

## Personnel Authority Critical to UConn's Continued Success

### Overview

Personnel authority was granted to the University of Connecticut, the Connecticut State University System and the Connecticut Community Colleges by the General Assembly in the early 1990's. It was part of comprehensive legislation intended to place operational responsibility and accountability most proximate to those directly affected by the operational decisions made. In addition to personnel decision-making, the legislation gave the constituent units responsibility for purchasing, budgeting and financial controls. By taking this action, the General Assembly enabled the constituent units to manage their state resources more efficiently and effectively. Legislators recognized that the Office of Policy and Management/Department of Administrative Services position control model was not appropriate for public colleges and universities, in addition to being cumbersome and inefficient. The General Assembly determined that it was not prudent to locate operational responsibility with State agency personnel who were removed from the direct management of the higher education institutions and not accountable to the needs of the institutions' constituents, namely students, faculty and patients.

UConn's unprecedented successes can be traced back to the early 1990's legislation and the State's investment in UCONN 2000. As a direct result of these landmark bills, the University of Connecticut has become the #1 ranked public university in New England and continues to rise in the national rankings. Since 1995, student enrollment, quality and diversity have increased dramatically, as UConn has achieved record levels for each category in virtually every successive year. Furthermore, federal research has doubled and private giving has nearly tripled.

UConn, like other public research universities, exists in a highly competitive environment, vying for students, patients, faculty, philanthropic support and sponsored research. In order for UConn to maintain its competitiveness and fulfill its mission, it is imperative that the University be able to make critical operational decisions in a timely and informed manner. Furthermore, nearly 70% of the Storrs-based budget and 77% of the Health Center's budget are generated from non-State revenues, making it appropriate for the University -- not one or more State agencies -- to make decisions about which positions to fill and when.

The University's main campus in Storrs and the Health Center in Farmington are twenty-four hour per day, seven-day per week operations. Managing the Storrs campus is the equivalent of running a mid-sized Connecticut city. As a result of its rural location, UConn is responsible for providing the array of services that cities typically provide along with some that are atypical, including police and fire protection, water collection and distribution, energy generation and dissemination, and waste collection, treatment and disposal. In addition, UConn maintains five regional campuses and the Law School. Collectively, the University provides services: to more than 30,000 students annually, to meet the health needs of about 950,000 visits from individuals who receive inpatient, outpatient and emergency medical and dental care annually, and to more than 9,000 full- and part-time faculty and staff.

Operating in a market driven environment, unique to higher education, requires UConn to be responsive to our students', patients' and faculty's legitimate expectations for the quality and timeliness of the services. In order to continue to compete effectively, it is essential that the University have the ability to make personnel decisions when they are needed. Within the limits of funds provided via the State appropriation and our other revenue streams, the University is best able to determine which positions should be filled, and when, thereby ensuring:

- courses are offered in response to student demand and to maximize student graduation rates;
- student needs for housing, dining, academic support and student life services are met;
- patients at the Health Center receive the highest level of care; and
- essential life-safety services are provided to students, patients, faculty and staff.

Placing position control in state agencies that have completely different missions from UConn's, that are not connected to the locations where those decisions take effect, that do not interact with the individuals who are most affected by those decisions and that do not possess expertise in the delivery of academic, healthcare, student life, athletic and municipal services, would be counter-productive and put at risk all the progress achieved in the last 15 years.

### **Adding a Layer of Bureaucracy**

Placing position authority with OPM and DAS would add another layer of unnecessary bureaucracy at the time when state government needs to be streamlined. Personnel at UConn, the Health Center, CSU and the Community Colleges represent roughly 20 percent of the state's total workforce. The competitive process involved in hiring faculty and academic administrators is very different from the hiring process that takes place in conventional state agencies. Reassigning this responsibility to OPM and DAS would significantly increase the workload of those agencies, perhaps even necessitating additional staff, without reducing the constituent units' administrative functions in the hiring process. Is there any reason to believe that OPM and DAS personnel will make better decisions than higher education personnel in deciding which academic and support positions are to be filled and when?

