



April 2005

Looking Back from Afar: Colby's far-flung international alumni consider their time on Mayflower Hill

Stephen Collins
Colby College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/colbymagazine>



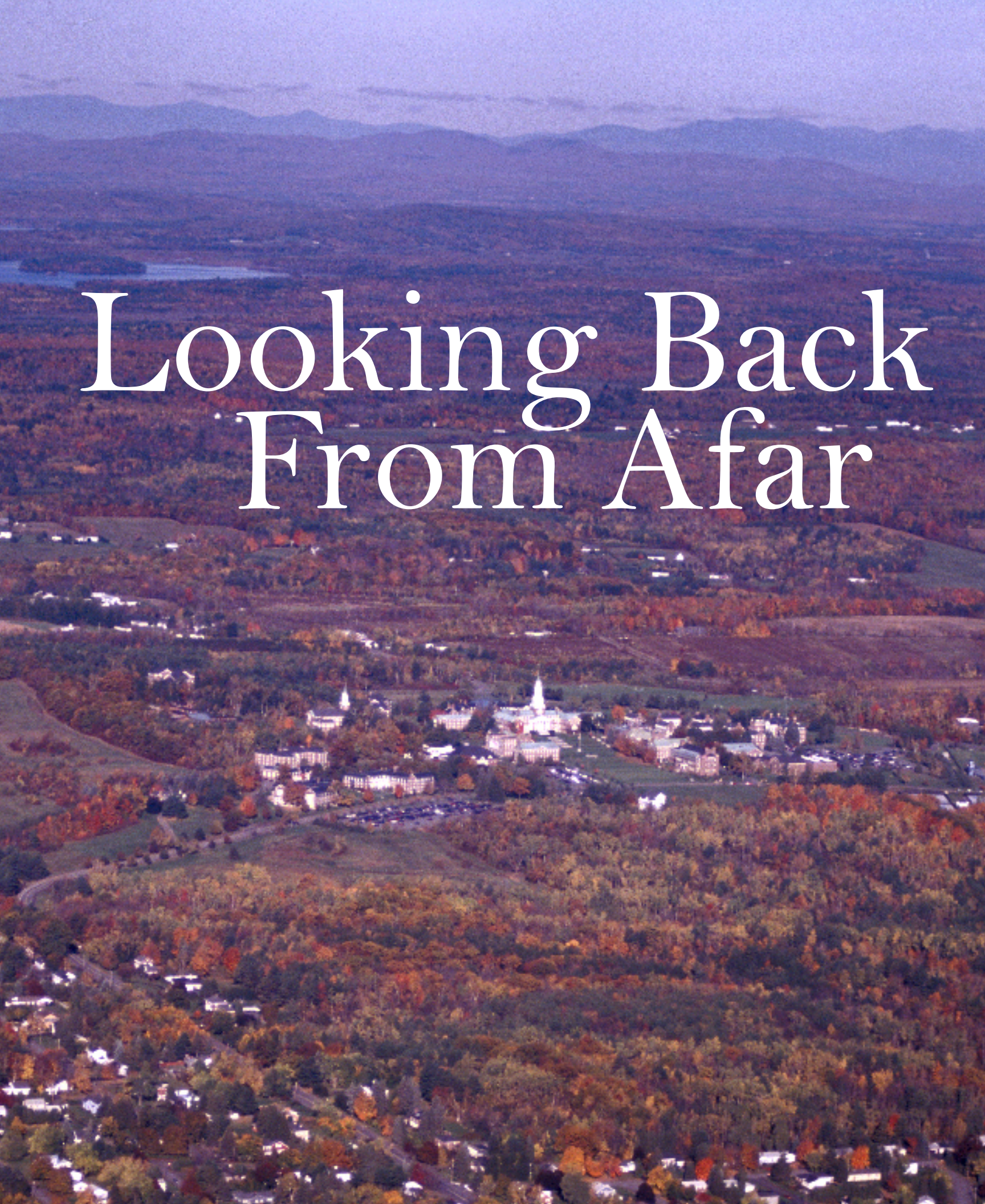
Part of the [International and Comparative Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Collins, Stephen (2005) "Looking Back from Afar: Colby's far-flung international alumni consider their time on Mayflower Hill," *Colby Magazine*: Vol. 94 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/colbymagazine/vol94/iss1/7>

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by the Colby College Archives at Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colby Magazine by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Colby.



