Making the World Their Classroom
by Michelle Godin ’00

The University of Hartford strives to offer its students a complete education, one that will prepare them for the challenges of the global community of the 21st century. During the past year, more than 100 students, representing all nine schools and colleges, have participated in the programs offered by the University’s International Center.

Students can attend universities in more than 50 different countries while earning credits toward their majors. Financial assistance may be applied to an affiliated study abroad program, so the experience often comes at no additional cost to students. English is the language of instruction for many study abroad programs, but students still have opportunities to learn and practice foreign languages. They can spend one semester, a winter or summer term, or a full academic year abroad.

The University also offers opportunities for international internships in a broad range of disciplines, that allow students to gain valuable work experience while earning course credits. During the time abroad, students have the chance to travel in their host countries and adjacent nations.

Four students who traveled overseas this past year spoke with The Observer during a recent International Center luncheon at The 1877 Club on campus.

Katelyn Schuft, a senior painting major and art history minor, had always wanted to study abroad. When she learned that the University’s Hartford Art School was affiliated with the Marchutz Painting School (an adjunct institute of American University) in Aix-en-Provence in southern France, it was a chance she couldn’t let pass her by. Even though Schuft speaks French, she says it was difficult for the first three months to adjust to the language. After her year there, however, she is now proficient in French. In fact, she did so well as a student in France that she won the Dr. Constantine Christofides Award for research that she did on medieval art history, sculpture, and artwork. Schuft said that Marchutz provided her with an interdisciplinary approach to painting and art history.

To Schuft, the most valuable part of her experience was living in the culture. “Their pace of life suits me,” she said. “No one is busy trying to climb ladders.” She spent her time in France getting to know people and becoming closer to nature. She enjoyed the outdoor market and eating only what was fresh and available.

While abroad, Schuft also traveled to Italy, where she was exposed to some of the world’s greatest art. She can’t say yet how her experience abroad will benefit her future career, but she does know that it has changed her perspective and her artwork.

Roommates Kate Dougherty and Kelly Gould spent the spring semester of their junior year in Newcastle, Australia. The University of Newcastle, an hour north of Sydney, appealed to Dougherty and Gould because it offered programs that incorporated both of their majors. Dougherty is a double major in English and education; Gould is a communication major. The decision to study abroad was a spontaneous one for the pair, who had heard wonderful stories about friends’ experiences abroad. They went to the International Center, signed up, and less than a year later they were in Australia.

The most important part of their experience, the roommates said, was the exposure to another culture. They enjoyed the Australians’ laid-back attitude and slower pace of life. Dougherty said that she plans to continue traveling and that the experience has changed her outlook on the world. Gould plans to stay in touch with the people that she met there—forever. “I loved every minute of it!”

Jeremy Hassel, a marketing major in the Barney School of Business, took advantage of the summer program that is offered at Richmond University in London. Except for the bland food, he said, it was easy to adjust to living in London. He enjoyed the international business classes and found it surprising that his professors acted not only as instructors but also as advisors, interested in students’ lives outside of the classroom. He was able to complete two classes in six weeks and travel to Spain, France, and Belgium for an additional two-and-a-half weeks. Hassel said his experience abroad has left him generally more open-minded and aware that there are a lot of opportunities in the world. “I would encourage all students to study abroad. It’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.”

Michelle Godin is a graduate intern in the University’s Office of Communications.
Discovering Britain
by Thomas Grant
Professor of English

In the mid-1980s, then–University of Hartford President Stephen Joel Trachtenberg had the clever idea of affiliating the University with Hertford [pronounced Hartford] College, one of the several colleges making up Oxford University in England, and one of its oldest, founded in 1282 as Hart Hall and refounded as Hertford College in the 19th century. Trachtenberg exploited the common origin of the two place names: Connecticut’s capital city and the region of the college’s medieval founder, Hertfordshire.

In the spring of 1986, Trachtenberg established a sort of “Rhodes Scholarship” with Hertford College, based on a competition among our very best seniors, one being chosen per year thereafter. The scholarship entitled the winner to two years of study, thus ensuring that, each year after the first, two University students would be in residence at Hertford College. By the time the first winner, David Casavant, arrived at Oxford for graduate study in the fall of 1987, the scholarship was funded and endowed in memory of the English-born CEO of Hueblein Corporation of Hartford, John G. Martin, by his sister, Helen Martin, a resident of Coventry, England. It has since been known as the Martin Scholarship. [See article on page 22.]

