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Global Reflections

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Colby College

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Andriy Avramenko
Ukraine



Nurlan Assilbekov
Kazakhstan



Madhi Bseiso
Jordan



Charles Benson Data
Sudan



Igor Gnyp
Ukraine



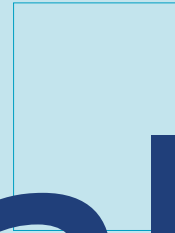
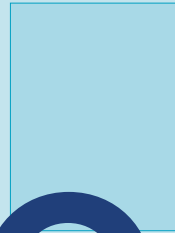
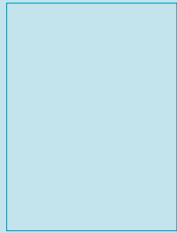
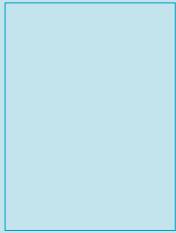
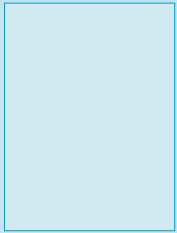
ElizaBeta Gorgoska
Macedonia



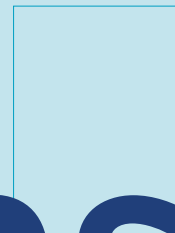
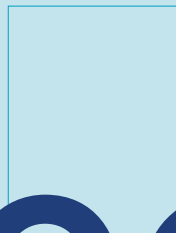
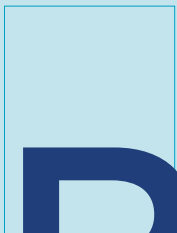
Emma James
New Zealand



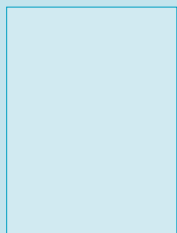
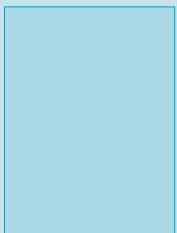
Nicholas Maturu
Zimbabwe



Global



Reflections



Ana Prokic
Serbia



Diego Puig
Argentina



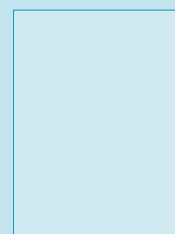
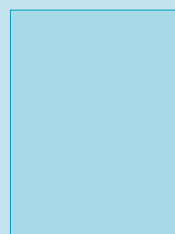
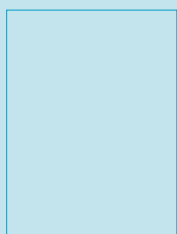
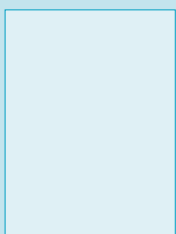
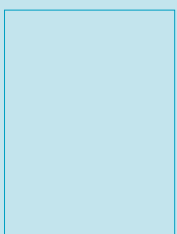
Peter Rashkov
Bulgaria



Valentina Saltane
Latvia



Ona Virketyte
Lithuania





The first Davis UWC scholars to graduate from Colby consider their experience on Mayflower Hill

In some respects they could be any nine seniors sitting around a table two months before graduation. At first the focus is dinner: take-out food from their favorite Thai restaurant. Exotic aromas of peanut sauce and curry mix with bursts of laughter and competing voices, some spiced with intriguing accents of their own. Conversation ranges all over the map.

Who's got the big job? Who's going straight to graduate school? Who's the free spirit, still unconcerned about anything like plans? Who is going back home?

But these students are part of the first group of scholarship recipients sponsored by Shelby and Gale Davis—nine of Colby's first 13 Davis United World College (UWC) Scholars, from Argentina, Bulgaria, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, New Zealand, Serbia, Sudan, Ukraine and Zimbabwe. While many of their interests are the timeless concerns of college seniors on the cusp of graduating, others are unusual, related to their status as pioneers or their individual circumstances. Here is some of what was on their minds as they prepared to take leave of Mayflower Hill.



By Stephen Collins '74

Ana Prokic, a Serb who went home to Belgrade during NATO bombing of her homeland, finds herself straddling loyalties. At Colby she found herself defending Eastern European views, but at home, she said, “I find myself defending the American point of view and American way of living and American culture. Because while I am Serbian, and there’s nothing that can change that, at the same time I spent six years in this country and have grown to love it. . . . I feel like I float right in the middle between two cultures.”

