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Approximately 4,250 candidates received bachelor's degrees in nearly 100 majors during the 139th undergraduate Commencement on May 23 at McGuirk Alumni Stadium. About 20,000 people attended the ceremony.



Chancellor Robert C. Holub presided at the Commencement and President Jack M. Wilson addressed the graduates.

Alumnus Earl Stafford, the featured speaker, told the graduates, "Yes, today's uncertain economic conditions will force us to be more innovative, more creative. They force us to consider ways to be more efficient and effective. But remember, we as a people have endured much together. And we endure because we are a strong, resilient people who see difficult times such as these as a stepping stone to greater things. We believe. We believe in ourselves, we believe in each other, in the promise of tomorrow. And we know that these beliefs, these ideas require vigorous action."

Distinguished Achievement Awards were given to Stafford, a Virginia businessman and organizer of the "Peoples' Inaugural Project," which invited disadvantaged people to President Barack Obama's inauguration, along with alumnus and businessman Robert B. Brack of Milford, and Aaron D. Spencer, founder, director and chairman emeritus of UNO Chicago Grill pizzerias.

Thirteen seniors were recognized as 21st Century Leaders, and one graduating Jack Welch Scholar was honored. A reception for graduates and their families, hosted by the chancellor, immediately followed the ceremony.

Holub told the audience, "I have something in common with the graduates today: We are both experiencing our first commencement at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. I share with you the exhilaration of accomplishment and the feeling of having made it to the finish line in an exhausting, trying, but ultimately exciting and thoroughly fulfilling race."

Student speaker Jackie Hai of Lexington, Mass., told her classmates, "Don't settle for a life of isolation and quiet desperation, to recast a quote by Henry Thoreau. We have the ability to take what we've learned from UMass, and like a seed, carry it with us. And wherever we end up, for work, for duty, or for love, we can plant that seed and let it flourish for our new neighbors. Whether it's volunteering at a soup kitchen, mentoring a kid, becoming a coach, promoting arts and literacy, or starting a community garden, we can each do our part, because we already know how."

This is the seventh year students received the 21st Century Leaders awards for seniors sponsored by the Chancellor's Office and the Alumni Association. The awards are designed to recognize students who are academically accomplished and have contributed to the university by exceptional achievements that distinguish themselves or enhance the reputation of the campus.

This year's recipients are: Ivan A. Bercovich, an Electrical Engineering and Mathematics major from Jamaica Plain; August Siena Thomas, a Linguistics, Italian and BDIC major with a minor in ancient Greek from Montague; Laurene Dykiel, a Chemical Engineering major from Acton; Abigail Lyn Harper, a Public Health Sciences major from Belmont; Robert House, a Civil Engineering major from Northboro; Amy Kent, an Anthropology major from Lenox; Ho (Yarty) Kim, a Finance major with a minor in Economics, from Amherst; Lauren N. Mahoney, a Comparative Literature and Women's Studies major from Marlborough; Lindsay E. McCluskey, an Anthropology major from Upton; Christopher W. Meaden, a Biochemistry and Molecular Biology major from Chicopee; Elizabeth F. Paice, a Psychology and Political Science major from Mansfield; Lauren Scheiper, a Communication Disorders major with a minor in Psychology and Linguistics from Longmeadow, and Matthew Sloan, a Biology major with a minor in Geography from Beverly. The recipients receive a plaque and a monetary award from the Alumni Association.

The graduating Welch Scholar is Kyle Johnson, a member of Commonwealth College and a Management and Economics major. Funded by a gift from the GE Foundation in honor of alumnus Jack Welch, the scholarships provide full funding for recipients throughout their undergraduate years, including support for summer research and study abroad. Welch Scholars are chosen for their academic achievements, social responsibility and leadership potential as demonstrated throughout their high school careers.

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