

Reconnecting to Mission: Connecticut College's Outreach to New London during the Claire Gaudiani Era

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Abstract

During her presidency (1988–2001), Claire Gaudiani reconnected Connecticut College with New London, the college's home city, whose citizens through grassroots fund raising and donations of land established the college in 1911. Through an emphasis on service-learning, community outreach, and an education not for oneself as well as economic investments in the revitalization of downtown New London, Connecticut College established a model that Gaudiani hoped other colleges would follow. Yet opposition to the investment of College funds to redevelop downtown New London led to Gaudiani's departure after a majority of Connecticut College's tenured professors signed a petition calling for her ouster. Though not entirely successful in achieving her economic redevelopment agenda, Gaudiani deserves credit and praise for establishing engagement and service-learning initiatives that continue to manifest the ideals expressed by Connecticut College's initial founding mission and promise.

Purpose and Research Methods

The purpose of this article is to provide a historical case study of Claire Gaudiani's efforts, as president of Connecticut College, to reconnect her alma mater to New London, Connecticut, the city that helped launch it. The Gaudiani case study stands as an instructive example of a college leader yoking an institution's local outreach and engagement initiatives to its founding mission. The information presented in this case study was drawn from interviews with forty individuals within the Connecticut College family, including thirty administrators, faculty, trustees, and alumni who were at, or closely affiliated with, the college during Claire Gaudiani's presidency; Claire Gaudiani's files in the Connecticut College Archives; and the Charles M. Shain Library's special collections on the New London Development Corporation, of which Gaudiani was president (1997–2002). The interviews were transcribed and then analyzed using the constant comparative method (*Merriam 1998, 159, 160*). The analysis checked interviews against each other for accuracy of detail and recurring themes.

A Daughter Returns Home

When Claire Gaudiani became president of Connecticut College in 1988, the historic relationship between her alma mater (she graduated in 1966) and New London had been inverted. At the birth of Connecticut College in 1911, the city of New London was prosperous, not simply languishing in the fading glow of its past significance as an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century whaling port. New London in 1911 had the wealth, stature, and civic energy to rally its citizens to dig into their pockets and piggy banks to raise \$134,000 to help launch the state of Connecticut's first women's college. According to the *New London Telegraph*, the funds invested in Connecticut College for Women had been

Millionaires' money, storekeepers' money, mechanics' money, laborers' money—money from the pay envelopes of street car men, the railroaders, the purse of the seamstress: one wonderful gift, perhaps you will recall, of a week's labor of a poor woman of the washtub; newsboys' money, school girls' pocket money—thousands and tens of thousands of New London money, the money of New London's rank and file. (*Commentator* 1917)

Indeed, at the outset, New London “invested a world of faith and love and labor in Connecticut College” (*Commentator* 1917). Numerous accounts of Connecticut College's founding describe New Londoners jubilantly sounding the downtown fire siren upon surpassing the \$100,000 donation goal and then having a daylong celebration that included the firing of cannons and a parade (*Noyes* 1982; *Nye* 1943; *Buell* 1911).

Few colleges in the United States started out owing as much to their hometown as Connecticut College did. Without the generosity of New Londoners, including summer resident Morton Plant whose \$1 million gift started the college's endowment, Connecticut College—which was known as Connecticut College for Women until 1969, when it adopted coeducation—might not have been more than the short-lived dream of its chief proponents: Elizabeth Wright, her fellow members of the Hartford College Club, and Colin Buell (principal of Williams Memorial Institute in New London), who led the grassroots fund-raising drive (*Wright* 1910; *Buell* 1911, 751).