Looking Back From Afar

Colby's far-flung international alumni consider their time on Mayflower Hill

BY STEPHEN COLLINS '74

In the last five years, Colby has almost tripled the number of foreign nationals in the student body. That's counter to a trend that saw a long-running increase in the number of international students attending American colleges and universities shift last year—the first decline in 32 years.

Colby professors and fellow students rave about the diverse perspectives and keen intellects that international students bring to discussions and laboratories and about the ways that the community is enriched when its members come from 66 foreign countries.

But what is the outcome for the adventurous souls who come to Maine from the great cities and the far corners of the world? How does a Colby education serve them, whether they end up on Wall Street or back home in Tokyo? How does immersion in American culture color their experience if they choose to return to Brazil or to roam the world? How does the uniquely American liberal arts education play in Istanbul?

Seeking case studies, if not definitive answers to those questions, *Colby* took a somewhat random walk around the world asking international Colby graduates how it worked out for them. Besides unearthing some interesting insights, impressive accomplishments, and compelling stories, we ran into some troubling trends in international education.

"It takes a certain profile to leave everything behind: family, boyfriend—everything," said Marina Netto Grande Campos '94, a Brazilian telecommunications executive, recalling her decision to come to Maine 15 years ago. Looking back to her years on Mayflower Hill she classified her international classmates—there as either fleeing a bad situation in their own countries or coming to the U.S. because they really wanted to be here. Based on that dichotomy, she said, "You're either homesick or homesick by choice."

In her case it was a choice. As with most of those interviewed, Grande had an international background before deciding to seek an education in the U.S. She was born and bred in Brasilia; her grandfather was Austrian, and she had lived abroad before coming of college age.

In Brazil, she explained, "you have to declare a major before you take the [university entrance] exam." Her brother, she said, has bounced from a military high school to a computer science track to law. For herself, going to college in the U.S. was attractive in part because it offered choices and broader exposure to ideas and subjects than the tracked system in Brazilian universities.

"My mom kind of thought it was a far-fetched dream," she said. But she was one of four determined students in her high school class eager to study in the U.S. "We pooled resources and wrote to four or five hundred colleges. We did a lot of research." Ultimately it was the reputation of Colby's Economics Department that attracted her to Mayflower Hill.



While it takes unusual determination to leave home so far behind, it also can take a mighty commitment for many international students to stick it out for four years. "To graduate from Colby was really, really tough for me," said Nozomi Kishimoto '96, now a bond trader in the Tokyo office of Deutsche Securities Ltd. "To do it in a second language and to read three books a week? It gave me a lot of confidence. I studied hard. I was always worried I would flunk out. I'm proud of the fact that I graduated from Colby."

Kishimoto, originally from Kobe, Japan, says she got over the worst of the homesickness as a high school exchange student in Iowa. "The food is different. Everything is different. I couldn't understand. I couldn't pronounce the word," she said in now-flawless American-inflected English. At Colby, she said, she "really didn't have any bad experiences because of difference," but between the academic challenge and the emotional upheaval there were times when it was a struggle. "In my third year I felt I was losing my identity. . . . I felt I was becoming an American."



Marina Grande Campos '94, pictured in Rio de Janeiro, fulfilled her "far-fetched dream" of attending a U.S. college.

Happily, it's a struggle now reconciled: she's back at home in Japan near family and friends, and she said, "I'm married to an American guy, so I kind of have a happy medium."

It was her husband, Brent, originally from Minneapolis, who answered the phone at their Tokyo apartment in late December. "Hold on," he said. "She's watching the fifteenth *Seinfeld* in a row."

Contributing to Kishimoto's comfort straddling Japanese and American cultures is a growing Colby presence in Tokyo. At Deutsche Bank, "Everybody knows where Colby is because that's where Edson Mitchell ['75] graduated from," she said, referring to the late Deutsche Bank head of global markets. In the Global Finance Division she works side-by-side with Ari Druker '93 "every day," and she also counts Joseph Meyer '79 as a colleague.

A Colby, Bates, and Bowdoin alumni group has occasional events attracting about 20 people, she said, and the Colby Club in Tokyo got together for dinner with Oak Professor of East Asian Language and Literature Tamae Prindle when Prindle visited the city in January.



Yoichi Hosoi '79 is from an earlier generation of Colby graduates, but he, too, can reel off alumni from his era who are in Tokyo—his classmates Meyer, Robert Stevenson '78, and Yasuo Kaneko '78. Though he was born in Japan, finished high school there, and still lives in Tokyo, Hosoi, too, bridges international cultures both in his work and in his family.

