Being the first graduating class of the new century is not the only thing that distinguishes the Class of 2000. The class will be remembered for starting a new tradition at the University of Hartford, one that organizers hope will get bigger every year.

Under a new program called Senior Signature, members of the Class of 2000 were asked to make gifts to the University of $25 each. Those who contributed had their names engraved on a senior class plaque, which was unveiled on May 9 on the outside wall of the University Commons.

Each year, a new plaque will be added to the wall with the names of graduating seniors who made donations to the University. The plaques will be the focal point of a new Senior Courtyard that will be developed outside the Commons.

The goal of the Senior Signature program is to encourage graduating seniors to go on to become active and involved alumni who support their alma mater. The Class of 2000 plaque features the names of 125 seniors who made gifts to the University, representing 12.5 percent of the graduating class. That is a tenfold increase over 1999, when just 1.2 percent of the senior class made contributions.

Katherine Dziedzic, a graduating student and member of the Senior Class Planning Committee, said she expects the number of participating seniors to increase every year as awareness of the program grows.

“Our class has set the standard, and hopefully each class after us will set new standards and new goals,” Dziedzic said. In addition to Dziedzic, the Senior Class Planning Committee consisted of Clifton Belcher, Shane Ciccarelli (who also served as president of the Student Government Association), Andrea Coletta, Alison Furst, Allison Gavazzi, Stephanie Kaplan, and Kasia Pink.

As the first senior class plaque was unveiled, several dozen graduating students excitedly gathered around it to look for their names and pose for photos. After the unveiling, they celebrated with a barbecue at the home of President Walter Harrison.

“One of my great interests is increasing alumni contributions, and there’s no better place to start than with the graduating class,” Harrison told students at the unveiling. “I hope you’re going to remain active and committed alumni. I hope to see plenty of you in the future.”

Visit <uhconnections.org/seniorsignature> to view more photos from the Class of 2000 Senior Signature events.
It was late Saturday afternoon of Commencement Weekend when a magnificent rainbow appeared on campus, foretelling the splendor of the day that would follow. Jeff Feldmann, grounds supervisor cum campus photographer, captured the auspicious image, as he has so many memorable University moments.

Sunday, May 14, arrived with a brilliant sun and not a cloud in the sky. Graduates and family members began arriving early to enjoy the beautiful weather and a Mother’s Day that would have more than the usual to celebrate. Red carnations abounded (one for each mother), as did eyeglasses shaped in the number 2000.

Eventually some 7,500 would assemble to hear words of wisdom from Federal Appeals Court Judge José Cabranes, Phoenix Chairman and CEO Robert Fiondella, American Girl dolls founder Pleasant Rowland, and renowned Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner. Student Government Association President Shane Ciccarrelli described what he had learned during the “best four years of [his] life.”

The ceremony was a homecoming for El Salvador President Francisco Flores, Hillyer ’79, who said, “The University of Hartford allowed me to inquire, to broaden the scope of my interests. It placed no obstacles [before] my thirst to learn, and it taught me discipline and focus. More than an institution, it became my new home. It became a community where my mind was nurtured and stimulated.”
Commencement 2000 fell on Sunday, May 14, coinciding with Mother’s Day. In recognition of the special day, University staff handed out a long-stemmed red carnation to each mother present. Mother’s Day was proclaimed a national holiday by President Woodrow Wilson in 1914, thanks to the determination of Anna M. Jarvis. Carnations, the favorite flower of Jarvis’s mother, became the official flower of the day. Our photographers captured many moms and their grads celebrating that day.
“To be fully prepared for success in this new millennium, we [women] must understand fully the intricacies and the imperative of personal finance and building assets, the importance of investing prudently in our own futures, the power and clout that come with economic self-sufficiency.”

DENISE L. NAPPIER, treasurer, State of Connecticut, speaking at Hartford College for Women

“Civilization is an ongoing and dynamic process that requires the constant positive contribution of its members. It is only when we become a creative center that we are useful to others. Find that cause. Find that center. Resist the temptation to be lost in the placid generality of the group. Stand by your truth.”

FRANCISCO FLORES ’79, president, El Salvador (The full text of President Flores’s speech appears on page 23.)

“This morning, you have graciously recognized me for my business achievements, but in so doing, you have honored something much more important: the ability of one individual to change the world for the better in one small way. For that, I deeply thank you.”

PLEASANT T. ROWLAND, founder, Pleasant Company, distributor of the American Girl product lines

“To be fully prepared for success in this new millennium, we [women] must understand fully the intricacies and the imperative of personal finance and building assets, the importance of investing prudently in our own futures, the power and clout that come with economic self-sufficiency.”

DENISE L. NAPPIER, treasurer, State of Connecticut, speaking at Hartford College for Women

Harry J. Workman, professor of chemistry, received the Roy E. Larsen Award for Excellence in Teaching. Fascinated by how students learn and driven to make that learning experience a better one, Workman is, to quote one of his colleagues, “a model of what everyone wants from a good teacher.”