Nearly eighty years later when Claire Gaudiani—a PhD in French literature who had authored three books—arrived from the University of Pennsylvania, where she had directed the Lauder Institute for Management and International Studies and held an academic appointment in the French Department, Connecticut College was the thriving, healthy child and New London was the ailing parent (*Tradition and Innovation* 1988). By 1988 construction of Interstate 95 had physically cut the 1,900-student liberal arts college and its city off from each other (*Decker* 1999, 34). The trolley line linking Connecticut College to downtown New London had given way to four-lane Mohegan Avenue (*Kimball* 2007, B3). The shipbuilding and defense industries that had once sustained New London had shed ten thousand jobs. Middle-class residents had fled to nearby towns, “depressing the real estate market and devastating the tax base” (*Decker* 1999, 34). New London’s downtown commercial district had become a moribund collection of empty storefronts (*Vogell* 1999a).

Between 1911 and Claire Gaudiani’s inauguration, Connecticut College had held itself mostly aloof from New London (*Decker* 1999, 34). Connecticut College had become the rich institution on the hill looking down at a poor city with decaying schools and decrepit buildings (*Gaudiani* 2000; *Hamilton* 1999). This reversal of fortunes troubled Gaudiani, who believed that Connecticut College owed its city an enduring, active commitment. Gaudiani saw a moral imperative—founded on the belief that the college’s existence and prosperity would not be possible without New London—for Connecticut College to give of its bountiful resources to its home city. In Gaudiani’s (1992, 2007) opinion, Connecticut College’s institutional genetic code contained

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an inherent mission on behalf of the common good. Preparing students for service to their communities had been emphasized as early as 1917 by Connecticut College’s first president, Frederick Sykes, when in his commencement address he stated that “the good that counts is good in action.” Thus, it was historically fitting when contributing to society, starting with the college’s own backyard, became the defining theme of Gaudiani’s presidency (*Gaudiani* 1992, 2007).

Claire Gaudiani's Outreach Agenda

Gaudiani saw many fronts for Connecticut College to demonstrate and impart the value of making contributions to society, but none more important than New London. In 1996, she and Connecticut College's social science faculty created the Holleran Center for Community Action and Public Policy (*Battista 2006*). The Holleran Center represented Gaudiani's long-held dream of making Connecticut College a pioneer in community engagement (*Gaudiani 1995*). By integrating community service into the academic program and fostering a campus ethos of *non sibi* (not for oneself), the Holleran Center gave tangible and symbolic expression to Connecticut College's founding mission as a college tied to its community. The Holleran Center also put Connecticut College at the forefront—especially in drawing publicity—of the service-learning movement sweeping through higher education in the 1990s (*Gaudiani 1995*). As she held leadership posts in organizations such as Campus Compact, taught a course called “Literature, Service and Social Reflection,” and touted service-learning projects, such as one student's renovation of an abandoned firehouse in downtown New London (*Gaudiani 1995; Vogell 1999d*), Gaudiani, according to observers such as Tufts University president John DiBiaggio and Brown University's executive director of Campus Compact Elizabeth Hall, became “an articulate national spokesperson on the intersection of justice, economic prosperity, and the common good” (*DiBiaggio and Hall 2000*).

To anyone who would listen, including audiences at numerous national forums, Gaudiani—as early as 1994—argued that service-learning enables students to explore links between academic study and community problems (*Gaudiani 1994b, 1995*). For a number of years, Connecticut College's course catalog, for example, opened with Gaudiani's “message from the president” that “a liberal arts education aims to prepare men and women for a lifetime of learning, service and leadership” (*Gaudiani 1999*). Gaudiani advanced the idea that a service-learning curriculum would ensure that “the best-educated young people in the country understand what it takes to build a community” and thus would be equipped to “move from ideals and knowledge in a book to really improving the quality of life for all citizens” (*Decker 1999, 36*). Integrating community engagement into the curriculum, Gaudiani (1995) asserted, would transform students and communities in positive ways. Connecticut College would be a “college with a conscience,” one that would utilize service-learning to provide the “transforming education” necessary to produce agents of change working for greater equality of

opportunity in society (Gaudiani 2000; Battista 2006). Such an ethos started with the students selected by the admission office. Whether an applicant to Connecticut College had community service experience became a critical element in the review of candidates for admission (Gaudiani 2000).

