“There was suddenly a fatwa on my head”

Pakistani journalist Marvi Sirmed finds sanctuary at UConn
Urban Forestry and Arboriculture students in the Ratcliffe Hicks School of Agriculture learn to identify, protect, cut down — and climb — trees. Those in the Storrs campus “Fundamentals of Arboriculture” course didn’t have to go far to put theory and science into practice last fall near Hicks Hall.
FEATURES

16 “THERE WAS SUDDENLY A FATWA ON MY HEAD”
For reporting on terrorism, extremism, and atrocities against women in her country, Marvi Sirmed found herself under the most serious of death threats. The Pakistani journalist found the freedom to live — and to work and teach — at UConn.
By Jaclyn M. Severance

22 GIANTS AMONG US
We take a walk with history professor Frank Costigliola, a gentleman farmer and a scholar.
By Julie (Stagia) Bartucca ’10 (BUS, CLAS), ‘19 MBA

30 REVENGE OF THE DATA SCIENTISTS
Talitha Washington ’98 MS, ’01 Ph.D. is turning tables on the data science that has worked against Black and Brown people — by creating science and math pathways for students of color.
By Jackie Fitzpatrick Hennessey ’83 (CLAS)

34 PLAY BALL!
From spitballs to spin rates, these two alums have stayed with every curve thrown at them in a combined four decades of umpiring Major League Baseball.
By Jon Caroulis

SECTIONS

1 UCONN NOW
A stigma buster; a visitor from 1911; UConn vs. NYU in “The College Bowl”; another polo championship; and Nikole Hannah-Jones in Storrs. Plus Dairy Bar sundaes, a tree full of climbers, and so many UConn love stories.

22 UCONN NATION
Alums talk Music City law, all-in-the-family graduations, the religion of hiking, wrangling volunteers for the fed, rugby reunions, and getting to the win on “Jeopardy!” Plus Class Notes, Tom’s Trivia, and more.

CLASS OF 2022
Millenia Polanco ’22 (ENG) and mom Marsha Polanco ’02 (CLAS) celebrated outside Gampel Pavilion following the School of Engineering Commencement ceremony on Mother’s Day weekend 2022. Husky dad William Polanco ’02 (BUS) was on hand, too. For the first time since 2019, ceremonies took place in UConn’s traditional locations. In Storrs, students in full regalia gathered with classmates in processions to Gampel and the Jorgensen Center for the Performing Arts, where they heard their names called and joined the great community of graduates stretching all the way back to 1883. After the last four years, that felt spectacular — and well-earned through a combination of individual effort and collective support, including from all those moms.

Find more at s.uconn.edu/commencement
We want to hear from you! Please share thoughts, insights, discrepancies, recollections, photos — and how’s your Tom’s Trivia win-loss percentage coming? Post to our website at magazine.uconn.edu, email me at lisa.stiepock@uconn.edu, or send by regular mail to UConn Magazine Letters, 34 N. Eagleville Rd., Storrs, CT 06268-3144.

Here's a sampling of feedback from our last issue. Find more at magazine.uconn.edu.

**UCONN LOVE STORIES, ILLUSTRATED**

We heard from so many of you who answered our call to reveal your own UConn love stories. Whether together for 2 or 62 (!) years, still in Storrs or on the other side of the planet, what we loved most were the photos you shared. A very few are right. Find many others, descriptions of these, and dozens more inspirational stories on our website. And please keep sharing!

 hoofprint

@UConn Thank you, Huskies! HuskyTHON 2022 raised an incredible $1,340,670.68 to benefit the kids at @connecticutchildrens

Greetings. Surprised to read that 31% of this year's engineering students are women. During my time, we had only two!

William S. Sanstrom '55 (ENG), commenting on “Engineering Her Best Self”

“Fierce Woman”

✈️ I’m glad to have seen this article. My husband and I drove past this mural the other day and couldn’t identify Ella Grasso. We aren’t from Connecticut! Beautiful work.

Heather Wolfe, via our website

“Walk This Way”

✈️ I’ve been fascinated by trees for many years so found this very interesting.

Carole Noble, via our website

“Secret Life of Dexter Gabriel”

✈️ He’s fantastic, easy to talk to, understanding, courteous, and a great professor x3 — including the current semester. Would recommend his course “The Black Atlantic.”

@stephanykeithan

“Fierce Woman”

✈️ I’m glad to have seen this article. My husband and I drove past this mural the other day and couldn’t identify Ella Grasso. We aren’t from Connecticut! Beautiful work.

Heather Wolfe, via our website

**INSTAGRAM**

@UConn

Thank you, Huskies! HuskyTHON 2022 raised an incredible $1,340,670.68 to benefit the kids at @connecticutchildrens

@UConn Thank you, Huskies! HuskyTHON 2022 raised an incredible $1,340,670.68 to benefit the kids at @connecticutchildrens

So Handsome

✈️ LaShawnda, I am so very proud of you! I was your middle school teacher at King Middle School. May God continue to keep and bless you abundantly.

Victoria Weaver aka Ms. Weaver, via our website

✈️ Thank you for sharing your story LaShawnda. I love this. I have never been a horse person, always more of a dog person. I never quite understood why people were so into horses. But you made me get it. That emotional connection with an animal is priceless. Thanks for all you are doing to help others get it, too!

Dave Dickson, via our website

✈️ Wonderful work, LaShawnda. Please continue your journey and uplifting communication.

Krish Naraine, via our website

“Walk This Way”

✈️ I’ve been fascinated by trees for many years so found this very interesting.

Carole Noble, via our website

“Secret Life of Dexter Gabriel”

✈️ He’s fantastic, easy to talk to, understanding, courteous, and a great professor x3 — including the current semester. Would recommend his course “The Black Atlantic.”

@stephanykeithan
I WOULDN’T HAVE LISTENED TO ME

The 1-84 musings of famed sportswriter Leigh Montville ’65 (CLAS)

The thought arrived on that mindless stretch of I-84 between Boston and Storrs. You know where I mean. You’re heading past what once was RedArt’s garage on the right, then a sign for the Ashford Motel, then the Ruby Road turnoff for the TA Truck Stop in Willington, then the billboard for exotic dancing at the Electric Blue Café, all in preparation for Exit 68 and that seven-mile straight shot on Route 195 back in time to the UConn campus you once knew so well.

“Will these kids pay any attention to me?” I wondered.

I was scheduled to speak to Mike Stanton’s Newswriting 1 class in a lecture hall in the Nursing School in an hour or so, describing a career as a sports columnist at the Boston Globe, a senior writer at Sports Illustrated, and as the author of nine books, plus a sports columnist at the Connecticut Daily Campus and as the author of nine books, plus a sports columnist at the Connecticut Daily Campus.

The names on buildings, for instance, become people from your past. Homer Babidge is not the president of the University, the well-dressed and smooth, dignified, Yale roommate of New York mayor John Lindsay and actor James Whitmore — he is the name of the school library. Don McCullough was not the pleasant guy running the Student Union. There is a plaque remembering him in the Student Union. The Daily Campus has an entire building of its own. Has had it for years. The Field House was where the basketball team played? When was that? There was no women’s basketball team? There were no women’s sports? None? [True! There were no varsity women’s sports from 1938 to 1974.]

“Tall Men, Short Shorts” is the book I had just begun when I made that visit to the journalism class in 2019. The subtitle is “The 1969 NBA Finals: Wilt, Russ, Lakers, Celtics, and a Very Young Sports Reporter.” The very young sports reporter is me.

I look at myself, four years out from UConn, 25 years old, covering this transcontinental series of seven games between the Boston Celtics and Los Angeles Lakers for the Boston Globe. I am interviewing Bill Russell and Wilt Chamberlain, tall and talented men I had watched not much earlier on a black-and-white television in the lounge at the Phi Sigma Kappa house in the fraternity quadrangle.

(There is no fraternity quadrangle any more? There is no Phi Sigma Kappa?) I had never been to California, never seen the Pacific Ocean, never traveled on a plane long enough to see an in-flight movie. Now I am flying to California and back three times in two weeks. The in-flight movie is “Bullitt.”

I use a typewriter, an Olivetti Lettera 32, the one all reporters use. I send my stories back to Boston by Western Union. I call on a pay phone to see if my stories have arrived. There are no cellphones. They have not been invented. There is no Twitter, no Facebook, no social media at all. The interviews are conversations, not staged events with an ad for some bank in the background. Only two of the seven games are on television in Boston, only three in LA. The written word is king. The delivery of a newspaper is an important daily event.

The world is so different. I watch my young self bound through it all. I wince at his combination of great confidence and greater naiveté. Turn back the clock to then and I would have great tips, great advice to a journalism class at the University of Connecticut.

Now? I try to tell some of it, tell the stories, try to capture the romance of that time. There are maybe 60 kids spread out in lecture-hall tiers in front of me. Each kid has a computer open. Some are typing. Maybe they are taking notes on what I say. Maybe they are playing Donkey Kong. Hard to tell. I do my hour, answer a few questions at the end. The kids head off to their next class. I head back to Boston.

It was all OK.

It was fine.

It was all right.

The world is so different. I watch my young self bound through it all. I wince at his combination of great confidence and greater naiveté. Turn back the clock to then and I would have great tips, great advice to a journalism class at the University of Connecticut.

