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A Global Forum

Davis-United World College program brings the world's students to Colby

It's late morning and students in the front row of Kenneth Rodman's class on international relations lean forward in their seats as Rodman, William R. Cotter Distinguished Teaching Professor of Government, lectures about a troubling question: who wins and who loses in an increasingly globalized economy? From their rapt expressions, you might think these students in Waterville had a stake in the fate of developing nations

They do.

The class includes Igor Gnyp '04 from Ukraine and Andras Rozmer '05 of Hungary. Megha Kapoor '05 is from Indonesia. Justinas Pelenis '05 is from Lithuania and Emma James '05 from New Zealand via India.

It's a world of experience, and the class knows it. So when Karin Shankar '05, a student from India, explains how developing countries that step up export of raw materials may actually punish themselves by depressing the prices they get for their product, everybody listens. They know Shankar's interest is more than academic.

More and more this is the scene at Colby, primarily due to an aggressive recruitment effort. It's also a consequence of an unusual alliance among the College, the United World Colleges (UWC)—a private college preparatory program open to students from all over the world—and a generous donor who has put up millions of dollars to support students at both institutions.

Shelby Davis, founder of a \$30-billion mutual fund and money management firm, is a \$55-million backer of UWC, an international college preparatory school with 2,000 students from 140 countries on 10 campuses around the world. In 1998 Davis donated \$45 million to UWC to fund 100 scholarships for American students. Two years ago Davis and his family, including Andrew Davis '85, a Colby trustee, added a commitment to underwrite up to the full cost of a four-year college education for any graduate of the UWC program admitted to one of five American universities and colleges—Colby, Middlebury and Wellesley colleges, College of the Atlantic, and Princeton University. In the wake of terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Davis also pledged \$5 million in matching contributions for general support of United World College, and his funding of

college-level scholarships for UWC graduates grew substantially as that program entered its third year.

Colby's ongoing efforts to "bring the world" to campus made it a natural partner for UWC, and Colby's international student population has boomed, the numbers doubling in the past four years, largely because of the Davis-UWC scholarship program.

"What Shelby Davis has done is to create a private-sector Fulbright program for kids from all over the world," said Philip Geier, president of the UWC school in New Mexico. Geier says that since many UWC graduates come from families with extremely limited incomes, they wouldn't be able to attend UWC in the first place, much less go on to college in the United States, without scholarship support. (International students are not eligible for most financial aid programs at U.S. colleges and universities.)

The Davis financial commitment ought to be a model for other philanthropists and the universities and colleges they support, Geier says. "Shelby Davis wanted to establish these programs, but he also wanted to challenge schools to realize that it's in their own strategic interest to transform themselves. As they've seen at Colby, you can leverage quite a bit of change over a short period of time by bringing these enormously qualified students to small and medium-sized colleges."

After three years in the program Colby has 67 Davis-UWC scholars, including 29 who started classes this fall. Studying at Colby has clear benefits for the international students—and their American classmates.

"These international students, especially the UWC kids, make a considerable contribution to the intellectual caliber of discussion in my classes," said Rodman. "They expose American students to quite diverse points of view and challenge the stale liberal-conservative split that dominates American political thought."

Such as?

"I had a Brazilian in my class, a very conservative pro-business guy," Rodman said. "One day this American classmate with similar views began referring to Latin American oil, this resource, as 'our oil.'" The result was what Rodman called "an educational clash."

“There’s an energy and drive among the international students that’s quite inspiring. They ask questions I hadn’t anticipated, and they really dig into the material. They encourage other students to aim higher academically.”

Pugh Family Professor of Economics David Findlay

In another class, an American feminist raised questions about the prevalence of female genital mutilation in some countries. “She raised the issue, with some passion, as a human rights issue,” Rodman said. “But an African feminist in the class, who shared many similar beliefs, really went after the American student about her ethnocentric cultural assumptions. Those are exactly the kinds of dialogues that are critically important to preparing our students for the world they’re inheriting. You wouldn’t have those exchanges if the international students weren’t here.”

American students agree. “Every single international student I’ve met brings a lot to the table,” said Kate Heidemann ’04 of Connecticut. “I was in an anthropology class where we watched a film about civil wars in Africa. The film was full of violent images, and we could all agree that what we were seeing was a tragedy. But sitting next to me was one of my friends from Zimbabwe, and he was crying through the whole thing. This kind of direct contact brings everything alive. You’re never going to get that from a textbook.”

