

theindependentvoice

Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges... Educators, Employers, Community Partners

Fully Fund the PILOT Program to Bring Relief to Connecticut Municipalities By Judith B. Greiman, President

Municipalities, faced with increased costs and decreased state revenue, are constantly searching for new sources of revenue to fund critical town services. In response, state policy makers have struggled to find new ways of crafting Connecticut's property tax structure. These efforts have not been successful due to the potential difficulties caused by a wholesale upheaval of a longstanding tax structure.

There is a simpler way to get additional money to those towns that need it most. By funding Connecticut's payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) programs at the mandated statutory levels, towns and cities in need will immediately be helped without any unintended consequences that might flow from a revision of our tax system.

Tax exemptions, given to colleges and universities as well as to non-profit hospitals, schools and cultural organizations, are based on the recognition of the longstanding tradition that such institutions serve the public good by enhancing the education, health and general welfare of the state's citizenry. As old as the federal income tax, the result of this exemp-

tion has been a blending of independent nonprofit and governmental providers in a number of important service areas such as higher education, hospitals and human services.

Over time, each state has developed some form of exemption for property owned by colleges and universities, either through specific charters, constitutional provisions or statutes. As with the federal tax exemption, the unifying concepts supporting this exemption are the public benefit derived from these educational activities and a belief that the government

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should not be the sole provider of such services. While the tax exemption outlined above is common in all states, Connecticut's response to it is not. Enacted in 1978, Connecticut's payment in lieu of taxes program (PILOT) is one of a handful in the nation. Additionally, it is the only PILOT program that mandates reimbursement at such a high level. Connecticut's PILOT program of grants to municipi-

ties is an important recognition of the fact that colleges, universities and hospitals benefit everyone residing here and not just those who happen to live in the particular city or town in which such an institution is located.

According to the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, about 75% of the colleges and hospitals PILOT goes to distressed municipalities and is, therefore, excluded from the state spending cap. The State, however, has never appropriated the statutorily mandated 77% reimbursement rate to towns.

The FY08 total assessed value of the private college and private hospital PILOT was \$207,303,851 with mandated statutory funding supposed to be \$159,623,965. The actual funding level, however, was at 59.06% or \$120,116,888. Over the next few years, due to strategic increases to property owned by colleges that will enhance Connecticut's economic development and research position, the PILOT pot will be stretched even thinner resulting in decreases to towns unless funding increases.

Connecticut's model PILOT program recognizes that colleges and hospitals concentrate in urban centers and that these institutions serve the public good by providing critical resources and benefits that assist all Connecticut residents, not just those living in municipalities in which the institutions are located. Tax-exempt status for institutions of higher education provides necessary and important

support allowing colleges and universities to pursue their basic mission of teaching, research, and service. Because of such policies, universities are able to survive now and for future generations.

In Connecticut, we are lucky to have the kinds of higher education neighbors that all towns seek to have. They are strong community partners year round bringing national and international exposure to our state. Whether it is in the arts, K-12 schools, economic development initiatives, sports or key degree programs, Connecticut's colleges and universities enrich our neighborhoods and our region while serving as key employers and educators. They are true community partners that take this role seriously, utilizing their resources to strengthen and enhance the vibrant communities in which they live.

Increasing the PILOT payment to the mandated statutory level would go a long way towards assisting Connecticut towns without necessitating the full-scale upheaval of our property tax system. This is a tool that should be embraced by the General Assembly this year.

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Senior Capstone Project Takes Student Researchers to Puerto Rico

In January, Hannah Hastings '08 and Andrea Pain '08 collected seagrass from the ocean floor to study nutrient content in a dinoflagellate-rich ecosystem off the southwest coast of Puerto Rico.

The seniors returned to Wesleyan and analyzed their samples for carbon, nitrogen and phosphorus levels. They discovered a high ratio of nitrogen to phosphorus compared to the normal ratio in the ocean.



Jessica Fischer '08, Miles Turner '08 and Julius Pasay '08 collect a core sample from the lagoon.

"We discovered that high dinoflagellate concentrations are directly associated with elevated nitrogen to phosphorus ratios," Pain said during Part I of the Earth and Environmental Science Department's Senior Seminar Research Project colloquium March 6. Part II of the colloquium is scheduled for March 25.

Hastings and Pain were among 15 students and two faculty members who traveled to Puerto Rico Jan. 7 to 13 to carry out multiple research projects on the island. These students are enrolled in the E&ES 398 course, Senior Seminar, the capstone course for the E&ES major. Tim Ku and Dana Royer, both assistant professors of earth and environmental sciences, teach the class.

"This year, we chose to take the class to Puerto Rico because the island has a wide variety of terrain and different environments to study," Ku said. "The students come up with an original research question and the procedures necessary to answer that question."

Ku and Royer suggest general research topics to their classes; however the students are encouraged to come up with their own ideas, too. The students break into groups of two and three, and direct their own study and analysis.