After spending a dozen years working for Sun Microsystems in Japan, last year he became president of Nihon SSA Global, which

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ARE A HOT COMMODITY

For years the U.S. has enjoyed a dominant position as a destination for international students, but that status may be in jeopardy. As the forces of information technology and globalization reshaped the world in the 1990s, and with new hassles getting visas for study in the U.S., other countries have stepped up the competition for international students.

In the wake of World War I, when America imposed strict quotas on immigrants, efforts were initiated to treat students differently. The Institute of International Education (IIE), founded in 1919 and still a leading U.S. authority on international education, helped win approval of a non-immigrant student visa, recognizing scholars as temporary visitors, according to Peggy Blumenthal, an IIE vice president. And for much of the 20th century the underlying reasons for the U.S. to recruit and educate top foreign students were to cultivate international good will and cooperation, to reduce misunderstandings, and to export American values.

With its reputation as a nation of opportunity, and boasting some of the world's best colleges and universities, America "never before had to have a strategy" for attracting foreign students, said Steve Thomas, Colby's director of admissions. But that may be changing.

Today an estimated two million students worldwide leave their countries of origin for undergraduate or graduate education. More than half a million of them come to the United States each year, but that number declined last year for the first time since the early 1970s, and competition for these students is just beginning to heat up.

Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin of the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation, based in Paris, has studied reasons and strategies for the intensifying competition.

Some countries with aging populations, notably Germany and Canada, have latched onto

educational recruitment to attract students with essential skills, especially in engineering and computer science.

New Zealand and Australia see full-pay international students as a revenue source—both countries have rules in place that prevent universities from providing subsidized educational services to foreign students.

Meanwhile China, Singapore, and India are busy building capacity in their own universities and see study abroad as a way to educate future faculty members and researchers for their expanding systems of higher education, according to Lancrin's research.

Colby's Admissions Office sees intensifying competition among American colleges as a more immediate challenge to its recruiting efforts. Thomas said that in the last several years he's gone from being the only visitor at the United World College (UWC) schools and other international secondary schools to seeing groups of admissions officers making those rounds.

He credits Shelby M.C. Davis H'04 as the catalyst, as Davis has spent millions of dollars on scholarship aid for international students in each of the last five years. Initially available only to Colby and four other east coast schools, the Davis UWC program recently expanded, opening opportunities for UWC graduates at more than 40 additional colleges and universities.

Colby had unparalleled success recruiting those students three and four years ago, but recent years have seen diminishing returns as other schools fish in the same pond. Now, said Thomas, "everybody's looking for the place that nobody goes." Dean of Admissions Parker Beverage traveled to Nepal and northern India for the first time last fall, for example.

International applications for Colby's Class of 2008 (this year's first-year students) actu-

ally declined, reflecting both a national trend and the experience of Colby's peer schools. Based on early counts of applications for the Class of 2009, numbers of international applications look about the same as last year, Thomas said.

Unrelated to some of the longer-term concerns about international competition for these students, the weak dollar seemed to be having an auspicious effect. "I've seen more full-pay international students in the pool than I've ever seen," Thomas said early in the process of building the Class of 2009.

From the perspective of Tsvetelina Natcheva '07, a Bulgarian student who attended the American high school in Sofia, it's still a seller's market for U.S. schools. She said that of 120 students in her class who wanted to go abroad for college, 50 or 60 made it to the U.S.

Many of her schoolmates go to Germany, where tuition is very low and students must pay for room and board. A few went to England, but since there is no tradition of financial aid there, they had to be able to pay their way.

Natcheva said competition is intense for Bulgarians applying to America's best colleges, like Colby, where the College pays the family's calculated financial need. "We are allowed only to apply to 10 colleges," she said. Advisors at her school want to make sure that the top students don't get all the acceptances and then turn down all but one, leaving other applicants without a spot.

Ivica Petrikova '07 from Bratislava, Slovakia, described by a long-tenured professor at Colby as one of the most capable students he's ever had in class, applied to 10 liberal arts colleges in the eastern U.S. and got into two. After a year as a high school exchange student in New Mexico, she was eager to return to the U.S. for college, though she says she could have studied essentially for free in Vienna.

does enterprise resource planning and customizes warehouse management systems. As regional vice president of the parent company, SSA Global Inc., based in Chicago, he frequently travels to the U.S.

In the mid-1970s Hosoi learned about Colby from Mike Meserve '72, who was teaching English at a high school in Japan. After he made the decision to apply and was accepted, Hosoi enrolled in an intensive 10-week English-language course in Brattleboro, Vt., to prepare. It was a program that would have a profound impact on his life, as it was there he met a fellow student from South America, who was to become his wife.

