



University of  
Connecticut



# Connecticut International

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Stephen Schensul, director of the UConn School of Medicine's Center for International Community Health Studies.

By Chris DeFrancesco

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He's made a career of becoming involved in poor, urban communities, securing grants to conduct public health research, and establishing community-run institutions and programs to benefit those communities after he leaves.

It goes back to the late 1960s, when anthropologist Stephen Schensul, then with the University of Illinois' Westside Community Mental Health

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## Adventures in Egypt

By Jacqueline Kubinski

After graduation, I moved to Egypt, a fascinating and unique country with a rich history. My experience thus far has been wonderful, challenging, and eye-opening. Over the summer, I studied Arabic at the American University in Cairo. In this country, English is everywhere and it is easy to avoid speaking any Arabic, so I have had to push myself to practice with co-workers, taxi drivers, and friends. Now, I am working at the Naval Medical Research Unit on vector borne diseases, where I collaborate on research projects with

Jacqueline received her BA in May, 2009, and has begun a year of study in Egypt

Egyptian colleagues. In October, I will start a diploma program at Ain Shams University (insha'allah- God willing) in Medical Entomology.

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My less formal education has come from the friends I have made along the way. In just three months, I have gotten to know some of the most interesting people that I have ever come across in my travels. Thanks to the legendary Egyptian hospitality, I have been offered apartments, assistance, and invitations to Ramadan Iftars (the breaking of the fast) from people I have known for two minutes or two weeks, and they are never less than genuine. I have witnessed the clash and compromise of Eastern ideas meeting Western ones, and I have discussed history, religion, politics, and women's rights with Egyptians and foreigners. As a result, my perspectives on the Middle East have been forever changed. I am captivated by this country. I know one year will not be nearly enough time to explore all Egypt has to offer, but I certainly hope to make the most of it.

## Researcher .....Continued from page 1

Program, started studying and participating in the development of Chicago's Mexican-American community.

He joined the UConn Health Center faculty in 1976. Today, as director of the Center for International Community Health Studies in the UConn School of Medicine's Department of Community Medicine and Health Care, Schensul's vision remains the same, but has an international reach.

For most of this decade, his focus has been on preventing the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases in urban India, most recently among married women in Mumbai. His work involves traveling there an average of three times a year, for two to four weeks at a time, through 2013.

"I've tried to work collaboratively with people in the communities where I've worked, so that the research could be of benefit first to them, and then to the general discipline, and then to policy and program developers and the public health disciplines," Schensul says.

"Research results can then be used by the community to advocate for its needs and for institution-building in the communities."

The research that Schensul initiated in the 1970s is the foundation on which two Hartford health institutions were built.

His work with Hartford's Hispanic community and with the Charter Oak/Rice Heights Public Housing Tenants Association contributed to the establishment of the Hispanic Health Council in 1978 and the Charter Oak Health Center in 1979.

"Both of these institutions continue to be a vital force in the Hartford community and are nationally recognized as models of community-based institutions committed to improving the health of underserved communities," says Martha Bojko, a research associate in the Department of Community Medicine and Health Care.

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## News from the School of Social Work

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Kathryn Libal, Assistant Professor of Social Work, and Scott Harding, Assistant Professor of Community Organization, at Mount Nebo in Jordan

Researchers in the School of Social Work studying the humanitarian support to Iraqi refugee populations say the news media have largely ignored the displacement crisis, as large numbers of forced migrants and refugees have fled Iraq for such countries as Jordan and Syria since the U.S. war in Iraq began in 2003.

Since 2006 Kathryn Libal, assistant professor of social work, and Scott Harding, assistant professor of community organization have been researching the ways in which services are being provided to Iraqi refugee populations in Jordan by international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), U.N. agencies and the U.S. government. They have conducted interviews in the U.S. with NGOs and human rights groups and in Jordan with representatives of organizations working on humanitarian issues.

Jordan hosts about half a million Iraqi refugees, according to the United Nations. “We thought that some of the established humanitarian organizations would have a much more visible presence there,”

Libal says. “We thought they’d be providing a lot of services to a lot of refugees, but that wasn’t the case. There were few refugee camps because most of the people were urban refugees.”

The research indicates that Jordan and Syria are ill-equipped to handle large populations for a long period of time, and resettlement is not a viable option for most.

“They’re both developing countries,” Libal says. “They have their own vulnerable populations, so to absorb another large population makes it even more challenging.”

Many of the NGOs, she says, believe the President of the United States plays a key role in asserting the importance of addressing refugee and displacement needs. “They’ve said if the president doesn’t take a leadership role, it’s very difficult to get other countries to participate in the endeavor.”

Harding adds that while there is a debate in social science literature about the role of humanitarian groups, their research shows that these groups play a vital role: “Because of the pressure and political advocacy of these groups, U.S. policy has changed significantly and the United Nations has done more. Advocacy does work, even on a global level.”

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# Global Citizenship Curriculum Committee

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The University of Connecticut is the site of numerous international, global, and intercultural initiatives in the areas of both research and curriculum. There has been, however, little coordination among the diverse programs and projects. In October 2008, Provost Peter Nicholls established the Global Citizenship Curriculum Committee (GCCC), chaired by Katharina von Hammerstein, and charged with the task to help coordinate the already existing elements of a global citizenship curriculum, further their visibility, and encourage the development of additional facets. The University's Academic Plan (<http://academicplan.uconn.edu/>), too, reflects an understanding of the need to prepare our students for lives, work, and responsible civic engagement in an increasingly global environment.

