It hardly seems to me that it has already been two years since I assumed the presidency here. As I reflect on all that we’ve accomplished during the past two years, I wonder if we really could have achieved so much in so short a span of time. There is still much to be done, but I believe we have made a really meaningful start.

In short, my message to all of you is this: It’s a great time to be at the University of Hartford.

I’d like to focus this column on some of the major accomplishments of the past two years. First and foremost, the University has returned to a solid financial status. After suffering like most of higher education in the early 1990s, the University has now shown healthy surpluses for each of the last three years. We have achieved this with strong financial planning and with some real sacrifices. But we have succeeded, and the financial future looks bright. We will still need to maintain a firm grasp on our finances and plan well, but I believe we can all look forward to a financially stable university for the foreseeable future.

Second, we are experiencing record undergraduate enrollments at the same time that we are becoming more selective in the admission process. When I arrived at the University, I learned that our undergraduate enrollment would fall 100 students short of our target for the 1998–99 academic year. I was sure that with better planning and marketing, we could create more long-term stability in our enrollment figures and, at the same time, improve our selectivity. So we put together an enrollment management team to work on improving our process. Led by Associate Provost Chuck Colarulli and Dean of Admission Rick Zeiser, the team has done just that.

This fall, our problem will be the opposite: we have too many students for our residential capacity. This is not a small problem. We want students not only to come here but also to have a satisfying experience for their undergraduate years. Crowded residence halls do not make that easy, so we have a new problem to solve: we must become even more selective but, at the same time, not fall short of enrollment goals. Just as we solved the first problem, we will solve this one. That is one of the joys of having talented and bright people on your staff!

Third, we have broken ground on the first major building project at the University in over a decade, the University of Hartford Magnet School. Since we wrote about that at great length in the last Observer, I need not repeat a description of this elementary school here. You can watch the construction of the magnet school by logging on to the University’s Web site and clicking through to the live camera on the construction site. Try it—it’s really fun to watch the building rising from the ground.

The magnet school is just the first of several projects envisioned by the University’s facilities master plan, the fourth accomplishment that I would like to highlight. The comprehensive master plan was completed last spring after two years of work. As a result, the next few years will see marked improvements to our campus. We plan a new entrance at Bloomfield Avenue, a new two-way road system, new athletic facilities, a new technology building and a renovated Dana Hall, a new energy system for campus, and renewal and repair work in nearly all of our buildings. For all of this to happen, of course, we must be successful in our 10-year fund-raising campaign, the Campaign of Commitment. After three years, we have raised $48 million, a solid start. But we still have much to do.

Fifth, last spring, the board of regents approved a five-year compensation improvement plan for our faculty and staff, and as of July 1, we have begun the first year of funding that plan. This is something I said we must do when I first arrived at the University; our faculty and staff compensation generally falls short of that of our competition. I am proud that we have achieved this in two years—you can read about the plan in detail in this issue of The Observer. Our challenge now is to continue to fund the remaining four years of the compensation improvement plan, and I am committed to doing that.

Sixth, we have recommitted this University to serving the greater Hartford community that gave it birth 43 years ago. Two years ago, we founded the Center for Community Service, and today, over half of our undergraduates are participating in some form of community service. My goal is to make civic engagement—a term I prefer to community service—part of every undergraduate’s experience here. We’re well on our way. We are also significantly more engaged with our surrounding communities of Bloomfield, Hartford, and West Hartford than we were a few years ago, and our collaborations are beginning to bear fruit.

Finally, we are breathing new life into our intercollegiate athletics program, winning conference championships in three sports last year and going to the NCAA tournaments in two of them. We have brought new coaches on board in many sports, most notably women’s and men’s basketball, and we are beginning to see the positive results we hoped for from those changes. Our intercollegiate program has a proud past. Our goal is to make its future even brighter. Watch us!

I am aware that we face challenges and tough decisions ahead. To handle them successfully, we have begun a strategic planning initiative, about which you will hear more detail in the months to come. With all that we have accomplished and all that is left to do, I ask for your help, your interest, your involvement, and your support.

As I said at the outset, it is a great time to be here. Please be a part of it.

Walter Harrison