Hosoi said he came of age at a time when "very few people were

going to the United States to college," but with his American education and his Colombian spouse, "We're an international family." His children attended an international school in Tokyo and speak Japanese, English, and Spanish. "Now my son is at Middlebury and my daughter, who is 16, will go to the States for college, too."



If Hosoi is part of an international family, Krishan Jhalani '99 is a one-man international juggernaut. A native of India and a graduate of the international school there, he had his sights set exclusively on America for college. (His mother is from Boston.) By the time he graduated he'd spent every summer abroad, one semester in Fribourg,

Germany, and another, a year later, in Berlin. He graduated as an international studies and German double major and got a master's in public policy at the University of Michigan, during which time he spent eight months in Lesotho, South Africa, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe. This winter he had recently returned from a three-week visit in Zimbabwe to Washington, D.C., where he works for Population Services International, a public health NGO. He's engaged to a high school classmate from Bhutan, and they hope to be posted in South-east Asia for three years after the wedding.

So how did Jhalani land in Waterville? The criteria were pretty straightforward. He recalls saying: "I want a school that's big and in Boston." He applied to Bowdoin, Bates, Tufts, and Trinity, but he was most impressed by the campus and the tour at Colby. And, coming from the Woodstock School in northern India with just 60 students, he said, "[Colby] was bigger than what I was used to, so it seemed big to me."

Jhalani's CV includes time at Greenwich Associates (a financial consulting firm), a wild two-year ride with an Internet start-up during "the bubble," and internships at Motorola, Hewlett-Packard, and Lucent Technologies. With some hiking and basketball coaching in India thrown in before grad school, Jhalani covered the literal and figurative gamut when he said, "a lot of it stems from the opportunities a liberal arts education gives you. You can tell from my experience, I've been all over the map."

Applying to four NESCAC colleges, Jhalani was clearly seeking a liberal arts experience. But not all international applicants are familiar with the anomalous American institution of the broad-based bachelor's degree. Many, if not most, countries track students into careers and specialized education in high school or even earlier. Some international students see the liberal arts approach as an opportunity to gain a broad understanding of many subjects and to keep their career options open; others approach a bachelor of arts program with misgivings.

"You have to go with the conscious knowledge that you're not going to be able to apply for a public-service job," said Grande, in Brazil. "'*Collegio*'—the translation means 'school.' If it was [Colby] University the translation would be easier."



For Mehmet Darmar '90, now the CEO of a large telecommunications firm in Turkey, coming to Colby for a bachelor of arts program was an adventurous leap of faith. "I didn't know what I would get out of it until I got there," he said.

Initially attracted by the five-year dual-degree engineering program offered jointly by Colby and Dartmouth, he soon got caught up in the choices on Mayflower Hill and was a math major with a computer

science concentration and a minor in administrative science.

But by the time he graduated, Darmar was a liberal arts evangelist: "You come in at eighteen or nineteen not knowing what to expect. When you go to university, not college, you're like a racehorse—you're given the blinders and you're channelized. At a liberal arts college you make your own path. You're given a lump of clay—you can make a vase, a plate, whatever."

"If you want to be specialized, liberal arts is not the end point," he said. He called Colby "excellent preparation" for his own graduate work—in just over a year he completed a two-year master's program in industrial systems and engineering at the University of Michigan.

Though he had spent two years before graduate school working for a consultant to the Ford Motor Co., he finished his master's in the midst of an economic recession and jobs were scarce. "I decided not to chase my tail in the U.S. It was always my intention to return to Turkey." But he took the value of his undergraduate experience with him. "It's much easier to comprehend different aspects of life. You can change and adapt," he said.

Change and adapt he has. In 1995 Darmar was the third person hired by what turned into Turkey's biggest Internet company, and in 1998 he founded the satellite telecommunications company Mobilkom, which now controls more than half of Turkey's market for mobile satellite phone, fax, data, and Internet services.



Mahdi Bseiso '04 grew up in Jordan and arrived at Colby from the United World College of the American West in New Mexico. A member of the most recent and the largest cohort to date of international students, he departed Mayflower Hill with "absolutely no regrets," headed for Wall Street, where he is now a forensic computer data analyst with the big accounting and consulting firm Deloitte & Touche.

Talking on his cell phone while navigating the crowded streets in New York's financial district at lunchtime, Bseiso explained that the analytic and forensic technology division gets called in when there are financial disputes within firms, between firms, or between the government and a firm. In December he was working on "a very high profile investigation—one of the high-profile financial scandals," but he couldn't reveal which one. His job is to go in and collect information from computers—to build applications or write scripts that can glean information from any form of data that can be stored electronically. "Very challenging and very stressful," he said.

