UConn Awarded $146 Million Gift

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STORRS — A software company presented the UConn School of Engineering with $146 million worth of computer software Thursday, the largest gift in the school’s history.

The gift from UGS PLM Solutions, a subsidiary of Texas-based EDS, the world’s largest independent information technology service, will give the University of Connecticut a wide range of state-of-the-art design, data management and problem-solving software.

The university hopes the in-kind donation will help attract more top students and faculty, draw more students into engineering, give students a dynamic, cutting-edge tool, and train students on programs used in companies worldwide.

UConn will also use the grant to open an Institute for Interdisciplinary Engineering Education, Design and Computing that will partner with employers to develop cutting edge educational facilities for UConn engineering students and to enhance the university’s outreach to K-12 students and teachers.

“When academia and industry combine forces, we forge a union of immense power and influence,” said Amir Faghi, dean of engineering.

The software company, in turn, says it selected UConn because it is a premiere institution and the company wants to help the region and Connecticut businesses, many of whom use its software, said David R. Werner, vice president of UGS PLM Solutions.

“We feel it’s good for business, it’s good for the community, and it’s good for our customers,” Werner said.

UGS PLM supplies software to 41,000 customers worldwide, and about 250 Connecticut companies, including Pratt & Whitney, Hamilton Sunstrand and Sikorsky.

UGS PLM’s software is used to develop and track products from the moment they are designed right through production, said Bruce Hudson, an enterprise software analyst for Stamford-based MBTA Group.

“This helps speed up a product and get it to market. It reduces costs and increases economies,” Hudson said. “It’s very powerful software and very costly.”

Companies like UGS PLM have strong incentives to place their products with engineering colleges and universities, Hudson said.

Students who learn how to use the software in college are often critical in persuading their employers to buy that product or continue using it. In addition,

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students who have used the latest version of a product can be a key factor in convincing employers to undertake expensive upgrades that they might otherwise avoid.

The company has also made software donations to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford University, the University of Michigan and Texas A&M.

Many UConn engineering students came to the press conference in the lobby of the Information Technologies Engineering building and cheered when they heard the news.

“This should be an incentive now for students to come to UConn and become an engineer with all the resources they’re going to have,” said Scott Rowland, an engineering student.

Enrollment in engineering at UConn dwindled by 54 percent between 1997 and 1998, posing a threat to the state’s economy, Faghi said.

But in the last six years, freshmen enrollment has risen by 116 percent, helped in part by generous scholarships to engineering students, he said. The school currently has nearly 2,000 undergraduate and graduate students, 126 faculty members and 35,000 alumni.

The software includes five different packages to help engineers conceive, design and engineer products, as well as manage projects and data, make models and create 3D prototypes. The company sets the commercial value of the packages at $146.1 million.

The gift by far exceeds any other donation to UConn; the next highest contribution is $2 million given by Pennsylvania businessman Raymond Neag four years ago.

The gift will not be counted toward UConn’s ongoing $500 million fund drive, Campaign UConn. The campaign has raised $259 million, with $41 million more to go by June 30.

Making private contribution to public universities in New England is a relatively new concept. Many assume state funding covers most of the cost, said Paul J. Brawley, associate vice president for communications and development for the University of Connecticut Foundation Inc.

But the state’s contribution to the university’s budget has dwindled over the years to 37.5 percent of UConn’s budget, compared with 50 percent in the early 1990s. As a result, UConn and other universities increasingly are forced to look elsewhere for money.