

UConn | WATERBURY

A REPORT TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY



University of Connecticut

Report in Response to Special Act No. 25-8

Strategies to Support and Encourage Student Enrollment at the UConn Waterbury Campus
Submitted to: CT General Assembly Committee on Higher Education & Employment Advancement
February 5, 2026

I. Legislative Charge and Purpose of the Study

Pursuant to Special Act No. 25-8 and in line with standard university planning and assessment practices, the University of Connecticut conducted a comprehensive study of strategies to support and encourage student enrollment at the University of Connecticut Waterbury Campus. The Act directs the University to examine dual enrollment programs, online course offerings, and workforce development initiatives and to report its findings and recommendations to the General Assembly.

This report reflects an institution-wide assessment grounded in enrollment data, student outcomes, demographic trends, fiscal conditions, and the strategic role of UConn's regional campuses. The analysis draws on recent planning documents, campus-level assessments, and system-wide financial and enrollment projections to present a realistic and responsible path forward for UConn Waterbury.

It is informed by the University's recently completed Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Plan, designed to fulfill the vision articulated in *Envisioning 2034*, the University's 10-year strategic plan. The SEM Plan establishes six goals, each with their own strategies and tactics which are being formulated now. Goals one and two prescribe improvement to student success, as measured by Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of retention and graduation rates. Goal three then articulates the interest in enrollment growth, based primarily upon the improvements accomplished in Goals one and two. And Goals four through six are centered on Graduate student enrollment and addressing career and workforce outcomes. In addition to maintaining KPIs, each goal has strategies and tactics that are being refined now into an action plan. The plan is a living document that will be adjusted as progress is made, the environment changes, and all aspects are data informed, and based on best practices.

II. Campus Profile and Mission Context

UConn Waterbury is a commuter-oriented regional campus serving a highly diverse student population in central and western Connecticut. The majority of students are first-generation college students, students of color, and Pell-eligible. Nearly all students commute, and many balance academics with employment and family responsibilities.

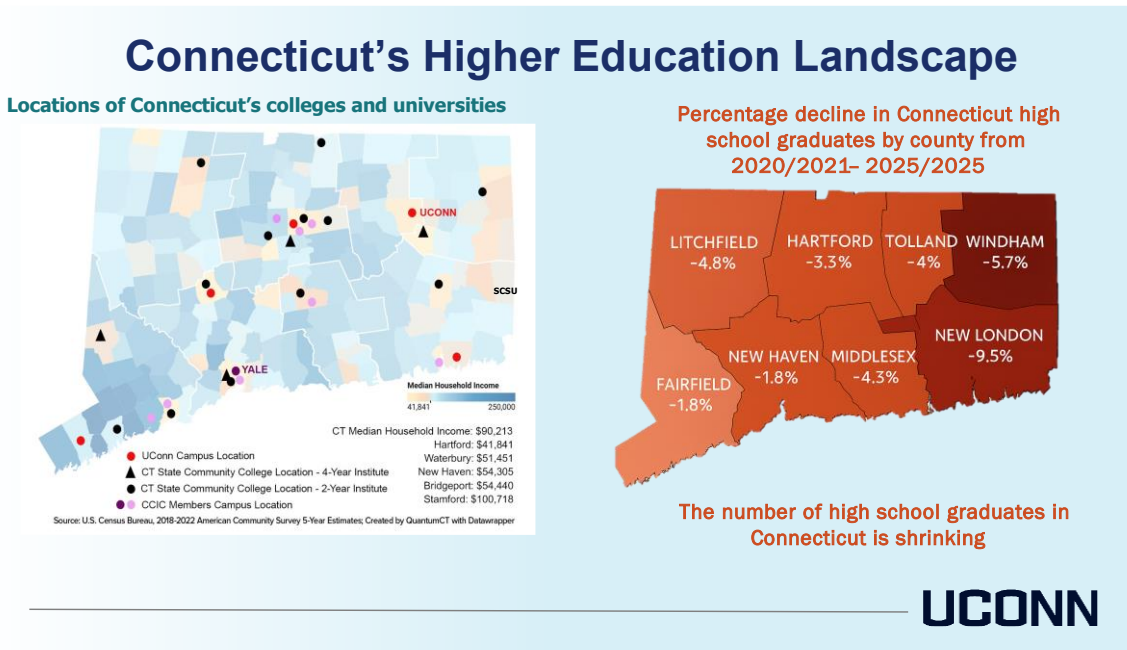
The campus plays a critical role in advancing UConn's land- and sea-grant mission by expanding access to a high-quality public research university education while supporting regional workforce needs. UConn Waterbury has historically functioned both as a point of access to UConn and, increasingly, as a destination campus with distinct academic and community strengths, particularly in health sciences and innovation-oriented programs.