Gaudiani (1994) pushed Connecticut College to provide an education fundamentally not for self but for others. It is the job of the College, Gaudiani (1994a, 1994b) argued, to help students to know, understand, and help others beyond themselves. Students, she believed, want and deserve an education that transcends worldly success and marketable skills. “We should not only talk about a just society,” she told a reporter in 1999 (Decker 36), “but we should be applying . . . our heads and hearts and hands to create opportunities for a just society to live and breathe around us.” In Gaudiani’s view, Connecticut College’s service initiatives beyond its campus fulfilled the college’s historical “moral obligation to [its] community and an educational responsibility to [its] students” (Decker 1999, 36). Those

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obligations and responsibilities were ones Gaudiani felt personally. “It’s easy to talk about social justice and community,” she observed, “but people—particularly young people—want to know, ‘what are you doing to make that real?’” (Decker 1999, 34).

In speeches advocating community outreach and service-learning programs, Gaudiani told audiences throughout the world that she brought the perspective of a president of a college perched on a beautiful hill overlooking a struggling small city. Proud as she was of her alma mater, Gaudiani was uneasy because despite the money raised and the new buildings added, Connecticut College had not attempted to repair its home city of New London, the community that helped give it life in 1911. Colleges, Gaudiani argued, are uniquely positioned to help create fundamental and transforming change in American cities. In her opinion, colleges, due to their wealth, privilege, and massive receipt of philanthropy, are themselves obliged to be philanthropic. Colleges, like her own, she said, teach by example, not just in classrooms (Gaudiani 2000). In closing a speech at a Santa Clara University service-learning conference, Gaudiani (2000) invoked the words of the prophet Jeremiah: “make the peace of the city your concern . . . for in its peace, ye shall have peace.”

The Holleran Center for Community Action and Public Policy did not represent all the possibilities for community engagement that Gaudiani envisioned for Connecticut College. She needed a bolder example of Connecticut College's commitment to New London, a high-visibility project that would proclaim to the world that her college cared about its backyard—a project that would stand as a national model of a college-to-community partnership (Gaudiani 1994a). High visibility was always important to Gaudiani, according to numerous members of the Connecticut College family (Unidentified interviewees 2007). Her strengths were most apparent in the symbolic leadership frame, and she had a penchant for grand gestures that would garner media attention (Bolman and Deal 2003; Unidentified interviewees 2007). She found one in 1997 when Connecticut College Downtown opened as a storefront satellite campus to be a “responsible . . . citizen” and a constructive force in its “home City of New London” (Gaudiani 2000; Hamilton 1998; Decker 1999, 36).

Connecticut College Downtown, according to its brochure, provided opportunities for civic engagement, economic investment, and student learning through service (*New London, New Vision 1999*). Student volunteers at the downtown campus established a micro-loan program, developed strategies to reduce truancy in New London schools, coordinated lunchtime theater and speaker programs, and assisted in prisons (*New London, New Vision 1999*; Vogell 1999c; Decker 1999, 36). Praising Gaudiani's efforts to use College resources and connections to help the city, the editorial board of New London's daily newspaper, *The Day* (1999), predicted that “this is just the beginning of the flowering of this city of New London and the benefits that blossoming will have for the whole region.”

Connecticut College Downtown was indeed just the beginning. Gaudiani convinced Connecticut's trustees to allocate \$2.6 million in College funds toward redevelopment projects in downtown New London, including the lease of 22,000 square feet in the Mariner Square building (Vogell 1998a). The Mariner Square property provided space for Connecticut College classrooms during the day and programs administered by Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute's (RPI) Southeastern Connecticut Graduate Center at night (Pearson 1999b). The Mariner Square project stepped beyond curriculum-based outreach and engagement and put Connecticut in the business of economic redevelopment. Trustees supported both of those outreach agendas, but faculty, from the beginning, were less sanguine regarding the downtown redevelopment initiatives (Deredita 2007; Doro 2007; Held 2007; Rogers 2006 & 2007; Willauer 2007).

