

UCONN SCHOOL OF
BUSINESS



**BUILDING
WHAT'S NEXT**

New Leadership Team Brings
Talent, Expertise, and Bold Vision

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FROM *The* DEAN

Dear Alumni and Friends,

It's a privilege to write to you for the first time as Interim Dean of the UConn School of Business. Every day I'm reminded what makes this place so special: the drive of our students, the commitment of our faculty and staff, and the pride our alumni feel in seeing the School's impact grow across Connecticut and beyond.

This is a moment of transformation in business education—and it's a moment for UConn to lead. Artificial intelligence, global competition, and new expectations for the workplace are shifting what it means to prepare students for success. Our task isn't simply to keep up with change; it is to shape it.

That's why we're reimagining what a public business school can be. You'll see it in these pages: from the pioneering research of Professors Wei Chen and David Bergman on AI and analytics, to our Hillside Real Estate and Hillside Ventures students investing real capital and making important decisions, to alumni who are building Connecticut's future through innovation and entrepreneurship. The throughline is clear: Our students don't just learn about business; they build it. That builder mindset defines our future.

The pace of innovation inside our School matches the energy of the world outside it. In Hartford and



Stamford, our BittBridge Lab is pioneering work at the intersection of AI and decentralized networks. Across our campuses, faculty are advancing research that moves practice forward, from financial markets to supply chains to the social impact of business. These are not isolated projects; they're signs of a School coming into its own as a hub for creativity, data-driven insight, and entrepreneurial energy.

*"The path ahead
will require
boldness."*

As proud as I am of our progress, I'm even more inspired by what's ahead. One of my goals is simple and bold: *Every UConn School of Business graduate will leave having built something real: an investment thesis, a market solution, a data product, a company, or a social enterprise.* This is more than a slogan. It's an expectation that every student will graduate not just ready for a job but ready to build the future of business itself.

To the many alumni who mentor, hire, and champion our students: Thank you! You make our progress real. Your partnership powers everything we do.

That spirit of partnership is at the heart of our \$150 million fundraising campaign. This goal is about more than funding; it's about fueling momentum. Our campaign is a reflection of your belief in what UConn Business stands for: opportunity, innovation, and impact. Every contribution, every mentorship, every door opened for a student helps keep UConn Business among the nation's great public business schools.

There's no question the path ahead will require boldness. But if the last year has taught me anything, it's that this community has all the ingredients: talent, heart, grit, and an unwavering belief that public education can transform lives.

Thank you for all you do to sustain that belief and for being part of what comes next. Let's keep building.

Go Huskies!

Greg Reilly
Interim Dean

year in review

REACH



1,205



3,315



54,383

A vast and engaged network of professionals who have achieved significant success across various industries.



120

Dedicated educators, known for their research, innovative methods, and industry experience.

RESULTS



749



575

STARTUPS

1,232

Startups our Connecticut Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (CCEI) supported in the last 10 years.

\$702.6 million

The amount of follow-on funding raised by those startups.



TOTAL SCHOOL ENDOWMENT

\$61.68 million

The School of Business's endowment recently swelled to an impressive amount, thanks to many generous donations.

2024

2025



RANKINGS

#1

Online MBA Program in Connecticut
ONLINE MBA
Fortune (2024)

#1

Public Part-Time MBA in New England
FLEX MBA
U.S. News & World Report (2025)

#1

Public Master's of Finance in New England
MSA
TFE Times (2024)

#3

Top Public Business School in New England for Undergrads
UCONN
Poets & Quants (2025)

#6

Graduate Entrepreneurship in the Northeast
UCONN
Princeton Review (2026)

#4

Undergraduate Entrepreneurship in the Northeast
UCONN
Princeton Review (2026)

#12

Best Online Graduate Business Programs in the United States
HRM
U.S. News & World Report (2025)

#27

Career Outcomes for Online MBA in the Nation
ONLINE MBA
Poets & Quants (2025)

#33

Online MBA in the Nation
ONLINE MBA
Poets & Quants (2025)

Where the Class of 2025 is Working:

Avangrid

BNP Paribas

The Boston Celtics

Cigna

Citigroup

CVS Health

Deutsche Bank

EY

Gartner

Greysteel

The Hartford

Hearst Magazines

Henkel

Houlihan Lokey

IBM

KPMG

Lockheed Martin

London Stock Exchange Group

Moody's

Newmark

PwC

RTX

Spectrum

Synchrony Financial

Travelers

UBS

Universal Studios

ROLLING UP OUR SLEEVES TO BUILD THE FUTURE

After 18 years at UConn, Interim Dean **Greg Reilly** has seen firsthand what makes the School of Business distinctive. "Our people bring curiosity, generosity, and persistence to every challenge," he said. "Those traits are the reason we continue to grow stronger, and they're the same spirit our new leadership team is channeling as we roll up our sleeves and build the future of the UConn School of Business." That leadership team, composed of faculty leaders with both deep experience and fresh perspective, is redefining what business education can be: applied, adaptive, and aligned with the rapidly changing world of work. Together, they are shaping programs, research, and partnerships to ensure that every graduate leaves UConn ready not

only to succeed in business, but to build the future of it.

...to ensure that every graduate leaves UConn ready not only to succeed in business but to build the future of it.

HANDS-ON LEARNING THAT MEETS THE MARKET

At the heart of the School's strategy is a simple idea: the best learning occurs when we strive to produce something real.

Reilly and his leadership team are making experiential learning the signature of a UConn Business education. "Our students don't just learn business. They practice it," he said. "They invest real dollars, design strategies, and solve problems that matter."

Leading this transformation is Associate Dean for Graduate Programs **Vishal Narayan**, who is reimagining UConn's eight master's degree programs to align with the pace and practice of today's economy. His team is redesigning degree structures, shortening time to completion, and expanding partnerships with Connecticut's leading employers in finance, technology, and manufacturing.



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"Graduate students want outcomes they can see," Narayan explained. "That means applied projects with companies, curriculum that reflects emerging technologies, and programs that evolve as business evolves."