III. Enrollment Trends and Demographic Constraints – Maintaining Current Enrollment is a Challenge

UConn recently completed its SEM Plan, designed to fulfill the vision articulated in the University Strategic Plan. As the Situational Analysis in that document suggests, while the university has garnered a strong reputation for the quality of education and student success, these results are not universally experienced by students across our regional campuses, and among first generation, low income, and minority students.

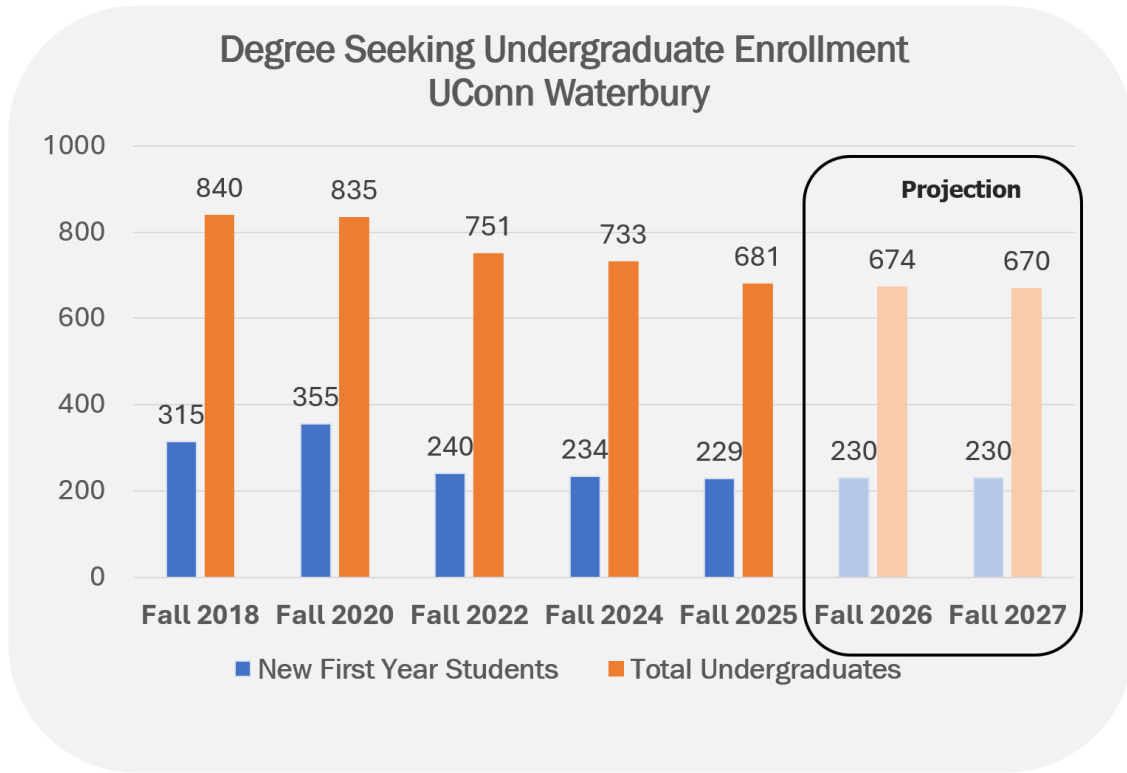
Demographic challenges as shown in the map below are significant, made more problematic by the intensifying competition among the substantial number of higher education institutions in the state vying for fewer students. Institutional finances, declining high school graduates, and other factors are forces that exist largely outside of the university's control.

