Dear Alumni and Friends,

One of the greatest objectives of any physical therapy program is to promote the growth and success of its students. This often starts with diverse individuals who bring their life experience and talents to the class. Our role as educators is to provide a strong foundation along with rich experiences to foster our students’ professional development.

Critical to this development are clinical education experiences. As most of us know, this is a challenge in our ever-changing healthcare environment. Developing strong clinical partners who provide enriching experiences for students is an essential component of program success. Our summer newsletter spotlights some of our students’ exceptional clinical placements—prime opportunities that accommodate personal as well as professional exploration.

Global opportunities are considerations that today’s students actively seek in their professional development. We at the University of Hartford are proud to have provided a rare experience for our DPT and P&O students in Peru. This year, we extended our reach to Mexico, where students from a faculty-mentored research project were able to participate in a research/practice opportunity sponsored by LIMBS International and Manos Hermanas.

Also this year, seven University of Hartford student-athletes joined the department’s Class of 2017. These bright, focused individuals bring their energy and enthusiasm for excellence and team success to our program. Their commitment to an additional three years at the University forges an even stronger bond with our program and our respected University.

Sincerely,

Catherine Certo, PT, ScD, FAPTA
Chair, Department of Rehabilitation Sciences
GLOBAL IMPACT

TRAINING PRACTITIONERS TO HELP AMPUTEES AROUND THE GLOBE

STUDENTS WHO EARN A DOCTORATE IN PHYSICAL THERAPY FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD ARE EXTRAORDINARILY WELL PREPARED TO CARE FOR THEIR PATIENTS. UNFORTUNATELY, THAT'S NOT ALWAYS THE CASE IN DEVELOPING NATIONS, WHERE THE NEEDS OF PATIENTS ARE GREAT AND THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR A QUALITY EDUCATION ARE OFTEN SEVERELY LIMITED.

Diana Veneri, associate professor of physical therapy, and her research students in the University of Hartford’s College of Education, Nursing and Health Professions (ENHP), are doing their part to train a new generation of practitioners around the globe to help patients with the greatest need.

Their primary focus is helping the 25 million amputees who live in developing nations. Over the past three years, they’ve developed a comprehensive instruction manual for clinicians who may never have treated people with an amputation before but are increasingly called upon to provide quality care. The group took thousands of photos of a person with lower-limb amputation and created a step-by-step guide to treatment.

“Physical therapists play a key role in treating patients with amputation both before and after they receive a prosthetic device,” Veneri explains. “It’s crucial to ACE-wrap the residual limb to ensure proper shaping for prosthetic fitting. Once a patient receives a prosthetic device, the therapist can show him or her how to use it effectively during mobility activities.”

Veneri and two students from her research group—Patrick McCallum ’12, D’15, and Alyssa Schmidt ’12, D’15—
put the manual to the test at a clinic in Guadalajara, Mexico. The trip was the result of a global collaboration with two nonprofit organizations: LIMBS International and Manos Hermanas. LIMBS International, which serves 21 countries, has developed a low-cost prosthetic device for patients with above-the-knee amputations. LIMBS International donated 10 such devices to Manos Hermanas for the clinic in Mexico and arranged the two-day training session.

“We started by working with 15 medical professionals at the clinic, including doctors, physical therapists, and physical therapy students,” Veneri says. “While amputation is a common practice in Mexico, prosthetics are not widely available, so they were extremely receptive to the training we were providing.”

The trainers evaluated patients after the training was complete, assessing their prosthetic fit and mobility skills.

“This was a tremendously emotional experience for me,” McCallum says. “Some of our patients had waited years for a prosthetic device, and we were truly able to change their lives.”

ENHP student collaborators were also thrilled with how well their instruction manual worked in the field. “After just a brief introductory session, therapists at the clinic were using the manual to treat patients on their own,” Schmidt says. “It took a tremendous amount of time and energy to put the manual together, but seeing how well it works in real life made it all worthwhile.”