Across departments, faculty are turning that philosophy into action.



3

In Operations and Information Management (OPIM), Professor **Cuihong Li**, the Robert Cizik Chair in Manufacturing and Technology Management and the Department Head, is leading efforts to embed AI-driven analytics and industry practices into the new master's in Supply Chain Management and the new AI for Business concentration within the master's in Business Analytics and Project Management program.



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In Marketing, Professor and Department Head **Gerlinde Berger-Walliser** is aligning innovation with purpose through the new master's in Social Responsibility & Impact in Business, a program that teaches students to use ethics and sustainability as strategic assets.

In Management & Entrepreneurship, Professor and Interim Department Head **Travis Grosser** is scaling hands-on initiatives such as Hillside Ventures and Hillside Private Capital, where students collaborate directly with alumni and employers to find deals, analyze business models, and manage portfolios.

"Employers tell us they need graduates who can lead through constant change," Narayan said. "We're preparing them to thrive in it."



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RESEARCH WITH REACH AND RELEVANCE

If applied learning is the School's front porch, high-impact research is its foundation.

Associate Dean for Faculty and Research **David Bergman** is ensuring that UConn's world-class

scholarship continues to shape not only academia but also business practice and public policy.

"Our faculty publish in the top journals, but we also want their insights to influence how organizations make key decisions," he explained.

That connection between research and relevance is the hallmark of two top faculty leaders. Accounting Department Head **George Plesko** advises the Congressional Budget Office and the Internal Revenue Service on corporate taxation, bringing national policy debates into the classroom. Finance Department Head **Yiming Qian**, the Toscano Family Chair in Finance, links faculty research with industry through applied studies in corporate governance, mergers, and emerging-market investment.

Together, Bergman, Plesko, and Qian are positioning UConn's School of Business as a source of ideas that not only earn citations but change outcomes.

"Our goal is to be the business school whose research people depend on," Reilly said.



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UNDERGRADUATE GROWTH WITH PURPOSE

The same drive for relevance extends to the School's rapidly growing undergraduate programs.

Associate Dean **Nora Madjar** describes today's students as "practical, collaborative, and impact-minded." She and her team are expanding micro-internships, community consulting projects, and alumni mentorships so that every undergraduate can apply classroom



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learning in meaningful ways.

On the Hartford and Stamford campuses, faculty and staff are building vibrant partnerships with industries to create mutually beneficial new opportunities for education and research. As the interest in business education has grown, the School has created accelerated master's degree programs that offer ambitious undergraduates a jump start on earning advanced degrees. And a new Experience Catalyst Fund helps ensure that financial barriers don't prevent any student from participating in experiential programs.

"Access and excellence are not competing goals," Reilly said. "They are our mission as a public business school—and they define the kind of community we want to be."

A CULTURE OF BUILDERS

Across programs and disciplines, Reilly's leadership team shares one conviction: The future of business education will belong to those who build.

"We're redesigning systems, deepening relationships with employers and alumni, and taking smart risks," he said. "The next era of UConn Business won't be defined by how well we preserve tradition—it will be defined by how boldly we invent what comes next." ■

1. Interim Dean Greg Reilly; 2. Reilly and Associate Dean Vishal Narayan; 3. OPIM Department Head Cuihong Li; 4. Marketing Department Head Gerlinde Berger-Walliser; 5. Associate Dean David Bergman and Interim Management Department Head Travis Grosser; 6. Accounting Department Head George Plesko; 7. Associate Dean Nora Madjar and Finance Department Head Yiming Qian.

PROFESSOR WEI CHEN:

CHAMPION OF GENERATIVE AI

A group of prominent retired Connecticut executives approached the School of Business two years ago seeking advice. They kept hearing that artificial intelligence was going to revolutionize business, and they wondered how best to utilize it.

"We have to move fast and grasp the opportunity together."

Professor Wei Chen, an expert on digital platforms and fintech, was knowledgeable about the technology. But how Generative AI, then a new development, would improve business success was anyone's guess. He set out to find the answers.

Since then, Chen has visited more than three dozen top companies and professional organizations and listened to their leaders' ideas, needs, and concerns. He has become so versed in the subject that he and two other UConn colleagues were speakers at the **AI and the Future of Work** conference this summer at UPenn's Wharton School.

A RARE AND REMARKABLE TIME

Chen couldn't be more enthusiastic about AI's potential.

"I think of this as a parallel to the era just before the introduction of the internet. This is a very rare and remarkable time," he said. "Everyone wants to know how they can use GenAI for business. They're turning to business schools for guidance."

"Companies that don't embrace the technology will certainly be left behind," Chen said. "It is very possible for us, in Connecticut, to help

manufacturing, finance, health care, and other industries become even more competitive. We have to move fast and grasp the opportunity together."

"As the AI landscape continues to evolve, the focus is shifting from early experimentation to strategic adoption. While some companies are just beginning to explore GenAI and others are deeply invested, the key is to stay informed and choose tools that align with organizational needs," he said.



"Real impact comes not only from selecting the right technologies but also from making the necessary changes to organizational structures and processes to support their effective use. GenAI offers significant productivity gains by generating insights from unstructured data, drafting first-pass reports, and accelerating analytics, freeing employees to focus on higher-value creative and analytical work. Success will depend not just on using AI but on integrating it thoughtfully."

Regardless of industry, Chen said, businesses are grappling with three major concerns: safeguarding confidential data, tailoring technology to serve an organization's unique needs, and scaling both teams and infrastructure so that the effort can grow smoothly and reliably. As an educational institution, UConn can offer advice without a provider sales pitch.

"In the past, AI was very expensive, and it would take six months to implement anything," he said. "With GenAI, you can have one developer, get a prototype over the weekend, and present it to your clients the next week."

That doesn't mean that GenAI is flawless. The technology can sometimes produce convincing but incorrect answers (hallucinations), and — like any automation — raises concerns about job displacement.

