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Charles Gibson, co-anchor of ABC’s “Good Morning America” and “Primetime Thursday,” told the graduates that they would face difficult decisions in the years ahead and that the code of ethics they developed as students at the University of Hartford must be their guide.


“Your four years were never about memorizing facts,” Gibson said. “These four years, you had a much broader mission. You were here to learn how to think, how to analyze, how to interpret, how to form an argument. And perhaps most important, you were here to develop a sense and a code of ethics because there are ethical imperatives in this life—compassion, honesty, fairness, trustworthiness, and a respect for others,” he said.

“You are part of what my daughter calls the post-9/11 generation,” Gibson told the graduates, “and that means two things to me. First, you cannot live in fear, you cannot let anyone compromise our civil liberties in the name of security. And second, you have got to be involved, and part of that is to be an informed consumer of my product...which is the news.

“Know what is important news and what is not. Make it a point to keep abreast of foreign affairs, domestic politics, and economic issues, and turn us off when we get fixated on...lurid murders or sex scandals. When an announcer says ‘a report you have to see,’ you probably don’t. When an anchor says ‘shocking details,’ they probably aren’t. When a reporter claims his news is fair and balanced, it probably isn’t. And when politicians say, ‘I’m going to level with you,’ they probably won’t,” he told a chuckling audience.

Gibson’s concluding charge drew enthusiastic applause from the graduates and their family members: “You are full of dreams; you are full of energy; the hormones are raging. You should be intoxicated with possibility. Go get ‘em. Show your folks out there how wisely they have invested in you.”

The Hartford’s Chairman and CEO Ayer urged the graduates to “get involved and encourage others to follow in your path, so that they, too, can aspire to all of the opportunities you will enjoy.

“Every graduate here today embodies the value of a commitment to education. Education is the single best secret to...transforming a person’s life,” he said, offering special praise for the more than 300 students and faculty members who have participated in the University’s Educational Main Street program as tutors in the Hartford public schools.

“Nothing will benefit the city of Hartford more than helping it build a world-class school system,” Ayer said.

Newman told the graduates that “those who do what they want to do live longer and happier lives. Why should I stop doing what I love? I can’t, and I don’t want to. Creative people are like that,” the 85-year-old photographer explained. “Renoir said, ‘It’s like the call of nature: you simply have no choice.’ The choice is enjoying doing what you like or being trapped in a field you don’t like. Try to select work that will give you the most pleasure in life. If you choose a profession for the sake of money, that’s very sad.”

At Hartford College for Women’s Commencement ceremony later that day, Pat Meiser-McKnett, the University’s director of athletics and special assistant to the president, told the graduates about her career-long effort to help advance Title IX, the federal mandate against discrimination in education, beginning in 1972 when she was an assistant women’s basketball coach at Penn State University.

Elizabeth Horton Sheff received HCW’s Pioneer Woman Award. Sheff is the majority leader for Hartford’s Court of Common Council and a longtime community activist whose son was the plaintiff in the landmark Sheff v. O’Neill school desegregation suit. Margaret W. Nareff, Class of 1967, was the recipient of the Marcia Savage Alumna Award.
Five faculty members and three students were honored at Commencement.

Mary L. Carsky, professor of marketing in the Barney School of Business, was honored with the Oscar and Shoshana Trachtenberg Award for Service to the University. Over the years, Carsky has taken on an enormous range of projects that have resulted in important contributions to the Barney School, the University, and her profession. Among her many accomplishments, Carsky developed and implemented the Barney School’s “No-Hassle” MBA services, served on the search committees for president and provost, co-chaired a task force that studied issues of importance to adjunct faculty, and served on the committee that has been developing standardized procedures for student evaluations of faculty. She has worked tirelessly to promote faculty development and to encourage the use of technology in her department.

Anne Fitzmaurice, who stepped down last year as vice president for student affairs and dean of students in order to return to teaching, received the University Medal for Distinguished Service. During her 24 years at the University, Fitzmaurice has served in a wide range of roles, including associate professor of mathematics, department chair, dean of Hillier College, acting provost, vice president, and regent. Her work has been defined by her deep devotion to students and to the University. She was responsible for creating a more student-centered environment on campus, establishing the Center for Community Service, directing the development of a five-year plan to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities, and expanding the University’s substance abuse prevention efforts.

Richard Freund, Maurice Greenberg Professor of Jewish Studies and professor of history, was the recipient of the James E. and Frances W. Bent Award for Scholarly and/or Artistic Creativity. Anyone who has ever sat in one of Freund’s classes or public lectures or worked with him on an archaeological dig in the Israeli desert will readily attest to his boundless energy and his expertise. His work in such areas as biblical archaeology, the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, early Christianity, Rabbinic Judaism, Jewish ethics, and Jewish philosophy has been cited and praised by fellow scholars. But what truly sets Freund apart is his ability to put those subjects in a context that the average person can understand.