This is just the first step, Veneri says. “We’re creating a DVD that will bring the manual to life, which we hope to complete in a year or so,” she says. “In the meantime, we’re considering creating a website to give practitioners worldwide access to the education materials. We’ll also provide links to our partners, so more and more people in developing countries will have access to these resources and support as well,” she explains.

“At the end of the day, this was truly a life-changing experience for all of us,” Veneri says. “Physical therapists dedicate their lives to helping others, and they see the gratitude in the eyes of their patients every day.

“Knowing that this project will endure, and that it has the potential to change the lives of thousands of patients and practitioners around the world whom we’ll never meet,” Veneri reflects, “provides an even deeper sense of satisfaction that’s hard to match.”
Students in the Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program each complete three clinical affiliations, which allows them to put lessons they’ve learned in the classroom into practice in a wide range of clinical settings. One of these affiliations is always outside of Connecticut, and students are often profoundly affected by these journeys.
Mark Reynolds D’15 spent a truly memorable 10 weeks at Madigan Army Medical Center in Tacoma, Wash. “It was the most amazing experience of my life,” he says. “I learned more than I ever could have imagined. And I had the opportunity to serve my country at the same time, which made it even more remarkable.”

Reynolds, who’s now 29, followed a nontraditional path to the DPT program. “I was training to be a Connecticut state trooper, but it just didn’t work out for me,” he explains. “I still wanted to be able to help people, and becoming a physical therapist is a terrific way to do that.”

Reynolds had plenty of opportunities at Madigan. “They treat active-duty military personnel, their families, and a large number of veterans. I don’t think you can find a wider variety of patients or a more [unusual] set of treatment needs anywhere else,” he says.

“As an example, I worked with several patients who had suffered from blast injuries during combat operations. The damage is often complex and long-lasting, and it’s an area of treatment that’s just beginning to be understood. Fortunately, Madigan has the most amazing medical professionals, as well as access to the most advanced research and technology, and they’re making tremendous strides in this area. It was a great privilege to be even a small part of the process.”

Not that the experience was without its challenges. “The first few weeks were nearly overwhelming,” Reynolds recalls. “The environment was so intense, and there was so much to learn, it took my breath away in the beginning. But my clinical instructors were great, and they gave me more and more responsibility as time went on.”

“At the end of the session, I made a presentation to the doctors and some of the other therapists who worked there, and they told me it was one of the best presentations they’ve ever seen from a student. That was tremendously gratifying for me.”

Reynolds is still not sure what he’ll do now that he has graduated from the program. “I’d love to go back to Madigan,” he says. “But the hiring process is long and complex, so I may try something else in the meantime.

“Going to Washington really sparked my interest in seeing the world, so I may try working as a traveling physical therapist for a while, before I settle down.

“One thing I am certain of, though, is that my time at Madigan, combined with the outstanding education I’ve received at the University of Hartford, puts me in an excellent position to succeed in whatever I do.”

“My time at Madigan, combined with the outstanding education I’ve received at the University of Hartford, puts me in an excellent position to succeed in whatever I do.”

Above left: Although his schedule was intense, Mark Reynolds D’15 found time to enjoy the great beauty that surrounded him in Washington during his clinical affiliation at Madigan Army Medical Center in Tacoma.
“My clinical affiliation at Cedars-Sinai gave me a much more profound appreciation for what it takes to be a great physical therapist,” says Patrick McCallum ’12, D’15. “I saw a tremendous variety of patients and came across a great many symptoms that I’ve never seen before, even after four years in health sciences and three years in the DPT program at the University of Hartford.

“So after long days at the hospital, I spent many long nights researching best practices and developing creative ways to apply them to my patients. Seeing them make progress as a result of the care I was providing definitely made all the hard work worthwhile.”

McCallum received outstanding support every step of the way. “Cedars-Sinai is one of the best teaching hospitals in the country, and Yvonne Zandi, who was my clinical instructor, taught me a great deal about the practice of physical therapy and what it truly means to be a professional. I still consider Yvonne to be a friend and mentor today,” McCallum says.