Even as a student Bseiso demonstrated the skills to manage this type of delicate technical operation. On April 1, 2004 everyone on campus got a masterfully dead-

Where in the World?

Mehmet Darmar '90

From Istanbul, Turkey

Current address Istanbul, Turkey

Title CEO, Mobilkom

Marina Netto Grande Campos '94

From Brasilia, Brazil

Current address Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Title Specialist in strategic planning and marketing at Telemar

Yoichi Hosoi '79

From Tokyo, Japan

Current address Tokyo, Japan

Title President of SSA Global Japan Co. Ltd and regional vice president of SSA Global Inc (Chicago)

Nozomi Kishimoto '96

From Kobe, Japan

Current address Tokyo, Japan

Title Trader, Deutsche Securities Limited, Tokyo Branch, Global Finance Division

Krishan Jhalani '99

From Delhi, India

Current address Washington, D.C.

Title Associate program manager, Population Services International

Mahdi Bseiso '04

From Amman, Jordan

Current address New York City

Title Analyst, Deloitte & Touche

For more on these international alumni go to www.colby.edu/mag/international.



Nozomi Kishimoto '96, at home in Tokyo, straddles the line between Japanese and American culture.

pan and untraceable notice, allegedly from the president's personal e-mail account, reporting on a big gift to the museum of art for the acquisition of a 1940 Picasso oil painting, "*Buste du femme*." It ended with the very unpresidential postscript, "Yeah Doghead!"

Ultimately, in a cordial moment around graduation, Bseiso admitted to President Adams (who clearly was amused) that he had a hand in the caper, but for the record he will say only that he didn't act alone.

Initially a government and economics major, Bseiso shifted to computer science. But it was the breadth of his education that served him well, he said. "I think this is part of what got me the job—computer science and good communications skills."

Asked how he decided to study in the United States, he replied: "This was the story of my plan from middle school in Jordan." He learned of the UWC from a newspaper article and was accepted, and after two years in New Mexico he applied to Colby without any knowledge of the Davis UWC Scholarship. The program he would benefit from had not been announced.

"I'm definitely happy with the way things turned out," he said.



What does it all add up to? What do we know about the original inquiry—"where do international students end up?"—that prompted this story?

College officials say it's a tough question to answer other than anecdotally. Both Margaret Felton Viens '77, director of alumni relations, and Cindy Parker, director of career services, admit that data are far from complete for tracking graduates who came to Colby from

other countries, particularly if they returned to their country of origin.

Viens said she knows of 470 alumni living in 75 foreign countries, but that includes American and foreign graduates now living and working overseas. There are no big concentrations, she said, though there are enough Colby grads in London and Tokyo to hold events, sometimes as blended CBB or NESAC alumni events similar to those in smaller or more distant U.S. cities.

Records show 180 foreign nationals, including Canadians, who have graduated from Colby in the last five years—more than twice the 84 students who graduated from five to 10 years ago. As the numbers continue to grow, and as information technology gets better, Viens expects it to be easier to communicate and offer services.

But even if communication is improved, it's not clear what type of affiliation international graduates may maintain with the College. Few other countries share America's traditions of philanthropy that help fund higher education and provide financial aid for new generations of

domestic and foreign students with need.

One area where international students have distinguished themselves as a group is in alumni networking for finding internships and jobs. "They really jumped on it," Viens said.

And it's not a one-way street, Parker said. "There are a few who have been very active recruiting other Colby students into the pipeline."

Among them Krishan Jhalani. Hired right out of college by Greenwich Associates, he recalls being "the first Colby guy," he said. "And I got to hire all my buddies."

Many of Colby's international students remain in the U.S., and many return to their countries, but there's insufficient data to compare. To Peggy Blumenthal of the Institute of International Education, it's not a matter of great concern. One goal, she said, "is to train people who can go home and make a difference in their societies." Another is to meet needs in our own society that our own students aren't filling. She cited engineering and technology as sectors that currently rely on immigrants for a variety of reasons.

"We find that when their home economies get strong, they start going back," Blumenthal said. That's been the case with Taiwanese and Koreans and it's increasingly true with Chinese graduates of American institutions.

But regardless of where they end up, she said, the real value of international students to American colleges is their impact on U.S. students with whom they study. "They're not taking the places of American students, they're enriching the American students' experience."