Figure 1. Connecticut's Higher Education Landscape



The result of these demographic trends has been that over the past decade UConn Waterbury has experienced a gradual decline in total degree-seeking undergraduate enrollment. With fewer students, competition from other universities has intensified, with some colleges offering significant scholarships, along with other college access and affordability initiatives. Enrollment peaked in 2017 and has since declined by approximately 15 percent. Contributing factors include both decreased first-year enrollment (8%), and a decline in retention (e.g., one-year retention has dropped 9 percentage points). Six-year graduation rates have dropped as well (by 9 percentage points), particularly among students in STEM fields and among underrepresented groups.

Figure 2. Enrollment Trends at UConn Waterbury



Across the academic disciplines, areas of growth include UConn Waterbury’s business programs, Allied Health Sciences, and select engineering disciplines. Declining disciplines include Bachelors of General Studies, and Liberal Arts & Sciences programs.

These trends must be understood within a broader context. Connecticut is experiencing a sustained decline in the number of high school graduates, a trend projected to continue through the early 2030s (by 3-5% regionally over the next five years). UConn’s major competitors are listed below, many of which offer a more comprehensive campus experience than UConn Waterbury. This list of competitors has remained relatively stable over time.

Figure 3. Waterbury Campus Competitors

Colleges and Universities Enrolling Waterbury Admits
CENTRAL CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY SOUTHERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY QUINNIPIAC UNIVERSITY WESTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAVEN CONNECTICUT STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE- NAUGATUCK VAL UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD SACRED HEART UNIVERSITY UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND CONNECTICUT STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE- GATEWAY EASTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY BRYANT UNIVERSITY COASTAL CAROLINA UNIVERSITY FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY VIRGINIA POLYTECH & STATE UNIVERSITY MARIST UNIVERSITY UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AT AMHERST ALBERTUS MAGNUS COLLEGE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY UNIVERSITY OF TAMPA

The university continues to sustain a robust student recruitment and marketing program across the UConn Waterbury catchment area. These include multiple visits to every school in the region, school counselor lunches and programs, bussing high school students to campus, application and FAFSA workshops in the schools, and a robust partnership with promise programs, in particular Waterbury Promise, which lends financial support and transparency on affordability to high school students in the city.

Given these conditions, the University’s assessment concludes that significant enrollment growth at UConn Waterbury is not realistic within current or foreseeable resource levels. The responsible and achievable objective is to stabilize enrollment while improving student retention and graduation rates.

It is important to note that maintaining current enrollment levels will be challenging within the current constrained fiscal environment.

IV. Academic Portfolio and Capacity Considerations

UConn Waterbury currently offers a focused set of undergraduate programs that can be completed entirely on campus, including Allied Health Sciences, Business Administration, Business Data Analytics, Psychological Sciences, Human Development and Family Sciences, Urban and Community Studies, English, American Studies, and General Studies. Allied Health Sciences has become the largest major and anchors the campus’s health-focused identity.

The campus also hosts graduate and post-baccalaureate programs, including the accelerated Certificate of Entry into Nursing and a K-12 teacher certification masters program. These offerings align with regional workforce demand but require specialized facilities and instructional resources.

While the campus has some physical capacity to accommodate modest enrollment growth, any expansion of academic programs would require additional faculty, student support services, and capital investment. Given fiscal constraints and demographic trends, the University does not recommend broad program expansion as an enrollment strategy.

V. Student Success, Retention, and Persistence

Data indicate that persistence is the primary constraint on enrollment sustainability at UConn Waterbury. One-year retention has declined from the high 80-percent range to the mid-70s, and six-year graduation rates have declined to approximately 50 percent.

In response, the campus has invested in a wide range of student success initiatives, including the creation of an Academic Achievement Center, learning communities, first-year experience programming, expanded advising and one-stop student services, mental health and wellness supports, and food security initiatives, all-known as evidence-based high impact practices. Early evidence suggests these programs are improving student engagement and belonging, and continued focus paired with outcome tracking will be important to translate these efforts into improved retention and graduation outcomes.

