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USG PRESIDENT TALKS ABOUT UNIVERSITY RESPONSE AGAINST ICE

by Kevin Guinan
STAFF WRITER
HE/HIM/HIS
kcg21003@uconn.edu

Andy Zhang, president of Undergraduate Student Government at the University of Connecticut, said there was less pressure from the federal government this academic year as their priorities slightly shifted from higher education.

"The federal administration has interacted with higher education and universities in different ways than they did back [last] spring where they were directly almost revoking student visas," Zhang said. "I feel like a year ago at the time, the federal anxieties and the federal pressures we were facing then are different, but still there."

On April 16, 2025, USG passed a statement of position that declared a formal stance for the organization on three key issues after 13 UConn students had their visas revoked, according to a Daily Campus article on April 15, 2025.

The three points where USG advocated for administrative action included a ban on U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement from private spaces on campus, refusals to negotiate or comply with unlawful federal demands and to establish a legal services fund for UConn members, according to USG's Instagram.

"We felt like it was something that was really important to pass at the time to make sure that at least those students, or at least UConn students as a whole, knew that their student government was... trying to outwardly affirm that they're going to defend their community and protect their students," Zhang said.

Zhang added how "thankfully" ICE never came to campus that spring, but that the issue of ICE coming to college campuses has become a bigger issue because of different incidents with ICE around the country. One February interaction involved federal agents arresting a Columbia University student after they told a university apartment building superintendent they were searching for a missing child, according to the New York Times.

UConn sent an email to students, faculty and staff on Feb. 12, guiding them to call the UConn Police Department if immigration officials try and enter a non-public space, according to a UConn Today article. The guidance did not ban ICE from entering these spaces and a Q&A defined non-public spaces as ones that are locked when not in use or can only be accessed using a key card.

Zhang said he's had conversations with a lot of administrators about the reason UConn hasn't banned ICE from private spaces.

"The common pushback I hear is that the university tends to think delegating certain spaces as private then gives the implication that every space that is not delineated as private will therefore be interpreted as public," Zhang said.

He added how one of the challenges in these conversations was finding someone with enough time and responsibility to figure out the necessary precautions UConn should take to protect their students.

"Finally trying to delineate between public and private [comes with] no real guarantee that will be what protects our students and stops ICE from actually coming onto or trespassing those bases," Zhang said. "It's been a really interesting question for all of us to try and kind of figure out what these necessary protections in these places are."

An internal ICE memo signed by Acting Director of ICE Todd Lyons on May 12, 2025, said that immigration regulations do not require judicial warrants to forcibly enter people's homes, according to AP News.

Debate about whether to focus on distinguishing public and non-public areas on campus wasn't the only challenge Zhang mentioned. He said USG has also been discussing how to handle community safety amid uncertainty that the UConn Police Department could aid in immigration enforcement.



Undergraduate Student Government President Andy Zhang. Zhang has been having conversations with UConn administrators over how to respond to ICE activity on campus.
PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDY ZHANG'S LINKEDIN.

"A lot of community members themselves don't feel comfortable with knowing that if they're in a place of distress, that UConn Police will be in a space to support them or defend them or protect their rights against ICE," Zhang said.

The challenge comes when administrators have asked Zhang what the alternative could look like.

"I think that is a completely fair question... but coming to the agreement about what an alternative is in a way that is feasible and an actual solution that people think is effective, is somewhere in the discussion disagreement may lie," Zhang said.

Zhang said that in discussions a coalition like UConn Students in Defense of Immigrant Communities has come into conversations as a solution but has received pushback from some administrators about how effective their response could be.

Three UConn students earn prestigious Goldwater Scholarship



The Three UConn students who were selected for a Goldwater Scholarship. From left to right the students are: Mackenzie Robillard, Ashly Gasior and Daniel D'Souza.
PHOTO COURTESY OF A LINKEDIN POST BY OFER HAREL.

by Pierce Colfer
ASSOCIATE NEWS EDITOR
HE/THEY
pierce.colfer@uconn.edu

Three University of Connecticut students were named Goldwater Scholars on March 27, earning a national scholarship established by Congress designed to support undergraduate students interested in pursuing research careers, according to the scholarship's website.

Ashly Gasior, a sixth-semester chemistry and physics major with a minor in mathematics, Daniel D'Souza, a fourth-semester molecular and cell biology and applied mathematics major, and Mackenzie Robillard, a sixth-semester molecular and cell biology major, earned the scholarship.

Gasior said that receiving the scholarship makes her feel excited for her future research.

"This has solidified that other people recognize my passion for research, and I'm excited to be able to take that and run with it," Gasior said. "It might make my life a little bit easier down the line now that people know what's up, and I'm very excited to continue doing research through PhD and then hopefully at an institution."

Robillard said that it was nice to be appreciated by something that's "bigger than UConn."

"[UConn] is not a small school, but it's obviously smaller than the rest of the research community, so [the scholarship] gave me some enthusiasm," Robillard said. "It just showed me that people believe in me enough that I could do something meaningful in the research community."

D'Souza said that the award came with a "boost in confidence."

"Research is pretty hard, in my opinion. You get a lot of failed results and it's very easy to get caught in the weeds of that," D'Souza said. "This award was, for me, a nice recognition of the fact that I am on the right path to pursuing a career that I want."

Gasior said that she was coming back from the American Chemical Society's spring conference and was having a "long day" when she found out she'd received the scholarship.

"My flights had been delayed, like, three times. I stood through TSA for two hours, so I felt so dead inside," Gasior said. "Then, I checked my email, and I got it. I was with a friend, so I was like 'oh my god.' I was just kind of shocked and surprised. Made the day a little bit worth it. Very tired, but happy."

D'Souza and Robillard were both in the lab when they found out they'd received the scholarship.

"I was with a lot of the grad students in my lab who'd helped me go over all my proposals and stuff I had to submit for this, so we were all very, very excited," D'Souza said. "There were a lot of hugs. It was an absolute blast."

Robillard said that she wasn't expecting to receive the award because of the volume of applicants for the scholarship.

"I mean, people from all over the country are applying so I didn't think that I would get it," Robillard said. "In past years, they usually picked, like, one person from UConn, and I figured chances were pretty low, but they picked three of us this year which was very cool."

Gasior said that applying was a "shot in the dark" for her.

"I thought that I had a pretty good shot, but I didn't think that I was necessarily going to [receive it]," Gasior said. "I knew I had a pretty good idea for a proposal, and I really wanted to apply since I had an idea, so I was like 'please help me,' to my principal investigator and he did."

D'Souza said that it felt like a "huge weight off his shoulders" to receive the scholarship during his sophomore year.

"I would have got to apply again, and my thought process was honestly expecting to apply again," D'Souza said. "It was nice to be able to just put this out of the way, and of course it also does come with financial support which made me feel great about the fact that I get two years of support."

D'Souza said that mentorship and support were huge parts of his story.

"Receiving this, especially as a sophomore, it's recognition of honestly not just my hard work but all the amazing support I have around," D'Souza said. "Great mentors, great friends and they make it very enjoyable to be putting in so much [effort]."

Robillard said that applying for the scholarship was a "really unique experience."

"There's a research essay and you don't have a lot of space to talk about who you are and what's made you into the type of researcher that you are, so it's interesting to try to think about what matters most to you in that experience and make it all succinct enough to fit into an essay," Robillard said.

The scholarship, named to honor Sen. Barry Goldwater, received over 5,000 applicants and selected 454 recipients to be named Goldwater Scholars.

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