Michelle Chen '08 and Rebecca Sorell '08 studied the depositional history of a salt flat near the shoreline city of Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico. The duo, along with their classmates, waded through worm-infested, mushy terrain collecting 10 sediment core samples in a lagoon. Afterwards, they dissected the core, photographed the contents and described the sediments' substance.

They discovered layers of clay, shell hash, silt, salt and organic layer, within their samples, and even traces of mangrove roots, and halite, or rock salt. Halite forms in evaporated water basins.

"We think this area was once completely wet and underwater, but then completely dried out where we found the salt layers," Sorrell explained. "Future projects could involve comparing this lagoon to others on the island."

Marie Brophy '08, Sophia Kim '08 and Miles Turner '08 studied the geology of the Bermeja Complex, the oldest rock formation on the island of Puerto Rico. The Bermeja terrain, which is estimated to be 200 million years old, is made of serpentinite, a green rock comprised of minerals from Earth's seafloor.

"Our question was, 'how did these rocks get to where they are today,'" explained Brophy. "They could have been pushed onto land

directly from the seafloor or plunged first into the mantle and then emplaced on the Earth's surface through volcanic activity."

The group studied the Bermeja's serpentinite and diorite rocks through optical microscopy and a scanning electron microscope at Wesleyan and developed emplacement theories based on their studies. They concluded the rocks were pushed, or obducted, directly onto land from the seafloor. All students traveled the island together, and helped one another with their particular projects.

"Every student gets to be a leader at some point," Royer explained. "For example, when Hannah and Andrea conducted their seagrass study, they acted as the leaders and directed the other students to areas to collect seagrass samples."

The students pay for their own airfare, but an endowment pays for all housing, island travel, meals and research expenses.

The remaining students involved in the Senior Seminar studies in Puerto Rico spoke on March 25. These groups presented their research on rainforest plants (Gabriela Doria '08, Margo Fernandez-Burgos '08, Dana Powell '08, Jordan Schmidt '08), bat droppings (Jessica Fischer '08, Sharon Newman '08, Ulyana Sorokopoud '08, and mogote topography (Julius Pasay '08).

For more information on the capstone course, contact Dana Royer at 860-685-2873 or Tim Ku at 860-685-2265.

By Olivia Bartlett, The Wesleyan Connection editor. Photos contributed by Tim Ku.

Goodwin College's Environmental Commitment Links Community, Education, and the Connecticut River

Where some saw a polluted post-industrial wasteland, Goodwin College sees a state-of-the-art college campus. And where others saw an undesirable swath of forgotten riverfront, the college and a consortium of supporters see a living environmental laboratory and an opportunity to bring local residents and visitors back to the Connecticut River.

Goodwin College is well on its way to turning 700 acres of land along the Connecticut River in East Hartford into a network of trails, parks, recreation areas, and protected open space, all anchored by the college's \$100+ million campus expansion. The multi-year project has a coalition of supporters, including the Connecticut Development Authority, state and federal environmental agencies, the Capitol Region Council of Governments, MetroHartford Alliance, and the Town of East Hartford.

The project began in 2005, when the college, assisted by a \$3 million

Goodwin (cont. on p.3)



Goodwin (cont. from p. 2)

Connecticut Development Authority grant, removed 30 above-ground petroleum storage tanks from the riverside site of a former bulk oil terminal and conducted soil remediation. Environmental studies confirmed that before the remediation, oil had been seeping into the river at the site, a problem that threatened marine habitats all



the way into Long Island Sound.

Goodwin College broke ground on the first building in its multi-phase expansion at the site in 2007. The 109,000 square foot classroom building and auditorium is scheduled to open its doors this fall.

Meanwhile, the college is planning a new system of trails along its 2.5 miles of riverfront land. Riverfront Recapture, a nonprofit organization dedicated to reconnecting the metropolitan Hartford region with the Connecticut River, is working with the college to connect these trails with its extensive trail network, providing recreational opportunities for residents while preserving open space.

In October 2007, the college continued its efforts to rehabilitate the river area through a grant from the National Oceanic

and Atmospheric Administration. Workers removed 900 cubic yards of submerged debris from the river, recovering propane tanks and other hazardous materials. As part of the grant-funded project, Goodwin College has partnered with the Connecticut Science Center and Riverfront Recapture to educate the public about responsible stewardship of the river, and is planning a volunteer cleanup of the area in October 2008.

Goodwin's efforts for the environment have benefited both the community and the ecosystem, and the college is hoping that a new Environmental Studies program will help pass that commitment along to students. A large vessel dock at Goodwin's River Campus once used to moor oil barges is being refitted to accommodate a research vessel — a floating river ecology laboratory that will serve as a cornerstone to the program, set to begin in January 2009.

Environmental Studies students will also have access to the environmentally sensitive flood plains that are part of the college's riverfront property. College officials see these areas as "living laboratories" uniquely situated for hands-on study of the ecosystem.

Officials have long described the college as having both educational and public service missions. The two are linked by the college's commitment to environmental stewardship.

