelli

A former co-chair of the University of Connecticut Public Engagement Forum, Preston Britner, PhD, remains involved in projects designed to contribute to university research, as well as those dedicated to enhancing UConn’s campuses and their surrounding communities. Dr. Britner is a Human Development and Family Studies faculty member whose passions drive him to work to make a difference in the fight against poverty, homelessness, child neglect and child abuse.

Always eager to collaborate with others, Britner in recent years has focused much of his energies on a partnership with the state Department of Children and Families (DCF), community development agency The Connection, and fellow Human Development and Family Studies faculty member Anne Farrell. Together, these experts have worked to develop Intensive Housing Support for Families (IHSF)—an innovative program designed to help prevent homelessness, and keep families intact, by providing intensive home-based support services to those within the Connecticut child welfare system.

Britner is among the researchers who’ve shown that supportive housing is a key way to not just keep families together, but to reunify those with children in state care. It can also help prevent the removal of children in circumstances where stable housing is a barrier.

Based on early success, the IHSF program in 2012 received a $5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to expand over the next five years, as well as for Britner and Farrell to study its impact. The program was one of just five in the nation to receive this selective award, which recognizes the potential of IHSF to provide families at risk for homelessness not just stable housing, but much-needed vocational, mental health, social, behavioral and educational support.

With the help of Britner's and Farrell's expertise, the program also has the potential to reduce the number of children in the foster care system and to be used as a model throughout the country. Toward this end, the UConn researchers, DCF and others involved are now collaborating with the Washington, DC-based The Urban Institute, which evaluates and analyzes social and economic problems across the U.S.

Overseen by DCF, the current phase of the IHSF program involves 240 at-risk families from Norwich, Willimantic and Middletown who’ve experienced multiple episodes of homelessness and for whom existing services have not met their—or others’—needs. Half of these families will be enrolled in DCF’s existing Supportive Housing for Families program and the other half enrolled in the new, intensive program.

Over the next four years, the program will expand to areas throughout Connecticut and involve as many as 780 at-risk families. The connection will provide many of the behavioral health, substance abuse, domestic violence, advocacy and other support services these families need, as Britner and Farrell examine the results.

Additional community organizations and state agencies like the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management and Department of Social Services will also be involved.

Previous research conducted by Britner and Farrell defends the belief that housing is essential to family stability. A 2010 study they conducted found that at-risk families involved in supportive housing programs, and receiving intensive case management services, were more likely to maintain a long-term residence, long-term employment and family stability. It’s work that Britner is both eager and excited to continue throughout UConn’s upcoming Year of Engagement celebration and beyond, as he follows and analyzes the progress of the IHSF program to create stronger families and communities.
UConn Engaged: Office of UConn Office of Public Engagement Newsletter - Fall 2013

NLP’s recent and diverse projects include:

• Working with Encore!Hartford to train unemployed corporate professionals for managerial careers in Connecticut nonprofits
• Creating an international learning exchange between Turkish and Connecticut nonprofit leaders
• Establishing a strong portfolio of educational programs for emerging leaders and CEOs of Connecticut nonprofits
• Launching a statewide nonprofit database, ctnonprofitstrategyplatform.org, as part of a partnership with the Urban Institute

Current and future work includes:

• A partnership with the Hispanic Federation to launch the Connecticut Hispanic Leadership Institute
• Continued development of an online graduate certificate in Nonprofit Management
• Continued management of the DPP’s Internship and Professional Practice program
• Expanding partnerships between MPA graduate students and Connecticut nonprofits, state agencies and town governments

In November, UConn’s NLP will also host the 42nd international conference of the Association for Research of Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) at the Connecticut Convention Center. The NLP is the youngest program in ARNOVA history to achieve this honor.