This opportunity for students opened other possibilities for study at Hertford College, one of which has evolved into a regular summer course taught by our faculty and open to all students as part of the University’s summer school. It is called Discovering Britain, a six-credit course taught by two professors, one affiliated with the University of Hartford and the other with Hertford College. Because of the proximity of Oxford to both London and Stratford, the course concentrates every summer, with some exceptions, on history, particularly the age of Elizabeth I, and literature, particularly Shakespeare.

In the summer of 2000, I had the good fortune to be selected as the University’s faculty representative, teaching a course on selected Shakespeare plays, ones scheduled for performance during the summer in theaters in Stratford and London. The course on Elizabethan history was taught by Prof. John Harrop, retired professor of history at Magdalen College, Oxford. Because the actual course ran only about four weeks, students were expected to prepare many readings in advance of their arrival in England and to complete the written assignments for both courses after their return.

Many UH students expressed great interest in enrolling, as did students by e-mail from other universities; by the deadline, however, our eight enrollees were all from the University. Three of our mixed group of men and women were older, commuting students, and three others came from our conservatories, Hartt and the Art School. I was initially worried that so diverse a group would be incompatible, but happily I was wrong. Even at our first get-acquainted meeting, all were exceptionally friendly toward one another. A couple of the students who had enrolled without knowing anyone else found new traveling friends and immediately began making plans to visit important sites, such as Bath, Dublin, and, of course, London.

On the main stage at the Stratford Festival Theater, we saw As You Like It and Romeo and Juliet; and at The Swan, a smaller, more intimate theater next door, we saw Henry IV, parts I and II. On our day in London together, we attended a matinee performance of Hamlet at the New Globe. The students were enthralled by the plays, marveling at the clarity and intensity of the acting, the inventiveness of the costumes and sets, and the originality of the dramatic conceptions.

Our reading experience truly came alive—and not without surprises. Although delighted to see Hamlet staged similarly to its original theatrical setting,
Britain continued from previous page

some students objected to the melancholy prince's cavorting about in his “antic disposition” dressed only in a filthy nightshirt, playing up the bawdiness in his lines and “mooning” the audience! No Mel Gibson was he—more Jim Carrey. Still, this refreshingly unorthodox interpretation was an experience not to be missed.

We stayed in individual dormitory rooms at Warnock House, a modern annex of Hertford College located only a few blocks from the center of Oxford. Our needs were ably met by Ian Sheehy, a graduate student in Irish history at Hertford College, who arranged our trips to the theatres and introduced the students to the local college pub scene. Because many of the colleges of Oxford University operate both summer programs for students and seminars for employees of companies from around the world, the residence halls were bursting with people and, together with the many gawking tourists, made the city of Oxford itself a lively but noisy mecca. Next door to our dorm, right on the Thames River, was a popular pub, Head of the River, where we sat outside and watched the pleasure boats and punters. Several students tried to master the art of punting a boat and, luckily, managed to avoid falling in.

My wife, Carol, accompanied me during my summer teaching term and stayed with me in one of the dorm rooms. While I was teaching, she spent time reading in the magnificent Oxford Botanical Gardens and planning our weekend adventures by rental car to Yorkshire, Wales, and Cornwall. Like the students, we enjoyed simply walking around the city, peeping into ancient courtyards, and ambling through the older colleges, where many fine evening music concerts were held.

 Officials at Hertford College were particularly hospitable, hosting a banquet for us at the high table in the 15th-century dining hall of the college, where we were surrounded by portraits of illustrious graduates, notably John Donne and Jonathan Swift.

continued on page 22

Man of Steel
by Jessica Levine ’98

Sabbatical. A time when professors traditionally take a break from their teaching responsibilities to do research and write.

Not exactly true for the “Man of Steel,” Benjamin Toth, associate professor of percussion at The Hartt School. True, he cannot leap tall buildings in a single bound, and he doesn’t have x-ray vision, but he does have more rhythmic and musical talent than your average man. Toth used five weeks of his sabbatical to travel to Trinidad, birthplace of the steel drum, to play with the Pan Knights, an 80-piece steel drum band headed by Robert Greenidge, one of the world’s most respected steel drum arrangers, composers, and performers.

“I arrived in Trinidad in February 2000, about a month after the band began their rehearsals for Panorama [the national steelband competition of Trinidad],” said Toth. “Generally, rehearsals begin in the ‘pan yard’ around 9 p.m. and continue till midnight. To catch up I had to arrive every day at five, six o’clock in the evening to learn all the notes.”

While in Trinidad, Toth stayed with a local family, the Solomons. The family rents rooms every year to musicians who play in Carnival. “They became my surrogate family,” said Toth. “I learned about the people and customs of Trinidad from Beverly Solomon, her children, and all of their friends and visitors.”

