Kevin Gray, associate professor of theatre, said it best: “You’ve got to have the best presidential gig in America!” I couldn’t agree more.

Kevin was commenting on my recent role playing as Christopher Sly in William Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*, performed by The Hartt School Theatre Division in May. Each year, theatre majors perform in two Shakespeare plays. Malcolm Morrison, former Hartt dean and now University professor of theatre, directed the senior class in *Hamlet* in February, and Robert Davis, professor of theatre, directed the junior class in *Shrew*.

The last time I appeared in any play was 40 years ago, when I played a minor role in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* while in graduate school. So Bob Davis performed nothing short of a miracle getting me to do a passable job as Sly, a drunk who is discovered unconscious and snoring by a passing nobleman, who tricks Sly into believing that he himself is a lord.

For those of you who are not Shakespearean buffs, *The Taming of the Shrew* is a story of the battle of the sexes. The protagonist, Petruchio, sets out to “tame” Katherine, the free-thinking, plain-speaking daughter of a wealthy Italian. It is not the easiest subject for early-21st-century sensibilities, and Bob wisely played it as a farce.

For six weeks I experienced what our theatre students experience through rehearsals and performance, and I came away with a newfound respect for their energy, talent, creativity, and, most of all, their intelligence. They taught me a lot about Shakespeare, and I have been reading, watching, and studying his plays since high school.

Each of these talented cast members has her or his eyes set on a professional career. And well they might. Some of their predecessors have had unparalleled success: Marin Ireland ‘00, nominated for a Tony Award for her role in *Reasons to be Pretty*, has just been cast in Meryl Streep’s new film, *Hope Springs*. Max Williams ’00 is the resident director of Hartford Stage. Kevin Duda ’01 and Douglas Lyons ’09 are performing on Broadway in the Tony Award–winning play *The Book of Mormon*.

In addition to their Hartt experience, our students receive professional experience, thanks to three partnership programs the Theatre Division has established with the Hartford Stage, Goodspeed Opera House, and, starting this summer, Ohio University in the Monomoy Theater in Chatham, Mass., on Cape Cod.

Alan Rust, who has been the director of the Theatre Division for almost all of its existence, deserves a great deal of the credit for this success. Thanks to his vision, leadership skills, energy, talent, and dedication, this program has become one of the best in the nation. So it is no surprise to learn that he has also been the director of the Monomoy Theater every summer for over 30 years.

This is a great presidential gig precisely because the University of Hartford is large enough to have specialized, nationally recognized programs, and small enough to provide students chances to experience new things and, as with its president, chances to grow and enhance their understanding of themselves and the world around them.

Walter Harrison
President