Nothing is more life-changing than the power of a great teacher or mentor. I know from personal experience. In the spring semester of 1966 when I was a sophomore at Trinity College, I signed up for a class called Introduction to American Literature with Professor Paul Smith. I chose the class because some friends told me he was an inspiring professor. I had searched for a major but had not yet decided on one.

So I sat in a class of 25 students listening and watching Paul Smith at work, leading us through meticulously prepared lectures on the classics in American literature. I was entranced by the precision and intrigue of the poetry of Emily Dickinson and thrilled by the passion and power of Walt Whitman’s verse. I began a lifelong love affair with F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby.

More importantly, I saw in Paul Smith the man I wanted to become—one who has a passion for literature and reaching, and a discerning intellect. Two years later, Paul Smith granted me the then-rare privilege as an undergraduate of enrolling in a graduate course in contemporary literature. Surrounded by older students, mostly high-school and community-college teachers of English, I explored the work of Saul Bellow, John Updike, and John Barth. These experiences changed my life. Paul Smith inspired me to live the life of the mind and music program. Acoustics and music may be the most selective and challenging major at the University of Hartford, since applicants must have the analytical skills of an engineer and the musical talent to pass an audition in The Hartt School. The program is led by one of our most beloved and respected teachers, Bob Celmer, known affectionately as “Dr. Bob” to his students. Demke will use what she has learned here at her new job as an acoustical engineer at Cerami Associates, headed by Victoria Cerami ’81.

Johnson was a vocal performance major in The Hartt School. She is one of many students who have been inspired and challenged by DeLois Traynum Lindsey, who is the advisor to multicultural programs. As president of Brothers and Sisters United, Johnson learned the lessons of leadership from Lois—something she says she will never forget. Johnson is hoping to join Teach for America next year.

Great teaching and close relationships between faculty, staff, and students have always characterized the University of Hartford. They continue to be the most important building blocks on which our current strategic plan is based. In the years ahead, I am sure that Haight, Demske, and Costello will use what they have learned here will change their lives forever.

Walt Harrison
President