n 1960, just three years after the University of Hartford was founded, a young Japanese girl named Eiko Johnson enrolled in the University to study mathematics and computer science. Three years ago, she retired, having become during the intervening 38 years the highest-ranking woman executive at Hewlett Packard Corporation.

Eiko Johnson’s story has inspired me since I met her in California during my first year as president. It exemplifies, for me, one of the most important roles this University plays: we hold out the promise of personal fulfillment and success to students from throughout the world.

This very important part of our mission as a university was captured for me again at Commencement in May, when I welcomed Kazuo and Yuko Ninomiya back to campus. Kazuo, who received his MBA from the Barney School of Business, and Yuko, an alumna of The Hartt School, had returned to celebrate their son’s, Kazunori’s, earning his MBA. It was a wonderful occasion, marking now two generations of Hartford alumni in the same family in Tokyo.

Our role as an international university was underscored for me this spring when we bestowed honorary degrees on Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan and President Moshe Katsav of Israel, six weeks apart, during a very troubled time for Israel and the Middle East. In her remarks after receiving her degree, Queen Noor challenged us to embrace the possibilities of world peace and understanding as central to our mission as a university. And I eagerly accepted that challenge.

Since our founding, we have been an international university. Now we have a real opportunity to become a great international university. This year, about 7 percent of our students came from countries outside the United States. We had 400 students studying here from 76 different countries around the world.

But much needs to be done if we are to fulfill this promise. I would love to see us reach a 10 percent level of international students. I know this is an enormous challenge, but I think the benefits for all of our students warrant our setting a goal of this magnitude. Universities should always fight parochialism. They should be places where we meet and learn to know people very different from us, and a significant international student body makes that possible for international and U.S. students alike.

We also have a very diverse international faculty, and I am most impressed by the talents and backgrounds they bring to our students’ educational experience. Dean Alan Hadad of the College of Engineering loves to brag that the College’s three department chairs come from Syria (Professor Hisham Alnajjar in Electrical and Computer Engineering), Afghanistan (Professor Saleh Keshawarz in Civil Engineering), and India (Professor Chittaranjan Shahay in Mechanical Engineering). International faculty distinguish themselves throughout the University; for example, this year’s awardee of the Bent Prize for Creativity among faculty was Yvonne Jehenson, professor of modern languages and literary and cultural studies, and a native of British Honduras, now known as Belize.

We have other challenges to meet if we are to achieve this distinction. Although we have an active International Center that serves our international students well and actively promotes experiences abroad for U.S. students, too few U.S. students study abroad. There are a variety of reasons for this, ranging from curricular challenges in professional fields to personal indifference, but we must address them.

And while we have an active and engaged international faculty, our faculty must be challenged and supported in bringing international dimensions to their courses, scholarship, and art. To that end, we have begun a research term for one of our faculty each year at Hertford College, Oxford. This spring, Professor Rao Singamsetti of the Barney School won the first competition for this position and has been working at Oxford. Next year, Professor Yvonne Jehenson will follow him. In addition, next year, Professor Robert Lang of the department of cinema studies will be teaching on a Fulbright Fellowship in Tunisia. We need actively to seek out and promote other similar opportunities.

To help us do that, we have formed an international advisory board. Made up of alumni, parents, regents, and friends of the University, this board met for the first time in late April and again in early May. The board members are regents Stephen Moseley ‘67 (Hon. ’87) and Brett Silvers; alumni Desmond Wong, Kazuo Ninomiya, Vish Govindasamy, Hussein al-Rifai, Haci Begendik, and Ozge Esen; parents John Botcheller and Mohammed Hammouri; faculty members Hisham Alnajjar, Mahmoud Wahab, and Marilyn Schaffer; and Arosha Jayawickrema, assistant vice president for finance. Mehmet Ayral and Jean-Pierre van Rooy also serve on the board.

This advisory board will play a vital role in helping us achieve an important goal. I intend to report our progress to you in future issues of The Observer. In the meantime, should you have ideas or suggestions, please feel free to contact me <horry@mail.hartford.edu> or Professor Catherine Stevenson <stevenson@mail.hartford.edu>, director of the International Center.

Walter Harrison