“Cosmopolitan” is the word that comes to mind when talking with Kathryn Stewart Hegedus, not in the sense of a woman’s magazine but in its original meaning: a citizen of the world.

Previously retired but now interim director of UConn School of Nursing’s education abroad programs, Hegedus was present at the creation of our trailblazing full semester clinical site education in Cape Town, South Africa, and San Juan, Puerto Rico, as well as the shorter intensive experiences in Ghent, Belgium, which she leads, and Hong Kong, China.

In recognition of her leadership, the School of Nursing’s Mu Chapter of the honor society Sigma Theta Tau created an education abroad scholarship in her honor, which she and her husband Zoltan Hegedus have now endowed. As an endowed scholarship, it will continue to provide students with resources enabling them to travel for curricular study.

Although Hegedus grew up in rural New York, her marriage to a Hungarian refugee who had escaped from the Soviet invasion of his homeland, provided her with “a blessed perspective into other cultures,” she observes. Before coming to UConn as a member of interdisciplinary and international teams at Beth-Israel Hospital in Boston and at Harvard, Hegedus came to appreciate the global dimensions of health.

What she discovered in Storrs was a school of nursing and a university eager to enter the world outside of the Quiet Corner of Connecticut. UConn nursing professor Henrietta Bernal’s ground breaking work on culturally-relevant care had created a compelling theoretical basis for engaging our students in other countries’ healthcare settings. Under Kathryn’s leadership, our first education abroad experiences happened in 2008 with students placed in Cape Town and San Juan.

The Kathryn Stewart Hegedus and Zoltan Louis Hegedus Study Abroad Scholarship will help students cover costs over and above tuition, either for the full semester courses or the short-term experiences. “Many of our students work at paying jobs just to make ends meet,” Hegedus observes, “This scholarship will help those students who are qualified but need some added resources in order to also participate in global health.”

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Lisa-Marie Griffiths, UConn School of Nursing assistant clinical professor, admits that she was an unlikely candidate to lead the first maternity-newborn (women’s health) clinical education abroad in Cape Town, South Africa, in 2008. “I’d never flown internationally, I’d never used an ATM or a mobile phone, and I didn’t have a passport,” she admits. However, Dr. Carol Polifroni, her mentor and at the time associate dean, recruited her as an eleventh-hour replacement for someone originally scheduled.

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Hegedus & Griffiths Scholarships continued...

As a result, her rich and life-changing experience with UConn seniors in South Africa prompted her and her husband Brian to endow an education abroad scholarship in honor of the man she credits with making it all possible: Rev. Vernon Rose, South African native and UConn on-site coordinator of student internships there.

Perhaps it was her stint on active duty in the U.S. Navy and later in the reserves that prepared Griffiths for this challenge. “In the Navy you’re taught to be organized in the moment,” she observes, “but if something changes, that becomes the new moment, and you’re ready for it.”

Griffiths had to hit the ground running that first year, although the foundations had been well built by Dr. Hegedus. But Griffiths also attributes her success to the credibility of Reverend Rose with directors of nursing; he opened doors for her.

Thinking about her legacy after 20 years at UConn, Griffiths and her husband decided to provide for students who had the desire to learn abroad but not the financial resources. “They can’t use scholarships or grants for education abroad,” she observes. “They also can’t work during their time away in order to make spending money. So some take out personal loans to do this.”

In order to qualify for the Reverend Vernon J. Rose Scholarship for Cape Town, South Africa Study Abroad scholarship, students must already be accepted into the program, have a demonstrated financial need, and provide a personal essay.

From a life-changing experience Lisa-Marie and Brian Griffiths are providing students with opportunities for life-changing education.

Learn more about the Scholarship Opportunities at nursing.uconn.edu/giving