Now? I try to tell some of it, tell the stories, try to capture the romance of that time. There are maybe 60 kids spread out in lecture-hall tiers in front of me. Each kid has a computer open. Some are typing. Maybe they are taking notes on what I say. Maybe they are playing Donkey Kong. Hard to tell. I do my hour, answer a few questions at the end. The kids head off to their next class.

I head back to Boston.

It was all OK.

It was fine.

Says the visitor from 1911. —LEIGH MONTVILLE ’65 (CLAS)
Journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones had one goal as a history major at the University of Notre Dame: to not take a single class in European history.

Growing up in Waterloo, Iowa, in the 1980s and ’90s, she heard all about European influences on America and not a word about Black contributions to the nation’s birth. So, when she advanced to college and took her first Black American history class, she pledged to delve only into the stories of other nations, creeds, races, and cultures.

“It was like I could breathe for the first time,” she said of that initial Black American history class.

Before college, she said she assumed Black people hadn’t had any influence on the country and its communities, because no one around her made mention of their contributions. Certainly, her teachers would have said something, she noted, because aren’t they supposed to spotlight the most significant historical impacts?

But “we have not had neutral history,” she told the UConn audience at a capstone event commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Humanities Institute. And Black “history has not been part of the standard way we have studied history.”

It was timed to coincide with the 400th anniversary of the first landing of slaves in what was to become America, and since has been used to develop school curricula to change the way history is taught.

“It was timed to coincide with the 400th anniversary of the first landing of slaves in what was to become America, and since has been used to develop school curricula to change the way history is taught.”

“The 1619 Project,” which Hannah-Jones describes as a “cultural phenomenon,” is a series of articles, essays, and other works that highlight the contributions of Black people and makes the case that slavery influenced the formation of the United States from the outset and continues to play a role in society today.

“One of the best things about our UConn Magazine offices in the Lakeside Building on North Eagleville Road is being nearly right across the street (Storrs Road) from the Dairy Bar. Since not everyone can be a 5-minute walk from nirvana, we’re sharing the “recipes” for some of the seasonal sundaes likely to be back on the menu board this summer.”

**Nacho Average Sundae:**
Three flavors of ice cream and waffle cone chips smothered with whipped cream, two toppings, sprinkles, and cherries.

**Red, White, & Blue:**
Blueberry cheesecake ice cream, strawberry topping, whipped cream, patriotic star sprinkles, and a cherry.

**Jonathan’s Sundae:**
Vanilla ice cream, whipped cream, peanut butter and fudge toppings, chocolate-covered peanuts, and a cherry.

**POLO WIN**
Women’s polo brought home its 8th national title after besting Texas Tech 15–11 at Legends Polo Club in Kaufman, Texas. It was their first championship since 2008. “We each practice very hard, put a lot of time and effort into this sport, and this weekend, it all paid off,” said captain Rynlyn Koger. “Every second of stress, every late night at the barn practicing, every past loss made us better and led us to this point.” From left: Toni Moore, Madison Robicheau, Kylie Dalton, Koger, Elizabeth Leudesdorf, and coach Anders Carlton ’19 (ENG).
PAST PERFECT

COLLEGE BOWL

Fame is fickle. But while it lasts, it sure can be fun. That’s one lesson members of UConn’s 1961 and 1970 “GE College Bowl” teams say they learned. These fearsome intellectual foursomes appeared on TV’s original “College Bowl,” which aired weekend afternoons from 1959 to 1970, first on CBS and then on NBC. (Peyton Manning now hosts a revival.)

Before millions of viewers, schools battled each other for scholarship money. To win the honor of sweating under the bright lights, players had to survive round after winnowing round of on-campus competitions. “It was a process of endless, endless stagings of matches” broadcast over Stuarts’ closed-circuit TV system, recalls Cris Birch ’71 (CLAS), a retired IT executive. “We were quick on the trigger when we knew the answer.”

When the team returned to campus, the April Fools edition of The Daily Campus greeted them.

“The week before we went on, I was, like, a big man on campus, but when we lost, we had to sneak back,” says Lieber, a former professor of American history at Essex County College in Newark, New Jersey. “And one of the big stories in The Campus was that he had thrown the match.” April Fools!

Fast forward nine years, and the UConn squad is rocking shaggy haircuts. Birch had far-out sideburns. Jeffrey Davis ’71 (CLAS), a retired anesthesiologist in White Plains, New York, made the scene with a groovy Fu Manchu mustache.

First, they nipped the University of Arkansas 180–170 with a come-from-behind overtime win. Physics major Birch blurted the answer to the question “What is the province of Germany that was ruled by three kings?” (Saxony.)

“I was the hero. It was absolutely amazing,” he says. Next week they crushed New York University 345–165.

“Thank you, Mr. Loodle.” Thiffault ’62 (CLAS) remembers “It was a matter of the speed of pressing the buzzer. They were a whisker ahead of us.” It was RFP’s fifth and final appearance. They had more experience.

The UConn quartet did have fun on-air. When host Allen Ludden kept mispronouncing the name of George Thiffault ’62 (CLAS), he quipped, “covered himself in glory,” according to the Courant. He frugally dined with Hill at a Horn & Hardart automat, where you used tokens to pay for food behind glass partitions.

“Steamy was the word for the show Hill’s team wanted to see. ‘Oh! Calcutta!’ had full frontal nudity.”

“I’m sure that decision went through several levels of NBC executives,” Hill presumes. The network let them have their way.

“The English major ‘made his singing debut when he was called upon to ’sing, hum, or whistle’ a few bars from ‘Ave Maria,’” reported The Hartford Times. “As soon as the host said ‘Ave Maria,’ I nailed that buzzer.”

Pennsylvania thyroid surgeon Peter Canning, ABC News, March 12, 2022

On the effects of saying “mass shooting” when the shooter’s Black:

“When you call something gang violence, I think people’s empathy goes down to zero because they think — those people are killing themselves.”

Psychiatry professor and a director of the Health Disparities Institute Dr. Wizdom Powell, New York Amsterdam News, April 28, 2022

On looking farther down the food chain to grow protein for human consumption:

“But let’s think about bivalves.”

Marine sciences professor Sandra Shumway, Scientific American, May 1, 2022

On politicians creating and feeding fears about sexual orientation and trans rights:

“Repressive sexism comes along with a resurgence of nationalism. They go hand in hand.”


Historian and retired IT executive Bill Ludden blessed the event. “We couldn’t have thought up a better job of preparing the team.”

When host Ludden was fuming over a fact we couldn’t recall, Thiffault chimed in, “Hanna was a father of three.”

Before millions of viewers, schools battled each other for scholarship money. To win the honor of sweating under the bright lights, players had to survive round after winnowing round of on-campus competitions. “It was a process of endless, endless stagings of matches” broadcast over Stuarts’ closed-circuit TV system, recalls Cris Birch ’71 (CLAS), a retired IT executive. “We were quick on the trigger when we knew the answer.”

When the team returned to campus, the April Fools edition of The Daily Campus greeted them.

“The week before we went on, I was, like, a big man on campus, but when we lost, we had to sneak back,” says Lieber, a former professor of American history at Essex County College in Newark, New Jersey. “And one of the big stories in The Campus was that he had thrown the match.” April Fools!

Fast forward nine years, and the UConn squad is rocking shaggy haircuts. Birch had far-out sideburns. Jeffrey Davis ’71 (CLAS), a retired anesthesiologist in White Plains, New York, made the scene with a groovy Fu Manchu mustache.

First, they nipped the University of Arkansas 180–170 with a come-from-behind overtime win. Physics major Birch blurted the answer to the question “What is the province of Germany that was ruled by three kings?” (Saxony.)

“I was the hero. It was absolutely amazing,” he says. Next week they crushed New York University 345–165.

“Thank you, Mr. Loodle.” Thiffault ’62 (CLAS) remembers “It was a matter of the speed of pressing the buzzer. They were a whisker ahead of us.” It was RFP’s fifth and final appearance. They had more experience.

The UConn quartet did have fun on-air. When host Allen Ludden kept mispronouncing the name of George Thiffault ’62 (CLAS), he quipped, “covered himself in glory,” according to the Courant. He frugally dined with Hill at a Horn & Hardart automat, where you used tokens to pay for food behind glass partitions.

“Steamy was the word for the show Hill’s team wanted to see. ‘Oh! Calcutta!’ had full frontal nudity.”

“I’m sure that decision went through several levels of NBC executives,” Hill presumes. The network let them have their way.

“The English major ‘made his singing debut when he was called upon to ’sing, hum, or whistle’ a few bars from ‘Ave Maria,’” reported The Hartford Times. “As soon as the host said ‘Ave Maria,’ I nailed that buzzer.”

Pennsylvania thyroid surgeon Peter Canning, ABC News, March 12, 2022

On the effects of saying “mass shooting” when the shooter’s Black:

“When you call something gang violence, I think people’s empathy goes down to zero because they think — those people are killing themselves.”

Psychiatry professor and a director of the Health Disparities Institute Dr. Wizdom Powell, New York Amsterdam News, April 28, 2022

On looking farther down the food chain to grow protein for human consumption:

“But let’s think about bivalves.”

