

The ADVOCATE

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Editorial

Many benefits in GE-UConn effort

More than an academic venture, the \$11 million alliance between GE Capital Corp. of Stamford and the University of Connecticut also should be a concrete step forward for lower Fairfield County's work force.

The association between the financial arm of Fairfield-based General Electric Co. and UConn's Stamford branch is meant to give business students a premier high-tech education and real work-world experience in electronic technology. Participating students actually will work on GE Capital projects alongside GE employees and UConn faculty as part of their course work at a \$2.5 million "e-Lab" at the Stamford campus. The affiliation may lead to attractive job offers for the most promising students. If successful, it also may entice other businesses to enter into similar agreements with local colleges and universities, expanding the benefit to other students and fields.

The depth and breadth of the commitment is significant. In addition to \$2.5 million for the 18,000-square-foot e-Lab, which includes the existing computer lab at the Connecticut Information Technology Institute, the undertaking consists of:

The Issue:

Technology training facility will help students, employers and school's reputation.

- \$1 million annually from GE through 2004 to upgrade the e-Lab system.

- \$1.5 million over the next five years from the GE Fund for a variety of initiatives. The funds will permit UConn's business and engineering schools to take greater advantage of the project. Faculty also will be trained and minority students recruited for the program. The amount could be doubled because GE employees are expected to contribute about \$1.5 million to the initiative through the GE Fund's matching grants program.

- \$1.5 million that should come to the university as the result of joint research that GE Industrial Systems will conduct with UConn faculty into materials, energy consumption and transfer and circuit-breaker technology.

No wonder Gov. John G. Rowland described the GE program as "extraordinary" during Tuesday's e-Lab dedication.

Another benefit is less tangible but as exciting. Mr. Rowland rightly speculated that the e-Lab further could enhance UConn's reputation as a public institution and encourage more Connecticut students to make it the first choice for college, rather than fall-back position. That in turn might keep more state residents in Connecticut's work force and stop the so-called "brain drain" into other states.

The e-Lab also may help to create future challenges for UConn, state lawmakers — and Stamford. Total enrollment at the city branch is 1,516 up about 3.8 percent over the past year. A successful e-Lab could and probably should put pressure on the university to expand physically and academically in downtown Stamford. Should UConn-Stamford's reputation continue to grow, so too will its appeal to students well beyond lower Fairfield County, who eventually may need housing and accommodations here.

These in many ways would be wonderful problems to have, and they won't arrive tomorrow. But with all that understood, municipal and state officials ought to continue to work closely with UConn officials as plans for this exciting campus evolve, and anticipate needs before they arise.