After a few days, Toth realized that he was lucky to be staying with the Solomon family, not just because of their hospitality but also because of their luxurious accommodations. While not a typical five-star hotel, a home with running water, both hot and cold, is the lap of luxury. Trinidad is a third-world nation, and many Trinidadians still live in shantytowns that share one spigot for drinking water, cooking, cleaning, and bathing.

Lack of material possessions does not equal lack of culture, however. “The country’s appreciation for music and the arts is overwhelming,” said Toth.

Steelbands in Trinidad are like pro-baseball teams in the United States. Steel drummers, known as “panmen,” are well respected. Each town or neighborhood has its own steelband, and the people support their local panmen, who enjoy a certain status, even in rough neighborhoods.

“Everyone wants to take part in the local band,” reminisced Toth. “I was talking to one guy who spent four hours every day during rehearsal beating out half notes on a woodblock. Then his beeper went off. That’s when I found out he was a doctor. Truth is, the band really missed him when he wasn’t there to mark the beat.”

Panorama is a highlight of the annual Trinidad Carnival. As rehearsals for the 2000 Panorama progressed, Toth caught up with the rest of the band. “Our band’s tune was titled ‘Picture on my Wall,’” said Toth. “It is a soca tune, composed by the calypsonian [Emuelan] ’Oba’ Synnette and

Ben Toth (center) performs with the Pan Knights in Trinidad.
Global Connections

Inspired by a picture that Synnette owns of an old-time steelband.

The Panorama competition is an exciting time. Divided into three rounds over three weeks, the preliminary competition narrows the field from 67 bands to the 20 that progress to the semifinals; 12 bands are chosen as finalists. And in the end, one band is the champion.

As the competition begins, the bands line all the side streets around Queens Park in Port of Spain. Surrounded by fans, the bands move toward the bull track, then the main stage, increasing their tempo from half to full. By the time they reach the judges, each band is hyped up and raring to go, with the music at warp speed.

Besides the 2000 Panorama, Toth also participated with the Pan Knights in “Pan in the 21st Century,” a competition that features pop, classical, and jazz music arranged in a calypso style. The Pan Knights performed the jazz standard “Autumn Leaves,” also arranged by Robert Greenidge.

“I have been playing steel drums for 20 years, yet I now realize I had never felt the swing of calypso quite the right way, and I never imagined the sheer energy generated in the pan yards of Trinidad,” said Toth. “My experience has influenced my direction of Hartt’s steelband. I have learned to build from the ground up, rehearsing at much slower tempos to really help the students learn the swing of the piece. In general, I learned more about the island, people, culture, and music of Trinidad than I could have hoped for,” Toth said. “It is clear to me that this experience will enhance my approach to teaching and performing music, not just in regard to steel drumming but in a much broader sense.”

Toth brought the music of Trinidad home to the entire University, when he performed on the Lincoln Theater stage at Fall Convocation on Sept. 5. The Man of Steel won the audience’s collective ear, as he took them to Trinidad through his steel drumming and captivating tales of the Caribbean. On that crystalline Convocation afternoon, Toth began passing along the fruits of his sabbatical.

Discovering Vietnam

The photos that senior Josh Blanchfield shot while studying in Vietnam last fall speak volumes about the endless possibilities available to students who choose to study abroad.

A history major, Josh spent six weeks attending classes at the University of Humanities and Social Sciences in Ho Chi Minh City. There, Communist Party officials delivered lectures on topics ranging from the history of Catholicism to modern economics. Josh then went on an extensive, four-week educational tour that took him from the capital, Hanoi, in the north all the way down the central coast of the country. That tour, combined with a month devoted to independent study, allowed him to cover most of Vietnam during his stay.

He experienced everything from having a famous propaganda artist design a poster specifically for him, to touring the country’s impoverished schoolyards, to meeting with Zen masters. Josh has a particular interest in propaganda and studied militaristic art in Vietnam. He discovered that the Vietnamese have a tradition of portraying their long military history in their fine art. Through his independent work, field seminars, interviews with residents, and participatory observations, Josh returned home with a deep understanding and appreciation for the Vietnamese culture and political system.

The highlight of his trip, he says, was swimming in the United Nations-sanctioned territory of Ha Long Bay, a pool of turquoise water surrounded by a perfect circle of 100-foot stones. “It was the most beautiful thing I’ve ever done.”

Josh Blanchfield (left) and friends en route to the Perfume Pagoda in northern Vietnam

Ha Long Bay in northern Vietnam

Discovering Vietnam