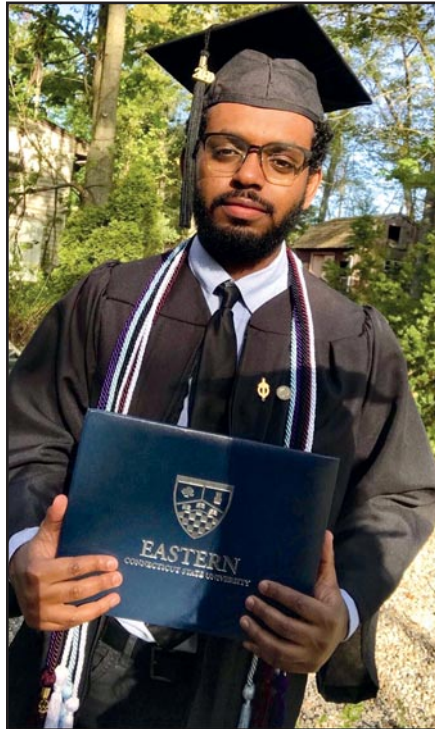


COMMUNITY

CONNECTICUT - COMMUNITY FOCUS

Nelson Mandela Would Be Proud of THIS Graduate!

By Dwight Bachman, Public Relations Officer at Eastern Connecticut State University



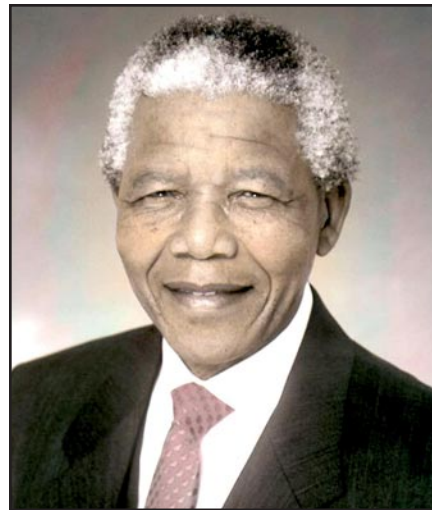
Natnael Belay

On May 19th, more than 1,250 undergraduate and graduate students, due to COVID-19, watched from home as Eastern Connecticut State University conducted its 130th annual Commencement Exercises via YouTube. In addition to 1,175 undergraduates, 85 graduate students received their degrees.

Prior to Commencement, the university sent each graduate their diploma cover, two copies of the evening's program, and their mortarboard and tassel to make their family's festivities more complete.

One of the graduates, Natnael Belay, from Ethiopia, would have made Nelson Mandela proud. Mandela once said, "Ethiopia always has a special place in my imagination and the prospect of visiting Ethiopia attracted me more strongly than a trip to France, England, and America combined. I felt I would be visiting my own genesis, unearthing the roots of what made me an African."

Belay graduated summa cum laude with a double major in Com-



Nelson Mandela

puter Science and Business Information Systems with 4.0 GPA in both majors! Natnael is extremely competent in Programming—Python, Java, Android, HTML, Big Date, Software Engineering, Mathematics, Data Management, Systems Analysis, Business and IT Strategy. He is a great photographer. I could go on. He is so good at so many things. He had so many job offers from high tech companies across the nation that he didn't know which one to take. He settled in Boston.

I loved Natnael because he, while also serving as the top student

coder on campus, sat 15 feet away from me in my office area and always helped me figure out how to use my cell phone! We would often share a chicken and spinach pizza and laugh and talk. What a generous, gracious, kind, respectful and honorable young man.

In addition to helping me, Natnael served as a math tutor on campus and helped renovate Eastern's website. Also, as a resident assistant, he helped Eastern's great Housing Director LaMar Coleman develop leadership, responsibility, accountability and emotional intelligence in students. Belay won numerous awards at Eastern, and was a member in prestigious honor societies, including the International Computing Honor Society and the National Leadership Honor Society.

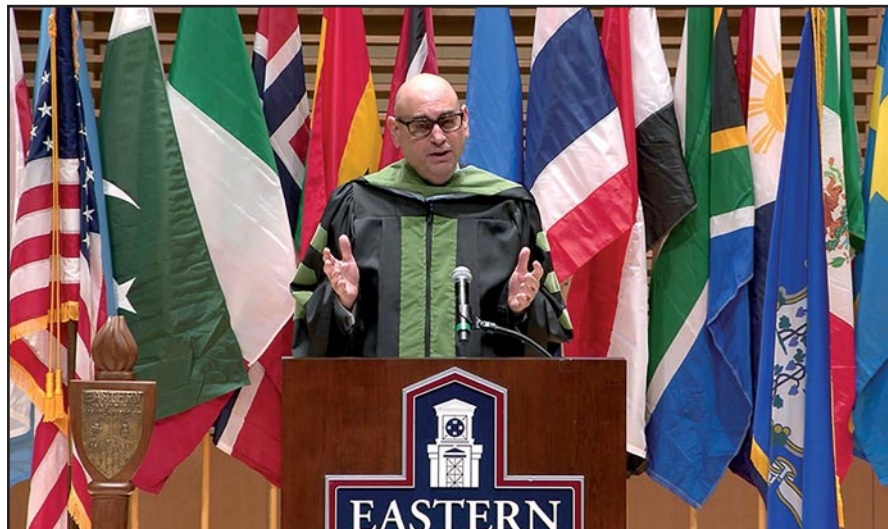
Commencement speaker Mark Boxer, Cigna executive vice president and chief information officer, encouraged the graduates to find ways to give back to society, turning to legendary children's television personality Mr. Rogers for inspiration: "There are three ways to ultimate success — the first is to be kind, the second is to be kind, the third is to be kind."

Eastern President Elsa Núñez told the graduates, "Since you arrived four years ago for summer orientation, the faculty and I have been telling you that the liberal arts skills you learn at Eastern will serve you well throughout your careers and your personal lives." She cited critical thinking, professional communications, ethics and collaboration as competencies highly sought by U.S. employers—skills mastered by Belay.

You Rock, Natnael. You are such an inspiration and role model! Keep it rollin'! And may God bless you greatly! ###



Dwight Bachman



Speaker-Mark Boxer, executive vice president and chief information officer at Cigna



Eastern President Elsa Núñez