Marine sciences professor Sandra Shumway, Scientific American, May 1, 2022

On politicians creating and feeding fears about sexual orientation and trans rights:

“Repressive sexism comes along with a resurgence of nationalism. They go hand in hand.”


And that’s because of fantasizing.

On the increase in drug overdoses and deaths:

“I’d say that there are more people doing drugs today, but it’s much more dangerous to do drugs. And that’s because of fantasizing.”

Marine sciences professor Sandra Shumway, Scientific American, May 1, 2022

On politicians creating and feeding fears about sexual orientation and trans rights:

“Repressive sexism comes along with a resurgence of nationalism. They go hand in hand.”


And that’s because of fantasizing.

On the increase in drug overdoses and deaths:

“I’d say that there are more people doing drugs today, but it’s much more dangerous to do drugs. And that’s because of fantasizing.”

Marine sciences professor Sandra Shumway, Scientific American, May 1, 2022

On politicians creating and feeding fears about sexual orientation and trans rights:

“Repressive sexism comes along with a resurgence of nationalism. They go hand in hand.”


And that’s because of fantasizing.

On the increase in drug overdoses and deaths:

“I’d say that there are more people doing drugs today, but it’s much more dangerous to do drugs. And that’s because of fantasizing.”

Marine sciences professor Sandra Shumway, Scientific American, May 1, 2022

On politicians creating and feeding fears about sexual orientation and trans rights:

“Repressive sexism comes along with a resurgence of nationalism. They go hand in hand.”


And that’s because of fantasizing.
Amanda Brenner ’22 MSW has always been a dedicated and accomplished student — she makes good grades, won her college’s award for best undergraduate research paper, and received a grant from the Special Envoy for Health at the United Nations right after she graduated from American University in 2016.

She majored in foreign policy, landed a great job a year after graduation, and was preparing to launch her career in international relations.

“I’ve liked policy work,” she says. “I always thought that was a way that you could be a very useful person, and feel like you’re useful, by getting involved in policy work.

Years later, and a recent UConn policy practice Master of Social Work graduate, Brenner is still working on policy, but it’s an extremely personal — she’s hoping her lived experience can give others hope, while helping to reduce the strong stigma that exists around severe mental illness.

Questions

Brenner was a first-year undergraduate when she started feeling ill. “I felt like a cold, and I didn’t know what it was — it was persistent and very frustrating,” she says. “It sort of progressed from there, where first I started feeling just a little bit physically sick, and then it became having weighty thoughts about things like purpose and existential dread. And then it shifted, where first I started feeling just a little bit physically sick, and then it became having weighty thoughts about things like purpose and existential dread, or change her thinking patterns — the physical pain that had been unsolvable for so long went. She began to reimagine the rest of her life, filled with gratitude for the support and care teams she had garnered along the way and motivated to use her talents to contribute to the well-being of others.

“ar was so very sudden, after re ing to that finish line, and it’s just the most
ting full circle, and work in D.C., and
nt to the well-being of others. Brenner continues, “I really wanted to do policy and study mental illness at the same time, and I found that you could do that in a study program like the one at UConn.”

Purpose

UConn’s Policy Practice MSW concentration prepares social workers to intervene at the level of service delivery, to work with individuals and groups, to influence policy and legislative advocacy. Students engage in robust, hands-on fieldwork placements designed to offer critical experiential learning opportunities. It was this approach to these all-important field placements that made UConn the perfect fit for Brenner.

“I want to amplify the voices of people with severe mental illness — Everybody has their own story.”
University Professor Dr. Cato T. Laurencin was awarded the 106th annual Spingarn Medal, the highest honor of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Bestowed upon such American greats as Martin Luther King Jr. and Maya Angelou, it honors “the man or woman of African descent and American citizenship who shall have made the highest achievement during the preceding year or years in any honorable field.” It hopes to draw attention to African American achievement and inspire young African Americans.

Accepting the honor (below), Laurencin said, “This list of those who have won the Spingarn Medal is incredible. I am honored to be in such awesome company. I am the first engineer to receive the honor, the fourth physician, and the fifth scientist. I thanked my father, a union carpenter, and my mother, a doctor and trailblazer in medicine and science, for teaching him Black excellence and Black resilience.

The Shape of Copper

Chemistry Ph.D. student Lamya Tabassum’s prize-winning photo of copper sulfide nanoarrays, taken with a Verios 460L SEM electron microscope that can magnify up to 2,000 times, was a happy accident. “I was growing copper sulfide nanoarray on the copper substrate to use it as a catalyst for water splitting,” she says. The process produces hydrogen, a valuable energy commodity. Tabassum was scanning the particles under the microscope to see if they actually were arrays.

The strange shape of the nanoarray in this image was not what she was expecting to find. In fact, it was new to science, and now Tabassum is publishing a paper about it. —KIM KRIEGER

Find a Q&A with Tabassum at s.uconn.edu/copper
“There was suddenly a fatwa on my head”

By Jaclyn M. Severance
Illustrations by Sean Flynn

In 1991 in Pakistan, there was a surge of women being burned. An stove would burst, the official report would say—a terrible accident—and only the young bride of the family would be injured or, more often, killed.

“It was very intriguing for me,” says Marvi Sirmed, a journalist and activist who was one of the rare young women working at a newspaper in Pakistan at the time. “When I started digging, first they said, ‘Oh, you know, because in the kitchen, only the daughter-in-law works, so everyone else remains unharmed.’”

Most newspapers in Pakistan at that time employed only one woman, says Sirmed, and that woman was known as the “lady reporter,” who would exclusively write for women.

Articles about the latest fashions or recipes or romantic short stories were the sorts of topics that women in the patriarchal society should be reading, according to the men who ran the newspapers. Sirmed, who was working as the editor of her newspaper’s weekly women’s edition, felt otherwise. “It kept digging for four or five months for this story, and some of these incidents would be accidental,” she says, “but most of it was because the daughter-in-law did not bring enough dowry. So, it was a dowry killing, or an honor killing, concealed into an accident.”

Her enterprising journalism was not welcomed. “I brought several stories of the survivors of these ‘accidents,’ and my editor just refused to entertain that,” she says. “He said that women buy the women’s edition because they want to read more about the pleasant subjects. But what you are doing is exactly what they don’t want to know and what we don’t want to put in our publication, because these are not pretty faces. If you want to do a modeling session with a high-ranking model girl who would display good apparel, we are all for it. But these faces of burned women, it’s absolutely a ‘no’ story.”

The stories of the burned women were far from the last time Sirmed would face opposition, controversy, harassment, personal attacks, and outright violence for the stories she wanted to tell and the light she aimed to shine on some of the darkest corners of Pakistani life and governance.

In fact, she’s still telling those stories and working as an activist for change in Pakistan and other South Asian countries, though she’s now more than 7,000 miles away from her home country, in the United States—teaching at UConn through the University’s longstanding and unique partnership with the international network Scholars at Risk.

For reporting on terrorism, extremism, and atrocities against women in her country, Marvi Sirmed found herself under the most serious of death threats and escaped an assassination attempt. The Pakistani journalist found the freedom to live—and to work and teach—at UConn.
A Network to Safety

“It’s at the very heart of a university’s mission to advance knowledge and to advocate for academic freedom,” says Kathryn Libal, an associate professor of social work and human rights at the UConn School of Social Work and the director of UConn’s Human Rights Institute (HRI).

Since November 2010, UConn and HRI have worked to help support that mission as part of the Scholars at Risk Network, or SAR. Established in 2000, SAR assists academics who face persecution by arranging short-term positions for them at host universities around the globe.

The scholars hosted through SAR represent all disciplines,” explains Libal, a champion of the network who also serves on the organization’s steering committee for the U.S.

“They might be physicists. They might be political scientists. They might be molecular cell biologists. And in their home countries, they are persecuted because of their research or teaching. SAR is a global institutional response that supports scholars and practitioners so that they have the freedom to think and exchange knowledge.”

Since becoming a part of the network, UConn has hosted scholars from Mexico, Iran, Syria, Ethiopia, Turkey, Nicaragua, and now Pakistan. They can stay two years or more, which gives them time to address a number of unmet needs, while gaining their bearings in a safe place.

“It’s not just about having a scholar figure out how to write for U.S. journals,” says Libal. “Many haven’t had access to good health care for some time. Some have experienced trauma and have latent health challenges. So having a couple of years to address health needs is really critical.”

UConn can offer this support to its SAR scholars, Libal says, because the entire University community — from the president and provost to the faculty and students — has embraced the network’s mission and goals, and has put the structure and resources in place to make the program successful. “UConn is deeply committed to our human rights mission, with this program serving as a powerful example of the impact we can have,” says provost Carl Lejuez.

UConn is one of the most active and committed hosts of SAR scholars in the country, says Rose Anderson, SAR’s director of protection services. “We have frequently asked UConn to participate in workshops for SAR hosts and scholars to impart our perspective on host support needed for a visit to be as successful as possible,” Anderson says. “In this way, UConn inspires other campuses to become involved.”