Yvonne Jehenson, professor of modern languages and literary and cultural studies in the College of Arts and Sciences, received this year’s Donald W. Davis All-University Curriculum Award. The students in Jehenson’s AUCS 150 class, Gender, Identity, and Society, describe her as one of the best interdisciplinary teachers and scholars at the University, and they portray her class as stimulating, engaging, and even life-changing. Jehenson challenges students’ ways of thinking, encourages them to express their opinions, and opens them up to new perspectives through a wide variety of speakers, films, lectures, trips, articles, and other materials. She is an internationally recognized scholar who speaks Spanish and French fluently and has studied biblical Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.

Raymond J. McGivney, professor of mathematics in the College of Arts and Sciences, received the Roy E. Larsen Award for Excellence in Teaching. During his 33 years at the University, McGivney has helped generations of students master the most complex material in the study of mathematics by helping them understand how math relates to familiar situations. McGivney’s colleagues and students describe him as a rare and gifted teacher who has the singular ability to bring a mathematics classroom to life and turn the most math-phobic students into motivated learners. He has co-authored two textbooks and written manuscripts for three. His energy and creativity were intrinsic to the development of two significant mathematics courses: Contemporary Mathematics and Modeling with Elementary Functions.

Sarabeth Grant is this year’s John G. Martin Scholar. Graduating with a double major in English literature and American history, she is described as an exemplary student who is “insatiable curious.” She was the 2002–03 Humanities Center Scholarship winner, a 2003 Senior Regents Award recipient, chapter president of Sigma Tau Delta (the international honor society for English) and president of the Alpha Chi honor society, which recognizes the top 10 percent of the University’s junior and senior classes. Grant is relocating to England with her husband, Jonathan, to pursue a master’s degree. As the University’s 17th Martin Scholar, she will study modern history and English for two years at Oxford University’s Hertford College.

Ghaith M. Hammouri was the recipient of the Belle K. Ribicoff Prize, awarded to a graduating senior who has achieved academic excellence, taken on leadership roles, and been active in extracurricular activities. A double major in electrical engineering and physics, with a minor in mathematics, he partnered with Dean Alan Hadad to finish a 20-year-old paper written by Hadad’s late uncle on prime numbers for submission to the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE). The paper was scheduled to be presented at ASEE’s annual conference in June 2003. His senior project included a digital power meter that communicates with a personal computer. A native of Amman, Jordan, Hammouri was president of both the engineering honor society, Tau Beta Pi, and the Muslim Student Association.

Jessica Johnson was the third recipient of the John G. Lee Medal, awarded each year to a graduating senior from Greater Hartford who has excelled academically and is engaged in extensive community service. A psychology major with a grade point average of 3.98, Johnson has an extensive record of community service. She has spent the past year as a volunteer at Planned Parenthood of West Hartford and previously as a volunteer assistant instructor with the T.E.A.M. Health, Inc. (Therapeutic Equine-Assisted Mental Health) program. The program teaches social skills to developmentally disabled students through the use of equestrian training. She is enrolled at Yale University for the fall of 2003, where she will pursue a graduate degree as a psychiatric nurse practitioner.
Music Feeds Her Soul

Erica Geller arrived at the University with a song in her heart—and with a song in her heart, she leaves it. Graduating with a degree in vocal music education from The Hartt School and a near-perfect grade point average, the New Jersey native earned a spot on the President’s List (minimum GPA, 3.75) in her first semester—and never gave it up.

Geller hopes to combine her love of music with her love for children by finding a general music teaching position in the Hartford public schools. Because of the University’s strong teacher-training program, she says, “the prospect of going on job interviews is more exciting to me than frightening.” She student-taught at several elementary and high schools throughout the Greater Hartford area.

“You do fieldwork from the time you take your first education course,” Geller explains, “and as you advance, you take on more and more responsibility.” Ultimately, you have full responsibility for a class for an entire semester—as she did in 2002–03 at East Hartford High School.

Geller's extracurricular interests extended well beyond the world of music. “I’ve made use of just about everything on campus!” she says. Especially satisfying was time spent at the University’s Center for Reading and Writing, where she worked with special-needs children.

Along with her PC and stereo system, Geller packs up and takes with her a host of accolades and honors. A member of Alpha Lambda Delta, a freshman honor society, and Alpha Chi, an honor society for juniors and seniors, she also was nominated for Pi Kappa Lambda, the national music honor society. In addition, she designed a special education and music Web page that has been linked to the Organization of American Educators and is now used by the education department in the University’s College of Education, Nursing and Health Professions.

Looking ahead, Geller plans to return to school for a master’s degree after she has a few years of teaching under her belt.