Thoughtful human oversight and up-skilling can keep both risks in check, Chen said.

Michelle Cote, a faculty member and the organizer of the popular annual AI Day program for the Greater Hartford business community, said Chen has been a tremendous asset.

"Wei has been an energetic leader of conversations and programs that advance student, faculty, and community members' understanding of how generative AI works, and how it can be applied to serve individual goals," she said. "His sessions at AI Day in 2024 and 2025 have been standing-room only, and the experience for all has been tremendous. He is creative, smart, and an incredible champion for our school."

PROFESSOR SHARES KNOWLEDGE FOR ALL TO BENEFIT

Chen joined UConn's Operations and Information Management (OPIM) faculty in 2023 after teaching at the University of Arizona. He earned his Ph.D. in Innovation, Technology and Operations from the University of California San Diego. He has won two prestigious early-career awards, most recently receiving a national honor from the Information Systems Society in 2024.

At UConn, Chen has been instrumental in shaping the AI curriculum in business, said professor **Cuihong Li**, head of the OPIM department. He developed the School's first course on

Generative AI. That work has since evolved and expanded into a suite of new courses, forming the foundation of a new AI for Business concentration and certificate within the master's in Business Analytics and Project Management program. Chen is also the academic director of the **UConn Digital Frontiers Initiative**, which links academia and business.

Chen often adds brief segments from his graduate GenAI course on YouTube so anyone can learn from them for free.

"My main goal is to make GenAI accessible, especially for people who don't have the time and money to enroll in extensive courses," he said.

Chen noted that several students in his GenAI course last fall were so motivated that they chose to tackle the semester-long group project on their own. Once completed, one student landed a job based on her finished prototype.

"These skills are in real demand, and our students are getting jobs because of their class projects," he said. "That's very satisfying!" ■

Discover how a UConn Generative AI for Business workshop can benefit your company.



Please scan the QR code to learn more

SCHOOL FACULTY DESIGN GAMES AND AI-DRIVEN TOOLS TO BOOST ENGAGEMENT AND LEARNING

Who wouldn't want to prep for their first college accounting exam by playing a Candy Crush-style quiz game on their phone? And what better way to harness AI than to personalize learning experiences for each student?

These are just two of the thought-provoking questions driving exciting new innovations by UConn business faculty.

"We are all seeking innovative ways to connect with students and teach through a modern lens, using novel educational technology and artificial intelligence," said **David Bergman**, Associate Dean of Faculty and Research.

"Part of our role as faculty is to discover better ways to engage a new generation — teaching in ways that excite them and, just as importantly, showing that we, too, are creators," Bergman said. "We're building, testing, and iterating, just like students are, so that they can witness innovation in action."

CRUSH ACCOUNTING: MATCH-3 GAMEPLAY MEETS KEY ACCOUNTING CONCEPTS

Crush Accounting invites students to learn, practice, and demonstrate foundational accounting knowledge. Through match-3 gameplay, players test their familiarity with key accounting terms and concepts in an engaging way, all while preparing for class.

Those with a good accounting foundation can sail through



the 100-level puzzle-matching game. If their knowledge is shaky, Crush Accounting will help them get up to speed.

"I think innovations like Crush Accounting bring fun into learning, allowing students to engage with course material while enjoying themselves," said Bergman, one of the creators of the game alongside Professors **Todd Kravet** and **Leanne Adams**.

The current release — available on the Apple App Store and Google

Play Store — is an early pilot version and is being evaluated for engagement and learning before being implemented more broadly in the classroom. Bergman, Kravet, and Adams envision sharing their technology across universities and adapting it to new disciplines, beginning with business analytics and statistics.

THOUGHTAMP: PERSONALIZED LEARNING WITH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Another recent innovation is **ThoughtAmp**, an AI-powered learning tool that helps instructors personalize how students engage with course material without sacrificing academic rigor. Instructors can preset tailored prompts that "seed" individualized conversations between each student and the AI tool. When teaching about supply and demand, for example, a professor might ask students to apply the concept to a field they care about — for example, sports, retail, or technology. The result is a one-on-one guided dialogue that connects concepts to personal interest.

"It helps students link ideas to their own world," said Bergman, who created the platform.

Using an instructor dashboard fueled by another AI tool, an instructor can assess student conversations, identifying patterns



Professors **Leanne Adams** and **Todd Kravet** and Associate Dean **David Bergman** developed a Candy Crush-style game to help students brush up on their accounting skills. This is just one of the ways faculty are embracing artificial intelligence to supplement student learning.

in reasoning and pinpointing learning gaps. The technology also helps guide classroom conversations and allows instructors to show students where there are gaps in what AI produces.

ThoughtAmp is also in the early pilot stage and not yet deployed broadly; upcoming tests will focus on instructional value, privacy, and alignment with course goals.

"When students can learn through a game or explore a topic in a context they care about, engagement naturally follows," Bergman said. "Personalized AI-driven conversations in the classroom don't just boost participation — they help uncover how students think and process ideas." ■

Crush Accounting is designed, funded, and owned by **Leanne Adams**, **David Bergman**, and **Todd Kravet** through **Gamification State LLC**. **ThoughtAmp** is created by **David Bergman** through **Diversify Core LLC**. Both are concept/early-pilot initiatives not yet in regular classroom use.

New Program Allows Undergraduates to Invest in Promising Real Estate Developments

Temperatures were pushing the mid-80s under a brilliant sun on June 6, but there was so much excitement at 100 East, a luxury apartment complex under construction in Greenwich, Conn., that no one seemed to notice the heat.

Workers were busy paving the parking lot and installing landscaping, the developers were beaming with excitement, and four UConn real estate students were feeling very

confident in their decision to invest \$25,000 in the project.

"Watching 100 East take shape was a proud moment. It made all the analysis and hard work worthwhile," said **Davio Visocchi**, a rising senior, who had joined three classmates to tour the property. "It showcased how our investment work can have a real impact on communities, while also giving students invaluable hands-on learning experiences."