With some 550 members in 42 countries, the SAR network each year places more than 100 at-risk scholars. An increasingly high demand forces SAR to focus its efforts on scholars facing the most immediate and severe threats, including threats of violence, torture, and wrongful imprisonment or prosecution — scholars just like Marvi Sirmed.

When the Threats Come

When, as a budding journalist, Sirmed asked to start reporting on politics, she was harassed by the male reporters who worked in the newsroom.

“It was very difficult, because if you are sitting in the newsroom with all the male reporters, they would be 100 percent sure that you are making yourself available for them, and you are fair game,” Sirmed says. “Sexual harassment was not even a word back then. It was considered a fact of life that a woman has to endure — to tolerate harassment — if a woman decides to move out of the four walls of the house.”

Sirmed left reporting and started working as a columnist, because it didn’t require her to go to a newsroom — she could instead work on her stories on her own time. She spent the next 20 years working as a columnist, often writing about political issues and terrorist organizations and advocating against human rights abuses in Pakistan.

She also worked for the United Nations Development Program in Pakistan as an expert on democracy and parliamentary institutions. And while she says the U.N. was supportive, Sirmed’s outspoken activism did not earn her many friends from within the Pakistani government, the military establishment, or the active extremist groups in the country.

In 2012, Sirmed survived an assassination attempt, when unidentified gunmen fired several shots at her and her husband, Sirmed Manzaor, who also is an investigative journalist, in the capital city of Islamabad. They were unharmed.

“That was one point in time where we seriously considered leaving Pakistan,” she says. “But we did not. Even at that time, we did not.”

She did ultimately leave her position at the U.N. and began working as a consultant, offering research and writing services to international organizations and using any profits to support victims of terrorism, especially women.

“There were very many destitute women who were left because of...”

“...a journalist and an activist was a continuous trauma”
Making SAR work at UConn

“Learning that lives with you.”

Jarred Ried (’24 CLAS), a double major in human rights and human development and family sciences, was one of the students in a human rights class co-taught by Marvi Sirmed and Kathy Libal.

“Marvi taught me to that course,” Ried says. “I read her story, and I felt her pain. I thought, what she had been through and all the accomplishment she had, but also what she was doing in Pakistan. That would be teaching this course. I thought it would be something that, honestly, I wasn’t ever going to get an opportunity. It was this type of experience with a professor.”

The course, Libal explains, is meant to help students understand the nature of human rights violations while also teaching about freedom of expression and the role of protecting journalists who are also human rights actors.

“Human rights journalism reflects an explicit commitment to reporting on one of the most pressing moral issues of our time,” says Libal. “It means that, as a journalist, you make a personal commitment to the voices of those who are experiencing human rights violations, or whose human rights aren’t fully realized. We hope that our students understand the importance of fostering human rights as a practicable imperative and that journalists will help us ensure that human rights aren’t just central to Marvi’s life.”

Another student, Joseph Russell (’22 CLAS), said of the class, “It is the type of learning that I should have been exposed to a long time, that lives with you.”

For more about the many academic and professional opportunities available through the Human Rights Collaborative’s High School Summer Institute, please visit hurights.uconn.edu.

For more on UConn’s Human Rights Institute, Scholars at Risk, and the National Endowment for Democracy, please visit uconn.edu/sar.

“Human rights journalism is meant to be something that, honestly, we can’t trust the police ever. Even if we are friends with some of their senior officials, and even if they assure us that they will help us, we are sure that they will never be able to help us in any way.”

For more about the United States Section of the Scholars at Risk program, please visit info.sar.org/.usa.
A walk with Frank Costigliola, a gentleman farmer and a scholar.
posts for the seminar he debuted last fall, “Personality and Power Since 1900,” and Costigliola wakes in the predawn hours to respond to students’ online discussion because coffee interferes with naps. Coffee is a zero-sum game. What I do for a quick He has a lot more to say about the naps, but the point is he needs the energy. “What I do, and I recommend it, is short naps. Five to 20 minutes. You wake up and reenergize, and then you have to go back to what you were doing,” he says. “I can do that.”

The owner would only sell all 195, and that’s how he and his wife, Diann, ended up with this sprawling, picturesque plot. He wasn’t going to raise cattle, either, but as with most things, Costigliola is all in, a subject-matter expert on raising and breeding his grass-fed Devons (supposedly the breed brought to America by the Puritans), connected with people in his community who take care of the artificial insemination and humane slaughter. He had a grandfather with a farm and bought 10 acres near that campus in 1972, when he started his farmer in 1998. “I didn’t think I’d ever tend to his 12 beef cattle, or work on his latest book (a “cradle-to-grave” biography of Cold War-era diplomat George F. Kennan), or lead the loving restoration of his property to honor its history and carry on the farming tradition of the area. The land, called Dunhamtown, as it was owned and farmed by the Dunham family from 1699 to 1879, contains mul- "And I think, in my mind, I blurred tings, like Costigliola himself. Corrals and pastures, flowing water and out- The land, called Dunhamtown, as it was owned and farmed by the Dunham family from 1699 to 1879, contains mul- "And I think, in my mind, I blurred tings, like Costigliola himself. Corrals and pastures, flowing water and out-
and a small barn. Like most of the buildings here, it’s made from Costigliola’s trees that were sawed at his neighbor’s mill and is where Costigliola will keep a half-dozen sheep procured from UConn.

Dunhamtown was covered in prickly bushes when Costigliola bought it, but he’s bringing it back to its former glory. Huge swaths have been cleared, buildings and bridges built, and irrigation systems installed. Remnants of centuries-old stone walls — where much of the stone had been sold off — are being rebuilt, including one that forms a corral Costigliola will use for the sheep (which will also be sold for meat; I wish I had taken a picture of the way he looked at me when I asked if he’ll be using them for wool).

“The big thing here is me just restoring what people worked very hard” — his voice catches, one of several times his reverence for those who came before causes emotion to overcome him — “people worked very, very hard to do. I’m trying to restore it. I have enormous respect for them, whoever they were.”

Big Pines

We leave the RTV behind near Club Med and continue on foot, hanging a left after a small pond next to the new sheep barn.

Ahead is a wooded area with trails running through it and fallen leaves covering every inch, and a brook you can cross on a footbridge of big, smooth stones taken when the water isn’t too high. This is a place for solitude and contemplation, leading to another road that goes down to wide-open pastures.

We’ve talked a lot about farming, getting into the weeds on everything from how the cows are bred to where on the property trees were cut down to make lumber for each structure. I finally ask about Frank’s career and the way he relates to students.

Weeks before visiting the farm, I sat in on a session of his new seminar, “History 2205W: Personality and Power Since 1900,” where students analyze how the personalities of Adolf Hitler, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin, Hillary Clinton, and Donald Trump affected their approach to power and what they accomplished.

Introduced last fall, it was a hit among students. In the four books he’s written, Costigliola explores how culture, emotion, and even gender norms dovetail with international relations, so the seminar discussions live in his sweet spot. Even for nonhistorians, the course content is fascinating. “I have to admit, I knew you couldn’t miss when you had Hitler and Trump in the same course,” Costigliola quips — but in speaking with students one learns the true draw lies in Costigliola’s teaching style and his humanity.

“I’ve never felt so heard by a professor before,” says Jessica Puxi, a third-year economics major from East Windsor, Connecticut.

Students praise the way Costigliola draws out their opinions, daring them to substantiate their views and articulate themselves in ways they might not have felt comfortable doing before.

“Everything you say is accepted
It’s so easy to get wrapped up in Costigliola’s passion and general menschiness that you almost forget his accomplishments as a U.S. foreign relations historian. His books have won awards and introduced culture as a legitimate topic for analysis in foreign relations history; in 2016 he was named a Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor, the University’s highest honor for faculty; he has received fellowships from the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton (where he met Diann), the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Norwegian Nobel Institute, and UConn’s Humanities Institute.

“Frank is an astute and empathetic critic, an excellent guide to history and to life, a great sort of companion in learning,” says History Department head Mark Healey. “In addition to being an exceptional undergraduate teacher, he is a really excellent graduate mentor — he has a distinguished crew of folks. He’s had a big impact on the profession and on the field.”

Costigliola’s graduate students have gone on to be teachers, professors and heads of history departments at other universities, and national security analysts.

“I can’t imagine a better advisor for supporting my project and my voice, and taking my career where I want it to go,” says Megan Dawson, who works for the Department of Defense in Washington, D.C., and is currently writing her Ph.D. dissertation on Ukrainian democlassification in the early 1990s. “In what’s historically been a very male-dominated field, Frank has been very supportive of myself and other graduate students, making sure everyone has equal access to opportunities, making sure everyone’s voices are heard,” particularly women, she says. “He tries to give a wider perspective on panels and when choosing books for a syllabus.”

The summer before Dawson started at UConn, Costigliola ushered her in to a conference of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations — an organization over which he used to preside, which recently honored him with its lifetime achievement award. He introduced her to “many people whose books I would read throughout my studies,” says Dawson. “He really wanted to make sure the door was open for me to walk through.”

Toward the end of our journey through the farm, Costigliola acknowledges the good fortune that put him in the position to help others through those doors.

He’s keenly aware of his privilege as a white male baby boomer, and as a professor whose “schedule is largely his own” and who can afford to do what he does.