UConn Initiatives in Urban Connecticut

By Mariel Smith

UConn’s Office of Public Engagement and the CT Cooperative Extension System hosted the third annual Spring Symposium on April 13, 2013. As former Vice Provost Robert McCarthy explained in his opening remarks, the afternoon was designed to celebrate the countless public engagement efforts that occur across UConn. Centering around the highlighting of UConn’s initiatives throughout urban areas in Connecticut, the afternoon included a wide array of posters and presentations demonstrating the University’s extensive and widespread public engagement efforts.

Provost Mun Choi began the afternoon by recognizing “the strong leadership of Vice Provost McCarthy and the members of the Public Engagement Forum,” as well as calling attention to the numerous prestigious accomplishments achieved by the University, including recently receiving the Presidential Award, receiving designation as a member of the Carnegie Foundation and the logging of over 1 million hours of community service in the past few years. “Our reach has extended beyond Storrs,” explained Provost Mun Choi.

Keynote speaker, Michael O’Neill, the associate dean of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources and associate director of CT Cooperative Extension System, truly set the tone for the afternoon. O’Neill began by presenting the importance of public engagement through three distinct lenses: a historical perspective, a geographic perspective, and a technological perspective. In particular, O’Neill emphasized the various changes that Connecticut has undergone throughout the years. “This transformation of society is the perfect opportunity to recommit to the land-grant mission and address new problems,” explained O’Neill, “We need to consider who we are, what we do, and how we live in the state.”

O’Neill concluded his speech by presenting those in attendance with a challenge, stating, “Ask yourself: What can you do to help UConn meet its land-grant mission?” The remainder of the afternoon was spent providing a response to this challenge. Through various posters and presentation the immense impact members of the UConn community have made within the urban areas of Connecticut became apparent.

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of the afternoon was the manner in which it highlighted the diverse nature of UConn’s public engagement efforts. The afternoon consisted of 14 different presentations and 24 posters. The presentations ranged from discussing the work of The Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry, to the research efforts of the Center for Public Health and Health Policy at the UConn Health Center and included the work of faculty, staff, graduate and undergraduate students. As O’Neill explained, the public engagement efforts presented at the Symposium “truly represent[ed] a cross section of the University.”

Public Engagement Volunteer...

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Public Engagement Volunteer Recognized for Community Service

By Mary Feathers

Dr. David Garvey and UConn’s Nonprofit Leadership Program (NLP) recently received the Access Community Action Agency’s 2013 Community Service Award in recognition of their impact on, and dedication to, low-income families.

Access is a federal- and state-designated community action agency that’s served eastern Connecticut since 1965.

“We’re grateful for the recognition and proud of UConn’s work with Connecticut nonprofits,” said Garvey, NLP director and a member of the Provost’s Public Engagement Forum. “The work we do is part of the University’s commitment, as an engaged partner, in strengthening Connecticut’s communities.”

Created by UConn’s Department of Public Policy (DPP) within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, NLP is designed to help strengthen the educational, communications and research infrastructure of nonprofits both in Connecticut and nationwide. In addition to serving as NLP director, Garvey teaches at UConn as an adjunct professor and serves on the University’s Excellence in Public Engagement Award and Service Learning committees. His research efforts focus on the dynamics of nonprofit strategic networks, as well as human resource capacity issues in nonprofits.

Community Initiative Designed to Enhance Student Learning While Tackling Real-Life Issues: Sustainable Hartford

By Mary Feathers

In 2012, UConn created the Hartford Coalition Task Force to identify existing UConn programs with direct links to the City of Hartford, as well as the potential for new ones. Inspired by the number of diverse projects under way and eager to create an expanded presence, the Sustainable Hartford Task Force was then formed as an extension of that work. This latter organization now serves as a centralized entity responsible for managing, enhancing, tracking and envisioning UConn-Hartford partnerships that will make both UConn students and the Hartford community better connected.

Members of the Sustainable Hartford Task Force include key leaders from UConn and from within the city. Among them are officials from the Hartford mayor’s office, UConn Law School and Dean Timothy S. Fisher, UConn School of Social Work and Dean Salome Raheim, UConn Greater Hartford Campus and Director Michael Menard and the Connecticut Urban Legal Initiative (CULI), a non-profit law firm located on the campus of UConn Law School, with Barbara McGrath, director. The UConn Office of Public Engagement, led by Director Carol Polifroni, oversees the task force’s umbrella-like structure.

