

## SPORTS

UConn women's soccer falls, men win their season opener | [Page 7](#)

## WORLD

Indian PM Modi offers to help to bring peace to Ukraine | [Page 6](#)

IN TODAY'S  
**CHRONICLE!**



# The CHRONICLE

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FILE

Former Hampton First Selectman Maurice Bisson in 2005.

## Former Hampton Selectman

## Ismaili begins presidency at Eastern, credits 7-Eleven for success

**NICOLE ZAPPONE**  
@THECHRONICLECT

**WILLIMANTIC** — A criminologist from Rhode Island has become the seventh president of Eastern Connecticut State University in Willimantic and will greet students this weekend as move-in starts. Dr. Karim Ismaili officially began his role as the university's new president on July 31. He comes to Eastern from Bridgewater State University, where he most recently served as the

Executive Vice President and Provost.

Ismaili was born in South London, England, to a mother from Kenya and a father from Pakistan.

"My family left East Africa because there was a lot of unrest at the time, and for safety, part of my family moved to Europe. Some of them moved to North America; my mother and father moved to London," Ismaili said. "I grew up there (South London) until I was 13."

Ismaili said that his par-

ents divorced when he was young, and because they had family in Canada, they thought it would be appropriate to move there.

"I grew up in a domestic household where there was violence, so we had to move for our own safety, which was a little bit difficult," Ismaili said. "So basically, it was me, my mum, and my brother. The three of us moved to Vancouver literally overnight, and then we were just getting used to a completely new country."

[See ISMAILI ON PAGE 4](#)



Nicole Zappone

Dr. Karim Ismaili is Eastern Connecticut State University's new president and began on July 31. He stands before the clock tower on the University's campus in Willimantic.

# Ismaili begins presidency at ECSU

**Continued from Page 1**

Ismaili said he was 13, his brother was seven, and his mother was the breadwinner, holding down many jobs.

"The story about Eastern and me starts here – my mum always felt that a university education was a way to ensure you were independent," Ismaili said. "I ended up graduating high school at 16 because when I moved from Britain, they were impressed by the fact that I was British and thought I was smart."

Ismaili said he had to adjust to math and ended up at Simon Fraser University in Greater Vancouver.

"I was a commuter student, and I worked my way through the entire degree process," Ismaili said. "I held down different jobs, and there was a point when I entered my second year at the university, and I didn't know how I would pay for education."

Ismaili said he got a job at a local 7-Eleven store and would work the graveyard shift.

"7-Eleven has a special place in my heart because, at a time when I wasn't sure how I was going to pay for my tuition and fees, they provided me with a grant to continue my education," Ismaili said. "The way it worked is that if you were a 7-Eleven employee at a College or

University, and you were doing a degree program in an area that would help 7-Eleven, and in my case, I'm a criminology student. So they said, you are involved in security and loss prevention, those kinds of things."

Ismaili said 7-Eleven changed his life.

"They gave me 80% of my tuition and fees was covered by 7-Eleven," Ismaili said.

Recently, Ismaili shared his story with 7-Eleven, and they sent him an official hat and several pins.

"If 7-Eleven had not given me that scholarship, I don't know how I would have finished," Ismaili said. "I got it for the remainder of my college education."

Initially, Ismaili planned to be a police officer with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and that was his plan until something changed.

"At the very end of my undergraduate degree, it was one of my last classes, there was a professor named Dr. Ezzat Fattah, and he was the kind of person who would tell you to write a 30-page paper for this class," Ismaili said. "He liked my work and asked me what I would do when I graduated. Like many of my friends, I said I'd applied to join the RCMP. He said you should consider graduate school."

Ismaili said he didn't

know what graduate school was and never thought about it. He even considered law school.

"I wanted to earn a paycheck and not be in debt for the rest of my life," Ismaili said. "It was in April, so he started asking me to come see him in his office to talk about graduate school. Back then, there was no way of getting information on the internet."

According to Ismaili, Dr. Fattah told him to find out about schools where he would like to pursue a master's degree.

"I was still trying to understand graduate school," Ismaili said. "Over the course of three weeks, he kept telling me to dream about where I wanted to go to school. At the end of the road, being English, I wanted to go back to England and I still feel like I'm a Brit. I picked Oxford University, Cambridge University, University of Edinburgh, and London School of Economics, and I got into every single one of them."

Ismaili then picked to attend Cambridge University, and Fattah helped him get a scholarship and also got funding.

"I walk into the door of the Institute of Criminology, and the program director introduces herself to me, asking who I am," Ismaili said. "The first thing she said was,

'Oh, you're Dr. Fattah's student.' I realized that he was the reason that I got to Cambridge, and it was advocacy and his reference, his reputation globally, that I didn't even know about."

With a background in crime policy and social theory, Ismaili has nearly thirty years of experience in higher education.

In addition to his work at Bridgewater State University, he has held academic and administrative roles at Radford University, St. John's University, Kennesaw State University, and Toronto Metropolitan University. Earlier in his career, he was a policy and research advisor on criminal justice issues in the Government of Canada.

Ismaili holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Western Ontario, a Master of Philosophy in Criminology from the University of Cambridge, and a Bachelor of Arts in Criminology from Simon Fraser University.

His research on immigration, policing, public policy, and criminology has been published in various academic journals and featured in national media outlets. His appointment comes with tenure and the rank of full professor in Eastern's Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Criminology, and Social Work.