Although Gaudiani expected Mariner Square to fill within two years, most of the building remained vacant. Gaudiani's critics took note and began wondering if the project had been a prudent use of College funds (*Bredeson 2007; Deredita 2007; Doro 2007; Held 2007; Rogers 2006 & 2007; Willauer 2007*).

Gaudiani also convinced the boards of Connecticut College and the New London Development Corporation—of which she was president from 1997 through 2002—to convert a historic downtown building into student apartments (*Pearson 1999a*). Living in the downtown apartments would give Connecticut College students, in Gaudiani's (2007) opinion, an opportunity to understand the needs of New London and contribute to its betterment. The result would be a living and learning center that would knit Connecticut College and its home city closer together (*Pearson 1999a*).

The Vision Comes Undone

Not everyone at Connecticut College supported Gaudiani's zeal for redevelopment of New London. Hesitation had been voiced periodically by faculty as Gaudiani moved beyond campus initiatives, such as the Holleran Center, to investments in downtown New London. When Connecticut College began to grapple with budgetary pressures and faculty began to face the immediate prospect of teaching classes at the downtown satellite campus, many began to express concern that the college was evolving in ways that they did not deem appropriate. Faculty generally could see the wisdom of the mission of reconnection and reinvigoration embodied by the student community service projects undertaken through the Holleran Center and Connecticut College Downtown. But putting the college's funds into economic redevelopment efforts that diluted the residential nature of the college struck many on campus as straying from mission as well as financially risky (*Bredeson 2007; Deredita 2007; Doro 2007; Held 2007; Rogers 2006 & 2007; Willauer 2007*).

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Furthermore, the economic redevelopment of New London felt to many like a pet project of Gaudiani's, not a necessary move to secure safer campus borders or make better first impressions on

campus visitors (Bredeson 2007; Deredita 2007; Doro 2007; Held 2007; Rogers 2006 & 2007; Willauer 2007). For example, Trinity College in Hartford, Clark University, and the University of Pennsylvania undertook economic redevelopment near their campuses in part because decay in surrounding neighborhoods had spurred declines in admission interest and campus safety (Vogell 1999a; Harkavy 2008; Wingood 2007). There was no evidence that economic redevelopment of New London was necessary to stimulate applications to Connecticut College or make an already safe campus safer (Bredeson 2007; Held 2007; Merrill 2007; Rogers 2006 & 2007; Willauer 2007). At Clark and the University of Pennsylvania, nearby neighborhood economic redevelopment efforts served the additional purpose of providing convenient and affordable housing for faculty (Vogell 1999a; Harkavy 2008; Wingood 2007). Connecticut College's New London redevelopment efforts had none of those goals and occurred largely because Gaudiani thought it was the right thing for her alma mater to do (Gaudiani 2007).

In May of 2000, 78 of Connecticut College's 105 tenured faculty members signed a petition calling for Claire Gaudiani's resignation (Basinger 2000b, A40). In the estimation of New London's *The Day* (Editorial Board 2000), the faculty petition was "not the work of a handful of malcontents, but rather an action undertaken soberly by overwhelming numbers of faculty" at the college. *The Day* found it ironic that Gaudiani had "a substantial national reputation for leadership, but . . . her relationship with her own faculty is poor."

The action taken by Connecticut College's professors signaled the degree to which they believed Gaudiani had moved too abruptly and without sufficient faculty advice and consent in undertaking redevelopment of downtown New London (Editorial Board 2000). Faculty saw Connecticut College Downtown and the RPI partnership as capricious visions forced on them by Gaudiani (Doro 2007; Held 2007; Rogers 2006 & 2007; Willauer 2007). Faculty subsequently criticized Gaudiani for insensitivity to input and process, asserting that they had not been consulted before she and the board chose to invest \$2.6 million of College funds in downtown New London (Benson 2000b; Fenton 2007; Held 2007). Despite Gaudiani's claims in 1992 and 1996 that a president "can only benefit from listening to the college community [and] exemplify[ing] community values," in the opinion of many faculty members, she often exhibited a disregard for faculty opinions (Doro 2007; Fenton 2007; Held 2007; Sheridan 2007).