Michael J. Panik, professor of economics, was awarded the James E. and Frances W. Bent Award for Scholarly and/or Artistic Creativity. His prolific research and work across disciplines have had far-ranging applications in the areas of tater, agriculture, opinion research, management, and public policy.
"Your job in the future—the job of all of us—is to make sure that the American experiment does not fail, that the American political and economic system remains synonymous with hope and promise for all people. Congratulations and good luck!"

JOSÉ CABRANES, judge, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit

"I don’t pretend to be an expert or have all of the insights other than I’m constantly seeking to learn, and seeking advice on how to live, and how to live life more fully. Probably the one thing I think I’ve done as well as anything is take advice, so I encourage you, as you go forward to open yourselves up and make yourselves vulnerable, to learn from all of those around you."

ROBERT W. FIONDELLA, chairman and chief executive officer, Phoenix Home Life Mutual Insurance Company

"Social Security is a woman’s issue. Women represent 60 percent of all Social Security beneficiaries, and 72 percent of beneficiaries age 85 and older are women. There are 137,000 individuals alive over age 100, and 131,000 of them are women."

BARBARA B. KENNELLY, counselor to the commissioner, Social Security Administration, and former Connecticut congresswoman, speaking at Hartford College for Women

Karen Barrett, director of the All-University Curriculum and associate dean of undergraduate studies, received the Oscar and Joshua Trachtenberg Award for service to the University. A driving force behind the development of numerous campus programs and committees, Barrett has been described by colleagues as “the quintessential University citizen.”

Jane Horvath, associate professor of economics and associate dean for academic administration, was presented the Donald W. Davis All-University Curriculum Award. Trained to look at things in an interdisciplinary way, Horvath believes that “when students get out into the world, they will be better able to understand the issues facing them if they can see how they are connected.”

Provost Elizabeth S. Ivey was presented with the University Medal for Distinguished Service. When she joined the University in 1995, Ivey arrived during one of the most difficult and challenging periods in the institution’s history. As she prepares to retire on June 30, she can be gratified that because of her dedication and hard work, she is leaving a financially sound University with a bright future.
Ad Humanitatem
Excerpted from the “Charge to the Graduating Class” by Shane Ciccarelli ’00, The Hartt School

An education at the University of Hartford is not just about 60-page papers, exams, lectures, and presentations. It is about learning how to treat and interact with other people, including yourself, and how to respect differences. Ad Humanitatem—these are the Latin words found on the University seal, meaning “for humanity.” I believe that these words capture the essence of our experiences and education here at the UofH.

All of the memories that have formed what we can call our college experience—they mean something and have made some type of impact on our lives. I do not believe that universities truly make the students; instead, they nurture them. I do believe, however, that students make the university, and each of us has been a part of making the University of Hartford the magnificent place that it is.

I am sure that many of us can think of at least one person, if not more, who works on this campus and has never turned us away when we needed guidance. Whether a professor, office worker, or administrator, he or she has also become a friend.

These past four years have truly been the best four years of my life. Yes, that ever-popular cliché that we all heard before we left for college has come true. I hope all of you feel the same. My life and who I am have changed dramatically since I first arrived on campus, and never could I have imagined the person I have now become.

Today we celebrate not only our achievements but also the past, the present, the future, and most importantly, we celebrate ourselves. Congratulations, Class of 2000, and always live Ad Humanitatem!”

A Commencement She Will Never Forget

When Monica Barrera logged onto the University of Hartford Web site a few weeks before graduation, she couldn’t believe her eyes.

Barrera had lived in El Salvador until she was five years old, and she goes back regularly for visits. Her father still lives in El Salvador, where he worked on the election campaign of President Francisco Flores.

Now, according to the UofH Web site, Barrera would get an opportunity to see Flores in person—not on one of her visits to El Salvador, but at her graduation in Hartford!

“It was amazing. You barely ever hear anything about El Salvador anyway, and to hear that the president would be coming here …it was just amazing,” Barrera said.

Barrera learned from the Web site that Flores graduated from the University of Hartford’s Hillyer College in 1979 and that he would be the 2000 Commencement speaker. Barrera was about to earn her associate’s degree from the University’s Hartford College for Women (HCW), and she would be one of the 1,326 graduating students at Commencement.

Several days before Commencement, Barrera met University President Walter Harrison at a banquet for resident assistants (RAs). Barrera, who was an RA on the HCW campus, told Harrison that she was from El Salvador and asked if it would be possible for her to meet Flores.

And so, after the Commencement ceremony on May 14, Barrera found herself standing outside Harrison’s office, shaking hands with the president of her homeland. Flores greeted her with a warm smile, and the two spoke for several minutes in a conversation that fluctuated between English and Spanish.

