The devastating impact of European contact on the original, or indigenous, populations of the world is a familiar story. Although these initial contacts happened hundreds of years ago, the issue of how indigenous and nonindigenous populations interact is still very much with us.

Last fall, visual communication design students in the Hartford Art School participated in a collaborative project called MIX06 (Migrant Indigenous eXchange) AUSA with students at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. The students’ assignment was to explore the relationship between indigenous culture and national identity in their respective countries.

The result is One Step Back/Two Steps Forward, a series of square panels containing digital images produced individually and in teams by the students along with Native American and indigenous Australian collaborators from each student’s home country.

First shown at Monash University in October 2006, the exhibit appeared at the Silpe Gallery at the Hartford Art School Feb. 17–22. It is slated to travel to the Icograda (International Council of Graphic Design Associations) Secretariat in Montréal, Québec, and then to Havana, Cuba, in the fall of 2007 in conjunction with the Icograda World Design Congress. The project was also recently adopted by UNESCO as an inaugural initiative of INDIGO (the Indigenous Design Network), formed to encourage cultural exchange between indigenous designers around the world and to promote indigenous visual cultures.

The MIX06 project was initiated by Robert L. Peters of Manitoba, Canada, the 2006 Georgette and Richard Koopman Distinguished Chair in the Visual Arts at the Hartford Art School. Peters invited Russell Kennedy, a senior lecturer in visual communication at Monash, to come and work with HAS students. Kennedy and Peters also oversaw the project’s Australian component.

If you’re not planning a trip to Québec or Havana soon, you can view the exhibit online at www.mix06.com.au.
When Opportunity Knocks

STUDENTS GET A GLIMPSE OF THEIR FUTURE PROFESSIONS

BY TRISH CHARLES

Rarely do undergraduate students get a chance to work on real projects that result in professional-quality products. Except at the University of Hartford.

Hartt students regularly appear in Hartford Stage productions and at Goodspeed Musicals. Engineering majors are designing new components for spacesuits at NASA’s Johnson Space Center.

This semester, Hartford Art School students and communication majors from the School of Communication are getting a chance to work at the professional level too, thanks to John Feierabend, professor of music education and director of the music education division at The Hartt School.

Feierabend is an internationally known expert on early-childhood music education. In 2001 he approached Dan McNamara, manager of the campus’s Kent McCray TV studio, about producing a DVD for educators who teach music and movement to young children. His publisher, GIA Publications, provided a budget to pay McNamara’s student employees. Any leftover funds went to the studio for supplies and equipment.

The first DVD, called Move It!, came out in 2002. This year, students are working under McNamara’s supervision with Feierabend on Move It 2, which also has a budget from GIA. The students plan to finish editing and creating the DVD during the spring semester. Plans for a third DVD, this time of Feierabend’s lectures.

“Move It! was a huge success,” says McNamara. “It brought in a lot of exposure for the TV studio. And it helps students understand how to work under pressure.”

Feierabend, who has done dozens of educational books and CDs, and now DVDs, is always looking for new ways to capture the attention of young children.

After seeing student work in the art school’s Senior Show last spring, Feierabend wondered if illustration students could work on a new series of 18 children’s picture books that he was planning. He ran his idea by Power Boothe, dean of the Hartford Art School, and that conversation led him to Associate Professors Dennis Nolan and Bill Thomson, both published book illustrators.

“We’re always looking for ways to give our students experience with off-campus projects,” says Thomson. “And this is a great example of collaboration between the schools as well.”

This fall, Feierabend visited Nolan’s book illustration class and had the students sing the two American folk songs they would be working on and dance all the steps that went with the lyrics.

“They were stomping their feet, and swinging their hands, and singing,” says Nolan. “I thought, this is wonderful!”

Nolan’s class spent the semester working on book dummies—each page shows a sketch of the artwork and any copy that will appear on the finished book page—and completed three illustrations. The two finalists, who will have their books published by GIA, are Melanie Champagne ’07 and Aaron Joshua ’07. They will complete their books in Thomson’s Senior Project class this semester.

“Right now, Aaron and I are doing everything that professional children’s book illustrators do,” says Champagne. “I think it will be much easier for us to transition into the professional market because of this experience.”

Mark Helpern ’08 (foreground) and Darrell Kee ’09 are mass media majors in the School of Communication. Here they are operating digital cameras during the Feierabend DVD project.

Aaron Joshua ’07 (right) shows an illustration from his book, There Was a Man and He Was Mad, to Melanie Champagne ’07. Champagne chose ants to people her picture book, My Aunt Came Back.