Recent alumni **Brendan Vodola** '25 and **Alexandra Richo** '25 joined students **Davio Visocchi** '26 and **Jason Carroll** '26 on a tour of 100 East, a luxury apartment complex in Greenwich, Conn., that students identified as a promising real estate investment.



All of the students are members of the **Hillside Real Estate Investment Fund**, a new experiential learning program that allows students to invest real money in commercial real estate projects. UConn real estate students had selected 100 East as one of the most promising new developments in the Northeast.

The complex, located at 100 East Putnam Ave., features 22 apartments, a large rooftop retreat, and retail space. Situated in a bustling section of Cos Cob, it is just a short walk to a Metro-North train station. Before the doors opened, the complex — a partnership between Wellbuilt Co. and St Katherine Group — had some 200 people apply to become residents.

HILLSIDE 'CATAPULTS' STUDENTS AHEAD

The School's **Center for Real Estate and Urban Economic Studies** has been ranked among the best in the nation for the last dozen years. But today, academic knowledge is only one part of a student's educational journey, said **David Wharmby**, director of the Center.

The Hillside Real Estate Investment Fund offers the hands-on learning opportunity that students crave, as well as connections to industry experts and a jump start on professional careers, he said.

The program was created in fall 2024, and some 45 students — including real estate majors and minors and finance, entrepreneurship, economics, and construction management students — have participated. They have reviewed and considered more than two dozen projects and invested in four, including multifamily housing, mixed-use developments, and an industrial complex, in Connecticut, New Hampshire, and New Jersey.

"What this program does for students is unbelievable," said alumnus **Jack Navarro** '78, a financial services entrepreneur and co-creator of Hillside Real Estate Investment Fund with Wharmby. "It allows students to take the risks they otherwise couldn't. They are so excited. They'll say, 'I found a property!' I talked to the developer!"

"We chose this investment." These are transformative experiences that give students a major advantage in the workplace and catapult them years ahead of where they would otherwise be."

'I WANTED TO USE COLLEGE IN THE RIGHT WAY'

Senior **Kiley Barbagallo** — president of the UConn Real Estate Society and chief of staff at Hillside Real Estate Investment Fund — said she was able to get hands-on experience examining real marketplace opportunities and meeting real estate experts.

"Even though we're only pledging \$25,000, we do an extensive financial analysis of every project," Barbagallo said. "When we identify promising opportunities, we present them to the class. Our alumni advisors and fellow students absolutely grill us! It is a great way to grow and build confidence before entering the real estate industry."

Alumnus **Trevor Mahabir** '25, who graduated in May, said participating in the Hillside Real Estate Investment Fund was one of his favorite college experiences.

"I wanted to learn things that would help me in a job. I wanted to use college in the right way, and this was the way to do it," he said. "When you have real money at play, it is a lot more serious. You're signing your name on it."

"Hillside made a world of difference. I didn't feel like a student any more," he said. "I could talk to professionals and hold up my end of the conversation. I've met some of the most successful people in the industry, and they've said to me, 'I never knew how to do this at your age!' I graduated feeling so prepared, so ready."

ENTHUSIASTIC ALUMNI RALLIED BEHIND THE FUND

In 2020, the School of Business launched a hands-on, real-world investing program called **Hillside Ventures**. Its remarkable success served as a model to expand into new experiential programs, such as the Hillside



Real Estate Investment Fund.

The program wouldn't have succeeded without the support of **TA Realty** in Boston, which sponsored the inaugural semester and helped raise funds, Wharmby said. The investment fund is closing in on its goal of \$1 million in commitments.

"When you have real money at play, it is a lot more serious."

— Trevor Mahabir '25

their search for interesting projects by making cold calls to developers. It is their responsibility to source, evaluate, and make recommendations about the real estate projects that they think hold the most promise. They present their proposals in class and then, if well received, to a group of alumni real estate experts.

"They don't let them off easy. Not at all!" Wharmby said. "Alumni are amazed at what our students are doing. They said they are as sophisticated as second-year analysts."

THE PROGRAM PREPARED HIM WELL FOR A CAREER

Visocchi ultimately hopes to return to his hometown of Boston to work as a commercial real estate developer.

"Hillside has offered opportunities far beyond what I imagined when I started at UConn," Visocchi said. "At first, making cold calls and sending cold emails was intimidating, but it quickly became one of the most rewarding parts of the experience. Our alumni are incredibly supportive. They're eager to connect, share insights, and even recommend deals. I've talked to friends at other schools who wish they had something like this!" ■



HALL OF FAME

FIVE PROMINENT ALUMNI INDUCTED INTO HALL OF FAME

The School of Business inducted five distinguished business leaders into its Alumni Hall of Fame on April 11 in front of a sold-out crowd of 400 at the Hartford Marriott Downtown.

Pictured above, the new inductees included (seated, l to r): **Laurie A. Havanec** '82, '94 JD, retired Executive Vice President and Chief People Officer at CVS Health; **Trisha M. Bailey**, Ph.D. '99, '23 H, serial entrepreneur and Owner/CEO of Bailey's Pharmacy and Bailey's Medical Equipment and Supplies; (standing from left): Interim Dean **Greg Reilly**; **Gregory P. Lewis** '91, retired Senior Vice President and CFO at Honeywell International; **Robert J. Skinner** '93, Founding Partner & Co-CEO of IEQ Capital; and **John Hodson** '85, President of True Benefit.

Another highlight of the night included the announcement of a scholarship created in honor of former Dean **John A. Elliott** (pictured top right with his wife, Laura Philips). During the reception, **Barbara Lewis** '89, former UConn Men's Head Basketball Coach **Jim Calhoun**, and inductee **Greg Lewis** '91 (center photo) had a chance to catch up. In addition, Associate Deans **Nora Madjar** and **Jose Cruz** presented an award to Student Fellow **Kangkang Zhang** '25 Ph.D., now an assistant professor at the University of Illinois (bottom photo).