Barrera was delighted when Flores recognized her father’s name. Miguel Barrera is a top manager with El Salvador’s national security agency, the Academia Nacional de Seguridad Pública (ANSP), and he is active in Flores’s political party, which is known by the acronym ARENA. The day after Commencement, Miguel Barrera awoke to find a photo of his daughter, with presidents Harrison and Flores, featured prominently in La Prensa Gráfica, one of El Salvador’s two national newspapers.

Monica Barrera said that her meeting with Flores “made me feel great pride in myself and in my country, and it motivated me to continue my education.” Barrera, who plans to study biological sciences at the University of Connecticut, noted that Flores’s success is a wonderful example of the power of education and hard work.

Even though she has lived in Connecticut since she was five, Barrera said that El Salvador will always hold a special place in her heart, and she will continue going back for regular visits. “The country is just beautiful. It just feels like home,” she said.

At the end of Barrera’s post-Commencement conversation with Flores, he told her, “We’ll be waiting for you in El Salvador.”

“I’ll be back,” she promised.
I know the privilege of using this podium entails the responsibility of being relevant to the occasion. But after visiting my old dorm and crossing the bridge over the Hog River, memories assaulted me with such force that I must allow me to briefly reminisce on that fall 23 years ago, when I first arrived at the University of Hartford.

I came to Hartford in the late '70s, in September 1977, to be precise. Strikes of gold in the generally green landscape of Connecticut announced an early autumn and with it, a cold winter. Months from that date, the weight of ice and snow would break the roof of the Hartford Civic Center. My parents' somber faces at the airport in San Salvador concealed deeper fears than those normally associated with a farewell to a 17-year-old.

Those were difficult times for me and my country. After decades of military rule, El Salvador was fast headed to the deepest conflict in its history: a civil war that would last more than a decade, and that, with its blind violence, would affect every single Salvadoran family.

By the fall of 1977, all the signs of a devastating conflict were in place: the restlessness of the entire population, isolated bursts of violence, a total contradiction between what was lived and felt and what was publicly acknowledged.

The message I received, therefore, was not "Get a degree, become a competent individual and come back to your country." Rather, it sounded more like "Build a life elsewhere, for El Salvador is no longer a possibility."

I thus began my work at Hartford with a sense of uncertainty, nostalgia, and being uprooted—feelings more suited to an exile than to a foreign student.

As odd as it may sound, I learned to truly love my country here at Hartford. By love I mean commitment, responsibility, and awareness of its possibilities.

It is no mystery that one becomes fully conscious of the precious components of life only after they are threatened.

Of the generation of Salvadorans who left the country in 1977, the majority of them went on to build successful lives abroad through hard work, and they are certainly a source of pride to our country. I, however, could not conceive of the idea of not going back. My personal life experience, my dreams, my creativity, my aspirations were so intertwined with my country as to be literally inseparable.

And so, one day, by the trees behind Mortensen Library, I decided that, come what may, I would go back. This decision had a momentous consequence. It exploded in my mind as the one essential prerequisite to any life project: I desperately needed to become well educated. And here is where my experience and yours, fellow graduates, are identical.

The two fundamental challenges in education are to learn to live and to understand what one lives for. The first is absolutely practical. It requires an understanding of the mechanics of our contemporary world, how it functions, what are the opportunities of our rapidly evolving circumstances. The second, though absolutely abstract, is as important, for only when we understand what we live for, can we develop a sense of meaning and purpose. This is the realm of values, and as such, of universally valid principles.

It is a rich paradox that the only way to develop a sense of direction in our future is by immersing ourselves in the timeless traditions of our past.

The University of Hartford awakened me to both these challenges. It allowed me to inquire, to broaden the scope of my interests. It placed no obstacles in my thirst to learn, and it taught me discipline and focus. More than an institution, it became my new home. It became a community where my mind was nurtured and stimulated.

Over the years, I have become acutely aware of how much I owe this University. I had always hoped for an opportunity to show my gratitude.

Never had I imagined that the occasion would come in an event like this, when the University bestows such an honor upon me. Now that the opportunity has come, I express my commitment to be worthy of this merit and hope my words can carry my deep-seated gratitude.

Dear graduates, as I see you in your gowns and tassels, so full of promise, I would like to share with you what has been my compass in life, in the hope that it might strike a chord in you.

There is a core in each one of us that distinguishes us from all the rest. It is that one characteristic that defines our personality. It is an inherent ability that we possess and recognize as our own. Upon its development depend not only our personal fulfillment but also our capacity to contribute to our society.

Civilization is an ongoing and dynamic process that requires the constant positive contribution of its members. It is only when we become a creative center that we are useful to others. Find that cause. Find that center. Resist the temptation to be lost in the placid generality of the group. Stand by your truth.

I went back to my country in the worst years of the war. I went to live with the campesinos in the rural areas. I found something greater than my past, greater than my roots, greater than my identity. I found my country; I found my happiness. May you, dear graduates, find yours.

Congratulations! Thank you.