Graduation podium provides a new outlook

800 SUNY grads hear actor Aidan Quinn

By Paul Brooks

New Paltz — You had to look past the throng of moms and dads standing on the brick sidewalks of SUNY New Paltz with flowers in one hand and a camera in the other, and past the professors in their fancy gowns and funny looking hats. Behind the education majors and the finance majors, the nurses and physicists and philosophers, at the back of the line of 800 undergraduates waiting to collect their degrees yesterday stood Lauren Ruane.

"I feel special," Ruane said as she and her friends waited for their commencement to begin. "I'm pretty happy.

Four years have given Ruane a new outlook. "It's weird looking at all the new people just coming in. They look so much younger," she said.

Dana Schoenman, right, gives Sarah Napolitan a hug yesterday after they received their degrees during the SUNY New Paltz commencement.

Her major in Women's Studies shifted her perspective on the test she took recently to become a probation officer on Long Island, where her family lives. A sentence on the test was worded with "he/him," she said. "I circled it. It's wrong. I get really annoyed when I see sentences like that."

Like the cars of a long train, the line of undergraduates, divided by school and department and degree, jerked into motion, flowing in fits and starts into the Old Main quadrangle where parents, relatives, friends and partners waited. Altogether, the college handed out 1,088 undergraduate and 341 graduate degrees this month.

Miguel Sanchez stood outside the fenced-off special seating area and peered into the division of black-gowned students seated in front of the podium. A young man rose from his chair holding a cell phone to his ear, turned and flailed one of his arms over his head.

"I see you," Sanchez shouted into his own cell phone. "That's my best friend, Bryant," he said.