The growing population of international students has opened doors to the world. “I grew up in Maine, and I never got farther than Quebec in high school,” said Catherine Fillebrown ’05, an East Asian studies major. “Here are all these students from Africa, India, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. I hadn’t seen the world before coming to college, but in a way Colby brought the whole world to me.”

That expanded world is a boost to students and faculty.

“There’s an energy and drive among the international students that’s quite inspiring,” said David Findlay, Pugh Family Professor of Economics. “They ask questions I hadn’t anticipated, and they really dig into the material. They encourage other students to aim higher academically.”

Assistant Professor of Chemistry Dasan Thamattoor reports that most of the international students he’s taught, even in his most difficult courses, have been stellar. They are unusually “driven and extremely motivated” in ways that inspire their American classmates, he said.

Thamattoor cites Rodwell Mabaera ’02, who grew up in Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe, and attended Colby on an Oak Scholarship, a program that brings students to Colby from Zimbabwe and Denmark. Early on Thamattoor noticed that Mabaera, a double major in chemistry and math, continually signed up for “the hardest classes imaginable.” He became “a kind of elder statesman” among classmates of all sorts,

Thamattoor said.

Mabaera ran on the cross-country team, played on an indoor soccer team with American and international students and faculty members and was a COOT leader. In May he graduated summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa after just three years, and in August he enrolled at Dartmouth Medical School.

Significant numbers of international students take courses in government and international studies, and their diverse perspectives enrich the content and discussions in those subjects.

G. Calvin Mackenzie, Goldfarb Family Distinguished Professor of American Government, worries, though, that future changes in national policy, inspired by security concerns, will make it more difficult for international students to study in America. In the aftermath of last year’s terrorist attacks, Mackenzie notes, there’s been understandable attention paid to the potential risks posed by international study programs. But there has been far less discussion of the other side of the story, Mackenzie argues.

“If we make it significantly harder for foreign students to come to study on U.S. campuses, we’ll substantially diminish the educational experience of American students who learn from them,” he said. “We will also destroy the great potential we have, through our colleges and universities, to make just the kinds of positive connections with young people in other countries that we need to make if we’re to raise levels of mutual understanding and combat future terrorism.”

Mutual understanding doesn’t come instantly, of course, and even on campus there can be adjustment issues.

Last spring more than a dozen Davis-UWC scholars from 13 countries and five continents gathered to talk about the particular challenges of being an international student on an American campus these days.

Several admitted that they were mystified by what they considered peculiar behavior by some of their American classmates. Alcohol abuse, especially among first-year students, and casual sexual activity shocked some of the international scholars. Instead of breaking down barriers, initial impressions sometimes reinforced stereotypes.

“Some of these kids only care about Abercrombie and Fitch and using daddy’s ATM card,” said a student from India. Another remembered her first view of “this vast conveyor belt of all the food” available in the dining halls and the massive leftovers piled into the trash

afterward. "It was a shock," she said, "to really see for the first time this use-and-throw-away culture."

Some recounted incidents of hostility or ignorance on the part of a few American classmates. The first question a scholar from Ukraine was asked by his roommate was, "Are your parents communists or are they part of the Mafia?"

But after a few similar examples, one of the Davis-UWC scholars protested. "I think we're creating a misleading impression," said Diego Puig '04, from Argentina. "This idea that Americans are ignorant—I think that's complete crap." He said he's met plenty of Americans on campus who are smart, engaged and open. And if an American dropped into his own hometown in Argentina, he wouldn't necessarily be greeted with enthusiasm, Puig says, so why should the international students at Colby expect special treatment?

Going abroad for college not only offers an opportunity to understand American politics and culture better but also a chance to reflect on one's own background and experience.

Stanislav Presolski '05, from Bulgaria, recalls an epiphany during an English composition course taught by Lee Family Professor of English Cedric Gael Bryant. Presolski remembers working on essays for the class on several nights from 8 p.m. until 8 a.m. "I wrote one essay about the gypsies in Bulgaria," he recalled. "It's a hidden conflict, almost like racism. Back home, when I was reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, I would say, 'Wow, see how Americans are so cruel in their treatment of black people.' But I had never questioned myself or considered that I had the same kind of bad opinion of the gypsies."

The value of such cross-cultural exchange runs in both directions, of course. Ana Prokic '04, of Yugoslavia, arrived at Colby in the fall of 2000. Within a few months, U.S.-led NATO troops were bombing Belgrade. "I was watching the live broadcast and they said on television that the military hospital where my mom works had been destroyed," Prokic said. It took her six hours to get through on the telephone to find out it wasn't the hospital that had been hit.