Prokic acknowledges that a Colby education, without any student loans to pay off, was a stunning gift. “[Davis] gave us an opportunity for the future that, speaking personally, I never would have had. My parents won’t earn in their lifetime a year’s tuition in this school. It changed my life and gave me a future and possibly a future for my little sister, because from now on I can take care of her and make a difference for herself.” That begins with Prokic planning to put her younger sister through an American college, she said.

For Andriy Avramenko, from Ukraine, the next stop is London, where he starts with JP Morgan Chase. From there he has his sights on an M.B.A. He can’t imagine not making the most of his education—and then having to explain that to people in his country. “At home,” he said, “if you’re given an opportunity and you miss it, you’re an idiot.”

Bolstered by Shelby Davis’s faith that he is backing leaders for the 21st century, most of the students say they want to return home and make a difference. But few plan to go back immediately.

“To go home and make a difference you have to be a specialist in your field,” said Valentina Saltane, from Latvia. She will enroll in a master’s degree program in public policy at Cornell next fall and plans to work outside of Latvia for several years to pay off grad-school loans. Eventually she hopes to do human rights work on behalf of her country, which is a new member of the European Union.

Nurlan Assilbekov of Kazakhstan said he’s gotten used to speaking frankly and dressing comfortably during his years at the Red Cross Nordic UWC in Norway and at Colby. In Kazakhstan, he says, speaking one’s mind and everyday modes of dress are, by tradition, more constrained. He also has adopted a more pragmatic approach to life. Here, he said, “You have the purpose, and once you see the shortest way to achieve this purpose, you go about it.” His goal is to return to Kazakh-



Valentina Saltane '04 from Latvia, Peter Rasbkov '04 from Bulgaria and Ana Prokic '04 from Serbia were among the inaugural Davis UWC scholars at Colby. The three were photographed at an international students coffee hour during their first year.

stan with an M.B.A., but he figures that will take seven or eight years. The route starts with a job at Barclays on Wall Street, where he begins work this summer.

Diego Puig, an Argentine, studied philosophy and valued the freedom that the Davis UWC scholarship gave him to take full advantage of the intellectual experience. “For us it took care of all our economic needs, and we could just focus on academics and just enjoy Colby. . . . We could fully devote ourselves to our academics,” he said.

Ona Virketyte, a Lithuanian, agreed. “It takes so much pressure from you. You can really concentrate on school.”

On the role of international students as part of Colby’s diversity, Puig said, “They [American students] have come to realize, and we’ve come to realize, that in many ways we’re like them. We’re not that different. We can get along just fine. You have to respect someone else because, despite the difference, in many other ways you are like them.”

Assilbekov noted the degree of change between 2000, the year the first Davis UWC group arrived, and this year, as increasing numbers of international students arrived on campus each year. “Walking on the streets at Colby, it’s not like you only see Americans—you see all colors, all backgrounds. It makes a difference.”

The students said they got used to answering surprising questions—at Colby (“You have computers back home?” “Do you have electricity?” “Yeah, we go to the river and wash ourselves, we don’t really shower”) and when they go home (“Why are [Americans] all so fat and ugly and loud?”). “You get the most stupid questions you can expect,” said

Virketyte. “You get them all.”

But there are more serious questions that these students grapple with, including the idea that their good fortune carries an obligation to their country or family.

For some, giving back is already part of their lives. Charles Data is from Sudan but his parents live separately in Uganda, one on a subsistence farm, one in a camp for Sudanese refugees. Data has sent money home from his campus jobs to put a couple of sisters through school and to help his mother get medical care. “Going to a UWC and coming here, at least for me, I feel there are some expectations that I need to meet,” he said. “It’s not people demanding something from me. I get this degree, I need to do something with it. It’s something that not only I worked for but a lot of people have put some effort into it.”

Data said he will be looking for ways to give back to his family and his country—“to affect the people around me in a positive way.” His journey back home begins at the United Nations University for Peace in Costa Rica, where he’ll pursue a master’s degree in international law and human rights.

As she moves into the next phase of her life, Prokic could be any recent Colby graduate. She is looking forward to attending graduate school in Chicago, especially since she will benefit from the strong relationships forged during college. “I don’t have the luxury of crashing at my parents’ house,” she said, “but I know I can be staying with friends. . . . That’s been helpful—having American friends who are so concerned about you and what’s going on in your country. They’re like ‘don’t worry, we’ll figure it out, we’ll find a way.’”