### **Impact on Academic Services**

All of Connecticut's public higher education units are experiencing record-breaking enrollment. UConn has increased enrollment by more than 7,000 students since 1995, and the number of degrees granted has increased by more than 2,200. These accomplishments result, in part, from the ability to adjust hiring to meet demand. UConn has focused on making certain that it has the appropriate number of faculty in the appropriate disciplines to meet anticipated student demand. Unlike the standard hiring practices in State government, the hiring of faculty is usually a six to nine month process, and because of the competitive nature of securing the services of outstanding research faculty, this process often requires an expeditious offer of employment. Enrollment growth and budget constraints have resulted in a growing student-faculty ratio at UConn, which, at 18 to 1, is already higher than that of our peer institutions. Just prior to the beginning of each semester, last-minute hiring decisions based upon expected enrollment, particularly for part-time faculty members, are inevitable. If decisions such as these had to be approved in Hartford, they would inevitably add time to the process forcing the University to make either premature judgments or risk not having the faculty necessary to meet student demand. And on what basis would OPM and DAS personnel make their decisions? Moreover, in academic fields of great importance to Connecticut's economy—especially such as engineering, the life and physical sciences, and medicine, and in specific cutting-edge research areas including stem cells, fuels and nanotechnology competition for outstanding faculty is intense, and UConn needs the ability to tailor offers to market demand. Without this ability, UConn's growing reputation for instructional excellence and success in attracting external research funding will be severely impaired.

## **Impact on Student Services**

Control over non-faculty positions is also critically important for the delivery of numerous direct services to students. Adequate levels of staff are needed to allow the University to meet the residential, health and life-safety needs of our students and patients. At the Storrs campus, for example, the University operates the equivalent of a mid-sized city where the tremendous growth in enrollment has driven concomitant growth in our residential responsibilities. Over the past decade, the number of University students living on the Storrs campus has increased by nearly 4,000, with 74% of undergraduates residing in 114 residential facilities. This significant increase in residential activity requires appropriate staff levels for maintenance/janitorial, dining, security and health care services. In addition, because there are no town utilities or service infrastructure, the University operates its own water system, sewer and waste treatment system. The University also operates its own Police and Fire Departments. All of these services are critical to providing a safe and secure living and learning environment that every parent defines as “essential.” UConn simply cannot meet the needs of our student population without replacing in a timely manner the employees who provide these critical services. There are other support services UConn provides which are an important part of the student experience. These include academic support services, such as academic counseling, student assistance (such as crisis counseling), and a full range of recreational and intramural programs. The ability to provide these services without interruption is directly related to maintaining the authority to determine which positions to fill and when. Many of these critical services are also provided at our Regional Campuses, the Health Center and our Law School.

## **Impact on Patient Care**

At the Health Center, patient safety and quality care are required 24 hours per day 7 days a week. Changes to our hiring authority would inevitably impact our ability to meet our patient care responsibilities and regulatory requirements (State Department of Public Health, Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services). For example, informed and immediate decisions are required when filling clinical positions that provide direct care to patients. In addition, the Health Center needs the ability to adjust pay to meet market demands for hard-to-fill clinical, research and teaching positions. Delays in the hiring process will result in inefficiencies and generate additional overtime costs. The OPM/DAS process is currently in place for the UCHC/Correctional Managed Health Care contract with the Department of Correction. This process has resulted in UCHC having difficulty filling clinical positions for the program. There have been many circumstances in which the Health Center has not been able to hire the best qualified candidate for clinical positions (nurses, physician assistants, dental assistants, radiology technicians) because DAS will not approve a market rate to hire. Consequently, positions stay vacant longer and are not filled with the top candidate for the job. Assigning position control to state agencies poses a threat not only to the quality and continuity of patient care, but also to the fiscal condition of the Health Center.

