Greetings from the College of Arts and Sciences!

The stories you will read here are about making a difference—whether in law enforcement, in teaching, in advocating for our environment, or in eradicating cancer. Our students, faculty, staff, and alumni are making the world a better place each and every day, and for that we are very proud.

The stories also illustrate the great power of a liberal arts education. Our students and alumni have the communication, research, problem-solving, teamwork, and decision-making skills that employers are looking for. Such skills are also highly transferable, allowing our graduates to take advantage of new opportunities as their careers advance.

If you have a story about how your University of Hartford education has helped you make a difference in the world, we would love to hear about it.

In the meantime, happy reading!

Katherine A. Black

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For information on included stories and more, please go to hartford.edu/a_and_s/express.
Hyun Soon Lillehoj ’74
Biology
Agricultural Research Service of the United States Drug Administration (USDA)

For Hyun Soon Lillehoj, receiving her BS in biology at the University of Hartford was just the beginning. She went on to earn an MS in microbiology from the University of Connecticut, and then a PhD from Wayne State University, School of Medicine. She is an international leader in animal immunology and genomics. As a senior research molecular biologist in the USDA’s Agricultural Research Service (ARS), she has made pioneering scientific discoveries that have helped prevent and treat diseases in commercial poultry, protecting the health of consumers and saving the industry billions of dollars.

During her 30-plus years at ARS, Lillehoj has helped mitigate the use of antibiotics in poultry, finding that certain food supplements, probiotics, nutrients, and vaccines can replace antibiotics as an effective means of enhancing the immune system and fighting common parasitic diseases and bacterial infections.

Lillehoj’s scientific breakthroughs have resulted in 10 U.S. and international patents, more than 390 peer-reviewed scientific papers, 14 book chapters, and 230 worldwide collaborations with academia, foreign governments, and private industry. She received the Career Achievement Medal at the 2015 Heyman Service to America Medals ceremony, the “Oscars” of government service.

This October, Lillehoj was awarded the most prestigious award presented by the University of Hartford Alumni Association, the Anchor Award. The awards were established to recognize alumni who have distinguished themselves by achieving the highest level of professional and community accomplishments and who possess absolute standards of integrity and character to positively reflect and enhance the prestige of the University of Hartford.

Colleen McLoughlin ’15
Politics and Government, Rhetoric and Professional Writing
Impact, a project of Environment America and the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (PIRG)

Like many new graduates, Colleen McLoughlin wanted to find a way to use her talents to help others: “I wasn’t sure exactly what I wanted to do after graduation, but I knew I wanted to make a difference.” She’s making that difference by organizing for green energy and environmentally responsible transportation. Since August 2015, McLoughlin has been working with Impact, a project of Environment America and the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (PIRG). When considering the position, McLoughlin writes, “I knew it was a good fit—coworkers equally passionate about important issues, a lot of autonomy and responsibility right off the bat, the chance to lobby elected officials, and the opportunity to truly make a difference in your community.”

For her first year, she worked in Atlanta on a solar energy campaign with Environment Georgia. While the cost of solar energy has dropped dramatically in recent years, not everyone is aware of it. Over the next nine months, McLoughlin helped change that. She worked to get the mayor of Athens, Georgia, to pass a renewable energy resolution and launched a “solarize” program to drastically reduce the cost of installing solar panels for homeowners. As a result, McLoughlin writes, “We tripled the amount of residential solar energy in Athens-Clarke County.”

Recalling her time at the University of Hartford, she remembers more than just classes, “One of my favorite things about the University of Hartford is the close relationship between faculty and students.” Taking an interest in her goals, “All of my professors made sure I knew about all of the opportunities available to me. Professors would send me e-mails about internships and job opportunities they knew coincided with my interests. In fact, it’s how I found out about Impact.”

This past summer, McLoughlin managed 25 college students in petition campaigns, collecting signatures door-to-door before making a move to Colorado. Still with Impact, she is now working with Colorado PIRG to improve transportation in terms of both environmental and economic cost. That means working with local groups to organize and reach out to state decision makers and advocating for priorities in mass transit, as well as in bike- and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure.

What’s ahead for McLoughlin when her two-year commitment to Impact is over? She’d like to stay with the organization, helping to expand their programs in western states such as Nevada, Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming. “I can’t imagine a more fulfilling job—I’m challenged every day, I meet great people, and I’m making a difference on the issues I’m most passionate about.” But she’s up to those challenges, in part because of the support she received at UHart: “I got so much out of my A&S classes, but because the faculty took the time to make sure I had experiences outside of the classroom, I was eager to graduate and enter the real world.”
STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS

Kochava Krieger ’17
Mathematics Secondary Education

An honors student in the Mathematics with Certification in Secondary Education program, Kochava is preparing for student teaching in the spring. The Arts and Sciences mathematics faculty is nationally known for its contributions to math pedagogy, so she is learning from the best. Under Assistant Professor Larissa Schroeder’s guidance, Kochava was able to conduct qualitative research on flipped classrooms, and analyze the effectiveness of instructors’ and students’ use of TrACE, a web-based media player. She presented her research last spring at the University’s Undergraduate Research and Creativity Colloquium, and plans to present her progress at the Colloquium this coming semester. Kochava also finds time to be involved in Hillel and the Women’s Advancement Initiative, a unique campus program that helps position women for success through education and leadership programs.

