

From the Provost

How the University Is Addressing the Health-Care Crisis



From the moment I stepped onto campus last May, it was evident to me that the University of Hartford is a vibrant, intellectual, artistic, and creative community. During the past year, I have come to understand even more fully the breadth of our expertise, the depth of our intellectual endeavors, and the extraordinary range of talent we have to draw upon.

Because one of my own areas of scholarship is medical ethics, I have paid particular attention to the burgeoning national health-care crisis and how the University is poised to address society's needs through our academic programs and outreach as a "private university with a public purpose." It is for this reason that President Harrison asked me to use his regular column in the *Observer* to highlight some of the current initiatives related to health care and technology—the focus of this issue's special section.

Since the completion of the preliminary sequencing of the human genome in 2003, geneticists have made remarkable progress in identifying the function of each gene in the human body. The hope is that unlocking our genetic code will enable researchers not only to predict whether certain individuals will develop various conditions but also to advance technological responses to some of our most common and devastating genetically linked diseases, including diabetes, heart disease, and cancer.

University of Hartford faculty members and researchers Jacob P. Harney and Hemchandra Shertukde have been aggressive in taking up this challenge with their investigations. By providing support to such outstanding faculty, and through the hiring of new faculty at the cutting edge of their disciplines, the University has succeeded in creating increased visibility in the research arena throughout the state.

Two recent examples are the \$125,000 Young Investigator's Grant awarded to Aime Levesque, assistant professor of biology, by the Breast Cancer Alliance for her promising research on breast cancer, and a \$75,000 grant to our nursing faculty to prepare nurses in the clinical specialty of community/public health. Through these and similar initiatives, the University is partnering with policy makers, health-care providers, and the public itself to confront the increasingly complex challenges of health care.

As a student-centered university, our primary emphasis continues to be providing hands-on instruction in labs and utilizing scholarship to inform classroom learning. The opportunity

for both undergraduate and graduate students to participate in research teams alongside their professors strengthens the quality and competitiveness of our graduates.

An excellent model is the work Kevin Ball, assistant professor of physical therapy, is doing in the Human Performance Research Lab. There, students are engaged in data collection and analysis to support the development of assistive technology to help patients receive a fuller, more rapid recovery from injuries due to accidents or medical crises such as strokes. The mentoring relationship integral to these projects inevitably has a profound and lasting impact on students' professional success.

Like the Human Performance Research Lab, the new Master of Science in Prosthetics and Orthotics program will involve intercollegiate collaboration between the Colleges of Education, Nursing and Health Professions and Engineering, Technology, and Architecture in addressing increased demands for technological solutions to the physical and psychological needs of the growing elderly population, as well as those returning from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Beyond the labs and classrooms, the service that the University provides to surrounding communities through programs like Project Horizon represents a unique dimension of liberal-arts learning that is central to our mission. By taking the classroom into the community, our students are offered insights into issues of cultural competence, diversity, and social justice that cannot be learned without direct interaction with the individuals we seek to serve.

I am immensely proud of all of the work being done at the University of Hartford to prepare students for jobs in the many aspects of health care and to foster a commitment to lifelong learning and civic engagement. I am confident that our students in the health professions will graduate with the academic skills necessary to play a leadership role in addressing both current and future health-care needs.

Lynn Pasquerella
Provost