Connecticut College faculty members were especially dismayed by plans to hold classes in downtown New London. As far as most Connecticut professors were concerned, the college's ample

classroom facilities on its hilltop campus made it unnecessary to establish a satellite center in downtown New London (*Doro 2007; Fenton 2007; Sheridan 2007; Willauer 2007*). Moreover, faculty felt that the downtown campus made Connecticut College seem like a commuter college, rather than a residential liberal arts institution. Connecticut faculty worried that the college's mission of residential education might be creeping away from their stewardship (*Deredita 2007; Fenton 2007; Held 2007; Rogers 2006 & 2007; Sheridan 2007; Willauer 2007*). Students also were dubious about the prospect of a downtown residential campus, fearing that it might "take away from the College's close-knit community" (*Pearson 1999a*). Gaudiani (*2000, 2007*), on the other hand, saw it as vitally important for Connecticut College to make a living demonstration of its outreach and engagement agenda by coming down the hill into New London.

Prior to their uprising in May 2000, skeptical faculty had been reluctant to push back against investments in New London due to a sense of resignation—that is, a belief that it did not matter what they thought. "A lot of her ideas are very good," Connecticut College psychology professor Joan Chrisler told the *Hartford Courant* in 1997 (*Frahm*), "but she doesn't have the patience to go through the faculty governance structure." Her "notion of shared governance is, she decides what to do and then shares it with us—that is, tells us," said Connecticut College sociology professor J. Alan Winter in 1997 (*Frahm*). In fact, faculty had voiced concern that Gaudiani ignored process as early as 1993 (*Maggin*). Likewise, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges accrediting board had recommended in 1996 that the college take "a period of reflection about the progress that has been made" (*Maggin 1993*). It is difficult not to conclude that her way of operating did not always square with a book chapter Gaudiani (*1996*) wrote in a volume on leadership, in which she asserted that college presidents are successful at bringing a vision to life only when the people in the college's community believe that they have helped shape that vision.

In response to the faculty's resignation vote, Duncan Dayton, the chair of Connecticut College's Board of Trustees, lauded Gaudiani for making the college "stronger than ever before," noting that Connecticut College had become, under her stewardship, the twelfth most selective liberal arts college in the United States (*Benson 2000a*). Up to the point of the faculty no-confidence vote, Gaudiani had received the strong backing of trustees and alumni leaders who applauded her energetic efforts to bring national attention to their college. One board member (Frank Turner) called Gaudiani one of the "five truly transforming college presidents" of the last

twenty-five years (*Brink 2000*). Knowing that she had the firm support of Connecticut College's trustees, Gaudiani refused to resign. Faculty friction was something Gaudiani had frequently shrugged off as *de rigueur* in academic settings, once telling a reporter, "You can't make an electric motor run without things rubbing together" (*DeCoster 1999, A7*).

Coinciding with on-campus disaffection for Gaudiani was the gathering storm off campus around the New London Development Corporation (NLDC), of which she was president (*Basinger 2000a, A41–42*). Gaudiani had become a leading promoter of "team New London," seeing it as her duty to provide the "moral juice" to propel economic development and social justice (*Decker 1999, 34; Vogell 1999a*). By the year 2000, no one at Connecticut College could have been unaware of Gaudiani's central role in the NLDC's drawn-out fight over eminent domain laws with individual landowners in New London's Fort Trumbull neighborhood—a case that became the landmark *Kelo vs. New London* decided by the United States Supreme Court in 2005 (*Anderson 2007; Von Hoffmannstahl-Solomonoff 2005; Riley 2005*). Fort Trumbull residents were the proverbial "little guys" battling against forces of power and money to keep their property from being bulldozed (*Riley 2005*). Stories about the NLDC's battle with Fort Trumbull residents ran almost daily in Connecticut papers, especially in New London's *The Day* (*New London Development Corporation Collection*).