“So you’re not slowing down?” I ask.

“No. People say, ‘What’s your end game?’ End game? I’ll die!”

Until then, he’ll continue to host the History Department’s Foreign Policy Seminar series, bringing in experts from around the world to talk diplomacy over Indian food in the Wood Hall basement. He’ll plan an end-of-semester party for the undergrads in his “Rise of U.S. Foreign Power” lecture. He’ll work on his next book, tentatively titled: “Hope over Fear: The Feelings that Got Franklin D. Roosevelt and his America through Depression and War.”

In Washington, D.C., he’ll be giving the “Seminar series, bringing in experts from around the world to talk diplomacy over Indian food in the Wood Hall basement. He’ll plan an end-of-semester party for the undergrads in his “Rise of U.S. Foreign Power” lecture. He’ll work on his next book, tentatively titled: “Hope over Fear: The Feelings that Got Franklin D. Roosevelt and his America through Depression and War.”

He’ll work on his next book, tentatively titled: “Hope over Fear: The Feelings that Got Franklin D. Roosevelt and his America through Depression and War.”

He’s keenly aware of his privilege as a white male baby boomer, and as a professor whose “schedule is largely his own” and who can afford to do what he does.

“So you’re not slowing down?” I ask.

“No. People say, ‘What’s your end game?’ End game? I’ll die!”

Until then, he’ll continue to host the History Department’s Foreign Policy Seminar series, bringing in experts from around the world to talk diplomacy over Indian food in the Wood Hall basement. He’ll plan an end-of-semester party for the undergrads in his “Rise of U.S. Foreign Power” lecture. He’ll work on his next book, tentatively titled: “Hope over Fear: The Feelings that Got Franklin D. Roosevelt and his America through Depression and War.”

He’ll work on his next book, tentatively titled: “Hope over Fear: The Feelings that Got Franklin D. Roosevelt and his America through Depression and War.”
Talitha Washington '98 MS, '01 Ph.D. is turning tables on the data science that has worked against Black and Brown people — by creating science and math pathways for students of color.

Speaking last year with the late UConn professor Joseph McKenna, he recalled a colloquium on mathematical studies of bridges he’d once given at Bryn Mawr College. He happened to run into Talitha Washington, one of his graduate students, who was there visiting friends. They said hello and McKenna went off to his colloquium.

“Usually these talks are fairly dull, with about five or six faculty members who attend out of a sense of obligation more than anything else,” he said. “But when I came to give my talk, somehow Talitha, in wandering around the department, had rounded up 10 to 20 undergraduates to come to my talk."

It must have taken a certain amount of courage to go into a completely strange place and gather up all those people, said McKenna. “That’s just the way she was. Talitha made things happen. She wasn’t intimidated or awed by anyone. She said, ‘Here’s a great talk, let’s all go to it.’”

Making things happen has been a way of life for Washington '98 MS, '01 Ph.D. She holds fast to the phrase “I’ll find a way or make one,” which is the motto of Atlanta University (now part of Clark Atlanta University), the oldest historically Black university in the South, where Washington is a professor of mathematics.

It’s also her mantra, she says, as she directs the Atlanta University Center (AUC) Data Science Initiative to bring underrepresented voices into the exploding field of data science. She likes how so much lives in the statement: possibility, resolve, carving a new path.

“We have all these examples of how data science has negatively impacted Black people,” she says, noting facial recognition software and all manner of algorithms where the science can lead to more harm than good “if data sets aren’t culturally relevant or if they aren’t taken into account all the nuances. Last year there was a big cry from the math community to stop doing work with the police because of productive policing models built on biased algorithms. The consciousness of the data science community was born out of what happened to George Floyd and others.”

At the AUC, Washington is flipping that narrative, working to “develop talent and become a significant producer of African Americans with expertise and credentials in data science,” she says. “We also want to create new knowledge and lead national efforts to address race, gender, and social justice aspects of data science, focusing on topics that impact Black America.”

The Tap
Washington was teaching at Howard University and starting her first year at the National Science Foundation (NSF), where she had built and coordinated a STEM program across 532 Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs).

She loved what she was doing at Howard and the NSF and hadn’t planned to make a change. But when she was “tapped on the shoulder” and asked to consider applying to Atlanta, she says she kept thinking about the impact of data science. Despite its use in nearly every field from healthcare to banking, education to hospitality, this arena of developing algorithms and analyzing data continues to lack diverse voices.

A Spelman College graduate, she was
discovering it was a five-year program, decided to
She went to Spelman to study engineering, but upon
growing up in Evansville, Indiana, Washington never
imagined going into mathematics. “I liked creative writing,
during high school, she excelled in English, winning a

also drawn to AUC’s deep roots in social justice. “In 1960 student leaders of AUC member schools [Clark Atlanta, Morehouse College, Morehouse School of Medicine, and Spelman] came together to challenge the scourge of segregation and created a manifesto appealing for human rights,” Washington says. “Our Data Science Initiative is built on this backbone of students really motivating social justice throughout our history.”

The job, though, might have intimidated a less courageous soul. “I work across six different institutions, four schools, a library, and the AUC Consortium,” she says, “I have direct lines to all the provosts, the executive director, and dotted lines to all four presidents. That creates an interesting dynamic. Normal people would probably have run for the hills.”

Add It Up
Growing up in Evansville, Indiana, Washington
never imagined going into mathematics or data science.

But math started to work its wonders on her, too.

She went to Spelman to study engineering, but upon
discovering it was a five-year program, decided to
major in math. She hadn’t planned on graduate study either, but her Spelman advisor, Jeffrey Ehme, urged her to continue her studies, and she came to UConn.

It was a tough time at first, she says. “Everyone asked me what country I was from, and I’d say, ‘I’m from Indiana.’” While the master’s and doctoral programs in mathematics had international students, she says, “I was the first U.S. Black American in the program.”

She found support from Willena Kimpson Price, director of the African American Cultural Center. “She was a Spelman alum and super outgoing, and it was so nice to be received by her and the cultural center.” She was encouraged, too, by professors McKenna and Yung-Sze Choi. When she became pregnant with her first child as she pursued her doctorate, she doubled up on teaching in the fall and “had my daughter on Christmas Eve.” She asked McKenna if she could take her nursing daughter to classes in the spring. He said yes, and her daughter quickly became a fixture at lectures and seminars. “The joke was that a talk was working out. “I’m a fitness fanatic,” she says.

Solving for x
Data science through a social lens
De-biasing predictive models
Adding a diversity of voices in STEM

Everyone asked me what country I was from, and I’d say, ‘I’m from Indiana.’”

“Indomitable is the word I’d use,” he said. “You could see the joy she had in doing what she did. And she was just not intimidated by anything.”

In making her a Fellow, AMS noted Washington’s “decades of work using mathematics and science to enable research, foster collaboration among diverse groups, inspire interdisciplinary exploration, and empower women.”

She says being the first person to be named a fellow in two esteemed mathematical societies was a huge honor.

But it’s clear what matters most to Washington is the platform it gives her to usher more young Black and Brown people into fields where their voices matter. “It has been an honor to create a space where we can support the development of scholarly work to address these key issues,” she says. “I’m very humbled by it.”
Play Ball!

From spitballs to spin rates, these two alums have stayed with every curve thrown at them in a combined four decades of umpiring Major League Baseball.

“The last three years our roles have changed,” says Jim Reynolds ’91 (CLAS). “The scrutiny with the pitch track system, the box, has added a lot of pressure. When Danny and I started, each umpire had their strike zone, and as long as they were consistent, everyone was happy.”

Reynolds has been umpiring in the major leagues for 22 years and Danny, aka Dan Iassogna ’91 (CLAS), for 21.

Each has two World Series to his credit. Lately the game’s different.

“I’ve got a guy out there throwing 97 miles an hour, trying to fool a batter. He fools the batter. I’ve got a catcher trying to catch it, trying to pull me to where it actually crosses the plate, while going through a box – and I’m the only guy that can’t see it,” says

By Jon Caroulis
They discovered they both had played baseball at various levels and Iassogna, the son of a high school football referee, said he thought it would be cool to be an umpire. Reynolds agreed.

Their initial gigs came at the hands of longtime UConn baseball coach Andy Baylock, who had them practice the mechanics of making safe and out calls and taught them how to position themselves to make the right call (be perpendicular to the play to get the best view for a call on the bases, after all). Eventually, they earned one classroom credit and graduated from umpiring JV to varsity games.

“Coach Baylock considered his umpires part of the baseball program, and we were treated that way. Although the players were not always happy with our performance, they never took it past the ball field,” recalls Reynolds. “In fact, the best player at UConn at the time was Pete Walker, now the pitching coach for the Toronto Blue Jays, and I can remember several times where if kids were getting out of hand with the student umpires, he would actually shut it down.”

Iassogna, now the manager of Professional Umpiring in Arizona, had the same good fortune. “I never had any negative interactions with any of the baseball players,” agrees Iassogna, adding, “I do remember officiating some intra-squad baseball games that got a little dicey!”

Baylock has their umpire jerseys framed on a wall in his house. “They were dependable as undergraduates, and they were still that way. They’re very good at what they do,” he says. “I’m very proud of what they’ve done.”