The University's assessment emphasizes that stabilizing enrollment depends on improving persistence for enrolled students rather than increasing the size of entering cohorts.

VI. Dual Enrollment and Early-College Pathways

Dual enrollment and early-college programming were evaluated as part of this study. UConn Waterbury is developing targeted dual enrollment, summer bridge, and early-admission pathways in partnership with local school districts, particularly in health sciences and STEM fields.

These initiatives are designed to strengthen college readiness, reduce time-to-degree, and increase the likelihood that students who enroll at UConn Waterbury persist to completion. They are intentionally limited in scale and aligned with workforce needs. The University does not view dual enrollment as a mechanism for large-scale enrollment growth but as a strategic tool to improve access and outcomes for local students.

VII. Online Education and Course Delivery

The study examined the role of online education in supporting enrollment. At UConn, online degree programs are awarded as University of Connecticut degrees and are centrally administered rather than campus-specific. UConn Waterbury branded online degree programs do not lend themselves as a strategic advantage to directly increase enrollment at the campus. Rather, as is prescribed by the university's SEM Plan, university wide online programs (e.g., UConn Online) hold tremendous potential for traditional in person and new adult learner populations.

Online and hybrid course offerings will play an important role for Waterbury's commuter and working students. Expanding access to flexible course delivery—particularly for gateway and high-demand courses—can support retention and timely completion, while also expanding the number of

programs students can complete for all four years at UConn Waterbury. The University is exploring the use of UConn Waterbury as a pilot site for digital learning infrastructure and course redesign, that can be scaled across the university through systemwide investments, partnerships, and reallocation where feasible.

VIII. Workforce Development and Regional Partnerships

Workforce alignment is a core component of UConn Waterbury's strategy. The campus has developed strong partnerships with healthcare providers, municipal agencies, nonprofits, and local employers. Programs such as health and nursing pathways, paid experiential learning, internships, and community-engaged coursework strengthen students' connection between education and employment.

Outcome data show that graduates of UConn Waterbury experience strong employment outcomes, with high rates of in-state workforce retention. These results reinforce the importance of focusing resources on completion and career alignment rather than unachievable first-year enrollment growth.

IX. Fiscal Constraints and Institutional Sustainability

The University's assessment reflects a careful stewardship lens amid significant fiscal constraints, including a structural budget deficit, declining state support, and deferred maintenance needs. UConn Waterbury, like other regional campuses, faces limited economies of scale. Within this context, we are prioritizing cost-effective strategies and targeted investments that advance Connecticut's workforce and economic mobility goals.

Any strategy to support enrollment must therefore rely on partnerships and philanthropy and must demonstrate clear returns in student success or workforce outcomes.

Across the university, addressing deferred maintenance is a priority for safety, learning environments, and long-term asset stewardship. These projects can also influence student perceptions of campus quality and, in turn, enrollment. At UConn Waterbury, the current deferred maintenance liability is \$33.3M, primarily related to HVAC, building exteriors, and electrical systems.

X. The Path Forward & Recommendations

UConn remains committed to sustaining a vibrant UConn Waterbury campus along with our other regional campuses through disciplined stewardship and a focus on measurable student and workforce outcomes. As UConn aligns resources with these outcomes, priority will be given to strategies that leverage reallocation, partnerships, philanthropy, and systemwide efficiencies, with any targeted investments tied to clear performance measures and accountability. The university's approach centers on stabilizing and strategically enhancing UConn Waterbury through a realistic, data-informed plan: strengthening early pathways, expanding flexible course delivery where it adds value, deepening workforce alignment, and improving retention and graduation outcomes. Within these demographic and fiscal realities, the university's most responsible enrollment strategy is to stabilize and strengthen UConn Waterbury by improving persistence and completion for enrolled students, while expanding access through targeted early-college pathways, flexible course delivery, and deeper workforce alignment. The initial focus will be on maintaining current enrollment levels.

