Welcome Class of 2012!

More than 1,500 freshmen and nearly 200 transfer students joined the University of Hartford community this fall. During weekend Orientation sessions in May and June, new students met each other and took tours of campus. After academic programs were outlined, eager students selected courses, learned how to access the University’s online technology, and received their ID cards. Spring Orientation is just one of many programs designed to help new students adjust more easily to campus life.

New on campus this fall is a drop-in center for students who are, well, . . . new on campus this fall. The Freshman Success Center, housed behind B complex and just off Alumni Plaza, offers a warm and welcoming haven for first-year students. It’s designed to help them get into the swing of college life and connect with our vibrant University community.

“For students to have a rewarding four-year experience at the University of Hartford, they need to feel like this is their second home,” says Irwin Nussbaum, associate vice president for student life and director of the new center.

To achieve its goal the new center “will be a comfortable place where first-year students can come to talk to us about anything that’s on their minds,” says Nussbaum, who conceived the idea for the center. “We will have information available on a range of issues that first-year students have to deal with,” he says, “and we will do all we can to assist them in becoming self-advocates and learning how to navigate any difficulties they may find.”

Nussbaum believes it’s important for the center to be proactive in getting students involved. “We’ve already reserved tickets to see Spamalot and Sweeney Todd at the Bushnell [Center for the Performing Arts] and The Big E [Eastern States Exposition], he says, and we plan to put on a freshman talent show and a karaoke night.” Nussbaum says he and his staff will take a look at what students were involved in when they were in high school, then introduce them to those same clubs and activities here on campus.

If “home is where the heart is,” the Freshman Success Center will feel like home for the Class of 2012.

Freshman Oasis Springs Up near Alumni Plaza

BY JUDIE JACOBSON

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Director Irwin Nussbaum (right) stands with Freshman Success Center staff, Administrative Assistant Priscilla Lawrence (left) and Senior Associate Director Suzanne Anderson McNeil, ready to welcome all new students to the center.
College is not high school. That was the underlying thinking behind the University’s preceptor program, which is now entering its third year. More precisely, high school graduates aren’t always prepared for the rigorous academic expectations that await them as college freshmen. The goal of the preceptor program is to increase the odds that first-year students will succeed academically by introducing into the classroom peer preceptors who will assist them in making the transition from high school to college course work.

“Preceptors are stars to steer by,” says Joseph Voelker, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Voelker developed and introduced the program and is heading it for the third year.

“A preceptor is an advanced student of superior talents, and often character, who has been handpicked by a professor to assist in a course that enrolls all or almost all freshmen,” explains Voelker. Chosen because they have excelled, often in the very same course, preceptors wear different hats, depending on the needs and expectations of the faculty member teaching the course and the first-year students. Preceptors play a variety of roles—study coaches, role models, advisors, guides, writing and homework tutors. Most importantly, preceptors bridge communication between the faculty member and students.

Preceptor Maria Qadri explains. “Often it’s hard for freshmen to approach a professor. Approaching me was easier,” says Qadri, a biomedical engineering major who is in her third year as preceptor for the freshman engineering and design course taught by associate Professor Hisham Alnajjar, associate dean of the College of Engineering, Technology, and Architecture.

Since the program’s launch, the number of preceptors has doubled from 30 to 60. According to a recent survey, student success factors, such as academic engagement, are on the rise among first-year students who took classes that had preceptors. Associate Professor Katherine Black, who tracked the effects of the program on students, faculty, and preceptors in her previous role as assistant provost, says, “The preceptor can communicate to the professor when the course content is not getting through, or communicate the faculty member’s expectations to the student.”

In her study, Black, who has since moved on to become chair of the psychology department, found that in addition to benefiting freshmen, the program provides a valuable leadership opportunity for preceptors.

“[The preceptors] raved about how much it enhanced their relationship with faculty members and boosted their respect for the professors and the teaching profession in general,” Black says.

Qadri, a senior who hopes to go on to graduate school, agrees. “It was a great experience for me. It taught me a lot about teaching and about how to watch students and determine whether they’re engaged and understanding the material. Many grad schools look for students with past teaching experience, so I believe this will give me an edge.”