Gaudiani's role as president of the NLDC eroded her authority as a champion of social justice, as she ended up defending herself against critics who accused her and the NLDC of insensitivity to the working-class residents of Fort Trumbull (*Vogell 1999e*). The NLDC's plans called for razing the homes of Fort Trumbull residents and replacing them with upscale housing and national chain stores. A number of Fort Trumbull residents dug in against the NLDC's attempts to buy their property or seize it through eminent domain. The neighborhood's holdouts charged that eminent domain amounted to "legalized theft" (*Vogell 1999b*). Some Connecticut College students stood up against the NLDC's plans, labeling them an attempt to turn New London into a "factory made cookie-cutter city" and calling the New London Development Corporation the "New London Destruction Company" (*Pearson 2000*).

Because Gaudiani stood on the side of the developers against Fort Trumbull's homeowners, buckets of negative ink were written about her and, by association, Connecticut College (*McEnroe 2005*). Gaudiani (1998) became the NLDC's representative of authority—that is, the person who announced neighborhood changes to Fort

Trumbull residents and became the lightning rod for their anger and criticism. The public criticism heaped on Gaudiani in New London embarrassed many on the Connecticut College campus and spurred faculty scuttlebutt that Gaudiani was entangled in New London redevelopment to the detriment of the college's own needs (*Bredeson 2007; Doro 2007; Enders and Enders 2007; Held 2007; Rogers 2006 & 2007*). The local press also often portrayed Gaudiani as cozy with Pfizer, the proposed chief tenant of the development the NLDC was pushing (*Anderson 2007; Cavanaugh 2006; Riley 2007; Von Hoffmannstahl-Solomonoff 2005*). That her husband, David Bennett, was a top executive at Pfizer, in charge of its corporate university, did not help Gaudiani's moral authority in New London or on campus. It also did not help that she justified the NLDC's plans with a flip-pant quip in which she asserted that, in most of the cases of forward progress throughout the history of America, someone has always "left skin on the street" (*Anderson 2007; McEnroe 2005*). Some held up that remark as evidence of Gaudiani's true attitude toward the plight of the proverbial little guy (*Anderson 2007; McEnroe 2005*).

In the latter half of the year 2000 it became clear that Connecticut College was staring at large impending budget deficits, worse than it had ever previously endured (*Basinger 2000b; Bredeson 2007; Deredita 2007*). It also became clear that the college was about to enter a period of severe institutional austerity. A \$10 million gift, the largest Connecticut College had received to that point, had to be used to plug a budget shortfall. Connecticut faculty members still scowl when considering the opportunity cost of using the \$10 million gift to fill a budgetary hole (*Bredeson 2007; Deredita 2007; Held 2007; Rogers 2006 & 2007*). Many in the campus community blamed the budget deficits on Gaudiani's choice to invest Connecticut College funds in the revitalization of downtown New London (*Bredeson 2007; Deredita 2007; Held 2007; Rogers 2006 & 2007; Strout 2005*). Some even wondered if Gaudiani's dual chief executive roles at Connecticut College and the NLDC had not always involved an unethical conflict of interest.

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Facing a deafening chorus of detractors on campus and rising opposition in New London, Gaudiani tendered her resignation as president of Connecticut College in October 2000 (*Basinger 2000b*).

Because of vehement faculty opposition, Connecticut College never did hold classes or house students in downtown New London (*Benson 2000b; Deredita 2007*). Soon after taking office, Gaudiani's successor Norman Fainstein—to the relief of faculty—scuttled plans to move faculty, classes, and students into downtown satellite facilities and closed them, although the college is still paying on its fifteen-year lease for space in Mariner Square. Paying that lease has been a financial liability for the college, because the Mariner Square building has rarely approached full occupancy. Reportedly the college also lost money when it sold off the rest of its downtown properties (*Deredita 2007*).