The recommendations that follow translate the study's findings into a focused, measurable plan for Waterbury, prioritizing reallocation, partnerships, and philanthropy first, and using any incremental

operating support only when it is time-limited, performance-tied, and essential to sustain or scale strategies with demonstrated impact.

1. Strengthen Student Belonging, Success & Retention Through High-Impact Practices. Expand high-impact student success models, including Learning Communities, experiential learning, Work+ UConn, Husky Prep Academy (Dual Enrollment + Summer Bridge), course redesign, CUREs, and culturally sustaining programming, to improve retention, persistence, and graduation.

Cost/Resources: No/low-cost redesign and pilots supported through operational efficiencies, and philanthropy.

2. Develop Waterbury as a Health & Nursing Education Pathway Hub. Expand partnership with the Elisabeth DeLuca School of Nursing to support greater access to nursing education in the region through both the 4-year traditional pre-licensure pathway and the accelerated post-baccalaureate Nursing program (Certificate Entry into Nursing, CEIN). Actions include: (a) expanding gen-ed and nursing course offerings at Waterbury for Years 1–2, (b) supporting student success and seamless change-of-campus to Storrs for pre-licensure students, (c) completing simulation space to increase CEIN enrollment by ~50% (~60 students by 2030) and (d) explore the feasibility of offering a 4-year BSN program at the campus if enrollment supports it and philanthropic resources are available.

Cost/Resources: Predominantly philanthropically supported, complemented by a modest, predictable university base to ensure program continuity and quality (~\$150K annually through FY31, increasing to ~\$325K annually thereafter as enrollment scales). 4-year Nursing program dependent on enrollment and new philanthropic dollars.

3. Expand Academic Pathways that Advance Waterbury’s “Health + Innovation, In Person” Identity. Promote Individualized Majors requiring no new resources (e.g., Criminal Behavior, Consumer Behavior, Human Health & Development) to expand access to tailored academic pathways.

Cost/Resources: Funded through philanthropy.

4. Advance Signature Innovation & Community Impact Initiatives. Elevate Waterbury’s distinctiveness through launch and scaling of initiatives such as the Neurovariability Initiative and the Financial Empowerment Studio. These efforts expand student success, support diverse learners, increase community engagement, and strengthen Waterbury’s identity in health + innovation.

Cost/Resources: Neurovariability seed-funded through philanthropy (~\$100K annually, FY25-28).

5. Capital Investments If State Bond Funds are Available

In addition, if state bond funding is available, the University recommends the following targeted capital investments:

- A. Digital Learning - Establishing undergraduate online degree programs across the university will provide greater flexibility for degree attainment, and expand available

degree programs at UConn Waterbury, while enabling potential retention and graduation efforts at the campus. This has the potential to further reinforce enrollment trends at the campus.

If the **\$3 million bond authorization** enacted by the General Assembly is released by the Bond Commission, UConn proposes to modernize digital learning infrastructure across the University. The initiative advances state priorities in **AI readiness, workforce development, and equitable digital access** for commuter and online learners.

Project Components & Costs

Student Success Platform – \$0.53M

Mobile-first system for advising, engagement, and accessibility services.

Pilot at UConn Waterbury; scalable across regional campuses.

Online Learning Capacity – \$1.38M

Updates to classroom technology/infrastructure, faculty training, course redesign, and AI integration to support **70 new online and hybrid courses** statewide.

Digital Learning & Engagement Studio – \$1.09M

Creation of a **CAVE immersive learning lab at UConn Waterbury**, with VR/AR simulations, AI-enhanced course tools, and K–12 STEM outreach.

- B. Funding for Deferred Maintenance to ensure the campus can continue to function properly in the future.

Deferred Maintenance Needs (\$M)	
Building Exteriors	\$6.4
Electrical	6.6
HVAC	14.6
Interiors	3.1
Roofing	1.3
Modernizations	<u>1.3</u>
Total	\$33.3

These strategies will ensure that UConn Waterbury continues to serve its students and region effectively while preserving the academic quality and long-term sustainability of Connecticut’s flagship public research university.

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