On a day filled with smiles, balloons, music, tossed caps, and ceremony, some 1,300 Hartford students become alumni.
Only the forecast refused to reflect the celebratory mood on campus for the university’s 48th annual Commencement ceremony on May 15. Dark clouds threatened a downpour but failed to deliver as approximately 1,300 members of the Class of 2005 gathered on campus to receive their degrees. Parking spaces were at a premium with a record number of friends and family on campus for the event.

University President Walter Harrison noted that the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, occurred just a few weeks after this graduating class arrived on campus as freshmen. “I hope all of your experiences here have helped you find friends, learn more about yourselves, and gain knowledge and wisdom that will lead to professional and personal success later in life,” he said in addressing the graduates. “But I hope that you have learned something else, too. That by coming together as a community of people who care about each other, we can overcome obstacles and fears.”

Four leaders in business, the arts, and human services joined the select circle of individuals who have received honorary degrees from the University of Hartford: Willie Anthony Waters, the charismatic leader of Connecticut Opera; Michael Bangser, who has led the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving for the past 15 years; Richard Booth, CEO of Hartford Steam Boiler Insurance Co. and chairman of the MetroHartford Alliance; and award-winning translator and author Gregory Rabassa, who is currently Distinguished Professor of Hispanic Languages and Literature at Queens College in New York.

The students also heard from one of their own, undergraduate communication major Natifia Gaines ’05. “We have a foundation that will enable us to do whatever we choose, to continue schooling or to start a career. No matter what choices we make, we need to keep in mind that there are more challenges to come as we embark on new life experiences. Reflect on what you’ve learned at Hartford and the experiences you’ve had, to give you the inspiration you need to surmount them.”

Waters, who has been general and artistic director of Connecticut Opera since 1999, told the university’s Class of 2005, “As you begin your work, let your soul guide you, let your spirit enrich and inform you as much as any amount of knowledge you will obtain. For it is the soul that fulfills us, and it is the spirit that helps us on our way.”

Rabassa, who has translated some 40 books from Spanish and Portuguese and has received numerous awards for his work, offered the graduates a lighthearted take on making the transition to the next phases of their lives. “What is happening to you today is that you are all being translated. You are students being translated into graduates. If you look at it closely, you will see that every day you awaken, you must translate yourself into that day.

“So I’d like to give you this little advice. Carpe Diem! You have probably seen that lots of times, and you’ve seen it translated a bit too literally. My translation of Carpe Diem is ‘Live it up!’”

Booth, who earned both his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in accounting and finance from the University of Hartford, told the
Class of 2005, “You are entering a world of exciting potential and incredible personal challenges. Often I hear that your generation will not have the same opportunities that mine enjoyed. I really don’t agree with that, and, in fact, I think your opportunities will be far broader and more significant.”

Bangser, who is stepping down after more than 15 years as president of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, complimented the university for its role in the community. “What really makes the difference is adding the human touch to community relationships. The university has exemplified [this] and other attributes of a good community partner, often without a lot of recognition and credit,” he said.

The university’s main Commencement ceremony also featured the presentation of faculty awards to Robert Carl, professor of composition and music theory at The Hartt School; Harald Sandström, associate professor of politics and government in the College of Arts and Sciences; Raymond McGivney, professor of mathematics in the College of Arts and Sciences; and the late Peter Harvey, adjunct faculty member in the All-University Curriculum. Student achievement awards were presented to graduating seniors Meghan Hegarty and Ramiz Khoda of the College of Engineering, Technology, and Architecture, and Julia Case of the College of Education, Nursing and Health Professions.

Go to www.hartford.edu/observer for more photos.