Innocent but Incarcerated
NOTED ATTORNEY CALLS FOR REFORM OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Noted attorney Barry C. Scheck spoke to a capacity crowd in Wilde Auditorium in March about the impact of DNA evidence in exonerating people who have been wrongly convicted of crimes. All together, 197 people have been exonerated through post-conviction DNA testing since 1989, including 14 who had been sentenced to death.

Of the convicted individuals who contact Scheck’s organization, the Innocence Project, and use DNA testing in an attempt to get their freedom, 40 percent are proven innocent, according to Scheck.

“That’s astonishing,” said Scheck, a professor of law at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law and the nation’s foremost investigator of criminal cases in which an innocent person has been convicted.

Scheck’s talk was the annual Jon O. Newman Lecture on Law and Justice, which was established in 2005 through the generosity of Jon O. Newman, a senior judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. Judge Newman is past chairman of the board of regents and a life regent of the University of Hartford.

One of the most recent cases of a wrongly convicted person’s being proven innocent by DNA evidence is that of James Tillman, a Connecticut man who spent 18 years in prison on a rape and kidnapping conviction before being exonerated in July 2006.

Tillman’s conviction was based on eyewitness misidentification, which is the “single greatest cause of conviction of the innocent,” Scheck said. He added that he hopes Tillman’s case and others like it will lead to a variety of reforms in the process of eyewitness identification.

For more information on the Innocence Project, cofounded by Scheck and Peter Neufeld, visit www.innocenceproject.org.
Acting Out
FROM PRATO TO VERONA, WINTERTERM STUDENTS TAKE IT TO THE STREETS
BY CATHERINE STEVENSON

“Dottore, Dottore, help me, please. I need your magic potion!”
The cobblestoned streets of Prato, a Tuscan town north of Florence, Italy, rang with these words in January as 17 University of Hartford students performed classic commedia dell’arte skits in the piazza in front of the town’s 13th-century cathedral. Since most of the students were music theatre majors from The Hartt School, the development of theatre was a particular focus of the trip.

As local citizens stopped in the midst of their afternoon errands to watch, students donned traditional masks and slipped into the postures of standard commedia characters—the know-it-all doctor, the cranky old man, the crafty servant. Some, like Harlequin and Peirrot, are the ancestors of the modern clown. The figure of Pulcinella, the hunchback jester, is the basis for the character Punch, of Punch and Judy puppet-show fame.

The open-air performance gave the students a chance to display what they had learned in three workshops about the classic characters, standard plots, and comic lazzi (we know them today as shticks) of commedia.

It was all part of a Winterterm study-abroad trip, the second such trip to Italy offered as part of the University’s new initiative to increase opportunities for undergraduate international experiences. The group was lead by Professors Catherine Stevenson (A&S) and Henry Fonte (Hartt), with the assistance of Keith Stevenson and Shannon Michael Wamser. Wamser, a New York–based actor, is an expert on commedia dell’arte, the improvised comedy performed by professional troupes in Italy and across the continent beginning in the 16th century.

The 16-day course concluded with a visit to Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza, the oldest free-standing indoor theatre in the Western world, and to Verona, the setting of Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet. Not surprisingly, many versions of the famous balcony scene were enacted in front of Juliet’s house.
A Hartford-Herat University Connection
ENGINEERING FACULTY REACHES OUT TO COLLEAGUES IN AFGHANISTAN

Associate Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering M. Saleh Keshawarz of the College of Engineering, Technology, and Architecture (CETA) announced in February that the University of Hartford has been awarded a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) grant of more than $215,000—to be received over three years—that will help develop an engineering alliance with Herat University in western Afghanistan.

Since the fall of the Taliban in November 2001, Keshawarz, a native of Kabul and a graduate of Kabul University, has made many trips to Afghanistan, where he has observed widespread devastation to his homeland’s infrastructure due to years of warfare against the Soviets and neglect under the Taliban.

With the support of the local government in Afghanistan and the University of Hartford, Keshawarz has been seeking funds from USAID and the World Bank for several years to revitalize engineering education, specifically at Herat University.

Under the grant, Keshawarz and some of his colleagues in CETA will help revise the undergraduate civil engineering curriculum at Herat University. In addition, two Afghan engineering professors from Herat will come to the University of Hartford to pursue their master’s degrees to obtain more up-to-date training for teaching engineering at Herat.

Grant funds also will be used to purchase new engineering textbooks for students and computers for the full-time faculty at Herat University to improve the quality of their teaching and research work.