What’s next for McCallum after the University of Hartford? “I loved Cedars-Sinai and I loved L.A., so I could easily see myself going back there,” he says. “But I’m still young, and there’s a big world out there. This affiliation opened my eyes to the infinite variety of opportunities that will soon be available to me.”

Yvonne Zandi, who was Patrick McCallum’s clinical instructor at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, has a personal appreciation of the value of clinical affiliations. “When I was a student, I did my final clinical affiliation at Cedars-Sinai and applied for a job as soon as I graduated,” Zandi recalls. “I’ve been here for 10 years now, and I’ve loved every minute of it.”

Zandi believes clinical affiliations are as invigorating for instructors as they are for students. “Students bring a fresh perspective to the practice of physical therapy, which has seen dramatic changes in the last decade,” she explains. “They remind us that even experienced practitioners have to keep learning every day to best meet the needs of their patients.”

McCallum clearly made a good impression on Zandi. “Patrick has a great personality and relates very well with all the people around him. He’s self-motivated and willing to go the extra mile to be the best practitioner that he possibly can.”

Students like McCallum give Zandi great hope for the future of the profession. “Students today are getting a much more comprehensive education than I did when I graduated in 2005, when physical therapists only needed a bachelor’s degree,” Zandi says. “I know that we’ll see even more significant changes in the future, and I have every confidence that both Patrick and I will be up to whatever challenges may come.”
Danielle Smith D’15 and Leah Raitt D’15 were roommates during their 10-week clinical affiliation in Louisiana.

**Danielle Smith D’15**

“I grew up in Massachusetts and I’ve always been very close to my family,” says Danielle Smith, who graduated from the DPT program in May. “Going to school in Hartford was already a big adventure for me. But my clinical affiliation in Louisiana really opened my eyes to a whole new world of possibilities.”

“I’ve worked in all three clinical settings—acute, subacute, and outpatient—during my three years in the DPT program, but Lake Charles Memorial [Hospital] was my favorite by far,” Smith says. “I get great satisfaction from seeing patients make major strides very quickly and that was the environment I was in at Lake Charles.”

“I’d often see patients right after surgery and have them up and walking out of the hospital in a couple of days,” Smith says. “You build very intense relationships with patients in an acute-care facility. Even though you may never see them again, you know you’ve given them a great start on the road to recovery, and that provides a special kind of satisfaction.”

There were other benefits to the experience as well. “Lake Charles is a teaching hospital, so the clinical instructors are absolutely first-rate,” Smith says. “You learn a lot in the classroom, but working with leaders in the field who have unparalleled knowledge and experience really deepens your appreciation of what the profession of physical therapy truly means. I still stay in touch with my clinical instructors and count on their advice and counsel when I find myself in a particularly challenging situation.”

Smith also formed lasting bonds with several physical therapists with whom she worked on a daily basis. “I’ve been back in Connecticut, I’m still Facebook friends with the therapists at Lake Charles. They’ve promised to provide references for me once I start looking for a job, and I think their endorsement will be very helpful in the future.”

With all I learned and all the friends I made, my experience in Lake Charles will always stay with me and inform my practice for years to come.”

**Leah Raitt D’15**

“I’ve always believed that physical therapy was the perfect profession for me,” says Leah Raitt, who graduated in May. “I consider myself to be a very compassionate person, and helping others has always been an important part of my life.”

“The DPT program has been exciting, scary, and hectic, but always worthwhile,” Raitt says. “Even though I learned a great deal in the classroom, working with patients really brings the lessons home and touches you in ways that are hard to imagine until you’ve been there.”

Raitt also enjoyed her time in Louisiana. “I’ve never been this far from home before, and it was a wonderful experience,” she says. “Danielle and I went on some great road trips on the weekends, and I was really struck by the differences in climate and culture compared to what I was used to in New England.

