Campus Profile

Hope in the World

New communication technologies and increasingly sophisticated and accessible transportation networks made it a given: “This is a shrinking world, and we must learn to be at home in it.”

The words might have been spoken by a devotee of Thomas Friedman, author of *The World Is Flat*. It happens, though, that they preceded Friedman’s 2005 book by just a bit. They were offered in 1866, the year that Hope was chartered, attributed to either the Rev. Philip Phelps, first president of Hope College, or the Rev. Issac Wyckoff, pastor of Second Reformed Church of Albany, N.Y.

It’s an emphasis that has found expression at the college in a variety of ways throughout all the years since. Two of the six members of the Class of 1879 were from Japan. Four of the seven members of the Class of 1887 went into foreign mission work. In the 1950s the college built ties with the Reformed Church in America’s mission school in Brewton, Ala., making higher education an option for African Americans from the segregated South. Hope established an exchange relationship with Meij. Gakuen University in Japan in the 1960s. Students come to Hope from around the world—31 foreign nations are represented in the student body this year—and Hope students in turn can go nearly anywhere themselves.

What drives the philosophy, particularly in the modern era, is the idea that both Hope students and the world need it to be so.

“At its very minimum, a Hope education must prepare students to leave Hope with the knowledge, requisite set of skills and understanding that will allow them to become successful world citizens,” said Alfredo Gonzales, who is associate provost and dean for international and multicultural education at Hope. “Such preparation will require all students to speak more than one language, know how to work and interact in a culture different than their own, and possess the knowledge for understanding the political, historical, economic and social structures of the world.”

The larger vision, Gonzales noted, relates to the college’s work as a whole, seeking to enlarge students’ capacity to believe—and to act on the belief—that they can contribute positively to the betterment of humanity.

International education at Hope emphasizes making real connections with the places being visited. Here, senior Aaron Green of Holland, Mich., is pictured with students while teaching during in San Francisco Constanco in Mexico during the college’s summer program based in Puerto Escondido. Led by Dr. Robin Kay who recently won a statewide award for the program (please see page 18), the course began as a spring break service project and retains a service emphasis.

(Pho courtesy of Aaron Green)
complements an additional academic focus, such as art, dance or medicine. When they come back, it shows. You know they have been somewhere else,” said Dr. Anne Lawler ’70, professor of French. “I’ve seen these students come back and they’re better students. They’re much more interested in what they’re studying. It’s not just about being a better student.”

“And when our students come back they are consistently saying that was the best semester of their years at Hope,” she said. That was senior Kevin Steinbach’s experience while studying at Vanzan University in Nagoya, Japan. “I met some of the most wonderful friends that I’ve ever had and had some of the most wonderful and varied experiences that I’ve ever had, and I’ve come back here and everything is subtly but very different,” he said.

International perspective is not limited to off-campus study. The college’s international students add immeasurably to the quality of campus life even as they benefit from the Hope experience themselves. They learn of Hope in many ways, sometimes through the efforts of alumni and friends, sometimes through long-established programs. Michelle Sepulveda Ral spent the summer and recent fall semester on campus from her native Queretaro, Mexico, through a new federally funded multinational initiative focused on the study of ethnic and public policy in the sciences of which Hope is one of only nineteen participating colleges and universities, conducting research in the sciences and taking classes in a variety of disciplines—and living every minute of it.

“Hope’s a really good university and it has a really good science program,” said Ral, who conducted research in paleontology with Dr. Brian Bodenbender and biology with Dr. Gregory Fraley in addition to completing a major paper on bioethics. She also connected socially, getting involved in activities ranging from tutoring Spanish, to the Japanese Club, to participating in a Korean dance in “Images: A Global Dance Culture,” to talking with friends about their cultures as well as her own.

“I’ve been doing everything here as much as possible,” Ral said. “It’s been so fun. It helped me to practice my language and meet more new people. I’ve made a lot of friends here.”

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Michelle Sepulveda Ral

Language study was what drew Steinbach to Hope. Growing up in Downers Grove, Ill., he had started teaching himself Japanese and was looking for a program that would support and develop his interest in the language and culture.

“We came up for a campus visit and I talked with Dr. Nakajima, and I came back and was looking for a program that would support and develop his interest in the language and culture.”

Dr. Wilson said.

“Introduction to Ethnic Studies.”

Senior Hilary Cason of Detroit, Mich., has appreciated the chance to discuss issues related to diversity openly in Ethnic Studies.

“The students were so receptive. The discussion panels, the ones I attended, were definitely packed,” Cason said. “The ‘Hope’ event helped me to realize that people on this campus really care about issues of racism and diversity. It blew my mind how many people participated.”

“We try to interface with as many departments as we can, as the vision is to have multicultural education throughout the fabric of the institution,” said Vanesa Greano, who is director of multicultural education. “It is existing that the Hope community recognizes multicultural education as a valuable component of every academic discipline, rather than a program.”

“Out of a variety of approaches—lectures, conferences, seminars, workshops, interactive programs, films, discussions and others—the goal is to cultivate cross-cultural understanding that promotes action to make our campus a welcoming and inclusive community for all constituents,” she said.

The office also serves as a resource for the college’s minority students.

“One of the things that we’re trying to be is a haven of support and celebration of racial diversity,” Greano said. “We want students to have a strong sense of their own identity, integrating without abandoning.”

There’s an art to bringing together people from many backgrounds and encouraging them to discuss openly, particularly to help making that a comfortable experience for those in the minority. Senior Hilary Carson of Detroit, Mich., has appreciated the way the office has helped make it happen, including through a campus conference—attended by mostly white and minority students alike—early in her first year.

“I saw most of those who were kind of out of the cultural scene shocked when I came,” she said. “I saw these upperclassmen who were here at Hope and they were so wonderful. I was tremendously empowered because it let me know that I could be successful.”

“Hope offers students the world, and in turn prepares students to go out into that world and make a difference. Pictured are participants in the Vienna Summer School last year.”

Dr. Montano said.

The God of creation demands the best we can do good, to embrace justice, to seek peace, to care for the natural world around us.”

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Lakes Colleges Association Students of Color Leadership Conference, which Hope hosted. That event, in turn, inspired Carson and other Hope students to develop a workshop program for the campus in January that focused on open discussion of issues related to diversity. They named the event “Hope.”

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“She has facilitated leadership opportunities made available through the office as well. Last semester she chaired the annual Great

A variety of campus initiatives emphasize diversity education. In the Phelps Scholars Program, students live in the same hall and share classes and engage in co-curricular activities together with an emphasis on exploring issues related to diversity.