Keshawarz and two of his colleagues—Associate Professor Hisham Alnajjar, who is also assistant dean and chair of the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, and Ivana Milanovic, associate professor of mechanical engineering—are also working on a proposal to the World Bank that would expand this alliance with Herat. Under the new proposal, CETA faculty would go to Afghanistan to teach at Herat University while Herat faculty come here for graduate studies. Additional collaborations and exchanges would also be encouraged under this expanded alliance.

“This is two-way collaboration through which University of Hartford students and faculty will benefit from working with the Afghan students and faculty on joint projects and thereby gain valuable international experience,” says Keshawarz. “I believe through activities like these we can build bridges of understanding and goodwill between the people of Afghanistan and the United States.”

Let the Sun Shine
ENGINEERING STUDENTS IMPROVING ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER IN INDIA

In the village of Abheypur, approximately 30 miles south of New Delhi, India, the issue is drinkable water. Almost none of the 3,000 residents have running water in their homes, relying instead on two hand pumps to supply the 2.5 gallons per person needed each day.

To get that water the women walk up to a mile to reach a well in their village, wait their turn at the pump, and then walk back to their homes, balancing containers of water on their heads. At least, that’s the routine when the pump is working.

Sophomore students in a spring-semester engineering course taught by Adjunct Professor Subhash Chandra are determined to improve the villagers’ access to clean water. They are learning the technology and engineering of solar-powered water wells and working with Engineers Without Borders (EWB) to help implement their plan. EWB is a nonprofit organization established to implement sustainable engineering projects in developing communities worldwide.

A $10,000 donation from United Technologies’ Pratt & Whitney funded a trip to Abheypur over winter break to assess the feasibility of the project and determine possible sites for the well. David Pines, associate professor and chair of the Department of Civil, Environmental, and Biomedical Engineering; Chandra; and Rachel Ladue ’09, president of Hartford’s student chapter of EWB, spent several days in Abheypur speaking with the villagers and the local rural development office.

“Our goal is to present our final design to the board of EWB in April for their approval,” says Pines. “We are actively seeking additional support from local foundations and corporations to fund another trip to India for the well’s installation, probably in late July or August 2007.”

Pines added that the student chapter of EWB is also looking for technical mentors and help with publicity, fundraising, and other areas. They would welcome support from alumni.
University faculty and staff joined members of the Greater Hartford community on Jan. 15 to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day on campus. The crowd filled Wilde Auditorium to hear a speech by Deacon Arthur L. Miller, director of the Office of Black Catholic Ministries for the Archdiocese of Hartford.

“Dr. King asked America to look truthfully at its own reality. To open our eyes and recognize the truth,” said Miller. “He told us we can no longer stand idly by while so many suffer.”

Miller added that King’s vision compels us to take action against suffering and injustice, whether it is halfway around the world in Darfur, Sudan, or a few blocks away in Hartford, Conn. Miller, who grew up on the South Side of Chicago, was 10 years old in 1955 when his schoolmate Emmett Till was brutally murdered in Mississippi at the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement.

Alexander Daniels, a sophomore at University High School of Science and Engineering, introduced Charles Anderson and Abigail Tyron, fourth- and fifth-grade students at University of Hartford Magnet School, who recited excerpts from King’s famous “I Have a Dream” speech. The pair ended their presentation by raising their clasped hands into the air, which brought the applauding crowd to its feet.

Ryan Green, a junior in The Hartt School, sang an a cappella solo of “Riding to Town” by Paul Laurence Dunbar, an early-20th-century African American poet. Also appearing was the Jackie McLean Youth Jazz Ensemble from The Artists Collective.

President Walter Harrison, who said he hoped the celebration would become an annual event, concluded his remarks by saying, “May we each in his or her own way, honor Dr. King’s memory every day.”

The Martin Luther King Jr. Day program was organized by a University committee chaired by Christine Grant of the Office of University Relations.

Keeping the Dream Alive
UNIVERSITY HONORS LEGACY OF MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

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Goldfarb Awards

Nick Kontos, a senior majoring in painting, was one of two Hartford Art School students to win this year’s Alexander A. Goldfarb Purchase Awards. Emily François, a senior majoring in photography, was the other. The awards were presented on Feb. 27, and the exhibition, consisting of 76 student entries selected from a field of 177, ran through March 22.

Kontos (above) received the award for his untitled abstract painting, which was done in acrylic, enamel, and oil. François’s entry (below) was a mixed-media piece titled Strip Mall Commemorative Plates. Her work consisted of 16 ceramic plates displaying photographs of stores in a local mall as overglaze decals.

Both students received $1,000 checks, made possible through the Alexander A. Goldfarb Endowment Trust.