“At the end of the day, though, I found that people are basically the same no matter where you go and that you never know someone’s true story until you take the time to ask. Because physical therapists have such a close relationship with their patients, we’re able to make those wondrous discoveries every day,” Raitt observes.

Given her compassionate nature, it comes as no surprise that Raitt has also done volunteer work as a therapist while pursuing her degree. “I volunteered at a therapeutic riding facility, where horses are an important part of the healing process for patients,” she explains.

Raitt is currently finishing up her final clinical affiliation at the Connecticut Children’s Medical Center in Hartford. “I’ve applied for a part-time position as a pediatric physical therapist at the medical center while I get my certification, and I hope to continue working here on a full-time basis.”

“I hope to become a well-established pediatric physical therapist and have my own therapeutic riding facility,” Raitt says. “Being able to combine my passion for horses, my appreciation for people of all backgrounds, and a profession based on helping others would be a dream come true for me.”
THE ALL-STAR TEAM: (l–r) John Busque, Tate Klononas, Alyssa Englert, Jon Gil, Zuzana Kudernatschova, Kim Eisen, Taylor Clark
BRINGING ATHLETIC CONFIDENCE TO PHYSICAL THERAPY

THE ALL-STAR TEAM
For the first time ever, there were seven student-athletes in their first year in the University of Hartford's Doctor of Physical Therapy program. They've excelled on the field, in the classroom, and in the community as undergraduates, and brought special skills and uncommon perspective to their graduate studies. Here are the all-stars in the Class of 2017.

KIM EISEN
Softball
National Fastpitch Coaches Association Scholar-Athlete
“I was in high school when I realized I wanted to be a physical therapist. I hurt my hip running track, and I had a wonderful therapist, who is still a mentor for me today.

“The University of Hartford was the perfect choice for me as an undergrad. I had a guaranteed spot in the DPT program if I worked hard and kept up my grades. That was especially challenging as a student athlete, since we play 58 games in a season.

“The DPT program is even more challenging than being an undergrad, but I still love it. There are only 38 students in the Class of 2017, and we work together and support each other every day, just like my teammates did in softball.

“I haven’t decided exactly what I want to do when I graduate, but I’m thrilled with my choice. Physical therapy is an exciting profession that’s always growing and changing. I look forward to a long and successful career doing the same.”

JOHN BUSQUE
Track and Field
Six-time member of the America East All-Academic Team
“My sister, Kacey, played soccer at the University of Hartford for four years and is working as a physical therapist today, so I had an excellent role model. I find graduate work extremely challenging, like holding a full-time job.

“The experience I gained running track as an undergrad definitely helps me stay focused and disciplined in my studies today. It also helps that I love what I’m doing, which makes all the effort worthwhile.

“At this point, my plan is to work with athletes at an outpatient clinic when I graduate. I still run 80 or 90 miles a week, so I’m very aware of the potential—and limits—of my own body. I think this experience will give me a better understanding of what my patients are going through and will help me design even more effective treatment programs for them.”
I realized that I wanted to have that same lasting relationship with my patients and that physical therapy gives me the best opportunity to help people in that way. I’m thrilled with the decision I’ve made, and I truly believe the future of the profession is getting brighter every day. “I know that no matter what goals I set for myself in my career and my personal life, I’ll be able to achieve them as a physical therapist.”

TAYLOR CLARK
Basketball

“There’s a culture of success in the athletic programs at the University of Hartford. The coaches expect you to excel in the classroom as well as on the basketball court, and they support you in every way possible so you can achieve your goals. That’s what first attracted me to the University, and these values continue to shape me today.

“I had a number of injuries in high school, and I worked with the same physical therapist for four years. I admired her very much. She showed me that I can combine my love for science with my desire to help people in a profession where I can have a very successful career.

“The first year of the DPT program is even more challenging than I expected, but I love every minute of it. There’s a culture of success here as well. Faculty members hold you to the highest standards, but they’re always willing to support you when you start to feel overwhelmed. I’m looking forward to taking on that role myself in a couple of years when I start coaching my patients to successful outcomes in whatever treatment they need to get healthy again.”