The next Hall of Fame is planned for **April 24, 2026**.



COMMENCEMENT

CLASS OF 2025 BUSINESS GRADUATES SEIZE THE DAY

An energetic and enthusiastic Class of 2025 arrived at Gampel Pavilion on May 10 as undergraduate students and left as business alumni. Before they embarked on their journeys around the world, Commencement speaker **Rich Eldh** '81 had one final lesson to impart: Become a servant leader who prioritizes the growth and well-being of your team members. Eldh, a finance major at UConn, became the co-founder and managing director of SiriusDecisions Inc., a \$300 million global research and advisory firm.

Commencement photos (clockwise): Speaker Rich Eldh; Danya Chopra, finance major; Jonathan XIV joined the festivities; Melita Collins, accounting major; student speaker Harish Prasad spoke about Husky resilience.



Faculty RAISING THE BAR

Professor Bird Awarded Fulbright Scholarship



Business law professor **Robert Bird** spent the fall semester as a U.S. Fulbright Scholar in Vaasa, Finland, where he studied human-centered legal strategy and design.

"I believe this research will add value to

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MBA Program's Michael Bozzi Named Air National Guard Honorary Commander



Michael Bozzi, an adjunct faculty member in the MBA program and the Director of the MBA Office of Student Services, has been selected as the Honorary Commander for the Connecticut Air National Guard's 103rd Maintenance Group.

organizations, make complex contracts easier to understand, and benefit my students as well," he said.

The Fulbright is a prestigious award granted to faculty based on their leadership and contributions. The University of Vaasa, where he was based, is the top college in Finland for business administration. During the fall 2026 semester, Bird will host a Legal Strategy Summit at UConn, which will include a discussion about his Fulbright experience. ■

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OPIM Professor, a 'Forward Thinking' Scholar, Wins Early Career Award



recognizes exceptional research contributions by newer scholars.

According to Professor **Cuihong Li**, head of the OPIM department, since joining UConn two years ago, Xu has made outstanding contributions to research and teaching, including supply chain finance and emerging technologies, and created a new MBA course.

"He exemplifies the qualities of a forward-thinking scholar, consistently exploring the evolving landscape of business and technology and bringing the latest insights into the classroom," she said. ■

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Management Professor Wins Award for Examining Impact of NFL Workplace Protests



Assistant Professor of

Management **Alexandra Rheinhardt Beer** received this year's School of Business Best Paper Award for her research on how employees navigate social movements at work and the career outcomes that may result. Her study focused on the NFL's "Take a Knee" movement, when players protested racial injustice by kneeling during the national anthem. "Our research found that athletes who protested were more likely to leave their teams afterward," she said. "But this effect was weaker for players in organizational environments more sensitive to the social issues underlying the protest movement. We also found that protesting players were more likely to move to teams with those kinds of environments." ■



Words Worth Repeating

"For many young professionals, meaningful work goes beyond just perks — it's about feeling like their efforts contribute to a larger goal and make a positive impact on society."

— Kelly Kennedy, director of transformative learning at the School of Business, in an article for *The Conversation*

"This team has changed so much...We had a preseason scrimmage, and we lost the scrimmage! I thought we wouldn't make the NCAA Tournament."

— Geno Auriemma, UConn women's basketball head coach, speaking about the importance of perseverance, right after the team won the NCAA national championship

"I was a bit hesitant at the start of the class. I'm a finance major; what do I know about the science behind beer? But it turned out to be one of the most transformative experiences I've had at UConn."

— Senior Aditya Shah '25 on taking a course called Brew Crew to learn the art and science of brewing beer

"What I look for in a new idea or product is its ability to replace harmful substances currently threatening human and environmental health."

— Chemistry professor **Greg Sotzing**, whose company, 404 Inc., is exploring the use of innovative organic materials for medical contrast scans and other purposes. The startup, co-founded with doctoral candidate Pragati Rout, took second place in both the 2025 Innovation Quest and Wolff New Venture competitions.

"Pick the company that's nice to pets!"

— The advice of attorney **Adam Silverman**'s 9-year-old daughter upon learning that Silverman, a partner in the law firm Wiggins and Dana, would be awarding pro bono legal services to a promising startup at the CCEI Wolff New Venture Competition

"With the way the world is now...company decision-makers need to be much more careful about what they're doing. They can be crucified by social media."

— Eric Yordy, a business law professor at Northern Arizona University and a guest presenter at the School of Business' Equity Now Speaker Series, discussing the evolving role of religion, ethics and the workplace

"I'm going to give it my heart and soul."

— FinTech graduate student **Nick Savignano** '25 on being selected for the prestigious DHL GoTrade GBSN Fellowship Program. He will assist with growth strategy for a wedding dress company that employs 1,000 in Ukraine.

"Giving people autonomy is a high-impact, low-cost way to improve how they feel about work. As much as you can, let people work from home if they want to. Give them control over when they start their day, and trust them to manage their schedules."

— Professor **Travis Grosser**, interim department head of the Boucher Management & Entrepreneurship Department, in a *Harvard Business Review* article on reversing employee discontent

"Windy days, basketball, and good ice cream."

— Finance major and new alumna **Julianne Kushner** '25 on three things that will always remind her of UConn

NEW GRADUATE DEGREE CAPITALIZES ON NEW ENGLAND AS A 'HOT SPOT' FOR SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT

The School of Business launched a master's degree in Supply Chain Management this fall, recognizing the tremendous growth in career opportunities and the identification of New England as a "hot spot" for leadership in the industry.

"The potential of this program is tremendous and will not only serve our students well but create a new cohort of talent to address the ever-more complex needs of supply-chain dependent businesses," said professor



Tao Lu, the program's academic director.

According to Lu, a strong supply chain is vital for businesses because it ensures timely product delivery, reduces costs, enhances customer satisfaction, and builds business resilience.

"This is especially true for Connecticut, as it is one of the nation's strongest manufacturing states," he said. "Businesses rely on a robust supply chain to synchronize thousands of specialized suppliers, keep high-value production lines synchronized, and safeguard the billions in annual output that anchor Connecticut's manufacturing strength."