The Minors

After graduation, Reynolds and Iassogna were roommates at the Jim Baylock Baseball Academy of Professional Umpiring in Arizona. After a five-week, $2,000 course, they were each assigned to work in the minor league levels of the minor leagues. “We didn’t work together again until the big leagues — postsea- son during the championship series in 2015 (see the photo on page 37) and 2020,” says Iassogna.

Like players, umpires progress through the minors, with top pros- pects getting promoted. And it requires sacrifice. There are only 76 major league umpire jobs, and umpires tend to work for decades. The primary way for someone working in the minors to get to “the show” is to wait for a retirement or resignation.

“There were probably 100 nights while I was in the minor leagues that I questioned the path I chose after graduation,” says Reynolds. “There’s little pay, a lot of long nights driving, and not a lot of support. I was living in Minneapolis May 7, 2017.

Iassogna also started as a fill-in umpire at third base during a Red Sox game — against Texas on Aug. 20, 1999. “I just remember it feeling like the biggest stadium that I had ever worked,” he says. In 2004 he got the call for the majors full-time. “I was ready to pack it in at the time,” says Reynolds. “I was done, I had spent almost five seasons at the A-ball level. I was ready to pack it in at the end of the season because there weren’t supposed to be any more promotions. My wife Denise drove up from Atlanta to Maryland, and encouraged me to keep going.”

Both Iassogna and Reynolds have been named crew chiefs, giving them the final say in decisions such as stopping a game for bad weather or getting colleagues to debate a call or interpret a rule.

In 2012, Joe Torre, then head of field operations for MLB, told Iassogna he’d be umpiring in the World Series. “When you get hired by MLB it’s a feeling of utter relief,” says Iassogna.

Reynolds agrees. “Mistakes will affect me more than anyone else, I promise you.” After each game he watches the video to see why he made the wrong call so “I won’t make that mistake again,” he says. There’s a problem with the call. Umpires do get hurt. Reynolds, who now lives in Arizona with his wife in a roughly 800-square-foot apartment, said he thought it would be cool to be an umpire. “I was really excited,” he says. “Just the thought of being part of the baseball. Substance checks, spin tracking, instant replays are now status quo at the major- and minor-league levels.

Last season, the Oakland A's Sergio Romo dropped his pants when Iass- ogna headed to the mound to inspect the baseball. Substante checks, spin rates, electronic strike zones, and in- stall replays are now status quo at the major- and minor-league levels.

“When Jimmy and I came up,” says Iassogna, “if you had a play that you wanted to see after the game, you asked the club to get the VCR tape and hopefully they taped the game, and you’d put that tape in, and you’d rewind it and it’s standard quality. You wanted to see after the game, you wanted to see it past the ball field,” recalls Reynolds. “It feels overwhelming at times but “our guys are really, really good at what they do. The ability of the players were not always happy with our performance, they never took it past the ball field,” recalls Reynolds. “In fact, the best player at UConn at the time was Pete Walker, now the pitching coach for the Toronto Blue Jays, and I can remember several times where if kids were getting out of hand with the student umpires, he would actually shut it down.”

Iassogna worked 12 years before reaching the majors full-time. “I spent almost five seasons at the A-ball level. I was ready to pack it in at the end of the season because there weren’t supposed to be any more promotions. My wife Denise drove up from Atlanta to Maryland, and encouraged me to keep going.”

Both Iassogna and Reynolds have been named crew chiefs, giving them the final say in decisions such as stopping a game for bad weather or getting colleagues to debate a call or interpret a rule.

In 2012, Joe Torre, then head of field operations for MLB, told Iassogna he’d be umpiring in the World Series. “When you get hired by MLB it’s a feeling of utter relief,” says Iassogna.

Reynolds agrees. “Mistakes will affect me more than anyone else, I promise you.” After each game he watches the video to see why he made the wrong call so “I won’t make that mistake again,” he says. There’s a problem with the call. Umpires do get hurt. Reynolds, who now lives in Arizona with his wife in a roughly 800-square-foot apartment, said he thought it would be cool to be an umpire. “I was really excited,” he says. “Just the thought of being part of the baseball.
I’ll Take Mihir Nene for $27,000, Ken

“Mihir Nene from Rochester once lived across the hall from some of the greatest sports champions of all time,” said interim Men’s Rugby coach Bob Merola ’75 (BUS). “They were great neighbors. They worked so hard that you hardly saw them,” Nene admitted. “But those were some women I looked up to.”

“There we go . . .” Jennings said with a laugh. “You had that planned.”

Another plan of Nene’s: being on the show — ever since age 7. That year, he received a keychain listing notable people who shared his July 32 birthday, including former host Alex Trebek. Nene started watching the show then in his Fairfield, Connecticut, home, applying every year starting around age 10 for various iterations, including the now-defunct kids version and later the annual teen and college versions.

At UConn he claims, “I never missed a trivia event, whether in the Student Union or at Ted’s.”

After graduating with a major in mechanical engineering and a minor in computer science, he moved to upstate New York for a number of All-Americans, some of whom, including Tom Brewer ’86 (CLAS), went on to play for the U.S. National Team.

More than 200 UConn rugby alumni and current players representing six decades gathered at Manchester Community College. They say they look back fondly on their UConn experience and all their many friendships.

In oral and maxillofacial surgery at UConn Health and was named board chair of the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care.

Objects. Early figurative pieces evolve into later conceptualist constructivist shapes using intuitive imagery that seems to be part of the human genetic code without relying on duplicating nature. Several study drawings and two constructivist photographs from 1976 show the evolution of the work. For decades, he put his sculptural talent to use in the design and construction of Jackson, New Hampshire’s cross-country ski trail system. To Perkins, trails are just large earth sculptures. Now these recent pieces are a return to earlier concepts, which remained dormant in the intervening years. Perkins lives and works in Center Conway, New Hampshire. He enjoys summer on his sailboat on the coast of Maine and winter skiing in the mountains in New England. Congratulations to Gerry DeRoche ’72 (BUS), ’80 MBA, who was named chair of the board of trustees of Lasell University in Newton, Massachusetts. DeRoche, who has served as vice chair for five years, had a long and successful career in commercial and retail banking, holding several senior executive positions. He currently serves as CEO of NEADS, a nonprofit that provides service dogs to individuals with disabilities.

Susan Carroll ’73 (CLAS), ’75 MA, ’81 Ph.D., writes that she and her husband, David ’74 (CLAS), ’77 MSV, who hold an impressive five UConn degrees between them, have written a new book called “Statistics Made Simple for School Leaders.” Together, Susan, a former faculty member in UConn’s School of Allied Health, and David run Words & Numbers Research, a research and evaluation firm that provides strategic information to educational institutions. Talk about a prolific author: Jeff Davidson ’73 (BUS), ’75 MBA has just published his 68th book, “Simpler Living: 1,500

John Natale ’59 (CLAS) and Barbara Gustafson Natale ’59 (CLAS) wrote to say that they recently celebrated their 62nd wedding anniversary at home in East Orleans, Massachusetts. The English majors met at UConn Hartford, transferred to Storrs, and after graduating, were married at Saint Thomas Aquinas Church on campus. They now have three children, nine grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren. John worked for the City of Hartford after being employed by Combustion Engineering and retired as a senior project manager in the Hartford Redevelopment Authority. Barbara, who went on to earn a master’s in library science from Southern Connecticut State University, retired as library director at Manchester Community College. They say they look back fondly on their UConn experience and all their many friendships.

Bob Bowen ’70 MBA published his third novel about America’s favorite pastime. “Sting Ray Field” tells the story of two helicopter pilots who carve a baseball diamond in the Vietnam jungle and their difficult transition back to civilian life. Finally back home in Connecticut, warrant officer Billy O’Hara, playing for a shot back to the College World Series, experiences an epiphany when he comes to realize you can leave Vietnam, but the ‘Nam doesn’t necessarily leave you.” Edwin Slade ’70 CLAS in making moves. He has completed his residency in oral and maxillofacial surgery at UConn Health and was named board chair of the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care.
DeMaio, who performs as Mark Anthony, signed with Iron Gate Records in Nashville as one of their newest recording artists. His first single, “Running Away,” was released in more than 80 markets worldwide in October. Congratulations to dentist-turned-educator Maureen (McSparran) Ruby ’77 (CLAS), ’75 MS, ’82 DMD, ’07 Ph.D. She was just named the first endowed chair at Sacred Heart University, where she will help prepare educational leaders as the new Isabelle Farrington endowed chair of social, emotional, and academic leadership. This is just the latest highlight in Ruby’s exceptional career, which includes being named teacher of the year for North Branford Public Schools. Serving as program coordinator of the graduate reading program at Eastern Connecticut State University, and becoming assistant superintendent of the Brookfield Public Schools. After a long and exciting career in medicine — first in family practice, then in the ER — Rhema Sayers ’77 MD retired and became a writer. Now, 10 years later, she has just published her first novel, “Wind out of Time.” On Amazon. Congratulations to Vicki (Woll) Forsman ’77 (CLAS) who was overwhelmingly re-elected to her third term as First Selectman of Torrington, Connecticut. 