JON GIL
Soccer

“I’ve been playing soccer for as long as I can remember. Every year, I would set new goals, and I would improve my body and my mind until I was able to achieve them. It was a very satisfying feeling. I’ve been able to bring that same motivation and self-discipline to the DPT program, and those qualities have been very valuable for me so far.

“I actually started out in pre-med when I first came to the University as an undergrad, but I was injured in my sophomore year, and that completely changed my perception. My physical therapist worked with me for several months until I was fully recovered and we built a very close bond.

“I realized that I wanted to have that same lasting relationship with my patients and that physical therapy gives me the best opportunity to help people in that way. I’m thrilled with the decision I’ve made, and I truly believe the future of the profession is getting brighter every day. “I know that no matter what goals I set for myself in my career and my personal life, I’ll be able to achieve them as a physical therapist.”

TAYLOR CLARK
Basketball

“There’s a culture of success in the athletic programs at the University of Hartford. The coaches expect you to excel in the classroom as well as on the basketball court, and they support you in every way possible so you can achieve your goals. That’s what first attracted me to the University, and these values continue to shape me today.

“I had a number of injuries in high school, and I worked with the same physical therapist for four years. I admired her very much. She showed me that I can combine my love for science with my desire to help people in a profession where I can have a very successful career.

“The first year of the DPT program is even more challenging than I expected, but I love every minute of it. There’s a culture of success here as well. Faculty members hold you to the highest standards, but they’re always willing to support you when you start to feel overwhelmed. I’m looking forward to taking on that role myself in a couple of years when I start coaching my patients to successful outcomes in whatever treatment they need to get healthy again.”

JON GIL
Soccer

“I’ve been playing soccer for as long as I can remember. Every year, I would set new goals, and I would improve my body and my mind until I was able to achieve them. It was a very satisfying feeling. I’ve been able to bring that same motivation and self-discipline to the DPT program, and those qualities have been very valuable for me so far.

“I actually started out in pre-med when I first came to the University as an undergrad, but I was injured in my sophomore year, and that completely changed my perception. My physical therapist worked with me for several months until I was fully recovered and we built a very close bond.

“I realized that I wanted to have that same lasting relationship with my patients and that physical therapy gives me the best opportunity to help people in that way. I’m thrilled with the decision I’ve made, and I truly believe the future of the profession is getting brighter every day. “I know that no matter what goals I set for myself in my career and my personal life, I’ll be able to achieve them as a physical therapist.”

TAYLOR CLARK
Basketball

“There’s a culture of success in the athletic programs at the University of Hartford. The coaches expect you to excel in the classroom as well as on the basketball court, and they support you in every way possible so you can achieve your goals. That’s what first attracted me to the University, and these values continue to shape me today.

“I had a number of injuries in high school, and I worked with the same physical therapist for four years. I admired her very much. She showed me that I can combine my love for science with my desire to help people in a profession where I can have a very successful career.

“The first year of the DPT program is even more challenging than I expected, but I love every minute of it. There’s a culture of success here as well. Faculty members hold you to the highest standards, but they’re always willing to support you when you start to feel overwhelmed. I’m looking forward to taking on that role myself in a couple of years when I start coaching my patients to successful outcomes in whatever treatment they need to get healthy again.”

JON GIL
Soccer

“I’ve been playing soccer for as long as I can remember. Every year, I would set new goals, and I would improve my body and my mind until I was able to achieve them. It was a very satisfying feeling. I’ve been able to bring that same motivation and self-discipline to the DPT program, and those qualities have been very valuable for me so far.

“I actually started out in pre-med when I first came to the University as an undergrad, but I was injured in my sophomore year, and that completely changed my perception. My physical therapist worked with me for several months until I was fully recovered and we built a very close bond.