## **Impact on Federal Grants**

This past year, the University, including the Health Center, received more than \$210 million in externally funded sponsored activities, primarily federal research grants. It is imperative the University be able to hire research assistants and staff to fulfill grant obligations and support these grants. If it fails to do so, this critical funding will be jeopardized. Many grant awards come in to the University and require that personnel be hired immediately. These dollars are not fungible. If the University is unable to spend the grant on a timely basis, money is returned to the granting agency and the work of the grant is not completed. Once an institution fails to fulfill a grant

commitment, it is unlikely the granting agency will award new grants to that institution. The normal OPM/DAS approval time of approximately 120 days could mean the loss of current grant revenue and impact the ability to secure future grants.

### **Impact on Recruiting and Retaining High-Achieving Personnel**

The University competes on a daily basis to recruit and retain top personnel, including faculty clinicians, research faculty members in a wide range of disciplines, academic deans, and coaches for our nationally ranked athletic programs. The recruitment and hiring process for positions such as these are unlike the hiring practices of state agencies. Changing UConn's employment authority by assigning it to other state agencies will prevent UConn from being able to attract and retain the high-achieving individuals needed to make a major public university successful.

### **Impact on UConn's Presidential Search**

Changes to our personnel authority would have a chilling effect on UConn's search for a new President. The UConn presidency is an extremely attractive position due in large part to the great strides the University has made over the past 15 years. Quality candidates will be discouraged from considering UConn upon learning that the University's personnel authority may be eliminated and assigned to two other state agencies as this is not a model for successful public research universities.

### **Labor Relations Issues**

Faculty collective bargaining and contract administration involve a range of terms and conditions of employment that are unique to higher education and absent from other state union contracts. For example, workload is defined typically in load credits, not work schedules, and there is significant faculty peer involvement in hiring, dismissal, promotion and tenure decisions. Unlike other bargaining units, faculty members at public universities routinely play a significant role in institutional governance, particularly with respect to academic standards, requirements and scheduling. Faculty contracts reflect this tradition of 'shared governance' which is foreign to most other union/management relationships. Universities that have deviated from these practices have run the risk of appearing on national censure lists and, as a result, are greatly hampered in their ability to attract and retain outstanding faculty.

It is important to note that the University has always worked with OPM in establishing parameters for wage settlements. As such, wage settlement histories of UConn contracts are similar to those of other State unions.

### **Information on UConn's Personnel Process**

1. All personnel decisions at the University are based on academic, clinical, research and student needs and available funds. Hiring can only occur for a budgeted position, and each fill or re-fill during the course of a fiscal year is verified against budget availability. If an unanticipated need arises that is not contemplated in the budget, an additional rigorous review is conducted by senior management to determine the outcome of the request.(What does this mean?)
2. On average there are approximately 1,000 regular payroll employment and classification requests per year (searches, reclassifications, temporary service in higher class assignments, compensation changes etc.), and approximately 6,000 temporary, semester-based faculty and

academic support appointment requests per year (special payroll), to support the institution's teaching, research and service mission.

3. Less than 4% of the payroll transactions (approximately 242 classified transactions) require pre-review and pre-approval from DAS and/or OPM. The role of DAS/OPM can take up to a week per request before the University can proceed with a personnel action request. It's important to note that there is one DAS Analyst assigned to UConn to review these 200+ transactions.
4. The University's search and hiring process was enhanced in 2007 to a more efficient, electronic review and approval process, reducing the time to complete a search from approximately 110 days to 60-90 days. Adding DAS and OPM to the approval process for all employment and classification requests will increase the processing timelines, and with the number of DAS staff assigned to UConn (1), clearly add significant delay given the existing volume.

*Note: The analysis in this section does not pertain to the University's Promotion, Tenure, and Reappointments (PTR) process.*

### **Conclusion**

If Connecticut wants to derive the benefits of having a nationally competitive public research university, it must continue to allow the University to make operational decisions while holding it accountable for those decisions. The unprecedented successes of UConn over the past 15 years are the direct result of the General Assembly having invested operational authority and resources in its flagship university. History has demonstrated that operating UConn like a State agency renders the University noncompetitive, which is how it operated not that long ago. To revert to the old system will once again deny our State the value of a public research university that succeeds in attracting and educating Connecticut's high achieving students; securing and retaining outstanding teaching, research and clinical faculty; and serving as an engine of economic development.