

## Walter Harrison, A Builder

University of Hartford President Walter Harrison retired on June 30, 2017, after 19 years. For nearly two decades the University experienced a period of energy and vitality unmatched in its history, thanks in large part to Harrison, the University's fifth president. His leadership spanned nearly a third of the University's 60-year existence. During his years at the helm, despite two significant national economic downturns, the University's finances, fundraising, and academic quality all improved dramatically.

Today's UHart campus looks nothing like it did when Harrison's presidency began. There are many new and renewed buildings. Major additions or renovations to the University's signature academic facilities include the Renée Samuels Center of the Hartford Art School (opened in 2007), the Integrated Science, Engineering, and Technology Complex (opened in 2005), the Mort and Irma Handel Performing Arts Center, which houses the dance and theatre divisions of The Hartt School (opened in 2008), and the Shaw Center at Hillyer College (opened in 2012). In addition, the University's newest residence hall, the five-story Hawk Hall, was completed in 2007; new athletics fields for soccer, lacrosse, softball, and baseball opened in 2006; and a significant renovation of the University Commons dining hall took place in 2014. A major

renovation of and addition to the library was completed in spring, 2017 and renovation of Gengras Student Union is now underway.

Arnold Greenberg, a past president of the Board of Regents, was on the hiring committee that recommended Harrison for the presidency in 1998. "After 19 years of close association I think it is the warmth and genuineness that people trust him for," says Greenberg. Greenberg adds that Harrison's tenure at the University was assisted by generally good economic times and that he made the most of that opportunity to not only build up the campus and the academics but to also forge bonds with the greater community.

Among the new academic programs added during President Harrison's tenure are a bachelor's degree in multimedia web design and development, a combined bachelor's in Health Science/Master of Science in Prosthetics and Orthotics (MSPO), a bachelor's in Health Science leading to a Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) degree, a master's in architecture, an accelerated joint doctoral degree in pharmacy in partnership with the University of Saint Joseph, and three low-residency MFA programs in photography, illustration, and global arts.

Building the best and most caring community possible for students was Harrison's focus and he monitored the success of that effort by staying in touch with students. He stopped to talk with them on walks across campus, he attended their performances, presentations, and sports events, and he taught classes. Harrison co-taught a course nearly every spring on "Discovering America: 1945 to the Present" with Professor of Educational Leadership Donn Weinholtz. They took turns lecturing in their multi-disciplinary approach to the topic, drawing on social science and literature.

"I came from a more critical theorist perspective, questioning the military industrial complex and the evolution of corporatocracy within the United States, and Walt came at it from a traditional faith in the American Dream perspective," says Weinholtz, "so we would gently joust in that regard."

"Walt has a heart for students and he has a heart for young people," says DeLois Lindsey, the assistant vice president for student development. "He's not an ivory tower president. He engages with students and shows he really cares."

"Building a caring community" is not just a phrase to Harrison; it's a way of going about life. "We've changed my mind," is a phrase Lucille Nickerson, now in her third year as chair of the University's Board of Regents, says she heard him say more than once. "Walt is extraordinary in his willingness to sort of 'lay it out' and let people engage in debate," says Nickerson. "He has enormous trust in the judgment of people of good will."

Anne Pidano, chair of the Faculty Senate adds, "One of the things that impressed me in my early one-on-one interactions with him was the extent to which he is genuinely engaged with people when he talks with them and very respectful of what people have to say."

Literally building a caring community by creating a vibrant relationship with the greater Hartford community is a hallmark of Harrison's legacy. The University was the first private university in the country with two public magnet schools on its campus—the

University of Hartford Magnet School (pre-K through grade 5) and the University High School of Science and Engineering.

To improve the neighborhood around the University as well as provide much needed space for dance and theatre instruction, the University, under Harrison, purchased a blighted industrial building and converted it into a 56,000-square-foot state-of-the-art facility that provides performance and rehearsal spaces, classrooms, and studios. This beautiful center for performing arts education also serves as a resource for the surrounding neighborhood community.

Harrison served on many boards in the Hartford area, including Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center, Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges, World Business Capital, The Hartford Consortium for Higher Education, and the MetroHartford Alliance. He is a past president of Hartford Stage, and was one of the founders of the Connecticut Science Center. He also participated in many parades, runs, walks, galas, and fundraisers.

Harrison is also recognized as a leader in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). He was the 2015 recipient of the prestigious NCAA President Gerald R. Ford Award for his work to improve the academic success of student athletes. He chaired the NCAA's Committee on Academic Performance from its creation in 2004 to 2014 and chaired the NCAA's Executive

Committee from 2005 to 2007. Diane Dickman, a long-time executive at the NCAA, says Harrison, "is a champion of strong academic standards" who has made "phenomenal contributions" to improving the lives of student athletes.

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If you measure success by how key indicators have changed since 1998, the numbers indicate success. Harrison congratulated 30,000 students as they graduated. Undergraduate applications for admission have more than tripled. The percentage of enrolled undergraduate students of color has tripled. Our students come from 46 states and 65 counties. The University employs 20 percent more faculty. The University's endowment has increased by 100 percent and we are able to provide more financial aid support and faculty development.

But how does one measure the building of a caring community? Perhaps by asking community members. "I think it's obvious he's here for the students," says Student Government Association President Julia Piri '17. "He will literally do whatever he has to, no matter the time or effort, to create a good student experience."

Lindsey, who has worked at the University for three decades, adds, "The experiences and feelings our students take back to their families, to their neighbors, and their churches and their synagogues, those are the things that I think attract more students. And I think we take care of our kids very well."

Indeed, it does appear that Walter Harrison built—and left the lasting legacy of—a caring community.

## WALTER HARRISON'S LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP 1998-2017



Applications  
up more than

**300%**

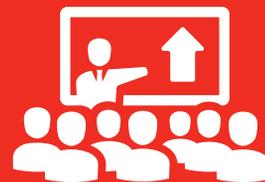
**2,560**  
international  
students from  
**SIXTY-FIVE**  
countries



Congratulated more than  
**30,000**  
graduates

Number of faculty  
members up

**20%**



Endowment up  
**100%**

Built or renovated  
12 buildings