“Right now we aim to define and meet immediate needs and create plans for focused and targeted activities with Hartford,” said Polifroni. “In the future, we will use this model to engage other urban areas in Connecticut.”

“Working closely with CULI, we aim to create a dynamic and flexible coordinated effort to meet city needs, while simultaneously providing our students real-life, practical opportunities,” Polifroni said. “City leaders know the benefits of partnering with UConn, and we welcome them into our classrooms and as part of teaching and learning activities. Interdisciplinary activities are powerful learning tools, and the chance for students to work on practical and important citywide problems provides a platform for discovery, and application of knowledge, that helps both sides shape best practices.”

Among other benefits, the task force will also provide a strategic direction for the Charter Oak Sustainable Communities Initiative (COSCI)—a program that works to match UConn faculty, Hartford agencies and other resources with community needs. The approach is a hybrid of UConn’s engagement initiative and a program created at the University of Oregon, called the Sustainable City Year Program. It focuses on meeting community and regional needs through service-learning, engaged scholarship and applied research opportunities.

One COSCI project under way now is a review of Hartford regulations by UConn law students to ensure consistency with recent revisions to the City Charter. Similar initiatives related to city-wide communications and healthcare access are being discussed.

“As we anticipate moving the UConn campus to downtown Hartford, it is exciting to be working with this group, as well as the city, the University and other community leaders working to determine how we can have an effective and meaningful presence in Hartford,” said Menard.

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Ted Yungclas, former assistant dean of UConn’s School of Fine Arts and former co-chair of the Public Engagement Forum, attended the 2013 TRUCEN Conference in early 2013. The Research University Civic Engagement Network (TRUCEN) Conference was held at Tulane University in New Orleans, LA. TRUCEN is an organization, which brings together various research universities that demonstrate strong initiatives regarding public engagement, in an effort to advance civic engagement and engaged scholarship and create models for use across higher education.

Yungclas was impressed by work done by other members of TRUCEN. In addition to UConn, representatives from 26 research universities attended the Conference. The universities included Arizona State University, Harvard University, Michigan State University, and Stanford University, among others.

In particular, Yungclas noted the inspiring public engagement work done by Tulane University. He noted that after Hurricane Katrina, members of Tulane University realized that the University needed to be doing more to give back to the community. They created the Center for Public Service, where all students at Tulane University are now required to participate in courses focusing on public engagement as part of their educational requirements.

It was recently announced that the 2014 TRUCEN Conference will take place at UConn, February 28 – March 1, 2014. According to Yungclas, UConn hosting the conference will be “a wonderful addition to the upcoming Year of Public Engagement. As a state, we are proud of UConn. Hosting the TRUCEN meeting lets us share what we are doing to give back to the state.”

The meeting will allow TRUCEN members to revisit past discussions and track development in common areas of interest. During the Conference, UConn faculty and staff will showcase the University’s experience in Engaged Scholarship at the local, state, national and global levels through various programs across the university.

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Public engagement is a central tenet of our mission at the University of Connecticut, and we are extremely proud of our tradition of outreach and public service. To celebrate and advance this important work, 2014 has been designated as the “Year of Engagement” at UConn.

The Year of Engagement will underscore our public mission at UConn and help us continue to grow and thrive as an engaged research university. We will celebrate achievements and best practices, intensify our efforts, and reaffirm our commitment to engaged scholarship and curricular engagement of students.

Comprised of individuals representative of various departments and campuses, The Steering Committee for the Year of Engagement is experienced in aspects of Engaged Scholarship, Service Learning, and Community Outreach. We look forward to showcasing diverse engagement activities and developing new opportunities to educate the university and broader community about UConn programs.

In the months ahead, we invite your input and your programming ideas, and always encourage your participation.