Over the past few months, the GCCC has pursued an ambitious agenda balancing thoughtful concept development with practical steps forward. For example, the GCCC met with representatives of the UConn Foundation to discuss fund raising for the UConn's university-wide global initiative. The Committee is also currently working on ways to provide information about faculty's international expertise, is debating developing an undergraduate Global Certificate that would complement any major, and has revised the document on global/international student learning outcomes. In collaboration with the department heads of all schools and colleges, the Office of International Affairs (OIA), and the General Education Oversight Committee (GEOC), the GCCC assembled a list of nearly 600 global courses in 55 departments and programs. This list, which will soon be available on the Global Website, will enable students to search global courses according to parameters, such as country, subject area, major, general education requirement, etc. The Global Website will serve as a central map for global teaching/learning and research activities at UConn and enable our undergraduate students to easily navigate the global curriculum and identify opportunities to internationalize their educational experience at UConn. The website will have links to international programs; global courses; faculty's international expertise; international/global student learning outcomes; a calendar of international events; the Global House and Eurotech living learning communities; pertinent international organizations; and more.

Among the GCCC's plans for the Academic Year 2009-2010 are a pilot faculty study abroad grant competition, a pilot grant competition for faculty global study groups, and highly visible events generating a university-wide conversation about global citizenship and corresponding curricular programming.

The success of UConn's overall internationalization depends upon the explicit and strong support of the upper administration and faculty's, administrators' and students' participation in and ownership of UConn's global citizenship curriculum. The GCCC welcomes partners from across the university.

*Katharina von Hammerstein, Chair, Global Citizenship Curriculum Committee*

OUR STUDENTS, OUR WORLD, OUR FUTURE

BY VALERIE CALDERON AND DR. THOMAS LAWRENCE LONG

"Travel," said Connecticut's adopted son, Mark Twain, "is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness," an aphorism whose lesson was learned by University of Connecticut School of Nursing seniors during the Fall 2008 term.

Fourteen nursing seniors began a semester-long journey to Cape Town, South Africa on September 1, 2008. The trip began with a kick-off party that took place at Augustus Storrs Hall, and the students left the event by bus to make their way to Bradley Airport.

Two faculty members, clinical instructor Lisa-Marie Griffiths, MA, MS, APRN and Dr. Arthur J. Engler, PhD, RNC, APRN, led the African venture. Griffiths, a maternity specialist, was with the students for the first half, while Engler, a pediatrics specialist, joined them after.

Before leaving, the students learned about South Africa's history, culture and politics, but this could not compare to the experience of stepping off the plane and actually seeing the country and visiting historical sites and natural wonders.

South Africa is known for its tropical climate and exotic wildlife, but also for being a country with a rich, and at times, turbulent history. The trip made many of the students aware of the economic, political, and cultural differences between their American home and the homeland of South Africans.

"South Africa has been a place that has really made me think. I've had to examine my own values and beliefs about poverty, racism and forgiveness, the problems that plague this country every day and are so obvious on the streets of the city," said Kari Nilsen.

They also worked in health care settings and spoke with doctors and nurses to learn more about the health-care climate in South Africa. While taking part in their clinical practica, the students saw some of the problems that are faced in the health-care field. Caring nurses use what is available to them to provide the best care they can. The equipment used may not be up to date, and many of the facilities lack technology, but the nurses do all they can to care for pa-

tients.

As Dr. Engler observed, "One of the sobering and saddening discussions was regarding allocation of those scarce resources. For example, how can one justify spending huge amounts of money on high-tech procedures (e.g., ECMO) and complicated cardiothoracic surgeries when so many more children who might die of such common illnesses as gastroenteritis and dehydration could be saved?"

Many of the students also saw first hand the effects of the AIDS epidemic in the country while working with children under the age of 10 who have been affected by HIV infection. As Ms. Griffiths observed, "The focus of the nursing care is antiviral medication, good nutrition and loving care. Each weekend, four of us can volunteer to help from 7 am to noon until the children start their naptime. I was able to go this morning, and I am still overwhelmed with the needs of the children and how little they have."

The students took a full academic course load as part of their study abroad experience. The students' South African Politics course, under the supervision of Rev. Vernon Rose, coordinator of UConn's international internships, earned three academic credits.

The two nursing clinical practica, Childbearing and Child Rearing, were served in various healthcare institutions including Mitchells Plain Medical Center, ThembaCare, Gatesville Hospital and Tafelsig Clinic, and earned three credits each. In addition, students took two classroom courses in Childbearing and Child Rearing, for a full-time academic load.

The 7,770 miles that separate Cape Town and Storrs were compressed by information technology: The students took advantage of UConn's course management system, HuskyCT. To publicize the students' adventures and to keep in touch with deans, faculty, fellow students and family members, Dr. Engler created a public blog with posts from students and faculty about their experiences, which can be found at <http://ucnursing.wordpress.com/>.

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However, it was not all work and no play for our students, who were able to go on a wildlife excursion, visit some of the beautiful beaches, and hike.

One of the seniors, Nayomi Dawes, probably spoke for all the students and faculty when she wrote at the end of the semester:

Whenever I leave Themba Care these last few weeks, I think about how much I will miss these little ones. . . . Each child has a history and a story; most of them are sad and heart breaking. . . . They may be stigmatized because their blood is infected with HIV, but they are all so precious.

Our students have learned that our world is larger than UConn, larger than their neighborhoods, larger than Connecticut.



Photo left: As part of their clinical practica in the neonatal ICU at Gatesville Medical Center, Cape Town, South Africa, Study Abroad students (left to right) Carolyn Maldonado, Kristen Fortunato, and Carolyn Zaccardo, look over patient charts. Photo right: Nayomi Dawes completing documentation for immunizations



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