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U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs selects Fairfield University's School of Nursing for pilot program

Fairfield University's School of Nursing is one of just four universities to be selected nationwide by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to establish a Nursing Academy, a unique partnership that is part of a five-year, \$40 million pilot program addressing the nation's severe nursing shortage while providing compassionate, highly educated nurses to look after the health care needs of veterans. According to the VA, the initiative partners "the Department's world-class health care system with four of the country's finest nursing schools."

Fairfield, the only university chosen in the Northeast to take part, has established a Nursing Academy with the Veterans Affairs Connecticut Healthcare System (VACHS), also known as the VA Hospital in West Haven, long an important clinical site for the University's nursing students. Together, the School of Nursing and VACHS are providing additional nurses to care for veterans, building on the strong relationship they have had for many years. All Fairfield nursing students now have enhanced clinical rotations at the hospital, so there are more students rotating there.

Jeanne M. Novotny, Ph. D., RN, FAAN, dean of the School of Nursing, said, "The program is providing well-educated, compassionate nurses to care for our veterans. It is an initiative to serve those who served our country."

Doris T. Lippman, Ed. D., professor of nursing at Fairfield who was an Army nurse during the Vietnam War, said nursing students rotating with the VA are finding it to be a personally enriching experience. "Caring for those who have made sacrifices defending our country is tremendously

fulfilling."



Jeanne M. Novotny, Ph. D., RN, FAAN,

The West Haven site cares for veterans of World War II through the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. It specializes in palliative care,

hospice care, geriatric care and pain management.

The Nursing Academy program also aims to attract more nursing students to work for the VA Healthcare System after graduation, a major concern because about 60 percent of VA nurses will reach retirement age within the next 15 years. Expanding the ranks of nursing teaching faculty, and creating new educational and research opportunities are other program goals.

The Nursing Academy program calls for eight more universities to partner with the VA over the next two years, for a total of 12 partnerships nationwide. The other three schools involved so far are the University of Florida in Gainesville, the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, and San Diego State University. The four schools were chosen from among 42 applicants. Ultimately, the program aims to increase nursing student enrollment by a grand total of about 1,000 students among the 12 nursing schools taking part.

Nursing Academy participants are involved in a project evaluating structure, process and outcomes assessment related to nursing-sensitive measures, such as infections, falls, medication errors, and pain management. Findings will help determine if improvements to patient care can be made, and replicated at other hospitals.

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UofH Students Bring Water to Village in India

Five University of Hartford engineering students, one faculty member, and two professional mentors traveled to India recently to install a solar-powered well in a small village near Delhi.

The January trip was the culmination of a three-year effort by dozens of students in the University's College of Engineering, Technology, and Architecture (CETA), who have been working to design a sustainable and accessible clean water source for the village of Abheypur.

Most of Abheypur's 3,000 residents are served by two hand pump wells. There are also two wells that have electric pumps, but these are not practical because the village only gets two to three hours of electricity per day. Thus many of the women in the village spend a considerable amount of time each day collecting water for their families.

The solar-powered ground water pump system designed by the CETA students has the capacity to supply the village with up to 9,000 gallons per day of potable water. For now, the newly installed system is supplying water to a primary school in Abheypur that serves about 200 girls. Until now, the girls primary school had no consistent supply of clean

water.

Organizers hope that the installation of the solar-powered well will be just the beginning of a long working relationship between the University of Hartford and the village of Abheypur. CETA students are now working to



The University of Hartford group poses in front of water storage tanks that are connected to a solar-powered groundwater pump, which supplies water to 200 girls at the primary school in Abheypur, India.

Back Row (l-r): Associate Professor David Pines; student Kevin Zheng; and Nadia Glucksberg of MACTEC Engineering and Consulting.

Front Row (l-r): V. Avinash of Evalueserve; student Andrej Dukalev; student Rachel LaDue; the group's driver (name unknown); student Maria Qadri; and student Craig Dolder.

design a rooftop rainwater harvesting system for the girls primary school. In addition, students at the University's Hartford Art School have embarked on a project to increase awareness about cleanliness, respect, and sharing through visual images.

The needs of Abheypur were brought to the attention of CETA students by adjunct faculty member and energy executive Subhash Chandra, a native of India. The project has been led by the University's Engineers Without Borders student chapter, under the guidance of Associate Professor David Pines, chair of the Department of Civil, Environmental, and Biomedical Engineering.

In addition to the daunting tasks of designing the solar-powered well and coordinating the installation, Pines and the CETA students spent years raising money for the project. The cost of the installation itself – including the purchase of photovoltaic cells, a pump and storage tanks, and drilling – was about \$19,000, and the January trip to India for Pines and the five students cost about \$2,000 per person.

Eventually, organizers would like to endow the project so that future engineering students will have opportunities to help residents of developing communities around the world.



The Independent Voice is a publication of the Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges, a public policy association representing Connecticut's nonprofit independent higher education institutions.

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