“I realized that I wanted to have that same lasting relationship with my patients and that physical therapy gives me the best opportunity to help people in that way. I’m thrilled with the decision I’ve made, and I truly believe the future of the profession is getting brighter every day. “I know that no matter what goals I set for myself in my career and my personal life, I’ll be able to achieve them as a physical therapist.”

TAYLOR CLARK
Basketball

“There’s a culture of success in the athletic programs at the University of Hartford. The coaches expect you to excel in the classroom as well as on the basketball court, and they support you in every way possible so you can achieve your goals. That’s what first attracted me to the University, and these values continue to shape me today.

“I had a number of injuries in high school, and I worked with the same physical therapist for four years. I admired her very much. She showed me that I can combine my love for science with my desire to help people in a profession where I can have a very successful career.

“The first year of the DPT program is even more challenging than I expected, but I love every minute of it. There’s a culture of success here as well. Faculty members hold you to the highest standards, but they’re always willing to support you when you start to feel overwhelmed. I’m looking forward to taking on that role myself in a couple of years when I start coaching my patients to successful outcomes in whatever treatment they need to get healthy again.”
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR DANIEL LEE IS THE NEWEST—AND YOUNGEST—member of the faculty in the University of Hartford’s Department of Rehabilitation Sciences. Yet his greatest passion is serving the needs of the oldest patients.

“I worked in a skilled nursing facility before I came to the University of Hartford, and I was very concerned that the older adult patients weren’t always getting the comprehensive care they needed,” Lee says. “At times, financial considerations were more important than the patients’ needs, and I want to do my part to change that in the future.”

Lee is opportunely positioned to do that in the University’s College of Education, Nursing and Health Professions because he teaches classes in both the Doctor of Physical Therapy and the Master of Science in Prosthetics and Orthotics programs.

“My primary focus in the classroom is awareness,” Lee says. “I want to make sure every one of my students understands the special challenges that geriatric patients face, and that they have a moral obligation to speak up if they feel their patients’ needs aren’t being met.”

As a practicing physical therapist himself, Lee is able to apply those values personally in his own practice.

He also has grander ambitions for the profession as a whole. “My near-term goal is to develop an evidence-based research tool that provides an objective measure of practitioners’ attitudes toward geriatric patients,” he explains. “With that data in hand, we can begin to make broad-scale changes in education and real-world practices.

“I also hope to publish in the field of geriatrics, which would give me a chance to improve lives on an even broader scale.”

Keeping a foot in both worlds, Lee, who holds a bachelor’s in kinesiology, a Doctor of Physical Therapy, and board certification in geriatrics, is currently playing a key role in developing a mobile app for amputees that will empower patients to take control of their prosthetic socket management.

“My role is to be a mentor and a motivator and to inspire my students to achieve great things. Our mission is to train the practitioners of the future, and no one does that better than the University of Hartford.”
Doctoral student Erika Jackson D’15 is working on a revolutionary new treadmill that will put far less compression on the lower-extremity joints of physical therapy patients. As this year’s recipient of the Doctor of Physical Therapy Scholarship, she was able to connect with the group of engineers who are assisting with the design.

“That experience was a turning point in my career and showed me that anything is possible,” says Jackson, who is working on the project with fellow doctoral student Mike Liguore.

Jackson, who graduated in May, says her career goal is to become a physical therapist for a professional sports team. “I’m making great strides toward that goal in my current clinical affiliation with Pivot Physical Therapy, which is affiliated with the Washington Capitals of the National Hockey League,” she says.

The DPT Scholarship Fund gives doctoral students rare opportunities for personal and professional development.

“The DPT Scholarship truly opened doors for me, and I want to help do the same for the students who are following me at the University of Hartford,” Jackson says. “I hope my story inspires others to contribute to the DPT Scholarship Fund as well.”

If you’d like to contribute, please send your donation to Grant Smith/DPT Scholarship, Office of Institutional Advancement, University of Hartford, 200 Bloomfield Avenue, West Hartford, CT 06117-1599.