Hartford, CT - More than 13,000 family members and friends filled the XL Center in Hartford on Tuesday, May 12, to cheer on their sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, as 1,130 undergraduates and 70 graduate students received their diplomas at Eastern Connecticut State University’s 125th Commencement exercises.

Award-winning author and distinguished Eastern alumna Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie ’01 was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters, Honoris Causa during the Commencement Exercises, and offered remarks following presentation of her honorary degree. Adichie graduated summa cum laude from Eastern in 2001 with a degree in Communication. She was also awarded Eastern’s Distinguished Alumni Award in 2004.

Adichie is the author of a collection of short stories, “The Thing around Your Neck,” and three novels. Her latest novel, “Americanah,” was published in 2013, earning recognition as one of The New York Times Ten Best Books of the Year. Last month, Ms. Adichie was named one of Time Magazine’s 100 Most Influential People in the World.

Adichie recalled that when she graduated 14 years ago, “I had doubts and worries. ‘What next?’ was the question on my mind. You are worried today just as I was. You should be worried, because it shows that you care. It is okay not to have all the answers.” Adichie encouraged the graduates to “make an effort and speak the truth. It is okay to say, ‘I am wrong’ or ‘I don’t know.’ Life on Earth is short. Each moment that we are not truthful to ourselves, we are wasting our time on Earth.”

Eastern President Elsa Nunez told the graduates, “Our nation and the global society we live in are looking to you for leadership. As you embark on your career, take care of yourself, take care of your families, but make sure that you take time to help others.”

Other graduates were reflective in describing their Eastern experiences. Aaron Daley, from Bloomfield majored in political science and minored in business information systems and pre-law. “My liberal education helped me to enhance my critical thinking skills, and built up my confidence; I now know that I can accomplish anything I set my mind to achieve.”

Taylor McBride from Willimantic, a sports and leisure management major from Willimantic who minored in sociology, said Eastern’s small campus community, “where everyone knows everyone, really enhanced my social skills. In addition, my mentors Janice Party and Coach Denise Bierly, and all the professors in my major, impressed me with the great passion and energy they had.”

ECSU Grad: Aaron Daley, of Bloomfield

Keynote Speaker - Chimamanda Adichie, who graduated form Eastern in 2001