As for faculty, notes Voelker, “You have to have courage as a professor to take on a preceptor because you are opening the door to being criticized. It’s a chance to be self-conscious about your teaching, to take a hard look at it and say, ‘Could I have done something differently?’”

A manuscript written by Voelker and Black about the successful program has been accepted for publication in a higher education journal.
Me and My Shadow
ALUMNI AND STUDENTS PAIR UP FOR A GLIMPSE AT REAL-WORLD CAREERS
BY VERNON TUITT III ’09, COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Usually I spend my spring vacations working or watching television. But last year I decided to do something really different. I joined a group of University of Hartford students who spent their spring vacations shadowing alumni in the workplace. We got a firsthand look at the day-to-day operation of various careers in area corporations, design studios, engineering firms, and medical facilities.

The new program, called Express to Success, is coordinated by Alumni Relations Director Kandyce Aust and alumni board member Salvatore Cianfaglione ’93. Kandyce met one-on-one with each of us and asked all sorts of questions to get a better feel for what type of career might appeal to each of us. Then she matched us up with alumni who worked in those areas.

I spent my week shadowing Louisa Handle at Fathom, a strategic marketing and design firm in Hartford that is owned by Brent Robertson ’94. I was amazed to learn about other types of writing out there. Since my focus is creative writing, I always thought I had to become a writer or a teacher, but neither field interested me in terms of a lifelong career. Louisa let me write a few press releases for Fathom and helped me edit my material so I’d gain a better idea of how to write something other than a fiction story. I think being in the Express to Success program helped each of us define and confirm our career interests.

“I could visualize myself standing where Dr. Schauer stood and comforting each patient from my heart, just as he did,” says Chelsea Walton ’10, who shadowed Dr. Peter Schauer ’71, chief of the Division of Medical Oncology at Hartford Hospital.

“It was a transition into the workplace, where you no longer feel like a student and see yourself doing this as your career,” adds Luis Sanay ’09, who shadowed David Sack, business administrator at Smith Barney in New York City.

Alumni say they also found it rewarding to participate in the program, and many have offered to help students in the future.

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“I’d tell students to enter the program with an open mind and a strong desire to learn,” said Rob Thomas ’92, who mentored Ashley Chai-Chiang ’09 in The Hartford’s actuarial department.

“Also, be professional but relaxed during the process; it isn’t an interview, but you are making an impression, so try to keep a good balance.”

When a student is looking for a career that might also be considered his or her dream job, there can be difficult choices. The University’s Express to Success program opens doors to possibilities and lets students try them out.

The positive reactions to last year’s first session have encouraged Aust and Cianfaglione to continue the program this coming year.

“Alumni: If you are interested in participating as a mentor in the Express to Success program, or know a student who may want to participate, please contact Kandyce Aust at aust@hartford.edu.

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"The mentoring program went very well, with positive feedback from both the mentors and the students," says Cianfaglione. "We are hopeful that we can attract even more students into the program this coming spring."
For Alicia Farrell ’09, the summer of 2008 was anything but a vacation. On top of two other jobs, she spent at least 10 hours a week working for Sling Slang Records, an independent record label based in Southington, Conn. Farrell, a music management major at The Hartt School, did everything from searching for new bands to promoting the label to recording background vocals. And she didn’t get paid, at least not in dollars, because she was an intern.

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“This was something that went above and beyond my expectations for a summer internship,” Farrell notes. “I learned so much more and put the skills that I’ve learned in school thus far to use.”

Her boss at Sling Slang, owner George Engel, taught her how to spot potential in new musicians, a skill that will be very important as she pursues her career. Additionally, she learned about music production and engineering from Hartt alumnus Scott Genereau ’01, who owns Aliehn Productions in Bristol, Conn., where Sling Slang artists record their music.

Engel says businesses benefit from having interns because, when used effectively, they allow more work to be completed. “We have so much to do here that it’s actually impossible to do everything without good workers,” he adds.

University of Hartford students earn credits for their internships, and that means some homework is involved. Farrell had several assignments from Conley, including weekly reports that detailed her activities, what skills she learned, and interesting people she met. She also had to write a 20-page paper. These assignments, along with evaluations from her boss, determined a final grade.

Engel had no doubt how he would rate Farrell: “She’s the best intern I ever had.”