The 30-credit STEM-designated program is offered online with in-person options for some courses. It can be completed in as little as nine months or on a more flexible pace, offering work-life-education balance. There is also an accelerated option for current UConn undergrads.

The program covers various aspects of supply chain management, including procurement, operations and distribution, analytics, risk, and sustainability. With a wide range of electives, including negotiation strategies, financial management, and artificial intelligence, students can tailor their studies to their

DEMAND FOR EXPERTS EXPECTED TO GROW SUBSTANTIALLY

The average salary of a supply chain manager in Connecticut exceeds \$120,000 per year. Companies like Walmart, Apple, Nike, H&M, CVS Health, Raytheon, Sikorsky, and Amazon are deeply invested in supply chain management. New England states, particularly Connecticut and Massachusetts, have higher supply chain employment than the national average and are considered a hot spot for the industry.

The School of Business has increased supply chain course offerings in recent years, including a minor for undergraduates, a concentration in the MBA and

graduate Business Analytics and Project Management programs, and a graduate certificate. Developing a master's degree program was a logical next step, said professor Cuihong Li, head of the Department of Operations and Information Management.

"We have strong faculty expertise in both supply chain management and related areas, including analytics and information systems," she said. "Our curriculum is designed to provide a solid core of end-to-end supply chain knowledge, complemented with strong technical skills, managerial capabilities, and business acumen."

PANDEMIC ILLUSTRATED THE NEED FOR RESILIENT SUPPLY CHAINS

Although always important, the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the vital link between business and consumer.

"The pandemic has shown how delicate supply chains can be. Even a small glitch in the chain may cause major disruption. Companies have become increasingly aware of the importance of supply chain resilience and the need to proactively plan for unforeseeable disruptions," Lu said. Today that also includes geopolitical disruption.

The rapid development of artificial intelligence is also creating new opportunities with supply chain management, from forecasting to optimization to supplier relations. The program offers courses to enhance understanding of AI and automation.

Lu said the program welcomes candidates from diverse backgrounds who demonstrate academic rigor.

"Just like managing a supply chain in the real world, we need talents specialized in quantitative skills, people with a creative mind who think out of the box for solutions, and co-workers with good communication skills, who can coordinate within or across organizations," he said. "I believe we will develop some exceptional supply-chain talent through this program." ■

A photograph of three female students standing in front of a Macy's store entrance. The store is decorated with large, colorful paper flowers (red, yellow, and orange) hanging from the eaves. The Macy's logo is visible on the building. The students are dressed in professional attire: one in a red blazer, one in a black and white polka-dot blazer, and one in a purple blazer. A red banner at the bottom of the image reads: "MACY'S WELCOMES GRAD STUDENTS TO EXPLORE SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES". Text on the right side of the image states: "Macy's recently asked four UConn business graduate students to serve as consultants on a sustainability project. Pictured at the Macy's flagship store are, from left, Arianna Landesbaum, Caroline Keary, Elizabeth Sullivan, and Taylor Moran (contributed photo)."

Macy's Inc., the iconic retail giant, recently invited four UConn business graduate students to serve as consultants in a months-long project reviewing and analyzing the company's sustainable business practices related to non-retail procurement.

"It was very daunting at first because we realized we were covering such a large area of the business, things consumers rarely think about, like, 'Where did they get their hangers?' and 'Who created their signs?' or 'Who is cleaning the building?'" said Caroline Keary '25, '26 MS.

Keary and classmates Elizabeth Sullivan '25, Arianna Landesbaum

'24, '25 MS, and Taylor Moran '25 worked with Macy's from February to May. Keary and Sullivan then stayed on as summer interns to begin implementing some of the recommendations from the team.

All four were enrolled in the Social Responsibility and Accountability in Business graduate course taught by business law professor Rachel Chambers. The course is part of a newer graduate program offering a master's degree in **Social Responsibility & Impact in Business**.

"Having direct experience with an iconic brand like Macy's will be a game changer for our students," Chambers said. "This is one of the experiences that makes the UConn

program distinctive."

During the four-month extracurricular project, the students partnered with members of two retail leadership teams at Macy's.

Laurie Rando, Senior Director of Sustainability at Macy's, said Macy's strives to empower the next generation of leaders through its Mission Every One social commitment.

"We enjoyed working with this group of high-caliber students," she said. "The work they did is incredibly insightful and will help us as we continue enhancements in human rights due diligence work." ■

Short Big TAKES NEWS



Basketball's Azzi Fudd Takes Care of Business

Ever wonder how UConn women's basketball player and national champion **Azzi Fudd** balances her athletic and educational commitments? Fudd, who is pursuing an MBA at UConn and a marketing internship with hair-product company Madison Reed, told ABC News that right after winning the NCAA Championship in April, she hunkered down to study for finals.

"Life is busy, but that's life. I'm going to be in the car watching lectures, doing discussion posts," she said, adding that she was looking forward to an upcoming cruise with her family. Fudd, voted the Most Outstanding Player in the Final Four, is back for her final basketball season at UConn. We wish her all the best!

Photo credits: 1. Fudd: Courtesy of UConn Athletics; 2 Boucher: Courtesy of Toni Boucher; 3. CT Wealth Management: Nathan Oldham, UConn; 4. Stowe: Oldham, UConn; 5. Ward: Courtesy of University of Hartford; 6. Plesko: Contributed; 7. InsurTech: Contributed; 8. Ireland: Contributed; 9. Segar: Courtesy of Shark Tank; 10. Decentralized AI: Courtesy of Yuma.



'The Husky Effect' Guides Entrepreneurs

Alumna **Toni Boucher** '02 MBA has had a front-row seat to the promise and peril of entrepreneurship, as her late husband, Bud, was a serial entrepreneur. She writes about his experiences and how UConn is preparing innovators to navigate business and avoid some of the pitfalls in her book, *The Husky Effect: How UConn Is Creating the Entrepreneurs of the Future*.