An Investment, Not a Giveaway

Talk about putting stock in a good education. This year alone, Shelby M.C. and Gale Davis spent \$15 million on college tuition and fees to send 312 students from all over the world to American colleges and universities. Add their earlier gifts to those same students' secondary schools, the United World Colleges, and the family, which includes Colby trustee Andrew Davis '85, has given more than \$100 million to support international education in the last six years.

At Colby, one of five pilot sites for the Davis United World College Program, the Davises paid the full financial aid, sometimes called the family contribution, for 93 students—more than 5 percent of the student body. None of the Davis UWC scholars is related to the family, and Shelby Davis says he doesn't expect a nickel back after the students graduate.

Many of the Davis UWC scholars had very limited options for post-secondary education before the family started the scholarships in 2000. The effect of the program on individual scholars is, not surprisingly, enormous, and the impact of those students on the Colby community, in classes and out, is dramatic beyond expectations.

"This kind of diversity has effects on individual students that will have consequences down the road, on the lives they lead and the aspirations they find within themselves," said President William Adams, quoted in a Davis UWC scholars' yearbook. "Wherever they end up, these students will be different. Our American students will be different too."

To Shelby Davis, who received an honorary degree from Colby this spring, the poignant stories of opportunities seized and the students' (and professors') heartfelt expressions of gratitude for the program are but a prelude. Focused on the long term, he expects nothing less than to improve international relations and, perhaps, change the course of history—in his own phrase, "to move the world."

"We have a saying in our family," Davis said at the pre-commencement dinner in May. "The first thirty years of your life should be to *learn*. The next thirty years is to *earn*. And the last thirty years of your life should be to *return*, to give back, to make the world better."

"What I'm *not* doing is giving scholarships and money away," he told the appreciative Colby audience. "What I *am* doing is investing in the future."

Davis is a man who knows investing. He made his fortune as the founder of Davis Selected Advisers, a mutual fund and money management company that now has \$40 billion under management. His study of history, at Princeton, taught him that extraordinary leaders influence history—a nugget he decided to apply on Wall Street, he explained. "What I learned there [in school] wasn't so stupid." He developed a strategy based on finding exceptional corporate leaders and backing their companies as he assembled stock portfolios. Davis Selected Advisers prospered.

His extraordinarily successful earning years were informed by his learning, and when it came time to think about returning, he adapted his theory of leadership again. "I was looking for leaders for the next century and I found them in this program," he said.

The Davis UWC scholarships are a generous financial commitment and a powerful lever to change the world for the better, but they are, in one sense, an afterthought—an outgrowth of the Davises' support for the United World Colleges themselves.



Taking a personal interest in the lives of the Davis UWC scholars, Shelby Davis visits the campus each year for a dinner with them. Here he is shown chatting with students in the Roberts Building in November 2003.

Davis traced it all back to his first visit to the UWC in Montezuma, N.M., in 1998. He arrived early, encountered two boys sitting by the pool talking and asked them if they were students. It turned out one was from Israel, the other from Palestine. "We're roommates here," one told him, "and we are friends—and this could never happen in our country," Davis recalls hearing.

The more he learned about the UWC program, which mixes students from all over the world for a two-year International Baccalaureate (IB) secondary school program, the better he liked it. "In Jordan three thousand students applied last year, and six made it," he said at Colby, to show the caliber of the students UWC selects. The more UWC students he got to know and the more unlikely cross-cultural friendships he observed, the more impressed he became.

"That's when it hit me. This was the thing to do."

With the success of the pilot Davis UWC Scholars program at Colby, Princeton, College of the Atlantic, Wellesley and Middlebury, Davis plans to expand the program to perhaps 50 colleges and he envisions as many as 1,000 Davis UWC Scholars in the near future. He insists that his is "an open-ended commitment."

Reaction to Davis's initiatives was best summed up following his two appearances during Commencement weekend. After he spoke at the dinner, trustees, faculty and administrators gave him an enthusiastic—and a noticeably extended—standing ovation, an honor matched the next morning when the same group plus students and parents saluted him as he received an honorary doctor of laws degree. —Stephen Collins '74