**Opinion: An Aerospace Department Would be Invaluable at UConn**

**By: Jacob Kowalski**

Staff Columnist

2/4/16

Freshman

Mechanical Engineering

860-984-1307

[jacob.kowalski@uconn.edu](mailto:jacob.kowalski@uconn.edu)

Few other disciplines have inspired and awed humanity as much as aerospace engineering. Brilliant men and women working in this field took us to the moon, built creations that have allowed us to explore beyond the reaches of our solar system, and have revolutionized the travel industry. We have aerospace engineers to thank for inventions such as handheld calculators, the computer microchip, insulation, water filters, and much more.

Connecticut has a rich history in this field. Boeing started here in Connecticut, and there are many prominent aerospace companies such as UTC, Pratt & Whitney and Sikorsky in the state. Yet the University of Connecticut does not have an aerospace department. There is no aerospace major or minor. The best a student can do is graduate with a concentration in aerospace within the mechanical engineering department. However, the university and its students would benefit greatly if an aerospace department was established at UConn.

As previously stated, the aerospace industry is very prominent in Connecticut. There are many important aerospace companies in the state. As of 2012(<http://www.bls.gov/oes/2012/may/oes172011.htm#(1))>, Connecticut had the fourth highest concentration of aerospace jobs in the country, with 1.71 employed for every 1,000 jobs. In 2014 aerospace exports in Connecticut totaled $6.9 billion dollars, comprising over 43% (<http://portal.ct.gov/industry_videos/>) of the state’s total exports. United Technologies Corporation announced the same year they would invest up to $500 million to upgrade and expand its aerospace R&D and manufacturing facilities over the next five years and up to $4 billion in research and other capital expenditures in the state.

And it’s not just Connecticut that has a large aerospace presence. Raytheon has locations in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Massachusetts also has Boeing, General Dynamics, Northrop Grumman, and other aerospace corporations. And New York has plenty of aerospace firms as well.

There is a high level of opportunity within the aerospace industry in this region, and it is clearly an integral part of the local economy. While this in and of itself is good reason to explore establishing an aerospace department at UConn, there is another very important factor to consider. That is the fact that in all of New England, only two schools offer a degree in aerospace engineering, MIT and WPI. (<http://www.findengineeringschools.org/Search/Majors/aero.htm>)

This presents an outstanding opportunity for the UConn. Establishing an aerospace major would set it apart from most other universities in and around New England. They would be offering something that Yale doesn’t have. That Harvard doesn’t have. That no other public university in New England has. This would set UConn apart, and almost certainly attract engineers from around the region and beyond. UConn has the potential to be the school that intrigues the high school student who dreams of working for NASA. The school an engineering student will want to transfer to because they developed a fascination with aerospace and their school doesn’t have the major. And UConn’s affordability, especially to in-state students, will make it much more attractive than more expensive private institutions.

The lack of other aerospace engineering schools in the region would not only attract those who wish to study the field, it would also provide a great chance for students to acquire jobs and internships from all the companies here. If UConn is the only school in Connecticut with an aerospace major, then it is almost inevitable that Pratt & Whitney, Sikorsky, and other companies will actively recruit at UConn when seeking engineers to fill positions. In addition, it is possible that companies might sponsor scholarships for students in aerospace or find other ways to invest in aerospace education at the university. By having an aerospace department, UConn would likely be afforded a unique and beneficial relationship with the many aerospace companies within Connecticut and around New England.

There are many advantages to establishing an aerospace department at UConn. It is a field that will last as long as humanity maintains its passionate curiosity of the unknown. Aerospace engineering will help attract high caliber minds from around the world, especially those in and around New England. And there is already a high level of student interest in the field, as scores within mechanical engineering are intent upon a concentration in aerospace. UConn is among the top 20 public colleges in the United States, and this is commendable. But if the university is serious about striving to reach the next tier, then this is an excellent way to distinguish UConn and cement the university’s place among the top colleges in the world.