Graduates Urged to Look for Opportunities in the Current Global Recession

During a chilly but dry Commencement on Sunday, May 17, former LEGO President Peter Eio urged graduates concerned about the global recession to find hope in the experiences of two legendary toy companies.

Eio, also a University regent, addressed the members of the Class of 2009 and their families and friends at the University’s 52nd Commencement ceremony. Both he and another former toy industry executive—Alan Hassenfeld, former chairman of Hasbro, Inc.—were presented honorary Doctor of Commercial Science degrees.

LEGO and Hasbro were founded during the Great Depression and yet—through imagination, entrepreneurship, and hard work—grew to become successful global companies, said Eio.

University President Walter Harrison announced during the Commencement ceremony that as a follow-up to the honorary degrees, both LEGO and Hasbro plan to donate a large quantity of toys and games to be distributed to area children through the Blue Hills Civic Association and the Upper Albany Neighborhood Collaborative.

Donald Sinta, a former Hartt School faculty member, acclaimed saxophonist, and chair of the winds department at the University of Michigan, received an honorary Doctor of Music at the ceremony. Louise Blalock, who recently retired after 14 years as chief librarian of the Hartford Public Library, received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters.

In addition, the University presented its Distinguished Alumni Award to broadcasting executive and businessman Richard Belkin, a 1956 graduate of the original Hillyer College, one of the founding schools of the University. He is currently chairman and treasurer of World of New York, Inc., a former corporate partner of Top of the World at the World Trade Center observation deck. Belkin is a former executive at the General Electric Company; McClatchy Newspapers, Inc.; Lee Enterprises; and for the Command Performance Network, where he created the concept of the electronic racetrack adopted by the state of Connecticut for off-track betting.

Among the many happy graduates at the Commencement ceremony were six faculty members from Herat University in western Afghanistan, who earned master’s degrees in civil engineering. The six men are part of a contingent of 12 Afghani educators who are studying engineering or architecture here as part of a partnership between the University of Hartford and Herat University. The partnership is being funded by a nearly $2 million grant from the World Bank and an earlier $215,000 grant from the United States Agency for International Development.

The first-ever Belle K. Ribicoff Junior Faculty Prize was also presented to Michael Robinson, assistant professor of history at Hillyer College.
Robert Graham was a member of an unusual graduate class in the Barney School of Business, one offered for the first time in the fall 2008 semester. Just as the Dow approached its lowest level since the Great Depression, Graham and his classmates were given $250,000 of the University's endowment to invest in the stock market. Adjunct faculty members James Hogan and Stephen Mulready gave advice. Students divided into two teams, one buying global funds and one buying green energy funds. Each student had to pitch his or her stock picks to the rest of the class. The outcome? The class invested $100,000, earning a 22-percent return by the end of the school year in May.

Graham, who is currently working as a portfolio manager for UPS Capital Business Credit’s Special Asset Department in Windsor, Conn., talks to the Observer about his experience.

**Being the Guinea Pig**  The student-led investment fund was the ultimate experience. It was great to be in the first [class of this kind]. We really had to hit it out of the park. It took a lot of hard work and a little bit of luck, and we did a good job.

**A Conversation Starter**  Make money or lose money, that class is awesome—no matter what. What they’re doing is just so real. You talk to your family about the stock class, and people want to learn more about it. It’s a conversation starter.

**Learning to Lead**  Barney has really helped me take charge and given me more confidence and more credibility to lead. Getting up in front of people is never easy. It was good that I did it [in the class] because when I did it at work, I didn’t stumble around. It just gives you that edge.

**Professors with Real-World Experience**  Most of the professors have experience in the business world. That’s good. In business there is the application and then the study and the theory. There can sometimes be a gap. But Barney provided a really good experience, a well-rounded experience. I’m very glad I went there.

Barney grad Robert Graham MBA ’09 and classmates successfully invested a portion of the University’s endowment as part of an unusual graduate class.
“I know it’s a very demanding business, but I have a great education and great training, and I know that with drive and persistence I can be successful in the long run.”

“While I’ve been fully committed to my studies and preparing for my career, I also get a wonderful feeling of pride and satisfaction from helping others.”

“It’s too early to tell where I’ll end up teaching, but I’m already looking forward to opening new worlds of ideas to my students and helping them achieve their dreams.”

Kelly Cipriano ‘09
Hometown: Woodbury, Conn.
College: Hartford Art School
Major: Illustration
Student award: Belle K. Ribicoff Prize, which recognizes one graduating senior who best exemplifies academic excellence, leadership, and the ability to excel outside the classroom
Academics: 3.9 GPA; graduated summa cum laude
Leadership: Resident assistant in Regents Park suite-style campus apartments
Outside the classroom: One of 100 student illustrators selected from nearly 6,000 candidates by the professional Society of Illustrators to have work displayed at the Museum of American Illustrators in Manhattan
Career goal: To become an art director, perhaps in the music recording industry

Maegen Garthwaite ‘09
Hometown: Windsor, Conn.
College: Barney School of Business
Major: Accounting
Student award: John G. Lee Medal, awarded annually to a graduating senior from Greater Hartford who has excelled academically and been deeply involved in community service
Academics: 3.86 GPA; graduated summa cum laude
Leadership: Active member of the Barney Leadership Council, helped to connect students with local business leaders, and organized fundraising drives for the Make-A-Wish Foundation and Toys for Tots
Outside the classroom: Raised money for the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence, volunteered for FoodShare, and supported Red Cross blood drives
Career goal: Joined CIGNA’s prestigious accounting development-track program in August

Daniel Hultgren ‘09
Hometown: Hillsboro, N.H.
College: College of Arts and Sciences
Major: Dual degree in physics and philosophy; minor in math
Student award: John G. Martin Scholarship, which provides funding for two years of study abroad at Hertford College at Oxford University in England. He will continue his studies in philosophy and physics.
Academics: 3.95 GPA; graduated summa cum laude and with University Honors
Leadership: Coordinated and managed tutors at King Philip Middle School in West Hartford, Conn.
Outside the classroom: Red Cross volunteer, member of University Philosophy Club, Educational Main Street tutor, performed with local band
Career goal: to earn a PhD and become a professor at a small liberal-arts college