Several American students whom Prokic didn't know well at the time were supportive through the difficult weeks that followed, and she says she won't forget their kindness. Her classmates' response to her personal crisis in turn informed her own reaction when she returned home for vacation last December, after the September 11 attacks.

Prokic said, "People blame the U.S. for the bombing in my country, and so they celebrated the attacks. I said, 'Can you hear yourself? Listen, it's not Bill Clinton, it's not the pilots who bombed our country that died, it's two or three thousand innocent people.' Watching the bombing of my country was really, really hard. But I was also here for the September 11 attacks, and when that happened I felt the same exact pain that I'd felt when I saw buildings crash back home."

International students at Colby say they've found themselves in a startling position during the past year. Several likened their new challenge to a navigation between the world at home and the world of classmates and professors in the United States.

"I've become a kind of interpreter between the American perspective and Polish perspective—an interpreter in both directions," said Pawel Brodalka '05 of Poland. Brodalka is on the track team and rooms with an "outspoken conservative" from New Jersey. "He's an intelligent fellow," Brodalka said. "He's got his strong views, but he's not close-minded, and he's willing to listen to my views too."

Since the terrorist attacks a year ago, "To my roommate and for the guys on the track team, I found myself to a certain extent able to explain why America is sometimes viewed as isolationist and unilateralist in its actions," Brodalka said. "And to my friends and family in Poland, I was able to explain just how frightened people are because those planes crashed into the World Trade Center. I told them the [U.S.] is no monolith, and that it's not as if everybody is against the Muslims now," he said. "I told them that people are smart, and that they understand that you should not generalize and play into stereotypes."

Brodalka also finds his own attitudes shifting as a result of the frank exchanges in the classroom, during workouts, at meal times and in the dorms. "Most of my life I found myself strongly pro-Palestinian," he said, offering an example. "Now when I listen to my conservative roommate and other American friends I find my perceptions shaken. I hope they find their perceptions shaken, too, in listening to me."

American students have found that Colby's 67 Davis-UWC scholars



Charles Data '04 from Uganda and Sheena Siu '05 from Hong Kong in an economics class.



Left, Nina Korolyova '06 of Bulgaria and UWC graduate Adelajda Zorba '06 of Albania chat at a recent International Coffee Hour.

are not cardboard cutouts, reducible “representatives” of diverse cultures or political views, but are, of course, individuals. The range of their backgrounds, the eclectic nature of their experience, can be dizzying.

Nicholas Matatu '04, from Zimbabwe, attended the UWC in Hong Kong, then came to Colby to study Chinese literature and Japanese politics. Nandini Naik '05, from India, is majoring in theater and dance and in religious studies and had a role in the campus staging of *The Vagina Monologues*. Joseph Okeyo '05, of Kenya, a fine basketball player, arrived on campus with experience in an AIDS hospice in Bangkok and is headed for an M.B.A. and a job in banking.

Lubos Hudec '05, an accordion player from the Czech Republic,

is studying music and physics. Adelin Cai '05, from Singapore, whose father is a professional magician, taught at a school of hearing-impaired youngsters two summers and is a stalwart of the popular Social Action Theater troupe at Colby. Andriy Avramenko '04, the son of two engineers from Ukraine, surprised himself by falling in love with classes in art and literature, especially one course on “Asian heroes taught by an Irishman. It had that odd mix, maybe that’s why I liked it,” he said.

It’s an eclectic mix of cultures that can be a melding of extremes. Charles Data '04 wedges his campus job in the post office between classes and a blizzard of academic obligations and volunteer activities. Like many international students, he also works up to 20 hours a week to supplement his scholarship funds. Like some others, he sends almost all of what he makes to his family back home.

Data, an economics major and one of 10 Davis-UWC Scholars from Africa at Colby, was born in the Sudan and grew up in Uganda. When he talks about his trajectory from Uganda to two years of academic and social preparation on the United World College campus in Norway to Colby in Maine, he said he’s “as surprised as anyone else to find myself here.” Born into a poor family (his mother works a small agricultural plot, his father lives in a refugee camp), Data was encouraged by his older brother to seek educational opportunities outside of Uganda.