“Los Liró ’78 (CLAS) reports that he hasn’t worked after 41 years in the oil industry. After graduating from UConn, he went on to earn a master’s in geology from the University of Chicago, then spent his career working in research and on exploration and development projects. He taught several courses on petroleum exploration methods, published 20 peer-reviewed papers, and spent his final career years as a global earth science training manager for Chevron. He and his

Mihir Nene (cont)
call would be answered. “This might be,” Nene recalls thinking, “but you don’t want to get your hopes up too much. Maybe there was just an issue with my application or something.” Instead it was “the best present I could have hoped for.”

A few weeks later on Jan. 19, Nene taped his first episode on the Sony Pictures lot in Culver City, California, just outside L.A. “It was a little weird on set because there was no studio audience at that point due to Covid-19 precautions during the worst weeks of the Omicron variant.

“So there was a particularly great sense of camaraderie between all the contestants — even though you’re about to try and crush them.”

Wearing a navy blue jacket and light blue shirt with no tie, Nene successfully answered clues on topics ranging from African geography to Greek gods. Nene cites those specific clues as two of the more interesting ways he learned his answers:

He knew the geography answer from a map on the wall of his childhood bedroom, while the Greek god answer came from the Percy Jackson children’s book series.

Nonetheless, he stood third place heading into the final Jeopardy question with a still-impressive $12,500 versus Boston e-commerce professional Callin Gillioy’s $15,400 and New Jersey attorney and defending champion Mark Anthony’s $20,500. This Premier League system of sending the 1 bottom-finishers to 2nd-tier league is like a messen- ger and an intermediary between the gods and man, the Etruscan god, Turnus, was equivalent to this Greek god.

Clue: The website for this trail that can be found through the right on his winning questions Mihir got “Jeopardy” on Italy’s west coast.

Questions — 1. “G” as in Geographic, Clue: This country is surrounded by Senegal.
2. “G” as in Geography, Clue: 2, Senegal.
3. “G” as in Geographic, Clue: Most people should simply look at this article on Italy’s west coast.

What does he plan to do with his $26,999 two-episode total? “I don’t really know what I’ll do with most of it!” Nene admits. “I was hoping to travel more after graduation, backcupping in New Zealand, but then Covid hit. So I’ll take some of the money and do that.”

The Friday of his UConn Magazine interview, Nene was asked what he would be doing that night. Not missing a beat, he replied, “Watching the women’s Final Four game, of course.” Seemsappropriate given that the United States women’s basketball team was about to host a third-straight set of starters.

Alas, Nene lost to San Diego app developer Tim McQuag. The Final Four champion Margaret Chipowsky’s team came from the Percy Jackson children’s book series.


Still, Nene earned a score of $6,400 and second place, which means his actual consolation prize was $8,000. (On “Jeopardy!” only the winner of each episode receives the actual dollar amount they appear to earn, while second and third place receive $2,000 and $1,000, no matter how high their apparent dollar earnings — as opposed to “Wheel of Fortune,” where all three contestants receive their apparent dollar earnings.)

Nene admits it was hard to keep the results of his show secret for the two months between taping and airing. But that made it all the more exciting to see his friends’ reactions at his watch party, held at a popular Rochester bar where he often plays Tuesday night trivia.

Those darn Etruscans. Clue: A messenger and an intermediary between the gods and man, the Etruscan god, Turnus, was equivalent to this Greek god.


Category: Those darn Etruscans. Clue: An interme- diary between the gods and man, the Etruscan god, Turnus, was equivalent to this Greek god.

Category: National historic trails. Clue: The website for this trail that traces a 19th-century Cherokee route calls it “A journey of injustice.”

Category: Characters named Alice. Clue: On this sitcom Ariel Winter was Alice, the smartest member of the Dunphys.

Category: Silent letter sound. Clue: A modern type of “device” helps you remember something.
WHEN THE WHITE HOUSE CALLS

The Biden administration wasted no time tapping this alum

For Karen Dahl ’99 (CLAS), lead architect of the Biden administration’s ambitious Public Health AmeriCorps — training initiative, the path to a presidential appointment began with a chance encounter one spring day right after she graduated, “she says.

“Growing up in Danbury, I had always wanted to move to New York right after I graduated,” she says. After talking to the AmeriCorps reps, Dahl took home an application — “the internet was a baby thing, we still used paper” — checked off education as her area of interest and New York as her preferred destination, and dropped it in the mail. A round of interviews later, she was accepted into the program and assigned to Jumpstart, an Americorps partner providing educational support to young children in underserved communities. She did everything from training college students in early childhood reading to creating partnerships with businesses, Dahl says of her year of service.

Flash forward two decades to the fall of 2020. A call to Dahl came at the corporate training enterprise Guild Education with a master’s degree from Harvard and years of nonprofit leadership experience. Dahl takes a phone call. Is it the Biden transition team. Would she be interested in a position?

Make It Happen

The administration brought her in on day one as Senior Advisor for Covid-19 at AmeriCorps. On day two, President Biden signed an executive order to create a public health, job corps. Dahl’s task: Figure out how to make it all happen. Fast.

“We had the phone with a lot of different agencies to try to imagine what the program would look like,” she says. “What makes sense? How could this work?” Very quickly we landed with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and started building a partnership.

Public Health AmeriCorps, a collaboration that leverages the CDC’s expertise in public health and AmeriCorps’ track record of job training, launched last May. It aims to recruit, train, and deploy 30,000 volunteers from coast to coast to support the country’s chronically understaffed public health system. The program’s twofold goal would be to provide immediate short-term relief in neglected communities while simultaneously opening pathways to meaningful careers in public health to a generation of workers. These recruits would not be doctors and health policy professionals but street-level service providers: vaccine clinic staffers, community outreach specialists, communicable disease investigators, companions to isolated seniors, mental health advocates. For many trainees it would be a first professional experience.

The agency has recruited a first wave of nearly 3,000 members who soon will begin service with public health departments and private service agencies in vulnerable communities around the country. Their assignments will last about a year to a year and a half, during which time they will receive a living allowance while gaining marketable skills.

Home Base

A first step for a new kind of federal partnership. But for Dahl, the continuation of a journey that began years ago in Storrs. “There’s a joke that once you are part of AmeriCorps, you can never leave,” Dahl says. “But I never imagined when I stopped at that table it would lead to a presidential appointment.”—KEVIN MAILEY


Kudos to Susan Austin ’80 EdD, who was named superintendent of schools for Groton, Connecticut. No stranger to politics, Houston Putnam Lowry ’80 MBA was elected to the board of finance for the town of Avon, Connecticut in November. He previously served on the town’s board of education for 14 years, including as board chair. He is also an adjunct faculty member at UConn School of Law. Jane Dewey ’81 (SFA) received the 2021 Kentucky Governor’s Award in the Arts in the Education category. Gov. Andy Beshear announced the nine recipients of the commonwealth’s most prestigious arts award in recognition of their dedication to sharing Kentucky’s rich arts history with its citizens.

In January, A. Andrea Grava ’81 (CLAS) became president of the National Association of Insurance and Financial Advisers-Texas. Grava, an association member for more than 35 years, owns an insurance agency selling life and disability insurance in Allen, Texas. Lauren Baratz-Logsted ’83 (CLAS) is starting a new venture. She joined American International Group, Inc. (AIG) as reinsurance operations lead. Her career move comes after running her own business, D.F. Consulting Co., for more than two decades. Congrats to Joseph Briody ’86 (BUS), ‘95 MA, 96 Ph.D., who was appointed assistant vice president/executive director of UConn’s Division of Student Affairs.

Congratulations to Eddylin (Cline) Blosh ’92 (MA) who completed her Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner Program from the University of Tennessee and became board certified last July. Andrew W. Bray ’88 CLAS, ‘91 JD is stepping where he accepted a position in the R&D division of Colgate-Palmolive. After a 30-year career during which he generated 33 scientific publications and 41 patents of various consumer product formulations, he has retired. They live in Piscataway, where they have raised three children, Matt, Steve, and Shannon. Richard Goodwin Sr. ’83 MBA recently published “Baseball Life Matters,” which celebrates the game of baseball and the historic accomplishments of the 1967 New York State American Legion Baseball Championship team from Rochester, New York.

Donna Pearlman ’84 (CLAS) is moving up and out. She has been in her position in the R&D division of Colgate-Palmolive for the past 25 years.

Abbey Connors

That’s the spirit: Burt Oateswar ‘90 (ENG) shares the news that he started a new abinthe company. He says that “knowledge acquired in a very special and unique UConn class, ITAL273 Humanism and Mysticism, set me on a path of mysticism — spending years in India — and helped to inspire the label artwork for the product.

Benjamin Bielak ’92 (CLAS), from New York, who is on the executive team at Lifespace, where he serves as chief information officer.