“The Mathematics Secondary Education program is superb. Students learn higher mathematics from excellent professors and are immediately placed in middle schools or high schools to gain valuable field experience. Dr. Schroeder has been an exceptional mentor throughout these four years, encouraging me to assist her in qualitative research as well as helping to write engaging lesson plans.”

Christian Rodriguez ’17
Criminal Justice

Christian is an outstanding scholar preparing for a career in law enforcement in Arts and Sciences’ Criminal Justice program. The program emphasizes an interdisciplinary view of crime and its control taught within the context of the traditional liberal arts. As part of their studies, students also participate in internships in order to gain valuable experience. During the summer of 2016, Christian interned with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, assisting agents in real cases and learning about the agency itself. He said, “Being in the actual work environment provided me with not only knowledge about how cases are handled, but also how to interact with others when working on such cases.”

“Everyone in the Sociology and Criminal Justice Department has provided me not only with lessons regarding the career of my choice, but also with life-long perspectives which I will always remember. Professors Norland, McGeever, DiChiara, Younts, and Skelly ([in the] Philosophy Department) are my mentors now as a student of the University of Hartford, but will always be—family.”

NEW FACULTY MEMBERS

Just before the fall semester started, at the annual college Kick-Off Barbecue, the College of Arts and Sciences, welcomed 17 new faculty members.

From Left: Margo Greenlaw, Abe Hefter, Ines Rivera Prosdocimi, Amanda Freeman, Katherine Hollander, Andrew Koob, David Miller, Michael Mackenzie, Jason Anastas, Elizabeth Pienkos, Julie Sochacki, and Adam Chiara.

Not pictured: Turgay Bayraktar, Katie Crowell, Philip Levchak, Dominick Rolle, and Hwayeon Ryu.

The Department of Biology welcomed Andrew Koob as an assistant professor.

The School of Communication welcomed Adam Chiara and Abe Hefter as new applied assistant professors, and Margo Greenlaw as a visiting assistant professor.

Joining the Department of English and Modern Languages, Julie Sochacki is an applied associate professor and the director of the English Secondary Education program. Also Ines Rivera Prosdocimi and Dominick Rolle join the department as Jackie McLean fellows.

In the Department of History, we welcomed Katherine Hollander as a visiting assistant professor.

The Department of Mathematics welcomed assistant professors David Miller and Hwayeon Ryu, and visiting assistant professors Turgay Bayraktar and Michael Mackenzie.

The Department of Psychology welcomed Jason Anastas and Elizabeth Pienkos as assistant professors, and Katie Crowell as visiting assistant professor.

Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice welcomed two new assistant professors: Amanda Freeman and Philip Levchak.
Associate Professor Aime Levesque is focusing on small details in order to solve a big problem: cancer. After earning her PhD from Dartmouth College, Levesque conducted postdoctoral research at the Norris Cotton Cancer Center in New Hampshire before joining the University of Hartford in 2006. In 2009 she was awarded a Young Investigator’s Grant from the Breast Cancer Alliance. This year she has become co-chair of the Department of Biology.

Despite her new role, involving students in her research is still a big part of her activity. Working at UHart, Levesque has been able to shed light on some of the cellular processes that can cause cancerous tumors to grow or the processes that inhibit growth. Cancer is characterized by an accumulation of mutations in DNA due to unregulated cell proliferation. To guard against the threat of DNA damage, cells use cell cycle checkpoints. Certain types of damage can trigger a pause in cell cycles to allow time for the cell to repair itself. If cells successfully repair the damage, they recover and restart the cycle. If the damage is irreparable, cells activate cell death pathways that kill the cell.

Some people’s inherited predisposition to breast cancer is due to mutations in key genes that are normally involved in protecting cells from DNA damage. A protein named p53 normally acts as a tumor suppressor, and plays a major role in both cell cycle arrest and cell death in response to DNA damage. In fact, in more than 50 percent of human tumors, the p53 is defective. Levesque is working to increase understanding of how p53 protects normal cells from DNA damage.

“I try to provide as many research opportunities to students as I can,” Levesque explains. “That’s an important part of my role as a professor.”

Levesque actively involves student researchers in her work. This past spring, at the 107th Annual Meeting of the American Association for Cancer Research in New Orleans, Levesque presented findings from research that was conducted with the assistance of Pawan Puli ’16, a recent graduate of the MS in Neuroscience program. This research showed some tumors that fail to form functional groups of p53 molecules respond to therapy involving a DNA damaging agent and a checkpoint inhibitor. She is now working with Rebecca Pappalardo, recipient of the 2015-16 Barbara Cooke Endowed Scholarship, on investigating why the p53 proteins in these cell lines fail to form functional groups.

Rebecca Pappalardo ’17 is currently assisting Aime Levesque in the next step in her breast cancer research.