As the new provost at the University of Hartford, I am enjoying the opportunity to become familiar with the teaching and research/creative activities of our talented faculty. While it was evident to me during the interview process last spring that faculty engage in a wide range of exciting projects, a closer look had to wait until my arrival on campus in mid-August. Having been intrigued by the institutional mission statement that “we engage students in acquiring the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to thrive in, and contribute to, a pluralistic, complex world,” I am heartened by the degree to which the research and teaching missions of the University have formed a dynamic synergy that I see as one of the strengths of this institution.

This issue of the Observer spotlights the link between our research and teaching missions. A campus such as ours, with a deep commitment to a liberal arts–based education, undertakes to provide students with a broad background of communication, critical-thinking, cultural, aesthetic, humanistic, mathematical, and scientific skills and knowledge. To foster the transformation of students into critical thinkers or creative artists, the faculty must be, and remain, such thinkers or artists themselves. The research activities of the faculty constitute their continuing activity as knowledge seekers while also deepening their expertise in the areas of knowledge in which they engage their students in the classroom, the laboratory, and the studio.

I invite you to explore this issue’s special section, “Off Campus and Around the World,” and the numerous examples of faculty research efforts highlighted there. You will see an extraordinary range of disciplines and breadth of expertise demonstrating how our faculty either actively involve students in their research efforts or prepare to bring back new knowledge, techniques, and approaches to share in the classroom. Note, for example, Associate Professor Ivana Milanovic’s summer NASA grant that supported her research at the John Glenn Research Center. Or the work of Professor Don Ellis, who conducts research in Israel that is then reflected in his course Media and the Middle East, concentrating on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And Associate Professor Carole Padberg, whose teaching and research in Ghana have brought non-Western art influences into her work and her classes.

Teaching and learning environments can reach far beyond the confines of the campus to include international experiences that provide students, both directly and indirectly, with the global perspective essential in a 21st-century education. I posed a question—“How does faculty research (including experiences involving international exposure) strengthen teaching and learning at the University?”—to College of Arts and Sciences Dean Joe Voelker. He responded that students who have direct exposure to faculty research enjoy accelerated learning. They go from “beginners to partners in the very short window of time they are in a bachelor’s program, and it gives them a wonderful advantage if they choose to go on to graduate school.” Some of this learning will be found in study-abroad opportunities, such as Assistant Professor Dennis Wasko’s study of puff adders in Gambia, East Africa, that promises a future study-abroad course, and in Barney Professor Susan Coleman’s recruitment of Shandong University of Finance students with reciprocal plans for taking University of Hartford students to China.

These are exciting examples of intertwined teaching/learning/research endeavors. They demonstrate some of the rich and rewarding results of the community of scholars, artists, and practitioners that make up the University of Hartford faculty.