"It's really hard to succeed as an entrepreneur. If you believe in what you're doing, have persistence and determination to stick with it, and believe in yourself, it can be done," said Boucher. The Boucher Management & Entrepreneurship Department at the School of Business is named in the couple's honor due to their generosity.



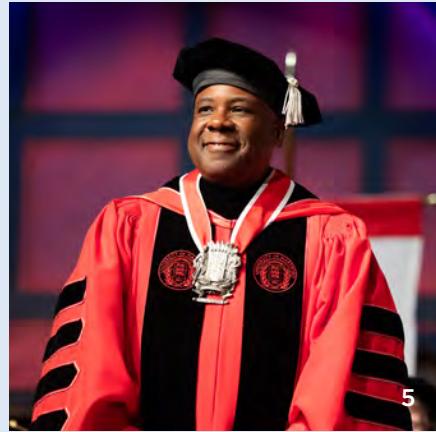
Helping a Hartford Landmark Thrive

The Stowe Center for Literary Activism is one of the historical gems of Hartford and the final home of Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Like many nonprofits, the Center had reams of data about its visitors, but no easy way to analyze it until five business undergrads took on the task as part of a capstone project. They helped the Center while gaining valuable experience with dashboards, predictive models, and project management. "Their work helped the Stowe Center better understand trends and connect with visitors in smarter, more impactful ways," said OPIM professor **Jon Moore**, who helped coordinate the project.



UConn, Connecticut Wealth Management Launch Program for Future Financial Advisers

Connecticut Wealth Management, a prominent investment adviser based in Farmington, has partnered with the School to launch UConn's first-ever student wealth management cohort. More than 100 students have expressed interest in careers as financial advisers, a field that is expected to bring double-digit job growth over the next decade.



Alumnus Leads University of Hartford

Alumnus **Lawrence "Larry" Ward** '92 became President of the University of Hartford in the summer of 2024. One of his goals is to look at the way a college education is delivered, said Ward, who majored in business administration and received a full scholarship to UConn. "I see a future that is increasingly more learner-centric, perhaps courses and degrees of shorter duration, and more just-in-time learning," he said.



Business: The Irish Way

Management professor and interim department head **Travis Grosser** led a study abroad course with 14 graduate students in Dublin, Ireland, over spring break. The mission was to develop an understanding of the Irish business climate and explore its human resources practices. They met with executives in financial services, pharmaceuticals, tourism, and more. Highlights included learning about how Novartis Ireland is using AI to enhance employee development, discovering HR practices at the Guinness Enterprise Centre, and speaking about organizational culture at investment firm Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co. Students also visited Dublin's Ha'penny Bridge (above).



Provost Honors Plesko for Distinguished Achievement

Professor **George Plesko**, head of the Accounting Department, has received the 2025 University Distinguished Faculty Research Award for Excellence in Community-Engaged Scholarship. The award recognizes the contributions of his research and his collaboration with various policy groups both in and outside of government, including ongoing work with the Congressional Budget Office and under the Internal Revenue Service's highly selective Joint Statistical Research Program. His extensive service includes leadership roles in major academic and policy organizations.



Swimming with the Sharks

Alumna **Hayley Segar** '17 (CLAS) made quite a splash on ABC's "Shark Tank," in January, when two entrepreneurship experts (Barbara Corcoran and Jamie Kern Lima) offered her \$200,000 and a wealth of business advice in exchange for a 20 percent stake in her swimsuit company, called 'onewith.' Of course she accepted! Her company grew with the help of some great advice from UConn, particularly the Connecticut Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (CCEI). "Hayley is the type of founder that we dream of working with," said CCEI's **Michelle Cote**. "She thrives on being challenged."



Team Wins InsurTech Championship

Two MS in Business Analytics and Project Management (MSBAPM) students took first place in the inaugural InsurTech NY Student Case Competition in New York City in April. **Elia Cocoli** '24, '25 MS and **Rehaan Ahamed** '25 presented ideas to address insurance fraud, including an AI-aided database that would identify and flag serial fraudsters. Both felt their high-energy presentation was pivotal. "We practiced a lot and that was a game changer," Cocoli said.



Immersed in Real World of Decentralized AI

"When I heard about it, I said, 'I definitely want to do this!'" said MSBAPM student **Dimitrii Tuzov** '26, one of five graduate students to participate in an experiential learning program focused on decentralized artificial intelligence. The UConn students, led by professor **Dave Wanik**, work with experts from Yuma to enhance their skills and develop and operate the project. UConn is one of the first academic institutions to build on the Bittensor subnet. "In a rapidly evolving technological field, the best way to prepare our students is to immerse them in real-world innovation," said Interim Dean and professor **Greg Reilly**.

PROFESSOR EMERITUS SURESH NAIR CREATES SCHOLARSHIP TO HONOR COLLEAGUE RAJU THAKUR

A handful of times in any successful career, a mentor makes such a profound impact that he or she changes their protégé's professional trajectory and earns their lifelong admiration.

