

NEWS: A YEAR IN REVIEW

by **Mikayla Bunnell**

NEWS EDITOR

SHE/HER/HERS

mikayla.bunnell@uconn.edu

and **Kevin Guinan**

ASSOCIATE NEWS EDITOR

HE/HIM/HIS

kcg21003@uconn.edu

The 2025-2026 academic year was nothing if not full of news at the University of Connecticut. The year brought construction, funding cuts and protests, but amid the challenges came wins, success stories and new records not to be forgotten.

Enrollment, housing and classes

Starting the year off right, the university welcomed the record-breaking class of 2029 last fall: roughly 7,500 new Huskies. Of that number, 4,715 were first-year students at Storrs and 1,850 at UConn's regional campuses. About 960 were transfer students.

At the same time, students discovered how the university decided who got housing after The Daily Campus' freedom of information request revealed that housing demand increased 11.25% — 1,172 applications — from fall 2024 to fall 2025. The Storrs campus housed 13,400 students, another record-breaking number, in fall 2025.

In October, the university announced that sophomores would be guaranteed on-campus housing, despite declaring that only freshman had guaranteed housing just months before. They said there would be a limited number of beds for rising juniors and seniors. Also in October, it was announced that development would begin for yet another off-campus housing complex near the Storrs cam-

pus: The Mark Mansfield, owned by Landmark Properties, the owners of The Standard at Four Corners, which opened to residents in August.

In the fall semester, UConn also conducted a review of 40 undergraduate programs, 21 graduate certificate programs and 11 master's programs. These programs were identified as having low enrollment, making them subject to being cut or consolidated. It's still unclear exactly which programs are still at risk.

Changes to campus: Construction, closures, boots

This year, UConn introduced a new device for parking enforcement: SmartBoots.

Boots are put on cars with over \$200 in parking tickets. To get the boot off, students were required to scan a QR code and pay off all their fines to get a code. Students had to type the code into the keypad on the boot and then return it to the Facilities Operations building. In just two months, Parking Services had already collected thousands of dollars in outstanding tickets.

Speaking of parking, UConn also announced plans to add another parking garage on the south side of campus, either behind John Buckley Residence Hall in Downtown Storrs or behind the UConn Fine Arts Complex, taking the space of Lot R.

Construction also continued throughout the year in many locations on campus, including renovation to the Gant Math-Science Complex, the construction of a new School of Nursing building and major expansions to the Greer Field House to build the Bailey Student-Athlete

Success Center.

Gampel Pavilion got some love this year as the second phase of renovations to the building got approved at the beginning of the spring semester. The largest renovation since the arena's opening in 1990 will cost \$99.4 million and will feature a complete roof replacement, update HVAC and ventilation systems, and install more concession options, premium clubs and merchandising space. Construction on Gampel started soon after the last basketball home game — so soon that the men's basketball National Championship watch parties were held in the Toscano Family Ice Forum and Joseph J. Morrone Stadium. Construction is expected to be completed in November 2026, just in time for the next basketball season.

At the very end of the fall semester, students said "good-bye" to Downtown Storrs' Barnes and Noble as it closed. It's expected to be replaced by Urban Lodge Brewery in fall 2026. This year, UConn Brewing Innovation, which offers academic programming in the craft beer industry, grew in popularity. The program served about 60 students for its first few years, but has amassed a waiting list of several hundred students. With the new brewery location in Downtown Storrs, more classes can be offered in the future, focusing not only on beer but also on running a business and marketing.

UConn and the federal government

This year, researchers at UConn had to figure out how to grapple with President Donald Trump's new research

priorities. The university decided to shift to these new research priorities to align with the administration and maintain its research funding. According to a letter from the university, some of these priorities included energy independence, AI and quantum technologies, defense, manufacturing, cancer genetics and genomics, technology development, entrepreneurship and more. While \$3.7 million in previously cancelled research grants were restored, there are still concerns about the future of federal research funding.

As U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement activity ramped up across the country in early 2026, immigration was top of mind for many on UConn's campus.

Through the fall semester, UConn continued their marketing partnership with Avelo Airlines as the company continued to work with ICE on deportation flights. The university never responded to three members of the public who reached out asking the university to end its relationship with Avelo. Avelo ended its partnership with ICE in January 2026, but remains a marketing partner of UConn.

In February, UConn confirmed that there had been no sightings of ICE on campus. The university emailed guidance on what to do if ICE did show up and tried to gain access to non-public buildings on campus like classrooms, offices and dorms: "inform" ICE officials to wait for University Safety, "call" University Safety to tell them that ICE is on campus and "escalate" by calling a supervisor. Also in February, students

held a vigil for ICE victims, including Renee Good and Alex Pretti, who were both shot and killed by immigration agents in Minnesota in January.

Campus wins

The year's news was not entirely bleak, however.

In October, the UConn Marching Band was surprised — on national television — with an invitation to the 100th annual Thanksgiving Day Parade in fall 2026, becoming one of only 10 groups selected to participate.

In December, Jonathan the Husky got his first book: "The Lucky Husky" by 2011 UConn graduate Bethany O'Brien. Proceeds from the book sales support the care of Jonathan XV, the real-life Husky mascot. It was the first book in a growing series. The second book, "Dairy Bar Disaster," released on April 12.

And HuskyTHON broke multiple records this year, amassing over 4,800 participants and raising over \$2.2 million for Connecticut Children's Hospital.

Like any other year, 2025-2026 had its ups and downs. Students and faculty spent days and nights worried about research funding and international students, and sent countless emails to UConn Housing and Parking Services. But they also spent time celebrating the many joys on campus, like the millions of dollars raised for children in need, the national recognition of the Pride of Connecticut or the stellar women's basketball season (even if it didn't end the way we wanted). No matter what happens on UConn's campus, students will leave here as Huskies forever.