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New campus learning communities added

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Health/Public Service and Eurotech will be offered to UConn students as the newest campus learning communities.

UConn has been offering different learning communities based on a shared major or interest for years, the goal being to give students a new way to connect to their university as well as with people they share a common interest or goal with.

"It's about providing an integrated experience for students beyond the classroom," said Melissa Foreman, program coordinator for First Year Programs.

One of the new communities, EcoHouse, has been a project in the making for about a year, mostly thanks to Jennifer Sayers, the sustainability coordinator for the Office of Environmental Policy. Sayers, who graduated from UConn in May 2008 with a degree in environmental studies, has been working to implement the program since her undergraduate days with EcoHusky. One of the most important points Sayers stressed about all learning communities is their ability to bring together different types of people who share a common thread and allow students to see things from different angles.

Though all learning communities share a common goal - to connect students and provide them with new opportunities - ResLife director Steven Kremer explained that there isn't "any one template."

For instance, students who join EcoHouse avidly care about preserving the world we're all a part of and gain the ability to educate each other as well as their community. As well as getting involved in different programs and classes on campus, EcoHouse students work on projects to promote change. One interesting aspect of EcoHouse are the meters that will measure the building's water and energy usage, allowing EcoHouse to compare their community with the campus as a whole.

The new Public Health/Public Service learning community promotes community service in the area. Student members of this community will gain experience and knowledge relating to public health while educating others in the broader UConn community. Both Public Health/ Public Service and EcoHouse are open to all majors, allowing students to connect on a social level in addition to an academic one.

Eurotech is a new learning community that brings together those working toward a dual degree in engineering and German. A unique learning community, Eurotech promises to be the start of other language-linked communities at UConn.

In Eurotech, "freshmen learn from the juniors and seniors," said David Ouimette, Executive Program Director of First Year Programs. "They're able to help each other with language."

The location of these new learning communities will also play into their effectiveness. Eurotech will be located in McMahon, along with Global House, while Public Health/Public Service will be in Alumni and EcoHouse will be in Hollister (West). The close proximity of these different communities creates a "neighborhood of learning communities," according to Kremer.

All three new communities are open to all grades, providing a particularly unique first experience for freshman. With so many general education classes the first couple of years, it's often hard for freshmen to

get a feel for the major they have in mind. When a student joins a learning community, they're able to experience more than their required classes. They get an idea about their major and interests they have in a "nontraditional way," according to Kremer.

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