He admits that he suffered a walloping dose of culture shock when he first arrived in Waterville. Thrown off at first by American customs, he wasn’t sure what to make of the cheery but seemingly empty greetings that were shouted out at him around the campus. “I didn’t know whether Americans were all fake,” he recalled. “People just seemed to be speaking at high speed—saying, ‘Hi, wuzzut!’—but it becomes very confusing to know whether they were at all interested in an answer to the question they were asking.”

The relatively open attitude toward homosexuality on campus also startled him. He’d feared being placed with a gay roommate and took some time warming up to openly gay and lesbian classmates. Attitudes about homosexuality in Uganda are so different, he explains. But Data experienced a dramatic change of heart over the course of his first year. His supervisor at the student post office, a gay man, “treated me respectfully,” Data said. “I really liked him. And that made me wonder why I should have disrespectful thoughts about gay people on the whole. I just began to let my prejudice go.”

“I feel that I’m taking the resources of fifteen people’s education by being here—it’s all being devoted to me. And that raises quite important questions for the rest of my life. I have to think where I’m going to end up. . . .”

Charles Data '04, a UWC graduate from Uganda

Data hopes to work for the United Nations, helping run resettlement programs. Eventually, he says, he'd like to go into politics in his native Sudan.

As he settles into his third year at Colby, Data is keenly aware of his special status—both at Colby and back at home. His unusual opportunity inspires a strong sense of responsibility. “I feel that I’m taking the resources of fifteen people’s education by being here—it’s all being devoted to me,” Data said softly. “And that raises quite important questions for the rest of my life. I have to think where I’m going to end up, and also how am I going to do something to compensate the other fifteen people who were sacrificed so I could be here.”

As he considers all the implications of increasing Colby’s international reach in recruiting students, President William Adams sees multiple benefits. Besides providing opportunities for talented and extremely well-prepared students from all around the world to study here, UWC provides compelling benefits for American students, too. “We believe that a contemporary college education ought to be both cross-cultural and transnational,” Adams said. “International students contribute to the intellectual life of the college in distinctive ways. We need them for the important contributions they make to the educational process itself. We need them, in short, to help educate us.”

For information about the United World Colleges visit www.uwc.org

Shelby Davis Explains

Shelby M. C. Davis is founder, chief investment officer and chief executive officer of Davis Selected Advisers, L.P., a \$30-billion mutual fund and money management firm. He, his son Andrew '85 and their families have contributed more than \$50 million to United World College, a private international college preparatory program with 10 campuses worldwide. The family also contributes up to \$10 million a year to support the Davis-UWC Scholarship Program, which underwrites up to the full educational and living costs of graduates who win admission to Colby, Middlebury, Wellesley, College of the Atlantic or Princeton University.



Shelby Davis meets with Davis-UWC scholars at Colby in October.

What led to your interest in funding college scholarships for international students?

When I was still in my teens, I took two trips around the world. It was on those trips that I began to understand that only through interaction between people can we build bridges of both understanding and knowledge.

These students [are] coming from Bulgaria or Russia or China, and they’re succeeding in a challenging academic environment in a second language. They need to succeed . . . but if your father earns \$30 a month, how is he going to fund \$30,000 a year? My goal, frankly, is to have all students that graduate at United World Colleges to go on to university.

How, and why, did you get involved in supporting United World College students?

After meeting Phil Geier [president, UWC of the American West] I

went out to visit the UWC campus in New Mexico. I was walking past one of the meeting rooms and here were these two students—one Palestinian and one Israeli—with their arms around each other. That just blew me away . . . I found myself thinking, “Hey, this is something I can believe in.”

Is this commitment unlimited?

It is. Anybody who can get admitted to Colby from Bulgaria, I figure they deserve it. Now, when I meet Bro and he says that professors here come up to him and say, “Get me more students like these” because

they’re enriching the classroom, they’re fun to teach, they bring different points of view to the discussions, and they’re making a big impact on the American students as well as learning a lot themselves—that just confirms the value of it.

How did the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., last fall affect your thinking about the program?

My whole company could have been wiped out on 9-11. My office is on the 94th floor of Two World Trade, [and] our board meeting was scheduled for that morning at 8:30. By chance, in August the meeting was switched to the O’Hare Hilton in Chicago. My son Chris was on the last plane out of Laguardia Airport, and the captain of the plane said, “There’s something going on at the World Trade Center.” They looked over and saw the ball of flame as the second plane crashed.

I was so grateful, of course, that we’d been spared. But I also felt that we had a special responsibility . . . to educate young Americans about global realities while exposing international students to U.S. college life.