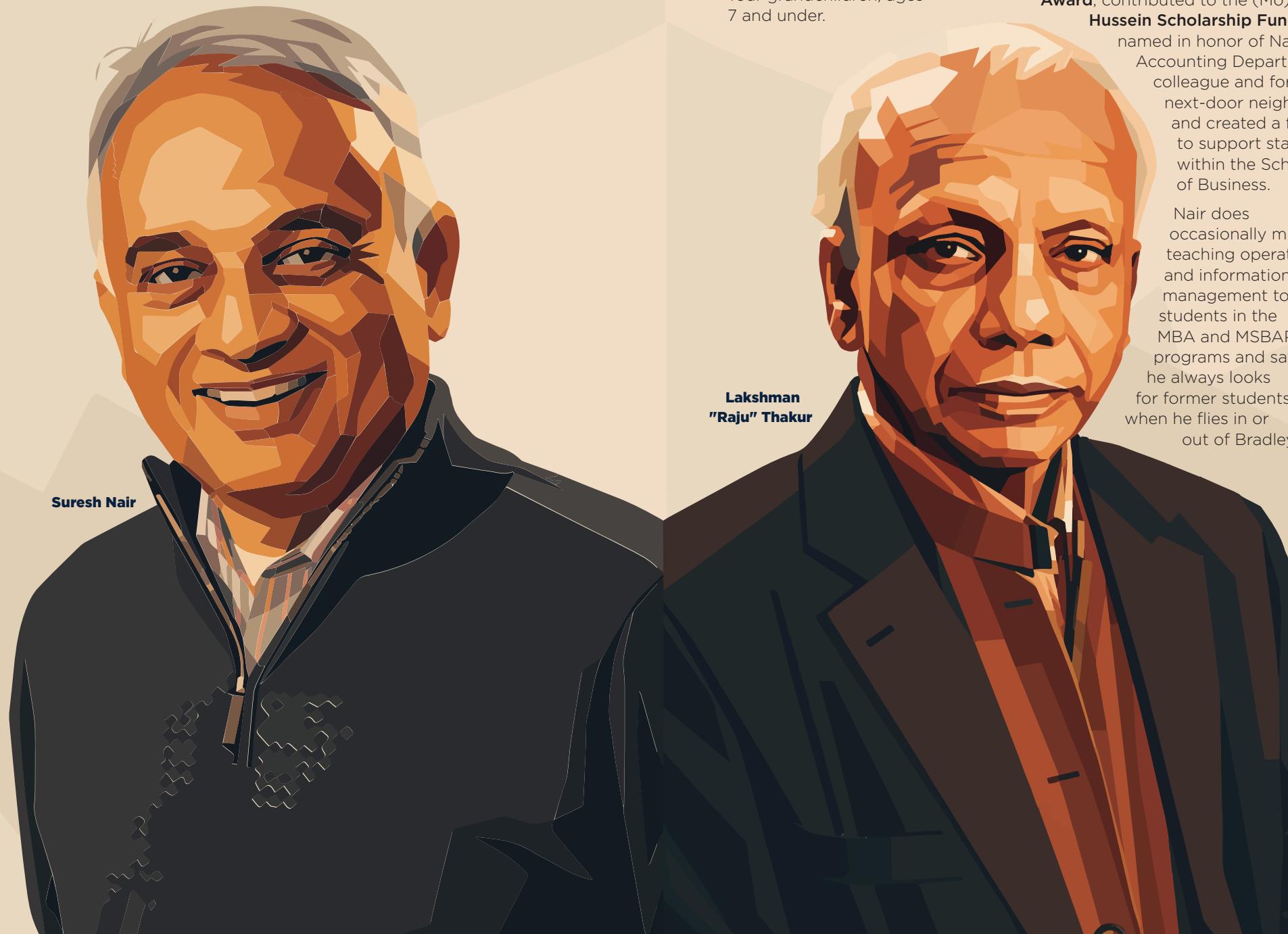
Professor emeritus **Suresh Nair** has had the good fortune to have several such influencers, including the late professor **Lakshman "Raju" Thakur**.

Thakur, the former co-director of the Management & Engineering for Manufacturing (MEM) program from 2001 to 2013, passed away unexpectedly in January 2024 while still an active faculty member.

Nair created a scholarship in his mentor's memory. **The Sarala and Raju Thakur MEM Scholarship** supports students in the dual-degree program, who are simultaneously earning bachelor's degrees in business and engineering. He created the scholarship in gratitude for his friend and so that his legacy would live on.

"Raju was brilliant. I learned so much from him," Nair said. A more senior academic, Thakur became a mentor and collaborator. "He was tremendously versed in large-scale mathematical programming, and we conducted research together. He was very thorough, a great writer, and very committed to the MEM program and its success."

In part because of their research achievements, Nair later became an Associate Dean of the School of Business and an Associate Vice Provost of Institutional Effectiveness



at UConn during his 32-year career here. But Thakur was much more than a research partner.

"He was a very spiritual guy, very knowledgeable, very deep, a wise man about any topic. He would always say something profound," Nair said. "He was very upbeat and always cheerful."

UCONN WILL EMERGE FROM DIFFICULT TIMES STRONGER THAN EVER

Since Nair retired in 2020, he has created a boutique hedge fund in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., and enjoys time with his four grandchildren, ages 7 and under.

He is serving a rare appointment as a non-alumnus on the UConn Foundation Board of Directors, the university's fundraising arm. He was recently inducted into the Foundation's Charter Oak Circle, recognizing his extensive contributions to the university.

In addition to the Thakur scholarship, Nair and his wife created the **Vidya and Suresh Nair OPIM Undergraduate Scholarship Award**; contributed to the (Mo)

Hussein Scholarship Fund

named in honor of Nair's Accounting Department colleague and former next-door neighbor; and created a fund to support staff within the School of Business.

Nair does occasionally miss teaching operations and information management to students in the MBA and MSBAMP programs and says he always looks for former students when he flies in or out of Bradley

International Airport. One of the highlights of his career in teaching data analytics was when a student used his course knowledge to apply the options model learned in Nair's class to invest real money and pay off his tuition bill. "We still keep in touch," he said.

Nair's experiences at UConn, from watching students prepare for their own careers to growing in his own pursuits, convinced him that there was no better organization to support.

"These are challenging times for higher education. In the last few years, colleges and universities have had to learn new modes of teaching, dealt with budget issues, and experienced visa challenges around international student admissions," Nair said. "UConn is a great University. It's going to do well. We'll come out stronger than ever."

"To me, it's a no-brainer to give to UConn. The money is well spent and a lot of students are benefiting from financial help in their academic journey," he said. "If someone has the funds and is thinking about giving to a charitable organization, UConn should be on the top of the list — whether you're an alum, a faculty or staff member, or a parent. It is a great place to invest your money." ■

"To me, it's a no-brainer to give to UConn."

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