Tom Carroll ’92 (CLAS), ‘00 JD is moving up — and helping out. He was recently promoted to principal counsel at BPNN and was a guest instructor discussing (continued on p. 44)
“We Don’t Get to Ring the Bell. My CML Story.” In it, she writes about her battle with chronic myeloid leukemia (CML), a rare and incurable cancer she was diagnosed with just four months after getting married in 2016. Lopez, who runs a writing business based in Chandler, Arizona, says she has reconnected with the University in recent years. She sat on an alumni panel about careers in writing in the fall and participated with economics professor Natalia Smimova ’04 Ph.D. to create video content for a writing course she is teaching. “I’ve loved getting back in touch with the University and helping students,” she says. Kudos to Nicholas Richard ’96 (BUS) on being promoted to director of advanced practic es at Mandarin. Kudos to Valerie Kiefer ’98 MS, ’19 DNP, a nurse practitioner at the UConn Student Health and Wellness, who was elected to the board of directors of the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care. William “Bill” Pizzuto ’99 Ph.D. is getting a well-deserved break. The former director of UConn Waterbury retired this past February after 16 years in the post. Previously, he was associate vice president for the UConn tri-campus program for Waterbury, Torrington, and West Hartford and was director of the Waterbury and Torrington campuses before the Torrington campus closed.

Sonja Vahidpour, M.D., who specializes in energy medicine and acupuncture, author of the bestseller “The Trail” by Ethan Gallogly ’87 (CLAS) recently received Amazon bestseller status. It explores the 211-mile John Muir Trail in the Sierra Nevada, along with its history and lore. In the novel, the UConn chemistry and biology major, now a professor of physical sciences at Santa Monica College, uses his 80-plus years as a hiker and backpacking leader to demonstrate how nature helps us reconnect with ourselves.


“Dad and Daughter Walk the GampeL Stage — TOGETHER”

“The Trail” by Ethan Gallogly ’87 (CLAS) recently received Amazon bestseller status. It explores the 211-mile John Muir Trail in the Sierra Nevada, along with its history and lore. In the novel, the UConn chemistry and biology major, now a professor of physical sciences at Santa Monica College, uses his 80-plus years as a hiker and backpacking leader to demonstrate how nature helps us reconnect with ourselves.

of Law, Andraya Pulaski Brunau ’13 JD, a litigation attorney who specializes in intellectual property and technology, and Justin M. Hannan ’11 (BUS), who specializes in tax law. Nick LeFort ’06, who switched to engineering during his senior year when he began working for Thule, switched again to writing a couple of outdoor gear blogs. He switched again during his senior year when he switched to studying a similar role at Seton Hall University. Matt Quaranta ’09 is senior director of communications for the Boston Celtics. He previously worked as public relations for the Boston Celtics. He has taken a job as a walk-on who ended up playing four seasons here and heading to Denmark after graduation for a couple of semi-professional seasons. Upon returning home, he tells us he made a career shift into acting, received an MFA from Harvard’s theater program, moved to New York City and worked in regional and off-Broadway productions of musicals. Midway through the pandemic he took a road trip to L.A., and decided to stay. He has starred in two independent feature films, one of which, “DASH,” he is producing. The film, he says, “is a feature-length drama/thriller shot entirely in one continuous take. No doctored shots, no hidden cuts, shot while driving the untamed streets of Hollywood at night. This film is a true one-take, something that has only been successfully completed a few times in the world.”

Carla Berube ’97 (CLAS) shares a life update. Though he started out as an English major at UConn, he switched to engineering during his senior year when he began working for Thule. When his first daughter was born in 2013, he returned to his true passion and began raising his two daughters in Haddam, Connecticut, and is raising his two daughters in a cottage in the woods where they’ve been planting lots of apple trees and blueberry bushes. Meanwhile, Brandon Guihard ’07 (BUS) is senior director of marketing for the New York-based menswear brand Todd Snyder. Also on the rise is Matt Guaranta ’09 (ENG), ’11 MS, who was promoted to vice president of the structural, mechanical, electrical, and plumbing and environmental engineering divisions of Loureiro Engineering Associates in Plainville, Connecticut.

Violet Lumani ’10 MBA published her first novel, “Firetold,” a supernatural tale of a high school girl who foresees the deaths of a neighbor and tries to stop it. Lumani, who earned a BA from Barnard College of Columbia University, lives in Connecticut with her husband, two children, and a pair of chihuahuas. Congrats to attorney Kelly F. O’Donnell ’11 (CLAS), who was promoted to partner at the Pullman & Comley law firm in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Way to go Melanie Thomas ’11 MA, ’12 MA, ’20 6th Year, a third-grade teacher at Truman School in New Haven, Connecticut, was selected New Haven’s 2021 Teacher of the Year. Welcome back to campus Will Alois ’12 (ED) has taken a job as assistant director of athletics for UConn Compliance. He previously had a similar role at Seton Hall University. Taylor Kieplinski-Rogers ’12 (ED) is moving from the gridiron to the parquet floor. She has taken a job as vice president for communications for the Boston Celtics. She previously worked as communications director for the National Football League.

Mac Cerullo ’12 (BUS) and Kristina (Simmons) Cerullo ’12 (CAHNR) welcomed a son, Anthony Michael Cerullo, in July and report that he is already a huge Husky fan. He arrived the same day that Mac was supposed to start his new job covering the Boston Red Sox for the Eagle-Tribune newspaper in North Andover, Massachusetts. Mac had covered UConn football and men’s basketball for The Daily Campus while at UConn and has spent the last decade so so in sports journalism. Kristina is now a marketing lead with SmartPak Equine. Justin Michaud

Former Husky Carla Berube ’97 (CLAS) led Princeton into the NCAA Tournament Round of 32, where her team lost a one-point game to a 3rd-ranked Indian that was then knocked out by UConn. Sociology major Berube played for UConn’s first national title team in 1995 and was an assistant coach at Providence College and head coach at Tufts University before heading to Princeton in 2019. Berube’s 11th-ranked Tigers knocked off 6th-ranked Kentucky in the Round of 64 and went 14-0 in the Ivy League this season.

Way to go Melanie Thomas ‘11 MA, ’12 MA, ’20 6th Year, a third-grade teacher at Truman School in New Haven, Connecticut, was selected New Haven’s 2021 Teacher of the Year. Welcome back to campus Will Alois ’12 (ED) has taken a job as assistant director of athletics for UConn Compliance. He previously had a similar role at Seton Hall University. Taylor Kieplinski-Rogers ’12 (ED) is moving from the gridiron to the parquet floor. She has taken a job as vice president for communications for the Boston Celtics. She previously worked as communications director for the National Football League.

Mac Cerullo ’12 (BUS) and Kristina (Simmons) Cerullo ’12 (CAHNR) welcomed a son, Anthony Michael Cerullo, in July and report that he is already a huge Husky fan. He arrived the same day that Mac was supposed to start his new job covering the Boston Red Sox for the Eagle-Tribune newspaper in North Andover, Massachusetts. Mac had covered UConn football and men’s basketball for The Daily Campus while at UConn and has spent the last decade so so in sports journalism. Kristina is now a marketing lead with SmartPak Equine. Justin Michaud
Bright Lights, Music City

“I’m with the band” doesn’t just work for groupies and roadies — it gets you past the bouncer if you’re the band’s lawyer, too. So knows Nashville entertainment lawyer Ricky Hernandez ’12 (BUS).

Back when Hernandez was a law clerk, he recalls, “our firm did some work for an amazing band called Loving Mary, made up of a diverse group of singer-songwriters. I had always wanted to see them play.” One of his partners found out that the band was playing downtown at the Wild Horse Saloon and they went. “Loving Mary had opened for Steven Tyler when he was on tour, and occasionally, he fronted the band. This was one of those nights! It was a great show — a mix of Aerosmith and Loving Mary originals that was otherworldly, and to top it off, we got to go backstage to say hi to the band and Steven. It was a surreal experience, but it’s emblematic of the types of nights that we get to experience all of the time outside of the office.”

Hernandez knew you won’t believe him, but he says he finds the in-office work equally entertaining. His latest job is vp of business and legal affairs at Concord, which represents artists from James Taylor to John Coltrane to Oscar Hammerstein.

“They’ve got a publishing branch, a recorded music branch, and a theatricals branch. They’ve done a lot through acquisitions in the past five years, and they are growing rapidly.” It’s crazy how every month, every week, in the short time that I’ve been here. I’ve been pivoting and trying to think of new ways to do things or creative ways to structure things. It’s fun. It keeps it fresh.” —PETER NELSON

What UConn band was Hernandez’s ticket to Nashville? Find that and more at s.uconn.edu/nashville.
Life got a lot easier for students here starting in the fall of 1994, thanks to the arrival of what?
A: Free bus service to Willimantic
B: Touch-tone telephone registration for classes
C: Dial-up internet service in the computer labs
D: Late-night food delivery to residence halls

The common hackberry tree on the northeast corner of Storrs Hall was planted in 1916 and dedicated four years later to the memory of BT Avery. Who was BT Avery?
A: An alum who died while serving in World War I
B: The founder of the History Department
C: The first graduate to later become a faculty member at UConn
D: A Hartford businessman who donated the bricks that built Storrs Hall

The 1963–64 edition of the “Coed Code,” an official handbook for women at UConn, prohibited women from wearing long pants in classrooms and other common areas, except under what circumstance?
A: The annual Sadie Hawkins dance
B: Final exams
C: Extremely cold weather
D: Utility outages

Which of these is not the name of a UConn-branded rhododendron developed by horticulture professor Mark Brand?
A: Buzzer Beater
B: March Madness
C: Slam Dunk
D: Double Dribble