Ready for His Close-up

He started out as an electrical engineering technology major at Ward College of Technology, but after logging thousands of work hours at STN–Channel 2, the student-run television station, Mike McCarthy decided to switch gears, or at least re-tool them. “I really grew to love broadcasting,” he says, “and I realized that narrowing my engineering major down to broadcasting, rather than electronics in general, would give me a much better chance of getting the kind of job I wanted.”

As a result, McCarthy became a “contract” major. With the help of an advisor, he put together a series of courses and suggested it as a major or concentration. In May the Rochester, N.Y., native received a bachelor of science and Technology with an emphasis in broadcast engineering. Two months ago he landed a job at WFSB-TV in Hartford, working at his craft and loving it.

McCarthy’s association—or, as he puts it, “obsession”—with STN–Channel 2 began the day he arrived on campus. He has served as STN’s chief engineering major down to broadcasting, rather than electronics in general, would give me a much better chance of getting the kind of job I wanted.”

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photographer and chief engineer, both elected positions. Of STN's many milestones during his time there, McCarthy's proudest achievement is the design and construction of new studio suites, which he saw through from start to finish.

Although he describes STN as "the most influential part of my college career," McCarthy also credits the University's television studio with giving him hours of hands-on experience. "I met lots of prospective students who would either stop in at STN or tour the University's television studio. I'd always tell them, 'If you're looking for a school that offers great hands-on experience, this is the place for you.'"

"My experience here has helped me decide what I want to do with my life. It has really given me unparalleled training for my career. It's the best training that I could ever have gotten anywhere."

Taking Time to Unwind

Erik Rugar has definite plans for life after graduation: putting all thoughts of a career on hold and taking some time to relax, unwind, and have fun. And why not? Four years of hard work and rigorous play have earned this personable young athlete from Suffield, Conn., the right to delay what he calls "getting serious."

According to Rugar, life at the University of Hartford has been a 50-50 proposition—50 percent of his time and energy cracking the books as a finance and economics major in the Barney School of Business, and 50 percent of his time and energy on the soccer field as a star player for the Hawks. Encouraged by his soccer coach, he also participated in community activities, including the Walk for Hunger and reading days at local public schools.

A lifelong soccer player, Rugar was surprised to find himself greeting the end of the soccer season this year with a sigh of relief. "My time over the past four years has been taken up by my studies and soccer," he says. "When soccer was over, I was relieved. I realized that I finally have the time now to pursue some of the things that I couldn't pursue before."

As he is quick to point out, putting a career on the back burner doesn't mean he won't earn a living. "I've pretty much always worked," he says, running down a laundry list of jobs that he has held at the University, "and I intend to continue to support myself. I just want to take some time to relax and think seriously about the kind of career I eventually want."

Leaving the campus, however, won't be easy for the two-time America East Academic Honor Roll recipient. "I can't imagine a school that could have fit me better than the University of Hartford," Rugar says. "I've made great friends, and through soccer, I've had the opportunity to meet people from every country imaginable."

Setting a Family Milestone

Commencement day gives every graduate's family the right to overflow with emotion. For Eulalia Garcia's family, the day brought with it incomparable pride and joy, and with good reason. When Garcia walked off with her degree in criminal justice, she became the first person in her extended family to graduate from college.

Garcia represents a success story not only for her family but also for the Hartford Scholars program that helped make her college career possible. She maintained her spot in this special scholarship program for Hartford public-school graduates by consistently earning a 3.5 grade point average or better.

Not satisfied with only taking from the program, Garcia gave back by becoming actively involved with The Associates, an organization composed of members of the Greater Hartford business community who play a major role in funding the Hartford Scholars program. Just weeks before graduation, Garcia was guest speaker at the organization's annual gala fund-raiser, an encore performance for her. When she spoke at the gala three years ago, her passion and sincerity in describing the program's impact on her life inspired a standing ovation.

Long active in Naciones Hispanas Unidas, the campus organization for Hispanic students, Garcia has also consistently offered her assistance to incoming freshmen as a campus Red Cap. Committed to community service, she holds a part-time job at AIDS Project Hartford, where she helps clients with such needs as finding housing or budgeting household income.

Garcia began her pursuit of a degree in criminal justice at Hillier College and then transferred to the College of Arts and Sciences, where she founded the UH chapter of the Criminal Justice Association. With her sights set on a career in forensics, Garcia will begin work toward her master's degree this fall at the University of New Haven. She was also accepted at Quinnipiac Law School.

Making a Statement Through Art

For Pedja Zdravkovic, who arrived here four years ago from Belgrade, Yugoslavia, on a tennis scholarship to study graphic design, a shaky start has led to a strong and winning finish.

"When I first came here to live," he says, "I was in culture shock. I was a year older than many other freshmen, and I didn't feel that I fit in. I went back home on every break. Then I got involved in school. I really started to enjoy my classes; my professors were really great."