Assessing Connecticut College's Attempt to Reconnect to New London

Many have looked back on Claire Gaudiani's presidency and wondered whether she was too focused on the redevelopment of New London. Gaudiani's numerous critics among Connecticut's faculty and staff saw her investment of \$2.6 million in College funds in New London, especially at a time when budgetary pressures were mounting, as an unforgivably bad decision (*Vogell 1999a*). A persuasive argument could be made that Gaudiani's presidency broke down due to the unfortunate entanglement of her service-learning agenda with efforts to achieve economic redevelopment in New London. Her attempts to engage students more fully with New London became a casualty of her controversial involvement in the New London Development Corporation. Her dual role as president of both Connecticut College and the New London Development Corporation created tensions that led to conflicts, as growing numbers of faculty questioned whether what was good for the NLDC was also good for the college. The top-down leadership that may have worked for Gaudiani in the more corporate environment of the NLDC ran counter to the shared model of faculty governance that has marked Connecticut College since its founding, and in the minds of many—including the drafters of its most recent strategic plan—still is a defining aspect of the institution (*Brownell 2007; Carey 2007; CCSP 2007*).

Small liberal arts college faculty expect to be consulted by presidents on most matters of consequence, but especially when curricular issues vital to the educational mission of the institution are up for discussion (*Bleak 2006; Birnbaum 1988; Eckel 2006*). Gaudiani, in the estimation of most Connecticut College faculty members, acted too much like an authoritarian CEO when she made the decision to lease downtown office space for classrooms without what they

considered sufficient consultation (*Deredita 2007; Doro 2007; Fenton 2007; Held 2007; Rogers 2006 & 2007; Willauer 2007*). Gaudiani might not have engendered such vehement opposition had she worked collegially to build coalitions of support for her ideas and used her political skills to enlist faculty to help get her downtown initiatives through the rough patches (*Bolman and Deal 2003; Eckel 2000; Hartley and Wilhelm-Shah 2006*). She needed to model her successful 1990 strategic plan for Connecticut College, which had been, as she stated in 1992, the product of “a collegial mind,” the work of someone who purported to have learned that a president “can only benefit from listening to people” (*Walters 1992*).

Arguably Gaudiani’s heart was in the right place; who can fault any powerful official for advocating a social justice agenda—rooted in institutional history and mission—to help a poor community? But all too often Gaudiani’s public actions as head of the NLDC contradicted her words as a college president devoted to imparting the social justice ideals and grassroots democracy lessons learned through service to society. Newspaper reports of her authoritarian, get-out-of-my-way style in running the NLDC eroded her integrity and authority both in New London and on the Connecticut College campus (*McGinley 1997*). That forceful and dramatic style of leadership led her to burn through numerous senior administrators, few of whom outlasted her presidency (*Deredita 2007; Held 2007; Luce 2007*).

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Many of Gaudiani’s critics argue that she became the victim of her own fascination for big, splashy projects. Those critics say Gaudiani showed less interest in Connecticut College’s many small yet substantial community outreach programs, such as those coordinated through its departments of child studies and education. Gaudiani, according to her critics, always preferred big-idea projects that would attract publicity to her and Connecticut College (*Unidentified interviewees 2007*). Some believed Gaudiani’s chief motivation for redevelopment of New London was always to raise the profile of Connecticut College (*Fromer 2004*). Some even suggest that Gaudiani romanticized her alma mater’s past relationship with New London, while others contend that putting too much

emphasis on New London made Connecticut College seem more provincial than national (*Unidentified interviewees 2007*).

Had she not overreached through the NLDC, Gaudiani might have been one of Connecticut College's most successful and revered presidents. Serving on the board of NLDC rather than as its president might have kept her more attuned to faculty needs on campus. Had she lent symbolic support to the NLDC's goals instead of getting entangled as its leader, Gaudiani might have achieved engagement with New London in a way that was historically consistent with the college's mission and not at odds with faculty wishes. Her motives for the downtown New London initiatives might then have been better understood as a reconnection with the college's founding mission and vision. Gaudiani's divided leadership of the two entities, however, unfortunately gave much fodder to critics who asserted that she let her enthusiasm for New London's redevelopment efforts distract her focus away from her stewardship of Connecticut College.

Gaudiani's detractors and supporters agree that, through her outreach and economic revitalization efforts, she tried to advance a vision for how development in New London could achieve economic opportunity and social justice for the residents of one of Connecticut's poorest cities (*Anderson 2007; Cavanaugh 2006; Riley 2007; Von Hoffmannstahl-Solomonoff 2005; Vogell 1998b*). But even New London city officials sometimes questioned her methods. "You either get on board her train, and it usually costs you somehow to get on board, or you find yourself under it and you get run over," said former president of the Southeastern Connecticut Chamber of Commerce William Moore (*DeCoster 1999*). Moore's comments were not outliers among the many newspaper accounts of Gaudiani's leadership of the NLDC.

Despite leaving amidst controversy and conflicts, Gaudiani still garners praise in some Connecticut College alumni circles as well as from some of the senior officials who served in her administration (*Briggs 2007; Carey 2007; Enders and Enders 2007; Kaplan 2007; Luce 2007; Merrill 2007; Oshen 2007*). Her proponents felt that "she [was] a genius [who] will work her heart and soul to the nub for the good of the school, and yet is criticized at every turn" and still believe that she had "incredible skill in steering the college where it should be going" (*Gray 2000*). Alumni continue to laud her for making good on her intention to provide a collective vision and direction for the college, and for inspiring a spirit of confidence about its future (*Briggs 2007; Kaplan 2007; Merrill 2007; Oshen 2007*).

Although Gaudiani's vision of a downtown campus for Connecticut College was short-lived, the college's curriculum continues to offer students numerous points of engagement with New London. For example, art history professor Abigail Van Slyke and her students staged a 2005–2006 exhibit at the Lyman Allyn Art Museum titled "Commerce and Culture: Architecture and Society on New London's State Street"—an exhibit that grew out of Van Slyke's seminar of the same title in which students traced the development of State Street between 1850 and 1950, and ultimately emerged with a deeper understanding of their college's home city. Community engagement opportunities are also available through courses offered by the departments of anthropology, English, environmental studies, gender and women's studies, government, human development, psychology, sociology, and theater (*Connecticut College 2005–2007 Catalog 2005*).

Gaudiani's outreach legacy most visibly endures in the Holleran Center for Community Action and Public Policy, which provides Connecticut College students and faculty opportunities to make contributions to New London (*Battista 2006*). The Holleran Center has put engagement and outreach at the forefront of the college's mission as it approaches its second century. In fact, the college's most recent mission statement and marketing slogan proclaim that it is an institution "putting the liberal arts into action" (*CCSP 2007*). Toward that end, the Holleran Center makes \$2,000 grants to encourage faculty to integrate community learning into courses with themes of social justice, economic opportunity, and youth development. In its first ten years of operation, the Holleran Center awarded 133 certificates in community action to students who have completed the required coursework, an internship, and a senior project (*Battista 2006*).

Viewed in relation to Connecticut College's founding mission and vision, Gaudiani deserves no small amount of admiration for laboring to reconnect Connecticut College's historical ties to New London. As an alumna, she understood better than most that Connecticut College's grassroots founding, original mission to educate students to serve the world, and campus setting give literal and figurative expression to the notion that it is a college not just facing but part of its home community. Gaudiani's case is cautionary and instructive, however, because her partially realized outreach vision might have been fully realized had it not become entangled with the controversies generated by her central role in the economic redevelopment of New London.

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